

IDEAS in Singapore: the experience of three schools

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Abstract

This paper reports on the experience of three schools in Singapore as they implemented a whole school revitalisation (improvement) project, Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools Project (IDEAS). The IDEAS project was developed in the Australian school context by researchers at the Leadership Research Institute, University of Southern Queensland and was launched in three Singapore schools in June 2004. The IDEAS approach towards school revitalisation recognizes pedagogical issues and harnesses the hidden capacity of the teaching profession as crucial elements of school revitalization. Of particular interest was the applicability of concepts developed and trialled in Australia to another cultural and societal context. To this end a research project was established with the Ministry of Education, Singapore, National Institute of Education and LRI/USQ.

The project was closely monitored by a research team at NIE and assisted by researchers from the LRI. The project reports how the staff in the three trial schools engaged in *developing a school vision* that is being linked to teaching and learning. *Teacher leadership* has been a key to the development of the project which in turn has *challenged the roles and relationships between teachers, students and formal leadership positions* within each of the school contexts. The outcomes provide particular implications for the transfer of context specific projects across countries. They also reveal important insights about how teacher leadership can be fostered and strengthened with appropriate supportive structures and professional development activities.

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Introduction

The IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (Andrews, et al., 2004) Project was launched in three Singapore schools in June 2004. This project was funded through the Educational Research Funds and was also a collaborative research with University of Southern Queensland. IDEAS is an approach towards school revitalisation that recognizes pedagogical issues and harnesses the hidden capacity of the teaching profession as crucial elements of school revitalization.

IDEAS grew out of a desire to ensure that school improvement initiatives – especially in an environment where power was being devolved more and more to school sites – resulted in classroom improvements. Thus, it aims to impact positively on student learning outcomes and the professional satisfaction of teachers. The IDEAS Project has already achieved success in Queensland, where it was first started in 1997 as an initiative of researchers at The Leadership Research Institute(LRI), University of Southern Queensland. It has attracted an Australian Research Council SPIRT grant, which is recognition of its place at the cutting edge of school revitalization internationally.

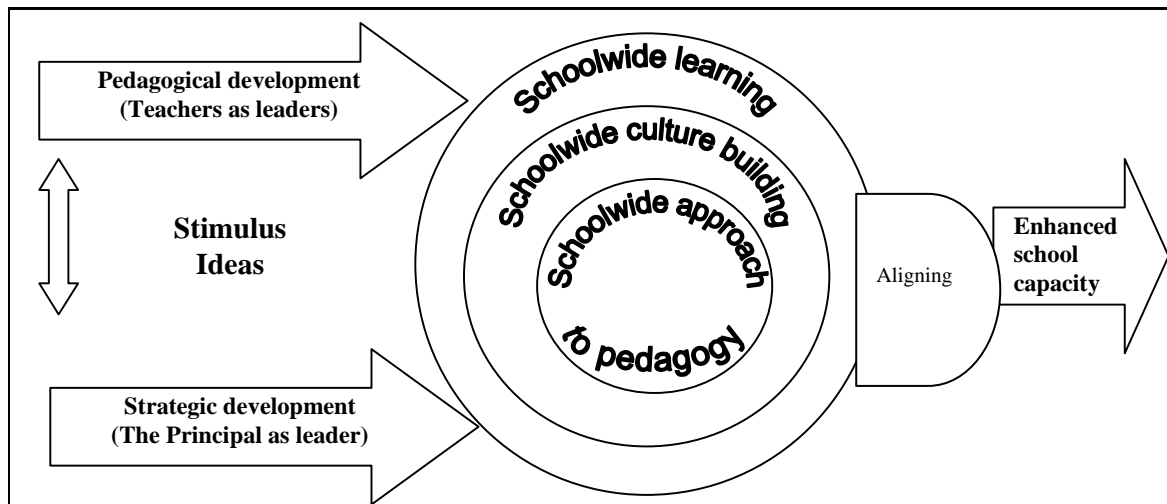
The Research-Based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes (Andrews et. al., 2004, pg. 8) in IDEAS highlights the significance of strategic vision and direction, engaging community to accept collective responsibility for student outcomes, and using structures and processes that support alignment and relationships.

The project in Singapore was closely monitored by a research team at the National Institute of Education (NIE) and assisted by researchers from the LRI. This paper reports how the staff in the three trial schools engaged in developing a school vision and a pedagogical framework that is being used for future action by the school professional community. Teacher leadership has been a key to the development of the project which in turn has challenged the roles and relationships between teachers, students and formal leadership positions within each of the school contexts.

The Underpinnings of IDEAS: the Model for School Revitalisation and the *ideas* process

IDEAS is a whole school revitalisation project that provides schools with tools and processes that enable each school to build its own distinctiveness. The image of a preferred future is based on a Vision developed from a shared sense of purpose and a focus on the work of teachers through the development of a schoolwide approach to pedagogy. The IDEAS underpinning conceptual framework is informed by the Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) model that reflects an understanding of processes that enable school improvement (refer figure 1).

Figure 1: Processes that enable school Improvement



Crowther, et al. 2002, p.44.

Figure one illustrates how the key concepts IDEAS are linked. The concepts are namely,

- a. An image of a successful school – the Research-Based Framework;
- b. A process of revitalisation – the *ideas* process, and
- c. A leadership model, Parallelism – the mutualistic relationship between the Principal (the Meta-strategic Leader) and Teacher Leaders who share a common purpose and goal (s) for the school community.

It is through parallel leadership, the three school based processes (school wide professional learning, school wide culture building and the development of a school wide approach to pedagogy -schoolwide pedagogy (SWP)) can be activated and integrated (Andrews & Crowther, 2002).

The *ideas* process

The IDEAS process used by schools (*ideas* process) is a process of professional inquiry. It provides schools with a school-based implementation strategy that encompasses five conceptually linked phases: *initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning and sustaining*, which usually takes about two to three years to work through in a school setting. Of central importance in most schools is development of a distinctive school vision and an associated schoolwide pedagogy (SWP). The *ideas* process requires the establishment of an internal facilitator(s) and an IDEAS school management team (ISMT) with the assistance of external facilitator support (Crowther et al, 2002).

IDEAS manifests a spirit that is exemplified in its five operational principles –

- teachers are the key to successful school revitalisation;
- professional learning is best thought of as a shared collegial process within each individual school;
- a “no blame” mindset should permeate organisational problem-solving ;
- a “success breeds success” approach should guide teachers’ analyses of their professional practices ;
- the alignment of school processes is a collective school responsibility.

The observance of these five principles while using *ideas* process for revitalisation provides a basis for educational professionals to create renewed purpose and revitalised practices in their workplaces.

The IDEAS in Singapore Research Project

The project has been a joint initiative of researchers at NIE and USQ and funded by the Singapore Ministry of Education June 2004-to December 2006. The project involved three Singapore schools, that is, two primary schools (West Grove and Marymount Convent School) and a Secondary College (Woodlands). These schools worked with USQ researchers to implement the IDEAS project. Engagement in the process included groups of teachers from each school visiting IDEAS schools in Queensland, Australia. The purpose of the study was to measure the relevance of a school improvement project developed in Queensland, Australia in the Singapore context. A major report will be presented to the Ministry of Education in late June, 2007.

The researchers tracked the process and collected quantitative and qualitative impact data over this period. The data included diagnostic survey data; interviews from teachers and the administration in each school; IDEAS documents developed during this period; and videos of staff presentations at IDEAS Forums held in Singapore and Toowoomba. The data used in this paper have been drawn from the teacher and principal interviews and documentary information collected from the participating schools.

Developing a Student-centered School Vision

The case of the three schools in Singapore that implemented IDEAS can inform other teachers and schools seeking to improve their teaching and learning programs. The importance of a coherent school vision is not only for school leaders but also for individual teachers that serve as an important focal point to understand and act on achieving excellence in teaching and learning for all students. This reality is easily overlooked when inquiry focuses on one classroom at a time, describing its teaching practice and student thinking and learning in detail. Linking teaching and learning to the shared school vision adds much to our understanding of teaching and learning, but

it is also important to add the view from a wider lens. The wider lens involved the students. In other words, the purpose of the school vision is now directly linked to the desired outcomes of students through the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, this paper proposes a working definition of a student-centered vision. Student-centered vision can be defined as the school's aspiration for the students. It brings focus and clarity of how the school wants to educate and develop students.

Following are some of the transformation in thinking about teaching and learning practices among teachers as a result of a coherent and shared student-centered vision.

At West Grove Primary, the creation of the school vision – Active Minds, Gracious Hearts provided an excellent process for teachers to actively contribute to the school. Prior to the implementation of IDEAS, West Grove's vision was seen more as a statement of values and beliefs that is not necessarily linked to the daily teaching and learning activities.

Revisiting the vision statement was a deliberate process in IDEAS as the vision links teaching and learning to school goals instead of just a statement that guides the direction of the school. At West Grove, the envisioning exercise involved all the teachers and school management staff through a series of workshops. There was much debate on what the vision should represent. Right at the beginning it was clear that different perspectives about what the school vision should represent among staff. Some staff saw the school vision as values and beliefs for the school in general while others see it as for the students. In going back to the desired outcome of students and also the purpose of teaching and learning in the classroom, staff began to discuss and suggest a statement that is student-centered.

As the staff worked through the workshop sessions, they actually were having fun as everybody's views and suggestions were listened to and debated. The student-centered approach helped staff to be more focused in coming up with the new vision. Thus at the end of the workshops, the new vision – Active Minds, Gracious Hearts was unanimously adopted.

Deriving common language on pedagogy through the vision

What followed was another important progress for the staff. Staff began to talk about not just aligning the strategic goals of the school with the vision but also about deriving a school-wide pedagogy that could be implemented by teachers in their daily teaching and learning activities in the classroom. As one staff puts it,

“in fact the envisioning part is itself very very important, because uh...everything comes after the vision and because of the vision. So the culture exists also by the vision.. And the next element, after the envisioning is the actioning part, so we work very hard on our schoolwide pedagogy. So from strategic foundations, to...identifying the schoolwide pedagogy.....and then...now we are, trying to, put in action to the schoolwide pedagogy and of this element now, the 3D pedagogy.”

This student-centered vision and the schoolwide approach to pedagogy (SWP- Andrews et al. 2004) now provides staff not just with a sense of belonging and identity with the school but a common language for working. Without this sense of a shared vision, staff tend to bend to test pressures and to the one-size fits all teaching practices. While staff are still concerned with school exams, they are not just teaching to the test but are also focusing on sharing of understanding, purpose, and development of values that are aligned to the school vision. The staff have found ways to achieve successful test outcomes, while at the same time developing innovative teaching practices reflected in their schoolwide pedagogy(SWP). The following excerpts from two staff shared how they now using the schoolwide pedagogy in their lesson planning that is aligned to the school's vision,

“I think in my choice of um planning, you know the choice of activities in my plan, let's say I have something to/that I'm in charge of, so I will keep the vision in mind..... It is important for me to see the link between the SWP and the vision because that, in that case, your meaningful experience will cater towards what you want to do, you know, your vision. What kind of vision you have for the students. So whatever you plan for will be more inline with it you see. in a way, it has helped me look at certain teaching points.

We have been doing a lot of uh community involvement that is, um, accordance to the, vision 'Active Minds, Gracious Hearts'. Very much on the 'Gracious Hearts'. A lot of CIP, a lot of activities a lot of programmes. In fact our action plan, um, has been...kind of streamlined to our vision. So realised a lot of things by the vision 'Gracious Hearts', we have done a lot of this community ...invovlement. Uh, but...consciously having a plan, to work on it...we can still improve on that.”

A coherent sense of the school's student-centered vision and how to achieve the vision through teaching and learning is beginning to help staff implement teaching and learning in the face of exam pressures by providing a common school-wide pedagogy reference for planning their teaching and learning.

Woodlands Secondary also engaged in the re-envisioning exercise in early 2005. From the start, the school realised that a clear vision is particularly important in enabling staff to link teaching and learning to the school vision. A clear vision not only encompasses how students engaged in learning but also a clear sense of the pedagogical approaches and roles that staff play in teaching. These pedagogical approaches and roles will enable students to encounter sustained learning because they would encounter common approaches not just in one subject but in all subjects and also outside the classroom.

Staff were obviously having some difficulties with the previous school vision in terms of clarity. As one staff puts it,

“...the old vision that we had ah...The Excellent School...we have a hard time remembering.... What is the difference between the vision and the mission and we have all these/ there's 7Cs, there's 3As that kind of thing.”

Vision - Articulation of what staff believe in

Based on this need to articulate a clear vision, the IDEAS coordinator led staff in a series of workshops to articulate the vision. Similar to the experience of West Grove Primary, the IDEAS coordinator at Woodlands led staff to refocus the school vision by adopting a student-centered approach. The workshops were highly engaging and staff participated actively. The student-centered approach to re-envisioning struck a common cord right from the start as staff shared common hopes and dreams for their students. The shared vision that was adopted at the end of the workshop – Weave, Dream, and Lead, was not positioned as something new but an articulation of what staff believe in and what they were already doing. One staff puts it succinctly,

“Yah, I would say...that... before we come up with this “Weave, Dream and Lead” right, uh, I have already been talking to my students about the setting higher expectations for ourselves and then um...Yah, I always tell them/ I mean, think about what they want/ what they want to do in life. Because ah, they/ some of them don’t really know what to do because they don’t have any plans or so called any dream about their future so they just come to school will always go in and tell them that uh, you know we need to know why we are here. I mean there’s always a purpose. You know we do things for a purpose so we must know our purpose.”

The right cord provided by the shared vision was further elaborated by another staff who linked what he has been doing in the past to the new vision,

“I have thought about ‘Dream’ quite a bit because I teach the Sec 5s. Uh, and many of them don’t have a direction. So I always say you must dare to dream. They don’t believe it. So I use the Dream quite a bit. Weave is... not easy for them to understand lah. Uh, Lead I think sometimes ah, I think a lot of teachers, when we talk about school vision, they think that it is for the students. Actually it’s for everybody.

...But a lot of time, we see it as for the students. It’s like ‘Weave’ ha, wah, so complicated, we have to help them weave. (SP laughs) ‘Dream’, you dream ..., Lead, ah, student leadership, teacher leadership, so the weave part, I think is a bit...”

Back to the Core Business – Not Teaching to the test only

An important focus provided through the vision was helping staff to refocus on the importance of teaching as schools continuously face multiple external demands. Scholars have highlighted multiple external demands on schools as a heightened state of policy incoherence (Fuhrman, 1993; Newmann et al., 2000). These external demands range from management practices related to data and information documentation and system-wide initiatives from the Ministry to school initiated programmes and activities. Often, staff have to struggle to juggle all these demands with the actual work of teaching and learning in the classroom. The renewed focus on the school vision has given hope to staff that the school vision is now more directly linked to teaching and learning than in the past as one staff puts it:

“But probably I’m just a little uh, I’m just um, I’m just happy that because when we first came in, it wasn’t pedagogy that was at the forefront. It was a lot of peripheral things. I assume I’ve actually told the other interviewer so with this focus I believe, pedagogy’s important.”

This student-centered vision also provides staff the focal point in aligning their personal teaching and learning to the school’s vision. More importantly, the vision now is able to provide legitimacy for staff to plan teaching and learning beyond just fulfilment of test requirements. Research has found that teachers have quite dramatically changed their practice in light of standardized testing. These studies reveal that teachers tend to give more attention to the content of the tests in their daily lessons (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 1999) and that teachers are also de-emphasizing content not on the test (Jones et al., 1999; Koretz, Barron, Mitchell, & Steecher, 1996). Abrams, Pedulla and Madaus (2003), who surveyed over four thousand teachers from what they termed "high stakes" and "low stakes" states, found that a substantial number of teachers in both testing programs reported that their standardized testing program had led them to teach in ways that run counter to their own beliefs about good educational practices.

While the reality of exams will still be a major preoccupation of staff, especially those teaching exam classes, they have begun to be more conscious in the planning of their lessons to link to the school’s vision. They have also begun to share practice across the school, learn from each other and critique each others practices. The following views shared by the IDEAS coordinator showed this heightened consciousness among staff in their planning of their lessons:

“So I think indirectly, we actually want to tell the students to dream the best. But of course we don’t say it like, “I want you to dream the best!” as in we don’t say it like that. In a certain way, we want the students to do that, we all actually action the vision and then, of course when we constantly look into our teaching/ we reflect on our teaching, I think/ and then we try to make some changes you know, we are actually weaving teaching and learning but I’ve seen like, I heard you know for example, the CCA head, when I’m walking to the class, I heard him talking about perseverance, you know, I think he was actually weaving values into what he was teaching.”

Is this heightened consciousness and seeing possibilities shared by other staff? The answer was obtained through interviews of other staff as they articulated how they see they have been inspired by the vision and see expanded possibilities through the vision.

“... the expectations and the possibilities have been expanded quite... Expanded in the sense that um, besides weaving, now we are actually talking about dreaming. And I think it’s a breakthrough because um, it actually takes us a step further by um actually encouraging the possibility of dreaming.... Because dreaming is , because we’ve always been rather focused on weaving, supporting, and um, without thinking that, after I support, after we can do what we have done already, what is the next step which is where I think dreaming comes in and leading to actually inspire and take charge.

Even for the students. So I think even our expectations of what our students can accomplish in that sense has been expanded. So, um, not so afraid anymore.”

Integrating Abstract Values

In particular the ‘Weave’ part of the vision was seen as providing staff the means to integrate the teaching of values in a more coherent manner. Values have often been seen as discreet and inculcated through specific programmes and activities. But now, staff are beginning to see the possibilities of linking the school vision to the integration of values in the daily teaching and learning.

“And uh, is it a ...is it the/a means to an end or you know, is it a process or is it the end product. So we also need to, yah, get it. So to me, I think the only thing that affects me is the weaving of the quality learning, teaching and the values. Coz’ to me, it’s very difficult to catch teaching moments sometimes/ I mean to teach values. I find it very hard to teach values. Unless ah, unless I will be able to come across certain situations. So the only thing that will affect me is uh, yah, to make me more aware of when the opportunity arises, I will be able/ I will catch that and try to teach them our values.”

“Weave quality teachings and values” right. Uh, we have one item called imparting values through teachable moments. Yah....number four, SWP 4, I think it has got to do with the value part and then the quality teaching learning is basically you know uh, the rest (referring to rest of SWP on paper). And um...yah of course uh, dream the best is yah, uh wait, it’s why we’re doing it.

Expanding Understanding of Teaching and Learning

Beyond just linking the school vision to teaching and learning in terms of pedagogy, staff are also seeing the importance of creating the right environment for sustained conducive learning for students. In other words, staff are seeing the wider implication of the vision that nurture and sustain good learning.

“... Actually the first one we talk about...you know merging a quality learning teaching and values and then we can actually clearly see it from the conducive environment... Yah, the teachable moments, all that and then how we provide/ how we provide quality teaching in terms of yah, by using you know the/ all these different things like you know, facilitation, modelling, challenge, question and having a conducive environment for the students to learn.

Similar experiences were surfaced by Marymount Primary as they re-visited their school vision. The student-centered approach to school re-visioning resulted in the new school vision – Soaring with Light, has provided Marymount with an injected urgency to link teaching and learning with the vision as one teacher puts it:

“Actually having the envisioning process, because, really before that the school really didn’t have a very clear vision and nobody really bothers with the vision. But with IDEAS ah, really, everybody talk about it. Though there

were times whereby we were forced to fine-tune it, to refine it because not clear, but it's really good because you begin to hear, you know, from the ground, how do teachers feel....

‘Soaring with LIGHT’, what you can see is that, the, student will be, imbibed with all those values because the ‘LIGHT’ is the LIGHT values.”

The re-envisioning experiences through IDEAS by these three schools with a student-centered approach have indeed generated renewed focus on teaching and learning among staff and students. More importantly, it also provides staff a clear link between their core business – teaching with the school’s vision. As new staff joins the school, they now have a common language of IDEAS that help them to discuss and learn from older staff.

Teacher Leadership in IDEAS – Challenging the assumptions of leadership

Teacher leadership is premised upon the professional model of school improvement (Crowther, et al, 2002; Andrews & Crowther, 2006). In the professional model, the daily realities of teaching-variety, uncertainty, and ambiguity-are recognized, and the need to exercise teacher judgment in addressing these realities is understood. Teachers then, hold tacit or craft knowledge needed to inform and lead improvement initiatives.

Assumptions represent the often untested beliefs held by people within the organization. These may be beliefs about anything: leadership, teaching, learning, the role of teachers in decision making (Hallinger, et al., 2000). Unexamined or conflicting assumptions often represent a major obstacle to accept changes to the roles of leaders. For example, many school improvement teams function ineffectively because the members have widely varying, often unstated, assumptions about the appropriate roles of leaders and teachers in school decision making (Morgan, 2006).

In the implementation of IDEAS, staff see themselves as designers and implementers of the school curriculum that is not just confined to the classroom but has direct link to the school vision and overall development of the student. Assumptions of teacher leadership were certainly challenged in the process. However, these teachers are still uncomfortable to accept that they are teacher leaders despite assuming roles of leadership. It appears that challenging the assumptions of teacher leadership still has a long way to go among teachers and as this is an re-imaging process the enabling role of the principal in the process is important (Crowther, et al, 2002). However, it does not diminish in anyway the fact that these teachers were indeed taking up roles of teacher leadership despite not accepting that they are teacher leaders. Following are some of the surfaced assumptions of leadership and how staff are assuming roles of teacher leaders without necessarily accepting the concept of teacher leadership.

Roles versus Concept of Teacher Leadership

The top-down leadership practice has been the most common assumption of leadership that has withstood time and many theories of leadership. Leadership has often been seen as belonging to leaders in formal positions (e.g., Principals and Vice Principals, Department Heads). These formal leadership positions are seen as serving the main purpose of ensuring the efficiency of school operations.

Shared, distributed and parallel leadership (Crowther, et al, 2002) are emerging where teachers serve as leaders without necessarily taking up formal positions. This wave of emergent teacher leadership recognizes teachers as central to the process of "reculturing" schools such that the intentions of the teaching and learning can be realized. Teacher leadership reflects an increased understanding that promoting instructional improvement requires an organizational culture that supports collaboration and continuous learning and that recognizes teachers as primary creators and re-creators of school culture (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Crowther, et al., 2002, p. 4; Andrews & Crowther, 2006) describe this expanded view of teacher leadership and its contributions as action that transforms teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together on behalf of learning, and that advances social sustainability and quality of life for a community. . . . Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life.”

The particular relationship that is developed between teacher leaders and the principal, as conceptualised by Crowther, et al, 2002 and used as the leadership construct in IDEAS, is called Parallelism. This conceptualisation encourages a particular relatedness between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that enables the capacity of schools to create a new and preferred future direction for the school community. The result takes the form of what Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) have called *organisational capacity* and what some other researchers have called *value-addedness* (Hargreaves, 1999).

Parallelism has three distinct characteristics: mutualism, sense of shared purpose and allowance for individual expression. The first characteristic, mutualism, takes the form of mutual trust and respect and usually manifests itself in the acceptance by each party of the responsibilities and expertise that are associated with the role of the other. The second characteristic, a sense of shared purpose, is an expression of shared values such as the integrity of teaching or the need for advocacy or social justice. This develops as transparent decision making, collaborative problems solving and positive communications. The third characteristics relates to the allowance of a significant degree of individual expression (and action) by respective leaders for each other This manifests strong convictions and assertive capabilities as well as the capacity to accommodate values of other leaders and work collaboratively with them (Crowther, et al. 2002b).

At Marymount Primary, these teachers were assuming the roles of teacher leadership without consciously being aware of the concept of teacher leadership. Only in the interview did it dawn on them that they were exercising teacher leadership.

“So...she also give us free rein like what to do, and she guides us along certain, steps lah. And she provides certain resources, but other than that, she just let you go..... she starts the spark, and the rest is the teachers.
...No, initially I think is more of a top-down. Now I think she’s giving us, she’s trusting us more. I’m not saying that she didn’t trust us more, I think...she’s letting us, go, on our own. Rather than, you know like, keeping track of what we are doing.

...it dawned on me a while back...I mean, still this year lah. Somewhere this year, but not early, somewhere late this year. Because I realised...she doesn't really keep, like, tabs tabs on you. It's more of, just updates lah. Very general updates, that's all. I don't particularly see, but I sense from Mrs. Ng's tone that she's like more willing to give us more time during contact time and all. But I maybe wrong, maybe she was willing all along. I'm not so sure

In an earlier interview with the Principal in 2005, the concept of teacher leadership was at least clear to the Principal in her intent in developing teacher leaders. The Principal is very much involved in helping her teachers to improve their pedagogical skills. At that time she conducted classroom observations with Heads of Department (HODs) and has the HODs give feedback to the teachers on their teaching practices to help them improve their lessons. She believed that this is one of the ways in helping teachers grow to be in parallel with her as she interprets parallel leadership as closing the gap of teaching experience between less experienced teachers and her. As the Principal puts it,

“I see it as the teachers becoming ultimately like me...They will take the lead...They will grow so fast that they become a teacher leader; teaching in a holistic approach; not waiting for the management to tell them you have to do this...that's what I envision.”

It is interesting to note that at this stage in the process, in exercising her role as a leader in developing teacher leadership, the Principal appears to see herself as demonstrating instructional leadership by ensuring that teachers will be able to develop expertise in pedagogical practices before assuming the role of teacher leaders. Her desire to develop her teachers to be “ultimately like me” appears to support this perception. This role of developing teacher leaders appears to limit the distribution of authority and power to make pedagogical decisions among staff in the initial stage. However, it does not necessarily indicate that she will maintain the same role in later stages where perhaps once she is able to ascertain that when her teachers are experts, then they may be given more power in pedagogical decision making.

In 2006 the Principal and the professional community reported a significant change in their professional relationship. Reportedly, the professional community had developed through the *envisioning* and *actioning* process of *ideas*, a strong sense of shared purpose, a positive movement in staff morale and professional confidence as well as a need for ongoing professional development. The Principal indicated that she has changed, moving her energies into enabling processes and developing a strategic focus. The later includes an articulation of positive school outcomes and enhancement of the school resources and infrastructure.

The main reason for the change in the relationship between the staff and the principal has been reported elsewhere (Choy, Khoo, Joseph & Associates, 2007). They state that the adoption of a common understanding on a no-blame culture, the staff also established a shared understanding of “Parallel Leadership”, recognising that the Principal and Vice Principal are the strategic leaders in the school whilst the teachers play the role of pedagogical leaders.

At Woodlands, a young teacher of 2 and half years of experience was actually assuming roles of teacher leadership. Yet, when asked directly about his role as a teacher leader, he sees himself as not a leader.

Interviewer (I): do you feel that you have actively contributed more to the school in Phase 2 than Phase 1?

Teacher (T): {Now, I'm more aware of erm the common things that I need to get across to all my different classes such that...like for example, in classroom management, I will have to set my expectations for all my classes to sync, all the classes to be the same because...actually I learn it from experience that they will go and ask around. For example, my Sec 1s will comment that "Eh? How come I'm so strict with my Sec 2s?". because of different expectations. So in a way, I start to realize that yah sometimes I when I do certain things with different classes I will have to...yah like make it common. }

(I): Have you shared this with your other colleagues?

(T): Yah, during department.

(I): "[interjects] Let me just ask another question first, sorry. Do you see yourself as teacher leader?

(T): Teacher leader in terms of pedagogy?

(I): Not necessarily, I would like to know from a wide perspective.

(T): [tentative tone] Not yet lah. I think yah, not...not yet.

(I): Ok, but for pedagogy, yes?

(T): Not at this moment lah, because I'm still trying to find out about my own personal pedagogy. So I will not say that you know...and after two and a half years of experience, as compared to others...I'm still young in this profession.

This contradiction of roles versus concept has surfaced often in other interviews. On one hand these teachers are assuming roles of teacher leadership and on the other hand refuse to acknowledge that they are teacher leaders.

Could acceptance of teacher leadership be enhanced through some coherent reordering of the workplace of schools? For example, reordering structures may create a climate that encourages teacher collaboration and involves young teachers in making decisions together. In other words, the school may need to initiate a more flatten hierarchy when it comes to designing and implementing teaching and learning.

Stated more forcefully, Coyle (1997) asserts that "unless we flatten the present hierarchies ... and create structures that empower teachers to collaborate with one another and to lead from within the heart of the school, the classroom, we will . . . discourage true educational leadership" (p. 239). Certainly these views assert the

influence of structure on teacher leadership. Also the role of the principal in this reculturing process is vital (Crowther, et al, 2002).

Conclusion

The lessons learned from the three schools in the envisioning process through IDEAS suggest that a guided approach will be meaningful and certainly help teachers to accept a shared vision. Using the student-centered approach to help teachers focus their discussions and deliberations in the envisioning exercise brought about a clearer understanding of the link between teaching and learning with the school vision.

The importance of a coherent school vision is not only for school leaders but also for individual teachers that serve as an important focal point to understand and act on achieving excellence in teaching and learning for all students. This reality is easily overlooked when inquiry focuses on one classroom at a time, describing its teaching practice and student thinking and learning in detail. Linking teaching and learning to the shared school vision adds much to our understanding of teaching and learning, but it is also important to add the view from a wider lens.

Challenging assumptions of teacher leadership still has a long way to go despite the fact that teachers are assuming the roles of teacher leadership without needing the formal recognition in terms of positions. This long held assumption that teacher leaders belong to those who hold formal positions could probably be traced to how teachers are socialized to be private, to be followers and to steer away from assuming responsibilities outside the classroom (Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Katzenmeyer & Moller &, 1996). In addition, one of the most prevailing norms in the teaching profession is egalitarianism, which fosters the view that teachers who step up to leadership roles are stepping out of line. It is hoped that through IDEAS, teachers will gradually accept that they are teacher leaders through a coherent strategy of aligning or reordering school structures and also promoting teacher participation in the designing and implementing teaching and learning that is aligned to the school vision.

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