

Queensland School Communities Build Sustainable Futures: Case Studies from Diverse Contexts

Andrews D^{1*} & Starr H^{2*}

¹ University of Southern Queensland, Australia

² Department of Education and the Arts Queensland, Australia

Abstract

This presentation provides thumbnail sketches of school communities that have engaged in a process of school revitalisation. The sketches illuminate the experiences of Queensland Schools engaging with IDEAS — Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (Andrews et al. 2004). The IDEAS process engages the professional community along with the broader school community in processes of whole school renewal. Using the IDEAS process, the school community develops a distinct identity, a vision of a preferred future and a strong sense of shared purpose that enhances the professional capacity of teachers to improve school outcomes, namely, the learning of their students, relationships with the community and the coherence of school operation.

Keywords

School improvement, community building, Indigenous community, leadership, curriculum

Introduction

This presentation provides thumbnail sketches of school communities that have engaged in a process of school revitalisation. The sketches illuminate the experiences of Queensland Schools engaging with IDEAS — Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (Andrews et al. 2004). The IDEAS process engages the professional community along with the broader school community in processes of whole-school renewal. Using the IDEAS process, the school community develops a distinct identity, a vision of a preferred future and a strong sense of shared purpose that enhances the professional capacity of teachers to improve school outcomes, namely, the learning of their students, relationships with the community, and the coherence of school operation.

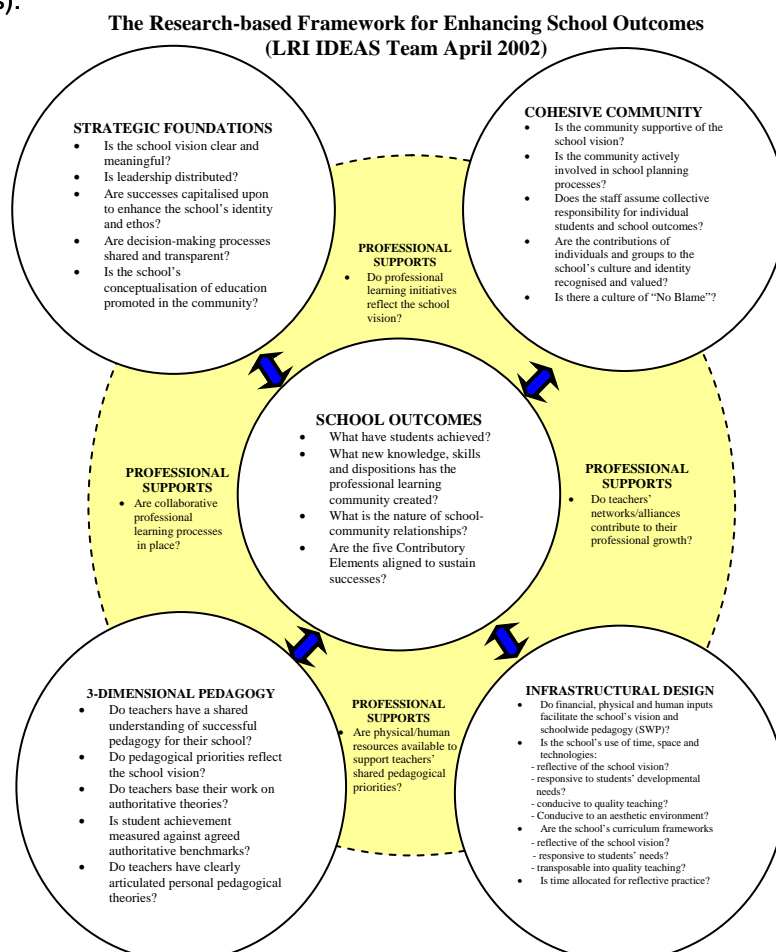
The thumbnail sketches illustrate how teachers, working together and building a strong link with the broader community have transformed the experiences of students and how they have contributed to transforming their communities. The thumbnail sketches presented include rural communities, Indigenous communities as well as schools in suburban areas with a high proportion of students from challenging and disadvantaged groups.

IDEAS began in early 1977 as the result of dialogue between Department of Education and the Arts, Queensland and the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research Institute. In its present form, IDEAS represents a strategic partnership between these two institutions and seven

years of research and development by Professor Frank Crowther and a research team based at the university in Toowoomba. Professor Crowther and his team have worked with over 170 schools in Queensland. In 2003, at the invitation of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Technology, IDEAS was successfully trialled in schools in New South Wales, Canberra and Western Australia. The paper provides case study evidence of school groups improving their local school communities in a sustainable way.

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 school-wide approach to pedagogy. IDEAS schools work with three concepts, namely:

- an image of a successful school — the Research-Based Framework (Figure 1)
- a process of revitalisation — the IDEAS process (refer Figure 2)
- 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 (Andrews et al. 2004, Education Queensland and Leadership Research Institute websites).



This framework has been developed through a five-year strategic alliance between the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research Institute and Education Queensland. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's longitudinal studies of successful restructuring in American schools (e.g. Newmann and Wehlage, 1995; King and Newmann, 2000) have been particularly helpful.

Figure 1. Research-based Framework (RBF) (Andrews et al. 2004, p. 8)

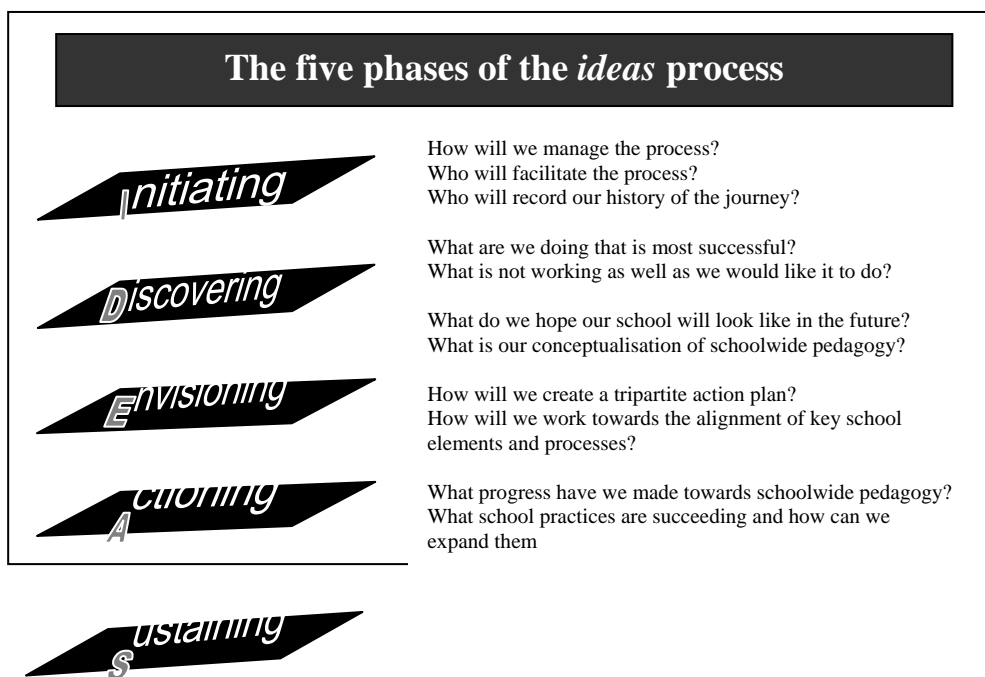
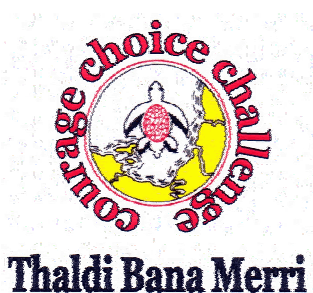


Figure 2. The IDEAS Process (Andrews et al. 2004, p. 11)

Thumbnail Sketches

Number 1:



**Mornington Island State School, Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland
 NGANGKIRR (TOGETHER)**

Through a belief that building connection between school and community is critical for the positive future of young people in a remote island Indigenous community, government agencies (particularly police and health), the Mornington Shire Council, other community organisations including the Justice Group and the school are working as a team to promote education through regular attendance.

From a two-year supported engagement with IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools) the Mornington Island State School is developing a way forward with community. From the sharing of hopes and aspirations for their youth, and gathering ideas from staff, students and community members, the community is actioning a shared vision.

The breakthrough came through the use of the 'turtle imagery'. The sea is an integral part of life on Mornington Island, with the turtle an important aspect of the traditional culture. The turtle image was

already strong in the community — it is the symbol on the school motto, it appears regularly in children’s art and in murals around the community. The school council had created the school compact based on the turtle imagery.

Linking the school vision to the turtle was the means of engaging the community and making what we are trying to achieve, meaningful and relevant.

Our Vision:

‘THALDI, BANA MERRI’ (Come and Listen)

COURAGE, CHOICE, CHALLENGE

The turtle demonstrates great courage to break through the sand nest, it must work hard and not give up. The turtle makes a choice for the direction it will take on its life-long journey. Along the way, challenges will confront the turtle — crabs, cranes, larger fish. The successful turtle will continue to face challenges throughout its life and make choices, learning with each new experience, but will not forget where it came from and will return to its homeland.

It is only the beginning of our journey, but the imagery has created a talking point.

“People listen to the turtle story” “Together we are making a difference...” (Loretta Juhel, community member).

Number 2:

Carole Park State School, Brisbane, Australia

Through building school as a ‘community place’ where fun and interest have been rediscovered, Carole Park State School community has made a commitment to leadership for renewal in Carole Park. This commitment requires the school through the Administration team, the teachers and all staff to engage closely with existing community groups, to lead and be part of community initiatives and to be a strong voice for the provision of services to and for the community.



Carole Park SS Principal – Ms Marilyn Barclay

The development of social capital within Carole Park is critical to improving the education outcomes for the students in our school. Our activities are designed to:

- improve the quality and depth of relationships between people in our families and the community
- build relationships that are productive and are based on a common vision for Carole Park — a set of expectations, a set of shared values, and a sense of trust among all the people.

Festivals have historically been a part of the Carole Park 'landscape', bringing the community together in celebration and friendship. The renewal of this tradition has been a major feature of engagement with community members to provide support, to seek information and feedback and to provide much needed entertainment and fun in the community. Engaging with IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools) has extended the work of community engagement into a focus on student opportunity and improving school outcomes. The school was recently acknowledged for its significant role through a Queensland State School Showcase 'Excellence in Leadership' award for its school renewal work with community.

With the school acknowledged as a leader in community connection by other recent community awards and grants to continue their work, the excitement of this renewal has been experienced through events such as '*Bring it On Carole Park*', '*Splash on Carole Park*', '*Carole Park Community Free Spirit Festival*' and '*Splash On '04*'.

Number 3:

Darnley Is State School, Torres Straits, Queensland

Learning Through the Arts makes 'Catching a Future' easier



School principal and community member of Darnley Island, Diann Lui, has reported that “participation in the IDEAS project has showed us the importance of developing a meaningful approach to educational strategy, making the understanding of People, Place and Culture integral to future planning as we live on an island much closer to Papua New Guinea than mainland Australia”. The business of education in this remote location is about acquiring insight, enabling formulation of learning strategies and support mechanisms to facilitate improvements in key learning areas. This must be done in a meaningful way so people can achieve their goals whilst living happy fulfilled lives as part of an isolated community.

Darnley Island State School has a history of acting as a pivotal centre for the creation, facilitation and maintenance of cultural developmental activities within the school and community. “The allocation of Education Queensland and Federal funding to build an Arts and Cultural Centre within the school grounds is proof that the ‘Learning Through the Arts’ approach is effective and valued” (Di Lui).

Through the IDEAS visioning process, the school developed a number of strategies to ‘Catch a Future’ and address improved learning in key areas. This included integrated curriculum and decentralised classrooms. Also what started as ‘Literacy Through the Arts’ has now become whole school ‘Learning Through the Arts’ with the program running across the entire school.

As education moves away from the traditional P–7 model the community is becoming involved in activities generated at Wao Erwer Meta (Learning House at Wao). The Learning house is comprised

of the School, the Arts centre, Community Broadcasting, the State Library and Museum. Wao Erwer Meta will:

- develop 'Learning Through the Arts' to improve KLA targets
- encourage school to work programs and develop private enterprise
- further enhance links with the community
- encourage partnerships with other training facilities
- become a leader in cultural maintenance and contemporary cultural development.

"IDEAS has enabled us to create a deeper dimension connecting to our shared vision, values and understanding between the school and community." (Darnley Island staff member)

Number 4:

Building community in a multi-cultural school: Quality and Equality at Woree State High School, Cairns

(The Principal, Woree SHS)

The school is located in a large regional city in Far North Queensland where the population is a mix of cultures and of a number of disadvantaged and disaffected people. It is also an area with a poor history of unacceptable educational access and achievement and high levels of unemployment. Staff satisfaction and learning outcomes were falling rapidly and school opinion data was painting a picture of a school in decline. However, today the picture is quite different. The school has revitalised and leads the way in building community for the wider southern Cairns population. The school is trialling The New Basics and has a purpose-built Community Learning Centre incorporating tertiary institutions and industry training being built in the school grounds to provide learning opportunities to students and adults who have limited access to other forms of learning. The school also has a Mathematics Excellence program being run in conjunction with James Cook University. This has been a result of bold and inventive leadership at all levels in the school and the use of an excellent model for school cultural reform and renewal.

IDEAS at Woree

IDEAS was accepted as a tool for change and the process of establishing a school leadership team inclusive of all staff was established. The process for change was initiated and the school undertook a diagnostic inventory. As a result there was significant upheaval and a myriad of changes aligned with the IDEAS Framework. A new course and direction had been set and then the principalship of the school changed again. The school had established a vision and values and where some infrastructural redesign had begun.

"As a new principal in a school that had begun a reform process, yet not being part of this reform, presented unique opportunities for my leadership. Also attached to this challenge was no previous

involvement in the IDEAS model for reform. I choose to utilise the IDEAS research-based framework as the tool for my audit.

It enabled me to demonstrate to the other leaders within the school an understanding of where they had been and where they were going and to value the reform agenda already initiated. I was able to present my audit to the executive leadership team and then to the entire staff as a tool of celebration for the journey so far but to also allay fears that the reform agenda was going to change significantly, i.e. I could demonstrate from day one that I knew what was happening in the school and how my leadership would move the journey forward not in another direction. The two key areas of development I saw as priorities within the IDEAS Framework were the need to build more closer links with the external community and to develop a strategic approach to the reform agenda across the school." (Woree Principal, May 2005)

Building cohesive community

In 2003 the school community comprised 650 students and 41.5 teaching staff. The student and parent population is extremely multi-cultural with 35 per cent of the student population being from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, a further eight per cent of students from a Pacific Island background, five per cent of students being Hmong and the remaining 52 per cent of students being predominantly from Anglo-Celtic background, but comprising many other cultures including Chinese and Japanese.

Parental engagement in the school was low particularly amongst the non-Anglo-Celtic community. A strategic approach was developed to try to place learning and Woree High as a focal point for the community and engage the whole community. Woree High's vision of Quality and Equality was extended from within the school fence to embrace the vision of Woree High as a Community Learning Centre providing quality learning opportunities to the wider community. It was felt that learning and Woree High could help develop a more cohesive community. Ranges of strategies were developed to start the journey towards this goal. These goals needed to start at the very beginning of engaging many of our families with the school such that it could also become their school. The school would highlight the cultural richness of the school as a measure of pride and differentiation and develop a culture of harmony and understanding.

The school raised the significance and focus on celebrating cultural difference and embraced symbolic celebrations of culture such as Anzac Day, Harmony Day, Australia Day, NAIDOC Week, Peace Week and the Cook Island Day of Celebration. We introduced our own Arts, Food and Culture Festival and developed Cultural Dance Performance Groups. These, together with our school's concert, stage and marching bands, become very public displays of cultural excellence in the true sense of the word.

The school has developed relationships and now formal partnerships with key education, training and employment providers for the development of a Community Learning Centre to be based at Woree

SHS. James Cook University, Tropical North Queensland TAFE and The Australian Marine Training Network, Cairns, are working with Woree High to bring the dream to reality. The school presented the partnerships that had already been established with tertiary institutions and training providers and the wider marine industry to provide quality learning opportunities in the southern corridor of Cairns. We were able to persuade and influence the entire Cairns community to support our vision of the development of a purpose-built Community Learning Centre utilising funds from the Cairns Educational Renewal. The project has received Ministerial approval to proceed. The project has also received endorsement and funding from Education Queensland's Smart School's strategy and James Cook University and Woree High will be running our first Community Reach programs from Semester 2, 2005 from temporary facilities within the school. The dream is becoming a reality with finalisation of design plans currently occurring.

The development of a 'Community Connexions' project was initiated, which was aimed at further improving relationships between the school and migrant families. This project incorporating Migrant Services, Queensland Police and Cairns City Council, DUTE Theatre, The Pacific Island community elders, the Hmong community elders looked at researching, scripting and performing a theatrical piece that addressed inter-generational and cross-cultural issues facing migrant families in contemporary Australian schooling. The elders of the communities were engaged and interviewed to present their feelings and opinions about the issues facing migrant families and these transcripts were used by the students with the guidance of a professional playwright to develop a script for public performance. The piece was a moving and powerful drama that incorporated the conflicting opinions between elders and youth and between cultures as well as demonstrating the richness of the cultures that comprise Woree High and the wider community. The initial public performance was held as part of Cairns Peace Week celebrations.

The school introduced a leadership portfolio role of Community Participation to focus directly on providing quality opportunities for community participation for the school and for the community to participate more within the school. More recently the portfolio role of Partners for Success was established to assist the achievement of the Partners for Success goals for indigenous students and their families.

Outcomes

The most powerful outcome from our initial work is in the transformation of a school that seemed to be going nowhere to a school that is providing educational leadership not only within the school fence but to its wider community and to the educational community in general. Woree High has increased its student enrolments over the past three years despite an aging community demographic. The percentage of Indigenous and migrant students continues to increase and, most importantly, the percentage of students being successful at school in purely the academic sense also continues to improve. Seventy-eight per cent of results for Year 12 students are of a sound level or higher — an increase of eight per cent on the previous year.

Other outcomes include:

- Parent group meetings for Indigenous and Pacific Island cultural groups in conjunction with a school Parents and Citizens Association. Significant leaders from within the Pacific Island and Hmong community attended the school for the first time and were engaged in the six-month preparation of our combined youth/elder Community Connexions project.
- Deputations of elders now confidently request meetings to discuss issues concerning families or their students
- Currently \$1.1 million has been provided to support the development of the Woree Community Learning Centre
- A Mathematics Excellence Program is being run in partnership with James Cook University from Semester 2, 2005
- A HUTAC–tertiary access course for students and the wider community is being run by James Cook University and will commence in Semester 2, 2005
- Parent/community participation in school cultural and educational functions has increased significantly
- Cultural celebrations/events regarded as some of the best in Queensland
- A significant increase in Indigenous and migrant students graduating in 2004
- Our Connexions Project where Migrant Services, Queensland Police and Cairns City Council worked in partnership with Woree High to develop and perform a theatrical performance to showcase inter-generational and cross-cultural issues facing migrant families in contemporary Australian schooling.

Number 5:

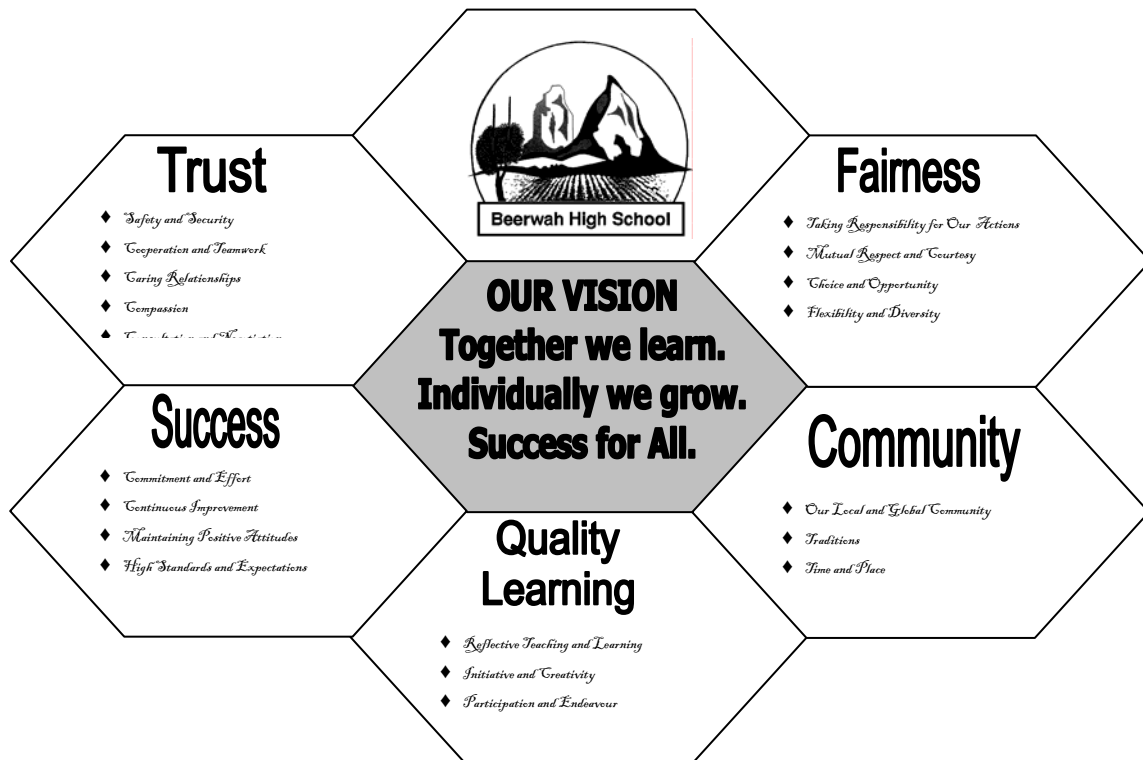
Beerwah State High School: Building a Middle School

Beerwah State High School (BSHS) is a large secondary school located in the township of Beerwah, located in the Glasshouse district of South East Queensland. It was established in 1992 and is one of several state secondary schools that service the Sunshine Coast hinterland. As a young school meeting the needs of a large number of feeder primary schools in the area, BSHS gained and enjoyed a favourable reputation in the community. However, the ensuing decade saw a change in socio-economic backgrounds from the traditional rural residential area to an increasing urban sprawl of residential low density housing and an increasing level of unemployment. These changes brought tensions and there was a need for the school community to take stock and build a new future.



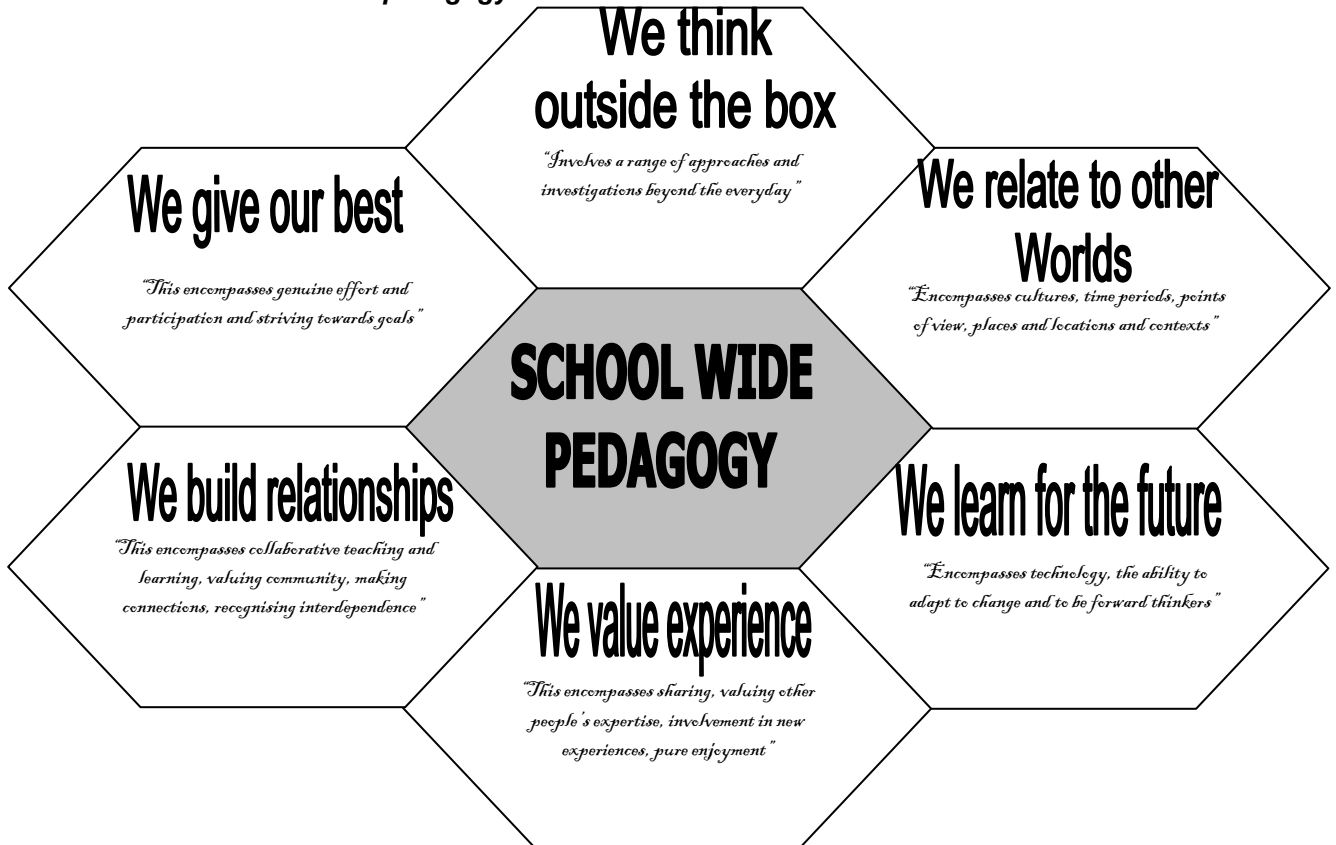
The school used the IDEAS process to develop a new vision and a school-wide approach to teaching, learning and assessment (Schoolwide Pedagogy).

Beerwah SHS vision and values



Emerging issues with students in the middle years became the focus of their actioning phase and the staff developed a curriculum and middle schooling alliance linking initiatives in Year 8 and 9 to their numerous feeder primary schools.

Beerwah SHS school-wide pedagogy



Actioning to sustaining

"The IDEAS process has given us a foundation Now there is a school-wide view of policies and there is a priority for what the school has decided.... we have middle schooling, a SWP and vision and values. Now we are ready for ... we'll do them properly." (Deputy Principal, 2003)

Summary

The thumbnail sketches of these diverse communities serve to illustrate how these schools have developed a distinctiveness related to their context and the needs of the broader community. As their 'new place' is being created the boundaries between school and the broader community have become blurred.

References

Andrews D, Conway J, Dawson M, Lewis M, McMaster J, Morgan A & Starr H 2004, *School Revitalisation The IDEAS Way*, ACEL Monograph Series No 34, Australian Council for Educational Leaders, Winmalee, NSW, Australia.

Education Queensland, <<http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/learning/ideas/>>.

Leadership Research Institute, <<http://www.usq.edu.au/education/research/cerd/lri/default.htm>>.