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A storyline of ideological change in a New Zealand primary school

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to report on the findings from a research project that explored a school's changing ideological storyline with the appointment of a new Principal and the Board of Trustees' intention to move towards a strengths-based approach to education. Following the school's dialogue and decision-making over a three-year period enabled the identification of a range of competitive processes between the dominant and an emergent ideology within the school.

Design/methodology/approach – Using an ideological framework proposed by Meighan *et al.* (2007), the research focussed on the development and maintenance of shared understandings within each ideology. For the purpose of this article, the participants have been limited to those in school governance, the school's senior leadership team and some teachers across a three-year period. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, online surveys and informal observations and analysed through interpretive and hermeneutic processes.

Findings – The findings show the subtleties and nuances of two dominant and competing ideologies that represented different philosophies for education: a deficit discourse of progressive ideals and a strengths-based ideology of education. The existing and dominant ideology is challenged by the determination and moral purpose of the principal with the unanimous support from those in governance. In due process, the school emerged into a creative enterprise through the adoption of shared understandings that were underscored by a strengths-based ideology.

Originality/value – It is incumbent upon school principals to notice the shifting organisational storylines within their schools and communities and act in a manner that realises the moral imperative of schooling for the students (Fullan, 2011). This article opens specific ideological processes that have appreciatively moved a school towards pedagogical excellence and a repurposing of the organisation for the students' sake.

Keywords Organisational change, Educational leadership, Ideological change, Organisational storyline, Strengths-based approaches, New Zealand

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Every school has an organisational storyline that typically involves people, objects, relationships and experiences (Boyce, 1996; Brown *et al.*, 2004; Çelik, 2010). As teachers and leaders, we can be so caught up in the everyday life of school that we lessen the opportunity to reflect on these storylines and their meanings. At one level, we recollect faces and shared experiences. At a deeper level, a school's storyline is rooted in human experience and might be recalled in terms of the aspirational intentions and achievements (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Deeper still, a school's storyline can be told

ideologically in terms of the development of shared understandings, shifting discourses and the construction and re-construction of meanings associated with the school's identity (Boyce, 1996; Giroux, 1992; Schein, 2010).

School leaders can engender shared understandings by re-telling and re-crafting their school's storyline. Indeed, these actions provide connections and meaning that can then be further re-constructed in dialogue with a wider audience. In this way, school leaders act as tellers of a particular organisational storyline that provides a lens on the school's "life" (Çelik, 2010; Quong *et al.*, 1999). Rather than a precise science, the articulation and communication of a school's storyline can support future-oriented visions and endeavours (Çelik, 2010).

While storylines are a metaphorical notion, they represent the events and meanings associated with individuals or group's lived experiences (Boal and Schultz, 2007). The nature of, and meanings within, the storyline are heightened at times, particularly when the personnel in leadership change or when the school's purpose and form is challenged by an alternative ideological position. As a result, the school's vision statement can be revisited and new language seeks to re-frame the discourse amongst leaders, staff and the wider school community. In the process, different ideologies vie for dominance.

Organisational storylines as ideological positions
Organisational storylines are an ideological representation of experiences, perceptions and meanings from the past that influence the present. These different ideologies exist as shared understandings in the form of a group philosophy or an organisational philosophy (Schein, 2010). Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (1997, p. 180) write that:

> Ideology is defined as a broad interlocked set of ideas and beliefs about the world held by a group of people that they demonstrate in both behaviour and conversation to various audiences. These systems of belief are usually seen as "the way things really are" by the groups holding them, and they become the taken-for-granted way of making sense of the world.

Ideologies by their nature engage in competitive processes of legitimation and incorporation, where dominant and minority ideologies play out their political agendas in public and private spaces. These competitive processes are systemic to being human and can be seen and told in every organisation. The nature and movement of the ideological positioning shows the interplay between the dominant, taken for granted storyline as opposed to other revisionist storylines articulated by the minor ideologies (Meighan *et al.*, 2007).

Those in positional power do not necessarily represent the dominant ideology. While leaders new to an organisation hold positional power, they need to strategically consider how they engage with the school's dominant ideology. Successful engagement might enable different purposes and priorities for the organisation to be constructed with a view to repositioning its future endeavours (Fugazzotto, 2009). In a similar way, organisational storylines are not linear or singular (Boal and Schultz, 2007; Boyce, 1996; Quong *et al.*, 1999). Closer inspection of a school's storyline can also show the emergence of new ideologies that break away from the dominant ideology. Similarly, when existing ideological emphases become embodied, new aspirations and intentions that build upon the current storyline and further validate the dominant ideology, are sought.

Organisational change is always dynamic and involves the engagement of individuals with different histories and experiences of the organisation, and different

ideologies coexisting within the organisation (Bolman and Deal, 2008; Fullan, 2004). Herein lies a challenge for leadership, that of crafting fresh purposes and supportive relational cultures that develop shared understandings in the form of an alternative ideology (or group philosophy) that moves intentionally towards the school's moral imperative (Fullan, 2011).

Ideological shifts in education

There are particular ideological shifts occurring internationally which are part of an organisation's broader socio-political context. For example, practices aligning with an economic rationalist ideology can be seen in the devolution of decision-making to local educational contexts as an advancement of school-based management. Similarly, the priority for quantitative improvement in students' learning is characteristic of a discourse associated with "leadership for learning" and "leadership literacy". Mirroring the ideological shifts in organisational development in the past two decades, there now appears to be an increasing international interest in strengths-based approaches to education that include the use of appreciative inquiry (AI) (Bushe, 1999; Cooperrider et al., 2000; Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987; Elleven, 2007; Lopez and Louis, 2009).

The reasons behind the increasing interest and adoption of strengths-based approaches in educational contexts are complex. One reason is that strengths-based approaches directly challenge deficit theorising in education, arguing instead for emancipatory approaches that shape and empower learners holistically (Freire, 2003; Hooks, 2003). Another closely aligned reason reflects the shift to economic rationalist policies and priorities that are steeped in quantitative and measurable compliance processes consistent with the dominant ideology. Critical and humanistic educators react to the reduction of educational experiences towards measurable knowledge and quantifiable skill development (Freire, 2003; Hooks, 2003).

This ideological shift in education is a shift from the primacy of quantitative imperatives to the identification and consideration of strengths-based practices that engender a sense of "life" for participants (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). Arguably, the shift from deficit thinking to life-centric practices appears to re-value relational approaches in education and leadership (Author1, 2011). The emergence of strengths-based approaches in education can be seen in the form of rethinking the orientation of school's approaches to strengths (Buckingham, 2007), leadership development (Henck and Hulme, 2007), alternative schooling (Norway), organisational climate (Allen, 2003), appreciative appraisals of teachers' professional practice in general (Author1 & Kung, 2010), inspiring student engagement (Liesveld and Miller, 2005) and appreciative appraisals of leadership practice (Hunter et al., 2011).

The introduction of strengths-based approaches within an educational context constitutes an ideological shift from a deficit discourse of progressive ideals towards holistic and humanistic imperatives where learning is embodied, relational and meaningful. Lopez et al. (2009, p. 1) describes strengths-based educational approaches as "best understood as a philosophical stance and daily practice that shapes how an individual engages" with others.

This article describes an unfolding and evolving ideological storyline within a primary school context arising from the appointment of a new Principal and the Board's intention to explore strengths-based educational approaches and practices within the school.

Methodology

Context

The context for this case study was a public school in Auckland, New Zealand. The case study focussed on the deliberate repurposing of the school's strategic development and every-day practice towards a strengths-based approach. The school, its Board and the wider school community bound the case study. In New Zealand, each school has a Board of Trustees (BOT), a statutory body providing governance to the school's management and operation. The BOT and its chair are elected members of the parent body.

For the purpose of this article, the participants have been limited to the school Principal, Board Chair, four Board representatives (in addition to the chair), six Senior Leaders and six teachers. These participants were re-interviewed during the three phases. The researcher had known of the school having formerly been a resident in New Zealand.

Data gathering

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to gather data from participants through both open and closed questions (Cresswell, 2005). The intention was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the change processes within the school across three time periods. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allows for dialogue around observations made by the participant and researcher, the exploration of patterns within the participant's responses, as well as the opportunity to "member check" the transcripts of previous interviews (Punch, 2009).

The purposes of the semi-structured interviews were to (1) background the arrival of the new Principal, (2) describe the introduction of a strengths-based initiative in the school, and (3) follow the shifting discourse amongst staff and leadership regarding their approach to schooling. Participants were interviewed in relation to the deliberate decisions that occurred from a strategic planning day in 2008 through to the Board's decision in 2010 to give strategic priority to the implementation of strengths-based initiatives within the school over the next three years. The first interview occurring in 2009 related to the arrival of the new Principal, whereas the second and third interviews occurring in 2010 and 2011, respectively, focussed on the strengths-based initiative.

The questions to open the interviews were organised chronologically as follows:
2008-2009 (new principal appointed):

Q1. The strategic planning day for the senior leadership team was the first such occasion under the new Principal. What were your impressions of this meeting?

Q2. How was the strategic plan different from previous documents? Explain.

Q3. Were there elements of a strengths-based approach evident at this time? If so, what were these elements? If not, when do you recall first being introduced to this approach?

2010 (strengths-based initiative implemented):

Q1. What do you understand the term strengths-based to mean?

Q2. How has a strengths-based initiative been discussed within the school?

Q3. What preparation occurred for the strengths-based initiative in 2011?

Q4. In what ways did external consultants contribute to an understanding of strengths-based approaches?

Q5. The Board made a decision to explore a strengths-based approach – what are your reflections on this decision now?

2011 (reflecting on the implementation of the strengths-based initiative):

Q1. What preparation occurred for the exploration of a strengths-based approach in 2011?

Q2. How did the activities on the teacher-only day contribute to this school-wide initiative?

Q3. In your opinion, how is a strengths-based approach being implemented in this school?

Documentation. Documentation that relates to decision-making was also analysed which related to the school's strategic plan, vision statement and the minutes from the senior leadership team's meetings associated with the strategic planning of the school.

Data analysis
Two analytical approaches were used in this inquiry, the first being a thematic analysis of the interview data and the second being a hermeneutic analysis where the meanings and understandings within the text were sought. The task of thematic analysis was to identify emergent themes (van Manen, 1990) within the school's storyline. The thematic analysis began initially with the use of Nvivo software and continued with hermeneutic processes employed in earlier research by Author1 (2011). Where thematic analysis tends to focus on the words, the benefit of coupling such analysis to a hermeneutic consideration is the opportunity to consider the data in terms of the meanings expressed.

Ethical approval
Ethical approval for this research was gained from the Faculty of Education, Law and Theology's Ethics Committee, Flinders University. Assurances were given to the participants in relation to the confidentiality and anonymity of the data and within the representations of the data.

Findings
The findings for this research inquiry are constructed as a storyline of a school's changing ideology over a three-year period. The findings contain information and perceptions that relate to a series of significant events. The findings have been constructed to show ideological positions and the interactions between the different ideologies within the school. In this way, the findings presented have an interpretive and critical perspective.

The findings are organised into three phases that overlap and contain recurring themes. The first phase focusses on the school's re-visioning activities between 2008 and 2010. The second phase focusses on the efforts to realign the school's mission and operation towards a new strategic plan alongside a deepening exploration of the school's philosophical foundation. The third phase relates to the expression given to a strengths-based ideology within the school and the processes of becoming the dominant ideology.

Re-envisioning the school between 2008 and

The school Trustees appointed a new Principal near the end of 2008 after a period of six months without a Principal. Prior to her appointment, the new Principal had held a senior leadership position within a school of education in a university located in the same city. As a school leader, the Principal had very recent and successful experience with her former school, and had also worked for the Ministry of Education as a Review Officer.

The school Trustees engaged in a rigorous process of recruitment and selection for a new Principal. The process itself was identified by the Chairperson at the time as a very significant milestone in the school's history. The Chairperson recalls the Board's appreciation with the way the prospective Principal brought her experiences as an educational leader and her academic prowess together with a strong moral imperative that centred on children and their development. A Board member describes the prospective Principal as having "a vision for what she wanted to do and was able to enunciate and convince us that where she was headed was what we wanted in a Principal, in terms of 'where next'".

Equally important from the Board's perspective was the sense of alignment between the Principal's words, the referees' reports and their first-hand interactions. Looking back after three years, one Board member (Chairperson) summed up his perception of the Board's view of the Principal, stating "I don't think there's been a single moment when we've thought that it was a wrong choice […] there are no regrets with this appointment".

The school has the special status of being a "Normal" school within the New Zealand educational context. Normal schools have a greater level of engagement with their local universities, and staff in both institutions work together in ways that enhance pre-service teacher education. In 2008, the Board Chair expressed concern that the school was not offering the best educational practice but was firmly of the view that it could. As a consequence, the new Principal was given an expressed mandate to bring the necessary change to the school and its culture. The Board Chair expressed this as follows:

> […] we had just recruited [the Principal]. An opportunity to start with a clean piece of paper. We had suspended the strategic planning process, [we] wanted the new Principal to own the plan – not just have it as something that the BOT had done. She had a vision for what she wanted to do and was able to enunciate [it]. […] she was about what we were going to become known for. […] it behoves Normal schools to be at the leading edge of what is good in education and to be pushing the boundary out further – I actually think it's our job.

Early in her tenure, the new Principal brought together the senior leadership team with the Board Chair and two external consultants to revisit the school philosophy and vision statement. In these *re-visioning* activities, the strategic intent of the school was reframed and re-languaged. The school philosophy was built around four statements:

(1) nurtured by community (inclusive);

(2) inspired by optimism (teaching);

(3) motivated by empowerment (learning); and

(4) to be responsible global achievers (sustaining the world).

While the words within the documentation might be found in other schools, the experience of co-constructing their meaning enabled a shared position to be taken for the school's direction and its central thrust. A Board member described the process and documentation at this time as:

[…] the first significant departure from what just had to be done. […] you can see an evolution and a stepping up move from bricks and mortar to people and philosophy.

Two school leaders described the philosophy and vision statement as original, alive and constantly under review. During an interview for this research, the Principal and a Senior Leader spontaneously discussed the vision statement; revisiting the meaning associated within the statement.

During this time, the Principal prioritised the importance of knowing and enhancing every child's *talents* as distinct from specific withdrawal programmes related to those children who were perceived to be gifted. Staff meetings and professional development focussed on talents. For children, this was explicitly experienced in a school-wide initiative that was called the "Day of Talent". During this time, the school's curriculum and programme were suspended in favour of creative workshops for the deliberate enhancement of specific talents, and organised by teachers who were seen to be working in their own talents. The day of talent is now an annual event. While the day of talent experience represents a talent-focussed approach, the Principal sought greater implications for the school, the curriculum and the pedagogy than a single day's experience.

The school's dominant ideology remained close to its origins prior to the arrival of the new Principal. However, the Board, Principal and some staff had begun championing the language of talents as a challenge to this dominant ideology. The unity between the Board and the Principal was critical to sustaining a prolonged consideration of talents *vis-à-vis* the new strategic intent.

While change was seen in the strategic documentation, the days of talent and the use of the word "talents", the *re-visioning for change* moved into a second phase where greater *realignment* and expression of the new intent was sought, alongside a deliberate exploration of some philosophical underpinnings that might provide a broader foundation for the school's praxis.

Phase 2: re-aligning and deliberate philosophical exploration

In Phase 2, between 2010 to 2011, the storyline involved a re-alignment of the school's strategic intent. Alongside this, another storyline emerged that involved the active pursuit of broader philosophical understandings.

Influenced by an external consultant, the school Principal engaged school staff in presentations and workshops that moved the construct of "talents" to a pursuit of strengths-based approaches and strategies, which included the strengths-based strategy known as AI. Very quickly, the language of "strengths" took the place of "talents".

This shift in language not only reinforced the school's philosophy and vision statement but enabled a consideration of an emerging philosophy for action. Whereas the language of talents could easily get locked into a discourse around special education, the language of strengths related to every child's development in a holistic sense.

At an ideological level, the interest in strengths-based education appeared to incorporate an increasing number of staff into this competing ideology that was endorsed by the Board, and championed by the Principal. For some staff, and indeed some Board members, the willingness to explore strengths-based approaches was an expression of confidence in the Principal's risk-taking abilities. Clarity over the essence of strengths-based education emerged. The chair recalls thinking:

Light came on for me in discussions with (Julie, pseudonym) around the philosophy – the conventional model involves patching up weaknesses – the research demonstrates that if you focus on people's strengths, it's a more effective way of learning and weaknesses improve. […] it's changed the way I think and made me remember some things that I'd forgotten about children and about myself. What an important lesson it is to focus on the positive, powerful, a profound shift.

The strengths-based ideology was endorsed at an early stage by the Board, gathered membership from the teaching staff and was enthusiastically supported by the wider multi-cultural community. The strengths-based ideology quickly found expression, given the "*intentional development of strengths through novel experiences*" (Louis, 2008). The ideology became the rationale for many new initiatives. Expressions of a strengths-based ideology in action included the engagement of a language specialist who was renowned for making a difference in children's learning through a meticulous child-centred approach which caused teachers to look more closely at the subtleties of each child's achievements.

A new form of professional development was created that set an expectation that staff would work in teams to conduct learning inquiries that focussed on advancing strengths-based education and the application of such for children's learning. Teachers were asked to utilise their own strengths to grow their student's strengths. Known as the "impact projects", staff were coached in a process that might be likened to a research process where they identified a potential topic of intent, discussed the topic with the Principal and a senior leader, conducted an inquiry and presented the findings to the staff at an in-house mini-conference on a teacher-only day later in the year.

One particular "impact project" involved a parent who did not speak English. The parent came daily to a class and learnt English along side her child. The Year 1 teacher completed additional planning to support the parent's learning of English, only to find that the parent became a role model for her daughter and for the children in the class as she engaged with the classroom activities and role modelled the risk-taking of reading aloud. For the teacher, the impact project was a win–win situation, as the parent quickly became an additional pair of hands, a reading buddy for the children, a teacher aide and an enthusiastic enlister of other parents. As well as the parent making accelerated progress with English learning, so did her child. The teacher presented her documentation and experiences to the staff and focussed on her research question, which centred on accelerated learning through intergenerational learning opportunities.

Negating the emerging ideology was the view that strengths-based approaches were just what good teachers have always been doing. While there is some truth to this view, the focus on strengths-based education and the ideological challenge to the existing infrastructure, organisation, leadership, curriculum and pedagogy was to be more than just what good teachers do. The challenge to a traditional form of schooling meant that the Principal experienced a sense of nervousness from other principals, which the Principal, her staff and the BOT reflected on. This added to the Principal's

determination to present their emerging strengths-based ideology in academic settings and encourage the completion of research on this ideological approach. The Principal strategically co-presents the school's strengths-based ideology with other members of staff to external audiences as a way of building a greater commitment to the ideology within the staff.

At one level, staff engaged with literature around strengths-based education, which included the work of Marcus Buckingham. At a more philosophical level, an external consultant engaged with Board members and staff around social constructionist philosophy, which drew upon the work of Gergen (2009a, 2009b) and considered the relationship between strengths-based approaches, AI and a social constructionist philosophy. Synergies existed here such that a strengths-based perspective was being characterised "by efforts to label what is right within people […]" (Buckingham, 2007, p. 6) and was linked with the intent of AI, which begins by asking "what is currently working" and what activities engender a sense of "life". The Principal remained insistent that the understandings and practice of strengths-based education is a matter for children's learning and education: the moral imperative of schooling.

In 2012, the Principal invited external academics to present their understandings on the topic of critical pedagogy to add to their strengths-based dialogue. These presentations appeared to reinforce the emerging strengths-based ideology. Through the many discussions, and the internal and external presentations, for these participants, the strengths-based ideology has become dominant through the support of the Board, the Principal, teaching staff and other members of the school community.

Phase 3: the emergence of a new and alternative dominant ideology
This School's storyline involves the emergence, challenge and establishment of an alternative strengths-based ideology of education. The predominant discourse shifted from traditional representations of schooling towards an alternative ideological position that privileges children's strengths as imperative to the educative process. In this school, the shift to a strengths-based dialogue represented a changing ideological landscape that was initiated by the Board and Principal, and then taken up by many teaching staff.

The primary instigator was the new Principal who brought very strong convictions about the ethical and moral imperative to grow and develop children in their strengths. In her relational manner, the Principal persistently and resolutely championed and embodied strengths-based practices to the staff, leadership team and other members of the school community.

Within months of being the new Principal, one staff member recalls being asked what her strengths were, and how she intended to build on these strengths for the sake of the children she teaches. The staff member recollects this experience as being deeply satisfying, while also facing questions she had not been asked in her previous places of employment. Expressing the desire to grow her interest in science, the environment and technology, this teacher has taken the initiative and been supported in the development of her strengths. As a result, she won a research scholarship to deepen her personal knowledge – about co-constructed curriculum within science – and championed students' interests in science and technology. The teacher reported being more aware of children's particular strengths. Similarly, her emergence as a curriculum leader is celebrated by her immediate teaching team. The hard data from the School's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study results which traditionally scored the

school as excellent in Maths, now showed the school as scoring higher in Science. Utilising this, teacher's strengths in science appears to have been influential in increasing student achievement.

The Principal suggests that, consistent with a strengths-based approach, when teachers and students function in their strengths, there is a greater sense of "life" in their practice and a greater willingness to engage with one's own weaknesses.

Storylines are construed as ideological representations of a group philosophy. This school has sought to make an ideological shift over a period of three years. The teacher with a non-English speaking parent in their class, and the teacher with strengths in science embody an alternative ideology of education: a strengths-based approach. A strengths-based approach has been prioritised and legitimised in practice. The Principal's goal is that, "at the very least, every child must leave the school knowing their strengths".

It has been interesting to note that the new, and increasingly dominant, strengths-based ideology engaged in legitimising its position with reference to academic literature, successful experiences and teachers who have been significantly influenced by strengths-based practices (Çelik, 2010). This particular Principal consistently reinforced the powerful benefits of this alternative way of approaching the educational process and the philosophy that might underpin this. The priority for the Principal was that a strengths-based commitment would lead to changed pedagogical and curriculum praxis for the children's sake.

A particular challenge for the instigators of this new ideology was sustaining change on a day-to-day basis. Organisational change of this nature requires a commitment and energy that builds a critical mass and embeds the new ideology in policy and praxis. In addition to those teachers who adopted the new ideology, the school's leadership team needed to echo an authentic expression of the new ideology. Without this, the school would continue to have competing ideologies within the senior leadership. This would be counter-productive, given the opportunity for this school to become an example of strengths-based education. Critique was welcome in the spirit of clarification. What was seen as important was that the organisational leaders had shared understandings around the philosophy and vision of the school. To ensure that the school continues with its vision, the school undertakes rigorous self-review processes. For example, in 2012, the school planned to undertake a senior leadership review to examine the extent to which the senior leadership team was embedding the vision in the school's practices.

The Principal continues to question the language associated with this emerging ideology. Most recently, she questioned the expression "strengths-based" and proposed that the expression should be "strengths-focussed". This arose from her reading of literature around the discourse associated with strengths-based education in relation to special education rather than public schooling. This ongoing dialogue around the literature appears to grow a greater clarification and ownership of the ideology internally.

Discussion of the findings

The findings presented above are considered here in terms of the ideological processes that were apparent across a three-year period beginning with the arrival of a new Principal. Being given a mandate for change, and working with the school Board and senior leaders, the Principal initiated change processes that sought shared

understandings in the form of a group philosophy that represented a significant ideological shift (Schein, 2010). With the school's reputation being a concern for the school Board and interim leadership arrangements existing prior to the new Principal, a mandate for change was given to the incumbent Principal. From the outset, the Board and Principal agreed that change was necessary. The emergence of an alternative and competing ideology was only a matter of time. While the dominant ideology was steeped in preserving traditional approaches to schooling, the alternative and challenging ideology (Fugazzotto, 2009) was framed around a strengths-based approach to education.

Initially, the change agenda focussed on repositioning its future endeavours (Fugazzotto, 2009) by re-visioning of official documentation that included the school philosophy and the vision statement. Later, the language of talents was related to the development of every child rather than a "gifted" notion. Activities were developed that sought to enact a concern for talents. While changes were apparent, one might argue that the dominant ideology incorporated this new language (Meighan *et al.*, 2007) through the inclusion of some additional school-wide activity. It would appear that the alternative ideology that sought to realign the schools operation to the new official statements was struggling to survive at times.

When the Principal introduced the notion of strengths-based education and strategies such as AI as being consistent with an alternative storyline, the accessibility of these ideas became more apparent (Çelik, 2010). Moreover, the bridge from existing priorities for schooling to this alternative ideology appeared to be more applicable and pertinent to every person within the school. A challenge to the dominant ideology was imminent; such was the courage and tenacity of the new Principal and the strength and mandate given by the Board to move in the new direction.

The emerging ideology became the basis of inquiries, leading to social constructionist ideas and critical pedagogy. The alternative ideology was philosophically grounded, something that was missing from the traditional, historical and pragmatic ideology of education that had been embedded over a long period of time. Having greater clarity, the alternative ideology brought a renewed sense of purpose to the school for many (Boal and Schultz, 2007). As part of the professional learning programme, staff pursued their own interests in relation to the theory and practice of strengths-based approaches, working in teams to conduct learning inquiries; a process enabling ideological incorporation (Meighan *et al.*, 2007). Many staff embraced the new ideology with a willingness to give it a try.

As the alternative ideology became dominant, the Principal and the leadership re-formed the leadership structures to ensure that a strengths-based ideology was expressed and further developed within the school. At this point, the dominant ideology appears to influence the policies and practices of the school.

Conclusion

Schools are never static despite the familiarity of their expression. Beneath the surface are espoused and practiced ideologies that reflect shared understandings about the processes of schooling for a group of people. While shared, these understandings are not always explicit. Identifying and articulating the nature of a dominant ideology serves the purpose of uncovering taken-for-granted understanding.

The emergence of an alternative ideology, in this school the strengths-based ideology of education, brings with it the challenge of legitimation and the challenge of acceptance by staff.

The relationship between an elected school Board, a Principal and a school's senior leadership team, is critical to any mandate for change and any change agenda. Where there are shared understandings amongst those in leadership, opportunity exists in part for an ideological shift. While this article focusses on the ideological landscape within a school, such ideological activity is evident in other socio-political contexts that directly and indirectly underpin a school's endeavours.

Principals, and educational leaders more generally, are well advised to stay attuned to the nature of dominant and emerging ideologies within their local contexts, as these ideological positions seek to reconstruct a school's storyline. Moreover, attuning to the dominant and emergent ideologies within a local context gives leaders the opportunity to strategically work for moral imperatives that seek to grow and develop every learner at the forefront of the schooling experience (Fullan, 2011). Being a leader in education is not for the faint hearted as the practical wisdom, strategic thinking and planning, tenacity and courage to sustain an ideological course for a greater public good is dramatic as much is it is subtle.

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