

**A Community-led Bilingual School in  
Action: The Deutsche Schule Melbourne  
(DSM)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research is a case study of the Deutsche Schule Melbourne – A German English Bilingual School (DSM). Located five kilometres from the Melbourne CBD in North Fitzroy, the DSM was established as an independent school in 2008. A unique feature of the DSM is that the school has not yet appointed a principal. This study investigated the founding of this school and asked, “What led to the creation of the DSM and how has the school been developed and sustained since then?” The scope of this research also included two minor questions involving the success of the school to date and the future needs and directions of the school. It describes the creation of this new bilingual school and examines the key factors in its formation and development. Data were gathered through documents and semi-structured, one-to-one and group interviews which comprised a selection of teachers and parents, as well as current and former Board members of the DSM.

The case study revealed that the idea for the DSM came from within the German-Australian community who wanted to establish a German-speaking school in Melbourne which would also become a focal point for their community. By drawing and building on support from within that same community, the school was formed. Two distinct phases in the school’s creation were identified and described: The Founding Phase and The Established Phase. Each phase contained a number of clearly defined developmental milestones. In both phases, members from the school community and the wider German-Australian community led the creation and development of the school, making it a community-led school.

Key factors found to be essential to the formation of the DSM were: a clear vision; a distributed leadership model; a distinctive marketing orientation; high levels of community support; a collaborative, democratic decision-making process; bilingual/bicultural focus; and, high levels of commitment and persistence. Further analysis revealed strong similarities to Kotter’s theory of change management process in the way the school was created and developed. A comparison of the leadership demonstrated by the DSM community and the Victorian model of Successful Principalship which was part of the International Successful School Principalship

Project also showed that the DSM was successfully led by its community. This case study provides insight into new school formation, school leadership, bilingual education and community involvement in schools, and will be of interest to policy makers, researchers and those involved in schools.

## DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

- (i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters,
- (ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- (iii) the thesis is 24, 944 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Signed:

Evelyn Linda Douglas

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose**

This research is a case study of the Deutsche Schule Melbourne (DSM). It examined the process of the creation and development of a German English bilingual school in the English-speaking country of Australia, and aimed to improve understanding about new school formation, broadly and, in particular, the creation of a bilingual school.

### **Significance of the Research**

Little research has been done in the area of new school formation and only a few studies in the Australian context (e.g. Collier, 2001; Nicholas, 2010). This research endeavors, in the first instance, to make a contribution to understanding of new school formation and development.

Researching the involvement of the community in the formation and development of the DSM sheds light on the links between school and community (DEECDa, 2011; Sergiovanni, 1994). The DSM has not yet appointed a principal which is unusual, but this has been recognized as a feature of community-based schools such as the College of Teacher model used in Steiner schools (Richards, 2005). Consequently, this study also examined the links between school leadership and community.

This research should also prove useful to the DSM itself as a way of recording the school's formation and the early years of its existence. Now that the school is into its fifth year of operation, this thesis should provide the school and its community with an opportunity for reflection and offer insights useful for future strategic planning purposes.

Finally, this research will make a small contribution on how to create and sustain a bilingual immersion program. As the DSM is the first German English Bilingual school in Victoria to offer a full immersion program, this study will detail the steps that led to the school's creation and the part that members from the DSM community and wider German-Australian community played in this process. Because bilingual

programs vary in design and delivery, and occur within a particular sociopolitical context, it is essential to look at the programs individually (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008, p. 307). Another researcher has noted the value of bilingual case studies that provide, “detailed portraits of particular programs, classroom, teachers, students, and their communities” (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992, p. 6).

Much of the research in bilingual education to date has focused on whether it works, how it works, and how it affects the first language of learners (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 29). Genesee noted that the majority of research done on bilingual education programs which have been running in Canada for forty years, focus on students’ literacy development and their academic achievement (Genesee, 2007). As a contribution to the field of bilingual research, this research may also help to reduce what Clyne referred to as the, “monolingual mindset,” which he felt predominated in Australia (Clyne, 2007, p. 3.6).

### **Background of DSM**

The DSM is a new German English Bilingual school which was established by a collection of individuals from the German-Australian community in Victoria. It is a small school and commenced in 2008 with 15 students. Enrolments have increased steadily to approximately 45 in 2012 and 57 students are projected for 2013.

The school’s vision is to prepare students to, “live and learn two cultures,” (DSM, 2011). Since it caters for families with German/English connections and also for parents who wish to provide their children with the opportunity to learn a second language as a mother tongue, the DSM has a bicultural as well as bilingual focus (DSM, 2010). Based on the Canadian early immersion primary school model, students at the school are immersed in both German and English from their first day at school. In Prep and Year 1, 90% of classes are taught in German and 10% in English. By Year 6, the proportion of English increases to 50% (DSM, 2011). The program thus serves as an enrichment program for monolingual English children and as a group-maintenance program for children from German-speaking backgrounds. Central to the philosophy of the school, is the view that by being able to communicate in two mother tongues, students are able to see the world from, “a range of cultural perspectives”

(DSM, 2011). This process is fostered through, “being an integral part of both local and German-speaking communities” (DSM, 2011).

The founders wanted to create a school where children could grow up bilingual, yet also biliterate in German and English. Garcia observed that *all* bilingual education programs must take into account the *concept of biliteracy practices* (Garcia, 2009, p. 338). The DSM had to make a decision about when and how to introduce literacy in two languages. Two choices were considered – a sequential mode and a simultaneous mode. In the former, literacy in the second language is not introduced until the child is competent in the first language. In the latter, literacy is developed in both languages at the same time (Garcia, 2009, pp. 344-345). This is the mode of literacy delivery that was chosen by the DSM (simultaneous) and Clyne pointed out that there exists a large body of literature, “which demonstrates literacy transfer from one language to another” (Clyne, 2007, p. 3.8; Genesee, 2007; Krashen, 1996). Literacy is thus acquired in both languages simultaneously and equitably (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008, p. 306). However, future researchers may like to note that there are few studies that describe, “how biliteracy is simultaneously and integratively acquired” (Garcia, 2009, p. 346).

### **Personal Background**

The researcher has been an integral member of the DSM school community since joining the Board as an advisor on curriculum in 2010; this involvement is further described in Chapter 3. While this may be seen as a possible conflict of interest, the role is an entirely voluntary one. Working as a researcher who is bilingual in German and English in a school with these languages, has allowed the researcher to reflect sensitively on the social and cultural implications of the research (Habibis, 2006). This also helps to ensure that the research being undertaken is not grounded in an, “assimilationist and deficit perspective,” and focuses instead on, “what is possible in bilingual education” (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992, p. 6).

### **Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and context, along with the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the existing

literature in four fields most relevant to this study: school formation, school leadership, bilingual education and community. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological design of the project which focused on a qualitative approach. The results are presented in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings and their implications, including further areas for research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

School formation, school leadership, bilingual education and community are considered in this literature review as those areas are likely to be of most relevance. Each area is explored to a depth commensurate with the scope of a Master's thesis. Key terms and concepts relevant to understanding this study are also defined and explained here.

### **School Formation**

In this section, the official requirements needed to establish schools in Victoria are outlined first. This is followed by a review of what some researchers of new schools have found.

### **Registering a New School in Victoria**

New schools in Australia must meet certain mandatory requirements which vary from state to state. In Victoria, a school must be registered before it can begin to operate. The organisation that oversees this is called the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). Its role is to register and monitor all schools to ensure that the quality of education in Victoria is maintained through regular audits and reviews of education and training institutions. It produces a guide for new schools applying to register which provides advice about school registration that is based on the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and on the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*. While there are many principles listed in the guide upon which school education in Victoria is based (and which are mentioned below), two are significant because they insist on adherence to core Australian values, a quality education that promotes student learning broadly conceived, and engages with parents. They are:

1. All providers of school education, both government and non-government, must ensure that their programs and teaching are delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practice of Australian democracy. These principles

include a commitment to elected government, the rule of law, equal rights of all before the law, freedom of religions, freedom of speech and association, and the values of openness and tolerance.

2. All Victorians, irrespective of the education or training institution they attend, where they live or their social or economic status, should have access to high-quality education that realizes their learning potential and maximizes their education and training achievement, promotes enthusiasm for lifelong learning and allows parents to take an active part in their children's education and training.

(VRQA, 2008, p. 1)

The VRQA defines a school as, "...a place that provides education for children of compulsory school age which is from 6 to 16 years," (VRQA, 2008, p. 3). A school applying to register for first the time must comply with minimum standards in the areas of school governance, enrolment, curriculum and student learning, monitoring and reporting on students' performance, student welfare, discipline, attendance, staff employment, school infrastructure and educational facilities. Evidence required for each of these areas is clearly stipulated and must be supplied in the form of specified documentation at the time of application.

### **Research on New School Formation**

There is a lack of studies in the area of new schools (Collier, 2001, p. 152) and an insufficient research base upon which to establish a theoretical framework for establishing new schools. Whilst meeting the mandatory requirements to set up a school provides a strong basis, whether a school succeeds and becomes successful depends on many factors, and most of our knowledge of these factors comes from studies of established schools.

Two studies conducted in Australia provide insight into the process of starting a new school (these were the only two contemporary studies that emerged during an extensive literature review). Nicholas completed a case study that documented the first two years of an Australian secondary school in Sydney from an insider's view

where she was the curriculum coordinator. It examined the structures, processes and relationships needed to establish a new school. In her literature review, Nicholas found that new schools are characterized by creativity, innovation and, “a great deal of fairly frantic, enthusiastic yet productive work by staff members” (Nicholas, 2010, p. 77).

Nicholas’ study gathered and analysed data comprising school documents, an observational journal and semi-structured interviews of 22 staff during the school’s first two years. These were compared with a synthesis of literature in the area of school effectiveness, school improvement, school reform and sustainability. A set of design characteristics were then developed which related to critical themes of school design: leadership and management; staff issues; technology; resources; student learning; sustainability; complete design and a theory of process. This was presented as a Table of Recommended New School Design Characteristics (Nicholas, 2010, pp. 83-84).

In her conclusion, Nicholas found several critical aspects in relation to the processes and structures needed when creating a new school. The first was that the principal needs to demonstrate leadership through a guiding vision and philosophy which must be effectively communicated to current and future staff. Recognising that, “establishing a new school requires enormous energy and expertise” (Nicholas, 2010, p. 88), giving teachers adequate support in the form of time and resources was seen as critical. Having role clarity is also vital at the start of a new school. Nicholas’ new school design covers key areas that need to be considered when establishing a new school. The three themes of sustainability, complete design and theory of process were considered by Nicholas to be vital in the successful establishment of a new school and she recommended further research to develop a model of process for establishing a new school.

Another study by Collier investigated 19 new K-12 Government school in five Australian states to find that there was a common need for new schools to establish credibility and a good reputation quickly, so as to gain enrolments and ongoing viability (Collier, 2001, p. 151). Across the different school contexts, Collier found



that new schools must quickly achieve rapid success in sustainable culture, develop a distinct ethos and engage in innovative practices that enable them to develop a market niche. His study acknowledged that further research into new school formation was needed and presented some general conclusions which have been summarized below:

- To remain competitive, new schools need to develop a distinct identity.
- This identity is related to the school ethos and a school based innovation which becomes part of the market niche.
- The innovations relate to the local community aspirations.
- Foundational documents were written collectively and early in the school's life and have the school culture and ethos embedded in them.
- Leaders and the leadership team have a clear vision of the school's stance and future.
- Significant challenges arising out of a school's context are overcome creatively and sustainably.
- These challenges arise out of the need to create credibility so as to increase enrolments and thus allow for further program development.
- Community collaboration aims to create ownership and a distinctive culture.
- Student learning and development are backed by proactive and interventionist student welfare initiatives.
- State of the art new technology are often built into new schools.
- All new schools in the study feature some innovative curriculum feature.
- Most new schools feel competition from established schools.

(Collier, 2001, pp. 160-161)

### **School Leadership**

The formation of a new school requires sound leadership, otherwise none of the processes described under the areas above can be enacted. Consideration must be given as to who provides the necessary leadership and what structures and processes support it. As leadership is so critical to a new school's success (Collier, 2001;

Nicholas, 2010), it is worth examining the word briefly. The Pocket Oxford Dictionary defined “lead” as:

Conduct by drawing along or preceding or accompanying or serving as a guide, bring or induce by persuasion or example or inference or by supplying a motive, govern by persuasion or management, direct the actions or opinions of....

(Fowler & Fowler, 1961, p. 444)

Even in this shortened definition, it is clear that there are many aspects to leading such as guiding, persuading, modelling, governing and managing. Thus, a leader is the, “person followed by others” (Fowler & Fowler, 1961, p. 444).

In an educational context, Caldwell provided a concise definition of what this term means: “Leadership is a process for establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring, and achieving change” (Caldwell, 2006, p 6), and it is a definition that fits well with a school that is being newly created. It provides balance to the focus on establishing, structures, processes, and relationships (Nicholas, 2010, p. 76) that may dominate the establishment of a new school. Perhaps what is missing is a focus on guiding the, “direction of instructional improvement” (Elmore, 2005, p. 57).

In a school that is being formed, leadership must effect change on a broader level, such as, “...establishing the direction of the enterprise and then ensuring that all who work in it are aligned in their efforts” (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008, p. 31). Because of the increasingly complex environments schools operate in, Caldwell proposed a framework for leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which has six key groupings: “vision, tracks for change, values, dimensions of leadership, domains of practice and integrating themes (Caldwell, 2006, p. 118). Caldwell presented three dimensions to this framework which were classifications of approaches to the practice of leadership. They were: strategic leadership involving a “big picture” and “whole school approach” as well as establishing structures and processes to enact that vision; educational leadership which includes the ability to nurture a learning community through leadership in pedagogy and curriculum; accountable leadership which

acknowledges the many stakeholders who want to measure the school's progress (Caldwell, 2006, pp. 119-121). He believed that these are the areas in which leaders should be engaged. Clearly, leadership practice in a new school must attend to a huge number of matters for the school to become established and then continue to operate effectively. Although most references to leadership in a school have in mind a principal who acts as the leader, the aspects of leading, as defined by the dictionary, can be done by others.

### **Distributed Leadership**

Leadership in a school need not be centered on one person only; it can be, "distributed" (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008, p. 31). Many of the actions and goals of leadership such as setting direction, selecting and using the right people, motivating and inspiring them to achieve the desired change need not necessarily be done by one principal. Spillane (Spillane, 2006, p. 4) argued that many descriptions of school leadership fixate on the leader as a hero, when, in practice, leadership, "involves the many and not just the few." This does not mean that leadership is simply shared. He proposed a "distributed perspective", which captures the complexity of the practice of leadership as, in his view, "it is the collective *interactions* among leaders, followers, and their situation that are paramount" (Spillane, 2006, p. 4). Spillane placed the focus on leadership in action, in making a difference and not romanticizing about having a single principal at the helm, who guides the ship through rough seas. This is not to say that the individual is irrelevant, but rather, his model recognizes that what is important is how they interact (Spillane, 2006, p. 103). He also lamented that there was limited research on the practical aspect of leadership practice, namely, "the interactions of leaders, followers and their situation" (Spillane, 2006, p. 84). While he saw that distributed leadership, "in itself is not a recipe for effective leadership" (Spillane, 2006, p. 103), he felt it led, "through reflection and diagnosis, to more effective leadership practice" (Spillane, 2006, p. 103). Whilst distributed leadership remains a contested idea (Harris, 2008, p. 173) and there are collaborative views of leadership (Whalstrom, et.al.,2010), given the enormous task of setting up a school, be it with or without a principal, it may simply be more practical to divide up the manifold responsibilities and management tasks of leading a school (Cummins, 2002, p. 79).

## **Bilingual Education**

Much of the research on immersion education examines whether it is an effective method for teaching languages and delivering content in a way that has a minimal effect on the first language. A review of research in this field to date noted, “These three foci, second language teaching, academic success and first language maintenance, form the bulk of the research questions asked of immersion programs” (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 29). Hunt identified a gap in existing research about long-term bilingual programs and the leadership structures that support them (Hunt, 2011, p. 188). It seems there is a need for research that looks at other features of a bilingual school besides focusing on how the two languages are taught.

## **Rationale for Languages Education**

The context for this case study is a German English Bilingual school. As such, the bilingual aspect of the school must be considered. There are currently 14 bilingual programs in 12 government primary schools across the state in Victoria (DEECDb, 2011, p. 3). Hence, the formation of the DSM as a bilingual school can be placed into a wider, system-level context which acknowledges the value of language learning. The State of Victoria recently released a paper outlining the government’s vision for languages education. In this document, The Minister for Education states that the teaching and learning of languages education, “...is not an optional extra for students – it is essential” (DEECDb, 2011, p. 1). This strongly worded statement indicates that the Victorian Government is concerned about languages provision and it is developing a plan to provide a languages education for all Prep to Year 10 students by 2025 (DEECDb, 2011, p. 7). In explaining why languages education is so vital, the paper states:

The ability to speak two or more languages has never been more important for Victoria’s children and young people. Life and work in the twenty-first century is characterized by global mobility, interconnection and exchange.

(DEECDb, 2011, p. 3)

Supporting the government’s vision is a clearly articulated rationale about the benefits which stem from having the ability to speak two or more languages. They can be

summarized as: an enhancement of first language literacy; top performing education systems around the world with compulsory languages achieve strong student outcomes as a result of the contribution languages learning makes to the development of students' cognitive, communication and problem-solving skills; students gain a new understanding of their own identity and culture as well as a deeper appreciation of other cultures; the Victorian community benefits as languages and cultures are maintained; improved social cohesion due to better communication with and respect for other cultures (DEECDb, 2011, p. 3).

The Victorian Government recognizes that a, "one-size-fits-all" approach will not do, so schools will be able to work with their community to select languages that suit their local context (DEECDb, 2011, p. 7). The fact that the current government, "will not direct schools to teach particular languages", is significant and means that the selection of a language can now, "reflect local community needs and interests and the resources available" (DEECDb, 2011, p. 9). It places the important decision of what language a school can teach clearly into the hands of its community.

### **Value of Bilingual Education**

There are many benefits to a bilingual education. Baker argued that, "there is a need to maintain colorful diversity in the language garden of the world," if we want to avoid, "monochrome gardens of majority-only languages" (Baker, 2001, p. 65). To retain diversity, planning for language maintenance or revitalization is needed and a bilingual program is one of the ways this can be achieved.

A review of research by Baker on the links between bilingualism and cognition, showed that early research conducted from the 1920's to the 1960's, presented a negative view of bilingualism as leading to lower intelligence, and that this was a misconception. On the other hand, to state that bilingualism, "gives undoubted cognitive advantage," is also misleading (Baker, 2001, p. 160). Baker concluded that these two extreme views are invalid and that, "...the evidence that currently exists does lead in the direction of bilingualism having some cognitive advantage over monolinguals" (Baker, 2001, p. 160).

Garcia (2009) presented a whole chapter on the benefits of bilingualism in her book on the subject. It included a discussion on, “the cognitive and social advantages that bilingualism accrues and that bilingual children have at their disposal” (Garcia, 2009, p. 107) and led her to believe, “...that some form of bilingual education is *good for all education, and therefore good for all children...*” (Garcia, 2009, p. 11). She noted the expansion effect on a child when undergoing a bilingual education in this way:

...bilingual education programs provide a general education, teach in two or more languages, develop multiple understandings about languages and cultures, and foster appreciation for human diversity.

(Garcia, 2009, p. 6)

In Garcia’s view, bilingual education has the potential of being, “ a transformative school practice, able to educate all children in a way that stimulates and expands the intellect and imagination, as they gain ways of expression and access different ways of being in the world” (Garcia, 2009, p. 12). She called this, “*linguistic capital, the ability to use appropriate norms of language*” (Garcia, 2009, p. 12). As well, she argued that knowing how to use a language is a way of gaining cultural and symbolic capital. By using a language effectively, one can, “gather information and build self-worth through social interactions” (Garcia, 2009, p. 12). As well as enriching a child’s experience of the world, a bilingual education can be transformative and promote greater social equality. These views are supported by Lo Bianco & Slaughter (2009, p. 29) who reported, “consistently positive findings on key questions asked in immersion education,” to support the view that, “immersion methodology is a valid, effective and durable mode for second language learning as well as for imparting the general curriculum to young learners, while supporting their English development.”

### **Definition of Bilingualism**

As the school used in this case study is a German English Bilingual School, it is necessary to examine the terms and concepts inherent in a school of this type. There are many dimensions to bilingualism and Baker’s (Baker, 2001, p. 438) Conceptual Map of this very complex field is useful in explaining what these are. He also pointed out that much of the terminology in this field does not have standardised definitions

and he warned that, “Defining exactly who is or is not bilingual is essentially elusive and ultimately impossible” (Baker, 2001, p. 15). However, some simple definitions relevant to this study are possible.

Immersion, bilingual and dual language programs all refer to the use of two languages in instruction (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 29). More simply, these programs can be considered as an education in more than one language. Their goals are the maintenance of a mother tongue other than English, or the acquisition of a second language by children who speak English (de Courcy, 2002). Dual language bilingual education occurs when there are, “equal numbers of language minority and majority students in the same classroom” (Baker, 2001, p. 212). Immersion can be defined as occurring when, “a group of L1 speaking children receive all or part of their schooling through a L2 as a medium for instruction” (Hamers & Blanc, 1989, p. 198). A school which chooses to provide a multi-language education has a number of options to select from in delivering its chosen languages. The issue is generally how much of the school’s curriculum content is to be delivered in the chosen languages, as all these programs are based, “on teaching language through content” (de Courcy, 2002).

Immersion education may be in the form of a bilingual program or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that uses two languages for instruction. In CLIL, individually selected subjects such as science or art may be taught in the second language for up to half of the curriculum (partial immersion) or for the full curriculum (total immersion). In both cases, the focus for the learner is, “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985, p. 18), which means that there is an emphasis on communication for meaning and fluency that is, meaningful input, rather than linguistic form (accuracy or grammatical correctness) (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009, p. 29). Immersion works because it provides students with a great deal of, “comprehensible input,” but good instruction must be provided in the first language without concurrent translation (Krashen, 1985, p. 18).

There are many different types of immersion programs and they differ in two main areas, namely, the age at which the child begins the experience and the total time spent in immersion. Early immersion begins at kindergarten and total immersion is

100% immersion in the second language, reducing after two or three years to 80%, reducing to 50 % in the final years of primary schooling (Baker, 2001, p. 205).

There is also a wider view of bilingual education which recognizes that it is not simply about, “one language plus a second language equals two languages” (Garcia, 2009, p. 6). A bilingual education develops, “multiple understandings about languages and cultures”, and fosters, “an appreciation of human diversity” (Garcia, 2009, p. 6). A bilingual education allows for growth for different directions, yet is also, “grounded in the diverse social realities from which it emerges” (Garcia, 2009, p. 17). Her analogy about a bilingual education providing, “...language practices that, like the banyan trees, build on each other in multiple ways and directions – up, out, down, across – but yet rooted in the terrain and realities from which they emerge” (Garcia, 2009, p. 8), is suggestive of the way a bilingual education works – it is firmly grounded in what the child brings to the school (its first language and culture), yet it enables a branching out, an enriching of new knowledge and skills (its second language and culture).

### **Bilingualism and Community**

Between a half to two-thirds of the world’s population is thought to be bilingual, however, these people do not exist in isolation, so that the idea that, “there is no language without a language community” (Baker, 2001, p. 43), makes sense. Successful bilingual programs realize this and make extensive use of their community. The effectiveness of a bilingual education can be assessed in a variety of ways – on an individual child level, a classroom level, a school level or the type of program. It should also take into account, “the social, economic, political and cultural context in which such education is placed” (Baker, 2001, p. 262), as these may affect the outcomes of bilingual education. More importantly, Baker noted, “the willingness of teachers to involve parents, and good relationships between the school and its community may be important in effective bilingual education” (Baker, 2001, p. 262).

Indeed, Baker noted that immersion education revolves around two key elements of, “teacher enthusiasm and parental commitment” (Baker, 2001, p. 359). Since the first immersion classes began in Canada in 1965, parent involvement has typically been very high. Immersion teachers, Baker discovered, “...are typically committed to



bilingual education, enthusiastic about bilingualism in society, acting as bicultural and multicultural crusaders” (Baker, 2001, p. 359). Because of this, he felt that the enthusiasm and commitment shown by teachers and others in a bilingual school, “may be an important and often underestimated factor in success” (Baker, 2001, p. 359). Thus bilingualism and community are inextricably linked in successful bilingual schools. Baker went so far as to say that, “...bilingual education can only be properly understood by examining the circumstances of language communities in which such education is placed” (Baker, 2001, pp. 43-44). The reason he gave for this, is that in order to avoid the second language becoming a “school-only language”, “...a person needs to become bonded in the language community while at school...The minority language needs to be embedded in the family-neighborhood-community experience...” (Baker, 2001, p. 82).

## **Community**

### **The Role of Community**

In Victoria, the government has recognized the significant role community can play in determining a school’s success. This is evident in the following comment made by the Minister for Education in a recent paper on, “Victoria as a Learning Community”:

We understand the benefits of parental engagement and the important role that parents and families can play in supporting excellence in our schools. We know that schools that are served and owned by their community thrive.

(DEECDa, 2011, p. 4)

The government wants schools to be connected with their communities and use local decision-making because this leads to better decisions (DEECDa, 2011, p. 4). Indeed, part of the government’s reform agenda is, “school-community integration”, underpinned by the belief that, “...no school can prosper without drawing guidance and strength from the capabilities and needs of its community” (DEECDa, 2011, p. 11). Achieving school-community integration is seen as increasing ownership within the community, which the government believes, can improve learning, as the paper states:

Parental and family involvement in schooling and learning is a key lever to improving outcomes. We need to explore two key ways of doing this, schools engaging parents in children's learning to improve learning outcomes more effectively; and schools being utilized as a platform to provide greater assistance to children and their families to improve a broader suite of outcomes.

(DEECDa, 2011, p. 23)

An earlier attempt by the Victorian government to increase school-community involvement can be found in the Professional Development program entitled, "Principles of Learning and Teaching" (DET, 2005). Six principles were identified as critical to improving learning in schools and Principle 6 specifically targeted community involvement. It stated: "Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom" (DET, 2005, p. 160). Enacting this Principle meant that the teacher, amongst other things, would be demonstrating the second point of the Principle, "plans for students to interact with local and broader communities" (DET, 2005, p. 160).

These views reflect a common thread that runs through all the literature so far reviewed which says that a school is more likely to thrive and prosper with the support of its community and there is a growing body of research that demonstrates that there are high levels of parental and community involvement in effective schools. One of the problems for those working in schools, however, is that details of exactly *how* best to involve and work with the school and local community are rarely given and so this important area is often neglected by schools.

### **Definition of Community**

Sergiovanni (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xvi) defined community as, "collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are binded to a set of shared ideas and ideals." He identified that the need for community which can be expressed as a sense of belonging, continuity and connection to others, was a basic and universal human need. At the time of his writing, Sergiovanni believed that schools had become organizations and he argued that they must work instead to build

an, “authentic community” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xiii). This occurs when a, “community becomes embodied in the school’s policy structure itself, when community values are at the centre of our thinking” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xiii). In his view, schools must become communities of learners and communities of leaders.

### **Building Community**

When considering exactly how to go about building community in schools, however, the task is not so easy; “There is no recipe for community building...Community cannot be borrowed or bought” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 5). He pointed out that building community in a school changes the nature of leadership and it becomes redefined since, “the emphasis...is no longer on ‘power over’ others but ‘power to’ accomplish shared visions and goals” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. xix). Another researcher, Doyle, also wrote about how leadership for community building required a major shift in thinking about leadership from being in the hands of a principal who governs in a hierarchical manner, to a community approach in a school where, “...governance is in the hands of the people who have a vested stake in it: parents, teachers, students, community members and administrators” (Doyle, 2004, p. 196).

Leadership thus becomes constructivist and leadership actions for community building must be followed by everyone involved in schools. According to Doyle, these include: empowerment – sharing decision-making responsibilities; commitment to the vision, goals and mission of the school; relationship building to develop essential interpersonal relationships which are based on openness, communicating, sharing and collaboration; adaption to new roles as teachers become decision-makers and administrators become facilitators; creation of a culture of inquiry and critique where risk-taking, innovation and discussion that encourage difficult questions to be asked and answered; procurement and coordination of resources which becomes a school-wide effort, not just the responsibility of a few; understanding when to act and when to wait as community building takes time and patience, just like real change takes time (Doyle, 2004).

While studies such as Doyle’s recommend ways of broadening community involvement, what actually happens in practice can vary from school to school. A New Zealand study of 22 rural elementary schools that examined eleven aspects of

parental involvement, found that there was a widespread diversity of practice with very few parental involvement activities that all schools used (Hornby & Witte, 2010). This study identified a number of weaknesses in the area of parental involvement: a lack of documented school policies; ad hoc nature of parental organisation; minimal parental education and use of home visits, limited ideas to support diverse parents and those with children with special needs and lack of professional development for teachers working with parents (Hornby & Witte, 2010, p. 771).

The degree to which parents become involved in a school can also vary, according to the culture and background of the parent group. An interesting study of parental involvement in an Islamic school in Australia, found in that school, that much of the parental involvement was limited with, “one-way communication from the school to parents the dominant strategy” (Raihani & Gurr, 2010, p. 74). While teachers felt that the school had opened up a wide range of communication channels for parents, cultural differences and the parents’ own schooling experiences might have created barriers to increased parental involvement. Once again, this study concluded that while all stakeholders in the school felt that increased parental involvement was important, there was little agreement on and insufficient understanding of how to do this.

An additional important point to note is that as schools develop, the leadership required to build community often changes and needs to be redefined as the community builds itself (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 192). By practicing leadership through “bonding and binding” to create the “we” of community, requires a “community of mind” which Sergiovanni defined as, “a set of shared values, ideas and ideals that define the school as a purposeful community and teachers as a professional community” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 198). Once this happens, he claimed this became a substitute for leadership. Motivation is internalized, people care, help and support each other to create a school which embodies life-long learning and inquiry. He concluded, “when this happens, everyone becomes self-managing and self-leading” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 198). The school community has thus been built.

## **Social Capital**

In more recent times, the term, “social capital”, has emerged in educational discussions (West-Burnham & Otero, 2008, p. 5). It has been used to describe the formal and informal partnerships and networks a school can use as support. While there is no precise agreement on what social capital comprises, the following components have been identified:

...a strong sense of shared values and social aspirations; a shared sense of social/geographical identity; levels of trust; levels of interdependence and sharing; collaborative vision; levels of volunteering and social engagement; participation in faith-based activities; turnout in elections; cooperation on economic and social projects; a sense of control and investment in the future.

(West-Burnham & Otero, 2008, pp. 5-6)

There has been an interest in creating partnerships between schools, families and communities because this building of social capital may also lead to school improvement. A major study of successful schools in six countries around the world found that, “increased community involvement in schools has the potential to assist student learning and increase schools’ intellectual capital” (Caldwell & Harris, 2008, p. 68). This study also noted that building strong community-school relationships can lead to further creation of social capital.

The linking of social capital with schools places responsibility for school improvement with the community so that, “...the shift is from institutional improvement to community transformation” (West-Burnham & Otero, 2008, p. 6). Schools can build their social capital by improving relationships so that they become, “**of** their communities, not just **in** their communities”(West-Burnham & Otero, 2008, p. 7). To achieve this, leadership cannot be invested in one person only, or even a small group, but rather, “It needs to be spread more widely through schools as a collective enterprise, exercised on the basis of distributed authority and influence” (Stoll, 2004, p. 6).

## **Summary**

This chapter reviewed relevant literature in four main areas pertaining to the major research question: school formation, school leadership, bilingual education and community. To open a new school in Victoria it must be registered by the VRQA and comply with an extensive set of standards. There were also found to be two important guiding principles of school education in Victoria, namely, a commitment to Australian democracy and a high quality education in which parents can take an active part.

There have been few studies on new school formation, but one study identified a number of key areas critical to success in an attempt to create a new school design. These included leadership and management, structures and processes, vision and philosophy, staff issues (support, time), effective PD, technology, resources and student learning as the focus of all practice (Nicholas, 2010, pp. 88-89). Another study found that a common need for new schools was to establish credibility quickly so as to increase enrolment numbers and achieve ongoing viability. Forming a distinct identity and creating a market niche for itself becomes important for a new school, and this is often done by offering a different or innovative program (Collier, 2001, p. 151).

In reviewing the literature on school leadership, it is clear that the many processes involved in the actions and goals needed to establish a school do not need to be centered on one person alone, such as the principal. It can be distributed among many people and this was viewed by some as possibly more effective than a traditional, hierarchical leadership model.

The literature on bilingual education suggests that a bilingual school can make a worthwhile contribution to a child's understanding of languages and that this experience is increasingly becoming considered as an essential requirement for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The essence of a bilingual school which seeks to embed its languages often means that the parents are heavily involved in the school and this has been noted as a key feature of a successful bilingual school. Involving the community in a child's education is also seen as desirable and schools are being encouraged to increase their social capital through greater parent involvement and by developing improved

relationships between stakeholders. These can then be harnessed to improve student learning. Bilingual schools, in particular, have high levels of participation from a community that is committed and enthusiastic. Building community requires shared vision and goals, shared decision-making responsibilities and a focus on decision-making – these are the very same two principles of democracy and parent involvement upon which the VRQA says school education in Victoria should be based.

The establishment of a new school is a complex, often lengthy process where participants must manage a number of external and internal pressures if the school is to succeed. For the founders of the DSM, establishing a new bilingual school added a layer of complexity, as having two languages, blending two curricula and complying with the Victorian and German governments, meant that, in effect, the workload of establishing a new school was virtually doubled. Studying this school's formation provides a unique opportunity to add to the knowledge of school formation, how to create a bilingual school, and to explore how a school can be community-led rather than principal-led.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this case study and explains how the data were analysed in relation to the research question.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the key terms under which this study has been conducted. Recognising that doing research, “requires clear and disciplined thinking” (Bouma, 2000, p. iv), this study follows these three clear steps set out by Bouma (Bouma, 2000, p. v): selection of a problem and how to go about answering it (the formation of the DSM); collection of data (using a case study methodology, with document collection and individual and group interviews); analysis and interpretation of the data (using grounded theory and an eight-step process to code and interpret the data) (Cresswell, 2009). The process of how this was done in this study is described in this chapter.

### **Approach and Design**

#### **Personal Context**

In 2008, the Deutsche Schule Melbourne first began operating as a German English Bilingual School. It was the first German English Bilingual school to open in Victoria using a full immersion approach and a planned structure of classes from Prep to Year 12.

Although this researcher is a teacher of German and English, the establishment of this school came as a surprise. The school opened and began taking enrolments which included, amongst others, this researcher’s niece. Contemplating these issues led this researcher to consider how this was possible: Who put in the work to establish the school? Why did they do this? What role did the community play in creating this independent school? How did it all happen?

This initial curiosity led this researcher to become involved in the school on a voluntary basis and eventually become accepted as a Board member with responsibility for curriculum in 2010. At this point, the DSM had been in existence for two years, operating a program from Years P - 4 and it was looking to extend its curriculum to include Years 5 - 6. Over this period, school enrolments gradually



increased, but remained insufficient to fund the position of a principal and the school continued to be run by its community. Since the school's inception, some of the key players involved in the establishment of the school had moved on. This is the main reason this researcher felt it was important to begin investigating the phenomenon that is the DSM, so as to describe and record what had happened in the school's foundation years, before more time elapsed and vital memories faded. Having an understanding of the school's past history might also assist those involved in framing the school's future.

This, "train of thought" (Kilbourn, 2006, p. 569), led to the definition of the focus of this study and, as such, means it is based on a social constructivist world view which Cresswell defined as having assumptions where, "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 8). This study is, therefore, "question led", rather than, "method led" (Grix, 2002, p. 180). This helped to define the major research question and the focus of this study, which is to address the question: "What led to the creation of the DSM and how has the school been developed and sustained since then?" Minor questions included: "What is the success of the school to date?" and "What are the future directions and needs of the school?"

### **The Nature of Qualitative Research**

When selecting a particular research design, Cresswell alerts the researcher to examine the nature of the research question, the researcher's personal experiences and the audiences for the study (Cresswell, 2009, p. 3). Of the three most commonly used designs – qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, the method that had the best fit with the major question of this study was the qualitative approach, as it was one where, "the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 16). In answering the question, "What makes a piece of research qualitative?" Lichtman provides us with a useful definition. She says, 'In general, qualitative research involves looking at things in their natural setting or talking to individuals about a particular topic' (Lichtman, 2010, p. 39). Its aim is to describe and understand human behavior and Lichtman believes that this process can be used to provide greater *insights* than research based on statistics and numbers (Lichtman, 2010, p. xiii).

Cresswell (2009, pp. 175-176) identifies nine characteristics of qualitative research and each of these are relevant to this research:

- The research is conducted in the natural setting of the phenomenon being studied.
- The researcher is the key instrument for collecting data.
- Multiple sources of data are used.
- Inductive data analysis is used in that the research develops a theory from the ground up through building categories and themes.
- The focus is on participants' meanings, rather than the researcher's.
- Emergent designs are often used.
- A theoretical lens may be used by a researcher to view their study, such as cultural or gender-based, or from a particular social, political or historical context.
- The research is interpretive in that researchers make an interpretation of what they see so that along with the participants and the readers, multiple views of the problem emerge.
- An holistic account of the phenomenon are developed.

(Cresswell, 2009, pp. 175-176)

When applying this approach to this study, data were gathered on the DSM and examined in relation to the key question. The researcher moved from the specifics of the data to the general, as central themes or issues were identified and used to make general statements about what had been found (Lichtman, 2010, p. 15).

Lichtman stresses the importance of natural settings for collecting data and this ties in with the nature of qualitative research which, “involves looking deeply at a few things rather than looking at the surface of many things” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 17). The researcher is thus, “the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 17). This may lead some to question the impartiality of the researcher, however, this issue is considered elsewhere in this chapter.

## **Grounded Theory**

This study did not begin with a hypothesis that was to be tested. Instead, it asked broad and general questions that allowed the researcher to fully explore the complexity of the relationships between the various individuals and groups that comprise the DSM. It used a qualitative methodology that best allowed for an inductive approach using grounded theory to develop meaning (Cresswell, 2009, p. 13). Adopting a qualitative approach allowed this researcher to focus on people, go beyond surface appearances and concentrate on context and process (Bryman, 2004, p. 280). A qualitative research design allowed the researcher to visit the school, gather data personally in the form of interviews and documents and then to interpret them, generating meaning from data gathered in the field.

Cresswell defined grounded theory as, “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction, grounded in the view of participants” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 13). The term refers to the way the data are organized and synthesized. Lichtman considered the essence of the approach as using, “Theoretical sampling, the constant-comparative method, and specific ways of coding” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 73). It has a circular process at its heart, rather than the linear approach of more traditional quantitative research. Indeed, Flick saw this as one of the great strengths of grounded theory, “because it forces the researcher to permanently reflect on the whole research process and on particular steps in the light of other steps” (Flick, 2005, p. 43). The function of theories in the research process should not be seen as correct or incorrect, but rather, “versions of a world,” which are undergoing “a continuous revision, evaluation, construction and reconstruction” (Flick, 2005, p. 43). This describes perfectly the circular model of the research process used in this study (Flick, 2005, p. 44).

## **The Case Study Approach**

This research used grounded theory and it can also be described as being a case study of the DSM. Since the DSM is a new phenomenon, conceptualizing this research as a case study allowed for an “in depth”, holistic approach to the topic through the use of individual and group interviews and inspection of documents. The aim was to understand the processes that led to the creation of the DSM and also to examine how the school had been developed and sustained since then. This also included discussing

the success of the new school to date and the future directions and needs of the school. In short, this research tells the story of the DSM.

Lichtman defined a case study approach as an, “in depth examination of a particular case” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 81). It does not have any particular philosophical underpinnings and is restricted to a single entity. Its essence is the, “specific and detailed study of a case” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 81). What constitutes a case can vary from an individual, a characteristic, a situation or a process. While the selection of a case depends on the researcher, Lichtman identified three types of cases: “the typical, the exemplary and the unique” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 82). This researcher places the case of the DSM in the latter category, because of the unusual circumstances of its formation by a group of parents, rather than the government of the day. This also fits in with the purpose of this study which is not to form generalizations, but rather to provide, “rich and detailed insight into the case” being studied (Lichtman, 2010, p. 84).

In addition to the above, Bassey (Bassey, 1999, p. 47) provided a definition of a case study as the, “study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings.” In his view, there are three categories of educational case study: theory-seeking and theory-testing case study; story-telling and picture-drawing case study; and evaluative case study (Bassey, 1999, p. 12). This case study of the DSM falls into the story-telling category which Bassey defined as, “a narrative account of the exploration and analysis of the case with a strong sense of time line” (Bassey, 1999, p. 62).

### **Data Collection**

In this study, a number of data collection methods were utilized. These included: document analysis; one-to-one interviews and group interviews; reflection by the researcher. Each one of these methods is considered in further detail and the reason for their use is given.

### **Document Analysis**

A review of relevant public documents produced by DSM was undertaken, excluding student records and personnel files. They were examined as a way of providing

background and a context for the study. At the same time, they were checked in relation to the major and minor research questions to see if they shed any light on the issues being researched. These were used in the inductive process of building categories and in the development of theories (Merriam, 2009, p. 154). They included the DSM's Constitution, Strategic Plan, Purpose and Vision, Curriculum documents, Newsletters, Publicity and Marketing information and the DSM website. It must be acknowledged that the authenticity and accuracy of documents may be an issue and, despite this and the fact that they were not produced for research purposes, they remain a good source of data, particularly in this case, as they offer an historical understanding of the DSM and provide a way of tracking change and development of the organization over time (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). The biggest advantage of using documents is their stability, being unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore are, "grounded in the real world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 156). Such documents can help the researcher to, "uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (Merriam, 2009, p. 163).

### **Interviews**

All participants were asked the same set of four questions. They were: 1. Can you tell me about your understanding of the creation of the DSM?; 2. How has the school been developed and sustained since then?; 3. Can you tell me about the success of the school to date?; 4. What are the future directions and needs of the school? The interviews were semi-structured and additional check questions were asked as needed to gain further insight or clarification.

### **One-to-one Interviews**

A number of one-to-one interviews were used to collect data. The purpose of these was to set up a situation where each interviewee revealed thoughts, ideas, feelings, intentions and sub-contexts (Lichtman, 2010, p. 140). In keeping with what most qualitative studies use, this researcher chose to use, "a small number of individuals and cover material in depth" (Lichtman, 2010, p. 142). Sampling for this study has been purposive so as to provide as rich a source of data as possible (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001, p. 120). The key people interviewed on a one-to-one basis were: the current Chairman of the Board; the current Business Manager (who was a former

Board member); the current Head Teacher; the Marketing Coordinator; a representative from the German-Catholic St Christophorus Church (one of the two Churches: St Christophorus Church and the German-Lutheran Trinity Church) that gave financial support to the school in its formative years; a former Board member. The German Consul General, Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich, was approached to be interviewed as a representative of the wider, global German-speaking community which has supported the school, however, she was overseas at the time the interviews were being conducted and thus was, unfortunately, not able to be included in this study.

### **Group Interviews**

Two group interviews were held with two different stakeholders in the school, namely the teachers and the parents. The group of current teachers comprised two interviewees and the group of current parents comprised seven interviewees. The parents were randomly selected by the researcher. The advantage provided by the group interview was that it was intended to be more like a discussion, allowing for group interaction. This allowed for new thoughts and ideas to emerge which might not normally occur in an individual interview (Lichtman, 2010, p. 154).

### **Interview Process**

To allow individuals time to consider their participation in the interviews, a letter outlining the study, its aims and purpose was given to each person, along with permission letters. The researcher then made direct contact with the interviewee (s) to arrange a date and time. At all times, this researcher stressed the value of the information, observations and insights to be gained from the interview in relation to the study. The interviews were approximately one hour in duration and were audio-taped. Interview notes were also taken by the researcher and used for analysis. The interviews were held at the school during a normal school day and at a mutually agreed time and date. The questions were semi-structured to allow for follow up of leads given by the interviewer. All participants received a copy of the questions prior to being interviewed, as only two people were native speakers of English. This process offered a general structure which was the same for all interviewees, yet still allowed scope for individual differences (Lichtman, 2010, p. 141). Because of the small size of the school, this researcher felt that it would be too difficult to guarantee

the anonymity of all the participants who consented to be identified by name in this study. Participants who were interviewed in the parent's group, however, were not named for privacy reasons.

The interviews were transcribed and member checks were made in that the individual interview transcripts were returned to interviewees for checking. Group interviews were not returned for checking because individual voices were not identified. Upon completion, a copy of the study and its final conclusions will be presented to the Board and all interviewees will receive a summary report. The study may also be presented at a formal meeting at the school. Finally, since this researcher is already part of the school community as a Board member, there will remain an ongoing partnership with the school, once the research has been completed (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001, p. 125).

### **Reflective Diary**

During the course of this study, this researcher kept a reflective journal. Its purpose was to assist in the process of data analysis in relation to the key question. Qualitative research methods based on grounded theory require constant comparison of data as part of the theory building process (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010, p. 159). Recording thoughts, emotions, hunches over the duration of the study, led to an increase in self-awareness through an examination and clarification of personal assumptions and beliefs (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695).

### **Data Analysis**

Text for narrative data was created from a number of sources, namely notes made during document analysis, individual and group interview transcripts and the researcher's own reflective journal. To begin with, relevant documents were read to provide the researcher with a background and context to the student. The analysis of the interviews followed the eight steps identified by Tesch and listed by Cresswell (Cresswell, 2009, p. 186). They were then analysed for themes and relevance to the questions being investigated.

After conducting the interviews, they were transcribed and member checks were used. The transcribed interviews were read and reread as a whole and connections and

relationships to the key question were made. Initial ideas and thoughts were noted. One interview was chosen for the initial closer examination and the question, “What is this about?” was kept in mind by this researcher (Cresswell, 2009, p. 186). This was repeated for all the interviews.

As all interviewees had been asked the same set of five questions, each interview was analysed using a colour highlighter relevant to a particular question and key points made by each interviewee were underlined in that colour. These highlighted areas were then further analysed and themes that began to emerge from them were noted in the margins of the transcribed interviews. These themes were again analysed to show interrelationships and points relevant to the research question. Analysis of the raw data in relation to the question and using the themes that had emerged began. During this process, the interviews were constantly checked and compared with the themes to ensure consistency. Many of the themes that emerged form the basis of the discussion in Chapter Five, such as the DSM’s vision, community, bilingualism, school leadership, the founding of the school, the establishment of the school, growth and change management process.

### **Rigour and Trustworthiness**

Since the researcher plays such a pivotal role in all aspects of the qualitative research process (Lichtman, 2010, p. 121), it is essential that issues of rigour and trustworthiness were attended to. For this study, a number of checks were used by this researcher to increase both the credibility and the trustworthiness of this study.

In the first instance, multiple data sources were used to gain a, “holistic understanding of the phenomenon” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). These include document analysis, two types of interview (one-to-one, group) and researcher reflection both as a researcher and as a member of the school community via a reflective journal that was kept by this researcher to facilitate reflexivity. Secondly, data were managed in systematic and organized ways and clear audit trails were kept. Member checks were used to validate interview transcripts and verbatim quotes were embedded into the study. Thirdly, data were carefully analysed using themes that emerged from the raw data. This allowed for conceptual connections to be made and conclusions to be



drawn that confirmed the findings. The school was kept informed of the entire research process through reports presented at each of the eight Board meetings held annually. By these means, the overall transparency of the study was increased.

### **Perceived Limitations**

The use of a single site case study means that it is difficult to make generalizations from this research. However, this researcher talked to many of the key people involved in the formation and development of the DSM, and this, combined with the documentary evidence, suggests that this is a rich case study, worth attending to.

It may be that the case study could be interpreted as being too subjective, especially since the researcher is also a member of the Board of the DSM. This was addressed in a number of ways such as using member checks by interviewees to verify the transcripts. Diverse quotations and multiple perspectives were incorporated to support the findings (Cresswell, 2009, p. 189). This allowed this researcher to triangulate the data. The findings have also been conveyed using rich data which can be linked to embedded quotes in Chapter Four: Results.

### **Ethical Issues and Risks**

In the first instance, permission to run the study was gained from the University of Melbourne. It was also gained from the DSM Board who were kept informed of the progress of the research through regular reports given at Board meetings. Permission was unanimous and the full value of the study was acknowledged. To protect the respondents, the following steps were taken: interviewees were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research and what their participation involved. They had the right to participate or to withdraw, free from coercion. This process took the form of a Plain Language Statement and a signed statement of Informed Consent. Data will be stored separately from files containing personal information and destroyed after five years. Finally, the findings will also be delivered to and discussed by the researcher and the school community. It is hoped that they will also be useful in assisting the DSM with its strategic planning process and in the continued sustainability of the school into the future. It is also hoped that the findings will be of

use to other schools by providing insight into new school formation, as well as leadership of a new school by its community, in particular, a bilingual school.

Chapter Four presents the results of the research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### **Overview**

This Chapter answers the major question of this study, “What led to the creation of the DSM and how has the school been developed and sustained since then?” It traces the process of the creation and establishment of the DSM and its continuation. It also examines the success of the school to date and what the future needs and directions of the school are.

Data were collected through a series of semi-structured individual and group interviews. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and member checks done. Each interview was approximately one hour in duration. Individuals were selected by the researcher because of the role they played in the school’s formation, and also to represent the diversity of the school community. Interviews were conducted with the following people who currently fulfil a variety of roles at the DSM: Volker Ankenbrand, a current Board member representing the St Christophorus Church; Sandra Battistoni, Head Teacher; Florian Dehne, Chairman of the Board; Bernd Kalinna, a current Board member responsible for Marketing; Barbara Walsh, the current Business Manager. Jo Sweeney, a former Board member and parent, was also interviewed.

Two group interviews were also conducted. A small group of two teachers who have worked continuously at the school since it opened and who still work there, comprised the first group: Susanne Hildebrand and Georgia Hohman. The second group interview consisted of seven parents from seven families who were randomly selected from a total of approximately twenty families and invited to participate by the researcher. They included a mixture of Australian and German nationalities. Four of the parents had been involved with the school since it started.

There were four main questions asked of each of the participants. They were: 1. Can you tell me about your understanding of the creation of the DSM?; 2. How has the

school been developed and sustained since then?; 3. Can you tell me about the success of the school to date?; 4. What are the future directions and needs of the school? Each of these questions had one or two check questions that were asked in addition to those listed above. As well, each person was asked individually to describe their role in the school's formation and development. Additional questions were asked as part of the semi-structured interview process. Participants were given a copy of the interview questions beforehand, as the majority of interviewees were not native speakers of English.

## **The Creation of the Deutsche Schule Melbourne**

### **The First Step – Gauging the Level of Support**

The idea for the Deutsche Schule Melbourne came from within the German-Australian speaking community. Barbara, who has been involved with the school since 2006, commented, “The school was created out of an initiative between different parties.” Sydney already had a German school, The German International School Sydney, and the Principal at that time, Klaus Steinmetz, was close to his retirement. The German-Australian community invited him to come to Melbourne and he, together with the German Consulate in Melbourne, put together what Florian described as a “road show”. Along with the Consulate Generals, he visited different cities in Australia to talk about the Sydney school, which was then about twenty years old.

Florian, when describing Klaus Steinmetz's actions, said, “...he was trying to plant the seed as one of the last actions prior to retirement for foundations of other schools around the country.” The first public meeting was held towards the end of 2004 in an impressive office space in the ANZ building on the 40<sup>th</sup> floor, which was described by Florian as being, “a beautiful space”. He recalled that it was well attended, with between 200-400 people and, after Klaus Steinmetz had spoken, a group of people, including Florian who were, “excited about the opportunities,” took Klaus out to dinner and discussed whether this idea of a German school could become a reality.

At the time, Volker was aware, “...that something was going on,” because of his contact with Roma Schultz who worked at the Goethe Institute. Volker felt that

because, “Melbourne didn’t really have a German-speaking school as Sydney had at the time...there was definitely the critical mass in Melbourne, so they thought it would be a good idea to actually create a school.”

This had been tried before, as Jo noted, “There had been two previous attempts to set up a German school in Melbourne.” These had failed because of, “issues about finding a building space and money that led to them not succeeding.” Not surprisingly, these were also the two areas that presented the greatest challenges to the creators of the DSM.

While Jo did not attend this first public meeting, her husband, Steffen Welsch, did, and Jo could report that Klaus Steinmetz’s presentation on the Sydney School was a, “very well attended talk with people from very diverse backgrounds.” It ended with a key question directed to Melbourne’s German-Australian speaking community, as Jo recalls, he asked, “So why haven’t you got a school like this in Melbourne?” One of the parents interviewed felt that his question was actually more of a challenge to the people at the meeting because Melbourne had a bigger German community than Sydney, and that what he really meant was, “You have a better environment to have a German school than what we have in Sydney, so you have all the ingredients for success. So it’s up to *you*, the community, to do something about it.”

### **The Second Step – Attracting Support and Finding Key Drivers**

Whatever the case, shortly afterwards, Melbourne’s German-Australian community scheduled a second meeting two weeks later at the Trinity Lutheran Church Hall, where the foundation of the school Association was to be discussed, as well as the formation of the first Board.

This meeting was also well attended by between 50-80 people as Florian recalls. People came to this meeting after hearing about it in different places such as a mother’s play group and a German cycling club. There were a number of reasons that people attended. Georgia went along because, “it sounded interesting.” Jo went because, “for me, it was more around culture and language maintenance,” while, for her husband, Steffen, “it was that, plus wanting to contribute to the German community.” Other parents came because, as one parent said, “a number of parents

wanted a German school because of their own German connections...it came out of a need for a German connection more than anything else.”

The founding Board of about 10 – 12 members were democratically elected at that first meeting. Jo remembers that, “when they stood for election as Board members, they had to do a little pitch about what they could offer”. To set up a school, however, required, “a lot of support from the community”, commented Sandra. Jo recalls that beyond the Board, “there was also a wider group of interested parties.” These included the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joachim von Mitzlaf the Lutheran pastor who allowed them to use the Church Hall for the meeting, Roma Schultz who worked at the Goethe Institute, and the German-Australian Chamber of Commerce.

### **The Third Step – Developing the Machinery**

Two weeks later, according to Susanne, a number of working parties were organized after the second meeting, “because they figured out straight away that some areas needed a lot more research.” These groups consisted of a Curriculum group, a Marketing group, and a Building group, in addition to the Board. Jo remembers the first Board doing, “an enormous amount of work to create a corporate identity of who we were.” These three groups developed quickly, and Jo recalls, “off they went, very capably, really, creating that identity.” When asked about how these groups were formed, Jo noted that they formed naturally and were based on, “people’s professional lives.” This led to a highly skilled team of people, all volunteers, who were able to work in their areas of expertise to establish the school. She said:

...for instance, Steffen’s an architect, so it was natural that buildings and building regs and planning regs...all fell to him. Florian Dehne is a Management Consultant, so all that demographics and...what is the need and the pitch ...was suitable for him. His wife, Averil, is a linguist, so the school model sat neatly there, and with Roma Schultz whose background was teaching, originally. There were two lawyers on the founding Board, so they picked up legal. The Chair of the Board had a psychology background, actually, and spent a lot of time helping just to create a structure.

This was fortunate because there was plenty to do and because the skills of the people were a good fit with the tasks. For example, in the Curriculum Group there were, amongst others, qualified teachers, a linguist and an anthropologist. Florian outlined some of the first Board's tasks which included, amongst others, to determine:

Is there a demand for the school...How do we set it up?...getting the school Association in place as formal entity. What's the right model? What type of school do we want to be? We thought about the name of the school and mapping out what's the path to establishing the school, figuring out what the requirements are and kicking that process off.

Each working group set about researching their particular area. Susanne recalled, for example, the Marketing group did detailed surveys about: How many German children under the age of 15 live in Melbourne? Do one or both parents have a German passport? Where do these people live? How much would they pay in school fees? The Curriculum group researched a suitable model for the school to use and to do this they went to various bilingual schools in Melbourne, talked to Principals and investigated Canadian immersion models. The Building group was keen to locate premises, and because it was clear that commercial buildings were unaffordable, various Church groups who'd previously run schools were approached.

Marketing was always important to the school, and Jo Sweeney, a former Board member, identified Edgar Demuth as one of the key people vital to the school's establishment. He was on the second Board and his area of responsibility was media and communication strategies. She talked about how he did an "incredible job" in his role of marketing:

...in those years where we were selling nothing to people. We didn't have a building; we had a school model; we didn't have financial backing and he was really...selling ice to the Eskimos.

Nevertheless, the clarity and quality of the school's vision remained rock solid. Jo also reflected that in the school's first year, while some things "felt very fluid and

changeable” other things, like the school model of “one teacher, one language” were fixed.

### **A Time of Change**

There was much activity during 2005 and the lease for a site at an old church school, St Ignatius, that had been shut down in Richmond was, “virtually ready,” when, as Jo recalls, “that fell through at the very last minute and we had a turnover of Board at that point.” Martin Schreiber, the first Chairman, resigned due to his other commitments. Roma Schultz became Chair of the Board, but then she also resigned because she was returning to Germany and the Deputy Chair, Daniel Rittlewski, was moving to Japan.

At this point, Florian, who had been on the first Board looking after commercial market questions, was asked if he would accept the position as Chairman of the Board. He had resigned from the Board to go to Germany in early 2006 but then returned later that year. Florian accepted the role as Chairman and from then on, as he noted, his role, “changed quite substantially,” to one of leadership. In his view:

...the most important role of the Chair is to keep the organization going and that involves making sure there is the right skills set on the Board at the time. You need to motivate volunteers, get the right ones, make sure that succession happens and try to motivate people to do the right things and...to get stuff done and I guess to some extent also, moderating setting of the direction as well.

This is a description of leadership in practice and shows very clearly how leadership revolves around the interactions of leaders and followers in various situations. Florian took on the role of Chair at the point where negotiations for the lease of the school site in North Fitzroy were being completed. He felt that 2007 was, “a year of detailed planning, rather than top level planning.” The focus was now on getting the school up and running. Edgar Demuth and the new Board members at that time brought what Jo referred to as, “a bit of fresh energy which was lovely and they all had different skill sets and off we went again on the second round.”

### **Securing Financial Backing**

Establishing an independent school is expensive. This is evident in Jo’s comment:



After we'd met perhaps about a year...it became clear that we were going to need a fair amount of start up cash and that wasn't going to come out of thin air and both the Catholic German Church and the Lutheran German Church were approached and became partners with the school. These two churches supplied the money which was essential for the start-up of the school. It paid for the first teacher, Armgard Hildenbrand and for the newly secured premises in North Fitzroy to be renovated.

Volker was able to shed some light on how the two Churches became involved in the school's formation. He outlined how, at the time of being approached to financially back the school, his Church, the German-speaking, Catholic, St. Christophorus Church in Camberwell, was itself, in a, "critical situation." He describes a community of around 400 people, but with an average age of 78 or 80 years. This, in his view, influenced the Church to accept the offer to support the school. He gave the rationale to do so in the following way:

Well, what do we do with the money we have in the account which is there for the survival of the community? But if we don't find young people and if we don't find young families, eventually the community will die and the money will go away.

This is how Volker outlined his role in the school's formation and development and the job of sourcing start-up funds:

My role...was...to get the funds right, because financially, nobody at the time was willing to support the German school, so I know at the time, Roma, she went...from company to company and nobody was willing to sponsor the German school. Nor did the German Government, because the rule of the German Government is, the school has to survive three years and only after three years, that sort of indicates it will have a future, then they will fund a certain degree...

Each of the two German churches, the Lutheran and Catholic, were approached and each church loaned the school \$100,000 as start-up funds. Volker expressed the view that this was felt to be a good investment, "because there's no point in having a

German speaking community if you have people who don't understand German in the first place." Supporting the school meant religious education would be guaranteed, as it is key subject in the German curriculum and putting money into a school made more sense as an investment, "rather than having money in the bank," said Volker.

### **Gaining Official Status**

#### Gaining accreditation from the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)

The curriculum of the DSM meets the requirements of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and also that of Thüringen, Germany. It was always part of the school's vision to combine these two curricula, as Barbara's comment reveals:

...the aim was always to also be recognized by the German Government to become a Deutsche Schule abroad, which is in line with the German political view of creating cultural pathways for Germans going into different countries, but also to spread the word, the culture, the language.

The Thüringen curriculum was selected, as Susanne remembers, "because it was the newest twelve-year curriculum in Germany...and it was one of the top scorers of the Pisa study...above the German average." This was then merged with the Curriculum in Victoria which, in 2004, was Curriculum Standard Framework 2, and would become VELS in 2006. The first Curriculum Group wrote the curriculum for VELS Levels 1 – 2, while a second Curriculum Group wrote the curriculum for VELS Levels 3 – 4 in 2010. As part of that process, when the two curricula were merged, the highest level from either the Victorian VELS or the Thüringen curricula was incorporated into the new DSM curriculum.

When the school first sought registration, the key body was called the Registered School's Board, but Jo remembers, there was:

...another little hiccup...it was the same year that the Education and Training Reform Act was passed and the

VRQA formed and so we were going to have to resubmit the next year for a whole new set of rules.

At this point, fortunately, said Jo, the curriculum had already largely been written and it, "...didn't have to be hugely modified...it was more around policies, procedures, governance and the amount of documentation and regulation that had to be submitted...".

While the changes to VELs and the new VRQA in Victoria posed problems for the writers of the Curriculum group, the change from the old Education Act of 1956 to the new Education and Training Reform Act of 2006, meant that the issue of only allowing English to be the language of instruction was removed. This paved the way for the official recognition of bilingualism in Victoria. Jo commented:

...there it was, bold as brass, written in the Education Act that you couldn't teach in any other language besides English. I think in years gone by it had been trotted out as a reason that it was always going to be difficult to start a school that taught in a language that wasn't English....

The final hurdle was to convince the VRQA to register the school. This came quite late in 2007 remembers Jo:

...right up until just before Christmas, we didn't have approval from the VRQA and so there were parents who...everyone was fully aware, we'd asked them to enroll their children in another school, in their local school, because there was a risk that this school would not proceed. We didn't have the designated number of students which was 20 and that was the key issue.

Finally, Florian and Jo attended a meeting towards the end of 2007 at the VRQA. Florian recollects:

I can very vividly remember that meeting. They had a great concern about how sustainable the school was in the long run...we were able to convince them that we have a concept that is pretty compelling.

Reflecting on what she thought the highlights of starting a school were, Jo commented:

I remember a particular meeting with the VRQA, with Florian. This was just before Christmas, the day we received verbal approval that the school was going to be approved by the authority and it wasn't clear what was going to happen...but they'd offered us an eleventh hour meeting ...it was clear to us at the end of that meeting that we were going to be able to proceed...and that, just elation, that we could tell those parents...the school holidays were days away.

### Gaining Accreditation from the German Government

In 2010, the school became fully accredited with the German Government as, "eine deutsche Auslandsschule," or a, "German school abroad." This was an important milestone for the DSM, because it gave the school official status and led to the school receiving financial backing from the German Government in the form of a grant to help pay a teacher's salary. The role of the Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Anne-Marie Schleich, was instrumental in this process. Sandra felt that she took care of, "the German side of regulations," and was also, "an advocate for it." Bernd, a current Board member responsible for Marketing, regarded Dr. Schleich as a driving force behind the school who took, "a personal interest in supporting the school."

Barbara also felt that the Consul General's role was, "very important in the recognition of a school in Germany as well." She went on to elaborate on the significance of this:

Obviously we wanted to be a German English Bilingual school that is in Melbourne and that runs by an Australian calendar. We didn't want to be a German island sitting in Melbourne. We wanted to interact with local communities, recognizing that a lot of parents might be Germans that have married an Australian and that to a lot of those children, the reality is, that they are out of two different cultures and we wanted to bring this together in a school.

Gaining official status from the German Government was, “a big achievement,” in Bernd’s view:

...this was unusual because we received it after two years of operation and usually they only grant that kind of status after three years, which, I think, shows that there’s a lot of trust in the school and people running the school.

The benefits of being officially recognized are many. Parents who are in Australia on a short-term visit know that they, “can just rely on the curriculum,” as one current parent said. It means, as Barbara explained, their children can attend a school in Australia, as one current parent phrased it, so that on their return to Germany, they can, “easily fit back into a German system, or, alternatively.... transfer to another German school abroad in a different country.” Barbara felt this gave expatriate parents, “a network and a security,” which is important when selecting a school for their child.

### **How The School Has Been Developed And Sustained.**

#### **The First Year - 2008**

The DSM began with just one composite class from P-2, one teacher, Armgard Hildenbrand, and 14 students (an average of 13 across the year), coming from 13 families. To open with such small numbers, the school had to get special permission from the VRQA, which was granted. It opened its doors with very limited facilities. Even by the second year, which is when the current Head Teacher, Sandra, arrived, Sandra remembers, “...it still felt very basic. We didn’t have the toilet block. We had very little teaching material. We had hardly any resources.”

One of the parents remembered what it felt like in the first year and commented, “There wasn’t actually infrastructure. There were just the bare bones.” There weren’t enough books, so the English teacher had to borrow readers from another school. However, the parents rallied around, as the parent above continued, “...we all kind of knew that. I think it’s fair to say we all had a good attitude about it. It was like, ‘Oh well, off we go!’ New pioneers kind of thing.” Part of the problem was, “...there was no historical back-up...everything was for the first time.” This became the theme for the year.

There was no administrative support and Armgard became, in Jo's view, "...the face of the school in a day-to-day operational way...she had a heavy load of classroom teaching, leadership and also administration." Despite this, many people interviewed felt that she was, as Bernd put it, "quite a driver," who was, "very engaged." Armgard was very much supported by Florian and the Board who, as Jo expressed, "took a very operational role in the beginning." Barbara also saw that the Board in these early days of the school, "was taking over all those administrative functions." There were no other paid positions apart from the one, full-time teacher, although there were also a few hours where part-time teachers were employed. Thus, the school relied heavily on volunteers to help get things up and running and keep them that way.

Eventually, by the end of the first year, Barbara, who had been Treasurer and was also looking after enrolments, realized that her, "different tasks were becoming too big," and, "could not be sustained in the long run," so she resigned from the Board and was employed as the school's Business Manager. This was the second major paid position in the school.

The school had opened without a principal, because, as Jo said, "We couldn't afford a principal...we had a lot of debt." The tasks that would normally have been done by a principal were distributed amongst the Board, the teachers and the parents. The Board combined two roles: providing leadership and, at the same time, making a significant contribution to the day-to-day running of the school. As Jo remembers, "The Board did a lot of very active, operational work and the teachers did work well above and beyond what a regular classroom teaching job would be."

Jo maintains that, "...it worked because of the goodwill of all the people involved." She said, "Everybody understood that that was going to be required...we were all volunteers except for the teaching staff." This sometimes led to confusion, "about who people should go to, for what," and she humorously recalled being handed the school's mail to open and being told, "You're the Principal. You do it," to which she replied, "I'm not the Principal."

To keep up with the rapid pace of developments in the school's first year of operation, the Board called regular planning meetings in addition to Board meetings. These were held, remembers Jo:

...every six months at that point because things were moving so fast, we needed to be regularly updating our goals and, "What's next? What's next?"

Board meetings were well attended, recalls Jo and, "...everybody had a full dance-card of jobs to do before the next meeting."

Jo and Steffen were the only Board members who had children at the school and Jo remembers that, on occasions, some parents saw the Board as "an invisible entity." To bridge any gap that was forming, Town Hall meetings were held. These were, Jo recalls:

...a great big Open House where anyone with any kind of question or issue that had arisen could come and the Board would be there, or a large proportion of the Board, to deal with people's concerns and issues.

It was clear that over the course of the first year, many issues and matters needed clarification, which the school's founders hadn't anticipated. This shift in focus from planning and trying to establish a school, to actually running a school and what that meant, in practice, was noted by many interviewees.

One parent reflected:

...that change from working...to get the school off the ground...and setting it up to, 'Oh dear, this is now a running concern.' There was a shift in what that means and how you need to work on a project to get it to the starting point and then it's actually a running concern, so that needs to be run differently.

Florian also noted an interesting change in the view of some Board members once the school opened. Having worked hard to establish the school, it seemed that some members felt that they had done enough:

For many Board members, it was like, well, we get it across the finish line and then say, 'Phew. I've achieved that. Thank you very much. I'll resign now,' which is fair enough, because they worked extremely hard, but the reality was, that a lot of the real work really started with the school opening, rather than being finished....

He continued with this pertinent observation, "...once you have a real school with real parents that have real issues...it was pretty difficult." In explaining the differences between a school that's established and one that's forming, Jo noted:

In one that's still forming, everything's questioned. Someone says,  
"Why isn't sunscreen on my child?"  
"Well, we haven't got a sunscreen policy."  
"Let's go and write one and decide what our ideas are about that."  
....All these things had to be established and, "Where's the first-aid kit? Where does it sit? Who checks it every week? Who knows about the Anaphylaxis Plan?"

Many of these procedural issues couldn't have been foreseen by the founders of the school, because they were issues that emerged once the school became a reality. Everyone involved with the school was being pushed to their limits. However, people tried to help each other out, so that the necessary administrative and organizational tasks were done. Bernd sees this as a strength of the school, "...it's a group of individuals who are persistent. They don't give up...are imaginative and have lots of ideas and follow them up." Georgia noted that, "It was trial and error. Everything was new. The consultation process got more and more transparent, clearer and concise as time went on."

What carried the school during its first year was its vision, as Jo confirmed:

...the school has done a remarkable job of continuing to hold firm to its vision, given the fact that there has been a changeover of people involved in the school. There has been enough continuity that the key...elements of what the school is about have come through.



Volker also noted that the fundamental purpose of the school, which was to provide a bilingual immersion program and the curriculum that goes with it, has remained constant, "...what was really avoided at the time were the huge fundamental discussions." Decisions were, "made much more about how to achieve the goal, than decisions about the goal itself."

During the first year, clarity about who the school was for needed to be achieved. As one parent noted:

I don't know whether the team that founded the school was very clear on who would actually use the school...and what kind of community would join, whether it would be people that would be purely expats, people that have German background and live here and speak German at home or the locals that want the immersion idea for their children.

Clearly, planning for a school while the school was in its founding phase and the reality of actually being open and receiving enrolments in 2008, were two different things about over which the school's founders had little control. As one parent stated:

The people that set it up before the school opened on day one, term one had authority and ownership and decision-making, and, as soon as the parents arrived, well, by definition, we all became equal partners.

The task of making the new school work now belonged to everyone and all hands were needed on deck to ensure the DSM's continuation and success.

### **The Second Year - 2009**

At the start of the school's second year, 2009, Armgard left to return to Germany and Sandra was appointed to take her place. This created some angst, as Sandra observed, "Armgard was the school in the first year and it was difficult to see her leave for the parents as well as the colleagues." Enrolling a child in what was not only a brand new school, but also a bilingual immersion one, "required an incredible amount of trust by the people that sent their children," recalls one parent.

The loss of Armgard was felt by all, especially, as Barbara noted, because she had been, “the only full-time teacher, so naturally she was holding up the school.” Her role had been a challenging one, as Florian reflected, noting that while the opening of the school was:

...great...it was probably also extremely tough for the then Head Teacher, Armgard...there were some part-time teachers but they only taught a few hours...Things had to get done primarily by one person at that time.

One parent commented that with the loss of the first teacher, there was, “a bit of vacuum as well.” Another parent said, “There was a level of uncertainty going on.” Perhaps it was a case, as a third parent commented, “...some people just felt emotionally worn out by the process.”

This is hardly surprising as the whole school community had invested so much in the creation of the school and it was finding that dealing with the realities of running a school, was demanding. Enrolments had not increased as rapidly as projected and this led to further unease. Of necessity, the Board was taking on two roles, governance and day-to-day operational tasks, so the risk of burn-out was high.

The pressures of running a new school, combined with staff changes, meant that during the second year, the school was in a transition phase. Sandra reflected, “I think that the transition was a bit difficult, but after two terms it ran quite smoothly again.” Role clarity was an issue, as Sandra explained, “In the beginning, it wasn’t that clear who has exactly what role, what tasks those roles comprise.”

This is also evident in parents’ responses when asked, “How was leadership and management demonstrated in the school during those first two years?” One parent said, “Most of it came from Florian and the teachers.” Another parent noted that, “the role of Chair took on an awful lot in order to try and contain some kind of leadership structure...”

Bernd also felt that during this time, “for a while, I think, everything was in limbo.” He asked himself the question, “Will the school persist?” Survival of the school was

paramount in everybody's minds. Volker explains what it felt like using a sport analogy, "It really felt a bit like a footy match. There's a lot going on in your mind and will it survive or won't it survive?" There was much at stake, not the least of which was the large sum of money invested by the two churches.

However, by the end of the second year, some of the transition issues had been clarified, more processes established and all of this took time, as Barbara noted:

...it's not done from today to tomorrow. It takes training up new people and understanding and passing on new knowledge. A lot of this knowledge is not written down in any form.

By the end of 2009, the school received more enrolments and Sandra began to settle into her role as Head Teacher.

### **Third and Fourth Years - 2010, 2011**

These years can be viewed as a time of consolidation and stability for the school. It was able to begin to repay, "large proportions of the loans with the churches which created a lot of confidence by those partners that they made the right decision at the time," recalls Florian.

Increasing enrolments meant more staff could be employed. As a result, Florian noted, "Every year we have more and more activities which unsustainably sat with Board members, move into the hands of staff." Parents saw that, "over the last couple of years...there's been some more distribution of tasks." Sandra also noted that roles were gradually clarified through discussion so that:

...in the third year we were able to organise that a bit better. The leadership role is basically spread on several people and so, me as a Head Teacher, I'm more the everyday organization or the parent contact, more leading the teacher's team, whereas Barbara does all of the finances as the Business Manager and Florian is involved...in the bigger decisions when they have to go to the Board, so we are always in close contact. The leadership role is spread on those three people mostly and, of course, the Board is included whenever there are decisions to make, or bigger changes.

In this way, the roles and tasks that would normally be performed by a principal are, in Sandra's view, "just spread among several people."

Gaining accreditation from the German Government had also provided more funds which were used to pay for extra teaching staff. This gave the school additional security and stability.

In considering the "do's and don'ts of establishing a school, Florian mentioned two things he felt were important. The first is to match enthusiasm with ability, as he said:

...when you're building a team of volunteers to get something done, motivation is only one part, but it's not enough. You actually need to have people that have capability and motivation.

Another key point Florian felt was important when starting a school, was realizing that doing so, is only the beginning, "...the start-up phase is an important journey, but it's probably the smaller one. The bigger one is actually once you've started, to keep it happening." His comments highlight the difference between two distinct phases in the school's formation – the founding phase and the establishment phase.

## **The Success of the School to Date**

### **Overview of Success**

Despite being in operation for just over three years, the total list of successes mentioned by the interviewees is extensive and wide-ranging. Most were able to nominate at least four key areas the school is good at. There were two aspects of the school which were mentioned by all interviewees: the bilingual program as embodied in the school's vision and its model of bilingualism; the strong sense of community felt by everyone involved with the school.

Two other areas were named as key successes by four interviewees. They were: the fact that the school is now established and growing; the benefits of being a small school. Two other respondents mentioned the school's increasing enrolments as another indicator of success.

Other areas of success that were mentioned by one individual only, are simply listed here and not discussed in detail. They are: the school now has better resources and facilities; expectations are clearer; its marketing and positioning; increased international interest; increased sustainability in the running of the school; accreditation by the German Government; promotion of understanding of other cultures and tolerance; engagement by students.

In what follows, the two main aspects mentioned by everyone, bilingualism and community will be discussed in detail.

### **The Bilingual Program**

For Sandra, there is no doubt that the full-immersion German language program at the school, “works really well.” She added:

We’ve seen a lot of Preps starting now with no German and you can just see how much they learn and how quickly they learn the language and improve in it.

Florian, felt that delivering a successful bilingual program was, “the key element of the vision of the school,” that is, “children who live and learn two cultures and languages.” He attributed this to the strength of the final model adopted by the school: “Fundamentally, the model is fantastic and we should keep it as it is. That’s the greatest measure of success: the model seems to be working really well.”

Barbara also harked back to when the school was being established:

...we took the view from the beginning that we wanted to bring cultures together because a lot of our students are from a mixed culture background and we did not want to be a German island.

This notion of not wanting to be, “a German island that’s not interested in what’s outside the fence”, as Barbara termed it, seems to have helped the DSM to establish its own identity. She explained:

There are German schools in different countries in the world, schools that follow the German curriculum, the German school calendar, everything they do is German...they are schools for expatriates that might come for different amounts of time...Their vision and output is completely different to ours.

Barbara explained how the DSM is different from some of the other types of Deutsche Auslandsschulen (German schools abroad) that exist:

Those are schools that might have, let's say, an English stream and a German stream and some classes they might share and swap students, so that's where the integration comes in, but then they go back into their own classes for different subjects.

In contrast to this, Barbara continued:

...Whereas our school is a fully integrated school. We don't have any streams. We mix streams from German language backgrounds, as well as English speaking backgrounds. Some might know one language, some might know the other and we mix them all together. We don't differentiate.

Susanne felt that being bilingual brings many advantages, as she said, "We hope that bringing up children bilingual increases their problem-solving skills. We have two ways to solve problems."

Jo thought the school, "really delivered on the language outcomes." She gave a personal example, "My kids already spoke some German but, within three weeks, they were fluent and could read straight away."

For parents, the bilingual experience has been a positive one for their child. One parent compared, "where we were at the beginning with where we are now, where the kids...they're living proof of the concept working and it's great." Another parent who had no German background and no German connections commented, "I brought my child in here and I think she's a really good example of that it can work and that it's easy." Another parent stayed with the school, despite having to deal with issues

to do with, "...what it means for me to be at a German school when I was born in the UK and Germany was still the enemy in the sixties and seventies..." This parent felt there were benefits to being at a bilingual school, "...my child is learning this other language and so...realizes that nothing's ever one way and nothing's ever the way that only you see it." To support her view, this parent quoted the late Professor Michael Clyne:

Michael Clyne said early on and, this is my quote, that, 'Monolingualism is curable', but I've always heard you've got to give it enough chance, so, for me, it was trying to stay positive and trying to find creative ways to participate in the community and stay involved and connected.

Bernd appreciated the combination of the two different curricula. He said:

When you look at them individually, the VELS has shortcomings and the German Thüringen one has shortcomings, but by combining them, I think you're combining the strength of both and you're supplementing the weaknesses of both...

Bernd felt that the combined curriculum meant the students are getting, "the best of both worlds...they get a very strong education and I think that's a really, really strong part of the school."

Volker also commented on how successful the bilingual program was, "The kids coming, especially those kids that are not of a German heritage, after a couple of months, they are speaking German fluently, so they totally integrate." He felt that being bilingual was beneficial for a child's personal development as well as their brain development as, "It gives alternatives in life that monolingual schools don't really have."

### **The Sense of Community**

This is a notable area of success for the school and was mentioned by all participants. When talking about what the school is good at, Sandra's comment is representative of all the interviewees:

I think what our school's good at, is really the feel, the community feel. I think the kids genuinely enjoy coming to school and don't want to leave, so I think the kids are very happy here.

She went on to define what she meant by community at the DSM:

I mean the school community, the children in the school, also the parents, the teacher team, is just a very close team and works well with each other and also all three of them combined as community.

Barbara saw that the DSM is, "able to facilitate a strong parent community." She saw that this happens naturally, "...because you have people coming from abroad that are looking for other Germans to speak to," but she also saw that the school, "can facilitate that process of parents meeting and working together." Parents can get involved in the Newsletter group, the Marketing or Events groups, or in the reading program. The school seeks to reach out to parents even before their child begins, as Barbara noted:

...we've got new parents for 2012-2014 and we are trying to facilitate those parents meeting other parents, so they can already build up relationships with others even before school starts, because that will help their child in the process of getting integrated into the school.

For Florian, successful involvement of the wider community links back to the school's creation:

We always had a vision...around creating a focal point for the German-Australian community. There was a vision for a school which was not just built around delivering a school program. It was around creating close connections within the parent communities and with the wider local and German-Australian communities to try to deliver the promise...but...plenty of elements can be experienced and I think that's certainly an area of success.

Jo also agreed that there was a strong sense of community and she regarded the steadfastness to the school vision as one of its greatest successes. She said, "I think



the school has done a remarkable job of continuing to hold firm to its vision, given the fact that there has been a changeover of people involved in the school.”

Susanne also noted that, “The percentage of parents involved in the school is enormous.” Her explanation for this was, “They are convinced about this absolutely fantastic school and they want to improve the school for their children. They see results in their work.”

For the parents as well, the community side of the school is its greatest success. One parent felt that the school allows the Germans to celebrate their culture:

What I see is...that the Germans can come to the school and our events, and things that we have here, and they can celebrate their culture quite openly...and that's something I have not seen in Melbourne so openly.

This same parent felt that the school worked, “like a magnet that draws the community together and allows them to enjoy the culture with one another.” This mixing of cultures was appreciated by one overseas parent, where, at the school, “You meet Australian locals as well. That's the great thing for us, not only Germans, but the Australians as well.”

For another parent, the school was like an extended family for her child:

I mean, the kids want to come, they want to play...certainly, in my case, there's three of us here and this is the extended family... and, “We want to play here. We don't want to go home after school. Can I play a bit more?”...I think that's something fantastic. Our kid loves going to school.

Several other parents also agreed with this view. Bernd explained:

You feel at home here. You can bond with the school, there's a strong feeling of bonding which is quite unusual for a school, as such, because normally people just send

their kids there and let it run, but here, everyone works together to make it work, to make it happen.

Volker noted that, in the end, it was the two church communities (which are also “not-for-profit” organizations) that supported the establishment of the school and for that reason, “I think the German school sees the community, rather than the sponsors”.

Finally, when discussing the wealth of community support the DSM drew on in its creation and establishment, Florian gave the following explanation:

I think there's something in terms of community engagement around setting something up and creating something new that engages people and you can get a lot of activity out of them if you have a vision of, “This is what's there now and this is what can or could be there if we all roll up our sleeves and chip in.”

He also saw that this enthusiasm and sense of excitement is not so easy to produce in a larger organisation, or indefinitely, but for now, at the DSM, this is still the case, as he continued:

It's easier for us because what we're building is so exciting and every year you can see, well, it's actually quite different and its much larger and, ‘I've had a big part in that,’ and that's motivating and reinforcing.

There were also various points where the community was openly consulted. These opportunities came at extra Annual General Meetings before the school was opened and then at Open Planning Days (also named “Town Hall” meetings), after the school opened. This also occurred at a Board level as well, as it took on extra responsibilities and carried out additional tasks, not normally done by a Board, so that it worked on two levels - strategic and operational. The Board was frequently consulted on many things a normal Board wouldn't have been, as Jo said, “...a lot of decision-making had to be taken back to the Board...the teachers felt they weren't in a position to decide and no individual Board member was in a position to decide.” It was very much a team effort and the high levels of communication that were required to keep the school going, helped to maintain morale and develop transparency.

## **The Future Directions and Needs of the School**

The interviewee's views on what form of the future directions and needs of the school might take, depended to a certain extent on their role in the school. Sandra, Barbara and the teachers felt that there was a need to continue increasing enrolments, so as to fully establish the primary school, as Sandra said, to achieve, "a full primary school with seven classes for seven year levels."

Another area of need mentioned by Bernd, Volker and Sandra, was to focus on developing a secondary school. Sandra saw that the biggest decision now for the school was "when the secondary school would start and what exactly it would look like." The issues raised by this factor included the type of curriculum that would be used for the secondary school, the employment of specialist teachers and the development of specialist rooms. Florian encapsulated the school's current thinking on this matter:

...we want to create a school which we now believe needs to be a school starting from Kinder to IB (International Baccalaureate) and I think this will take a long time and there are many steps to go, but we certainly still have that as a vision.

To accompany this vision of a growing school, Volker, Bernd, Florian and Jo saw that a Principal would be needed, as Jo said, "A school Principal is required urgently for the teachers and for the families and for the Board. It'll just make everyone's life a little easier...". This would then mean, as Florian pointed out, that the Board, "...can focus on core Board activities," and that would also increase the school's sustainability by reducing the reliance on what he saw as, "a certain number...handful of individuals."

Balancing the future needs and directions of the DSM will be a delicate task, but what is vital to maintain in the school, was aptly expressed by Volker, "The focus is really to maintain the good quality and, as well, the satisfaction of the parents." Continuing

to deliver quality student outcomes will need to be balanced with the reality of increasing enrolments as one parent noted, "...I think that's something about being able to hold growth and work for it, but also being able to manage it." Volker's final comment made at the end of his interview, perhaps best expresses what those who worked for, or are still working for in the DSM, want:

In the end of the day, the success of the original idea will be measurable only by the end result of the education: if the children leaving the school are good humans and doing right things for the future. I guess that's our interest and that's any school's interest...

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Overview

The aim of this research was to discover what led to the creation of the DSM and to examine how the school has been developed and sustained since then. The scope of this investigation also included the success of school to date and its future directions and needs. This chapter contains three sections: discussion of the results of the case study in relation to the research question; exploration of the findings and new school formation; insights gained from this case study relating to the areas of school leadership and community. To gain further insight into these last two areas, they are examined in relation to a theory of change management (Kotter, 1996) and the Victorian contribution to the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) (Gurr & Drysdale, 2008). The key points of the findings are summarized in Table 1. This Chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings, including areas for future research.

**TABLE 1: FORMATION OF THE DSM**

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Developmental Milestones</b>	<b>Change Management Processes</b> (Kotter, 1996)	<b>ISSPP-Australian Model of Successful Principalship: Building School Capacity</b> (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006)  (In order of Priority)
<b>The Founding Phase</b>  <b>2004 - 2008</b>	Klaus Steinmetz  German Institutions  1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> Board  First Teacher  Parents	1. Defining levels of support 2. Attracting supporters and finding key drivers 3. Developing the Machinery 4. Securing Financial Backing 5. Registration with VRQA for Yrs P-4	1. Establishing a sense of urgency 2. Creating the guiding coalition 3. Developing a vision and strategy 4. Communicating the change vision 5. Empowering a broad base of people to take action 6. Generating short-term wins	1. Community 2. Organisational 3. Personal 4. Professional
<b>The Established Phase</b>  <b>2009 - 2011</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Board  German Institutions  Head Teacher  Other Teachers/Staff  Parents	1. Structures and processes established 2. Increasing enrolments 3. Full registration with VRQA for Years P-6 4. Accreditation with Germany	7. Consolidating gains and producing more change 8. Institutionalising new approaches in the culture	1. Organisational 2. Professional 3. Community 4. Personal

## **The Creation of the DSM**

The opening of the Deutsche Schule Melbourne in 2008 was the result of an extended and coordinated effort over the previous four years by members from the German-Australian speaking community in Melbourne. There were two distinct phases in the creation of the DSM. The first concerns the period of time leading up to the school's creation and just after it opened, which this researcher has named, "The Founding Phase, 2004 – 2008." The second concerns the time when the school began to feel more like a "real" school, which this researcher has called, "The Established Phase, 2009 – 2011." Both of these phases are briefly described here. They form a framework for the discussion of the results that follows.

### **The Founding Phase, 2004 – 2008.**

Many people were involved in the creation of the school. The first public meeting where Klaus Steinmetz proposed the idea of a German school in Melbourne drew an immediate and strong response from the German-Australian community. It served to both gauge whether there was sufficient support from within that community to support the establishment of the school, and also to rally members to create the school. A subsequent meeting elected the school's first Board and over four years, many willing people came forward to make the school a reality. Key milestones were: gaining supporters for the idea and finding key drivers prepared to work to create the necessary structures and process to found the school; securing financial backing from two churches, finding a suitable site and buildings for the school; writing the curriculum and gaining VRQA registration for years P-4.

Motivation to establish the school came from the desire to create a bilingual school for the maintenance of the German language and culture, which was supported by a passionate belief in the value of bilingualism. There was also a strong sense that this would help to strengthen the existing German-Australian community by creating a focal point. For some, there was a sense of wanting to "give back something" to the community. To make the school a reality, the wider German community which supported the school and the Churches that gave financial backing to the school, were also motivated to do so out of a need to keep their own communities alive. This entire process required high levels of trust from everybody involved, as two previous

attempts to set up a German school in Melbourne had failed. In the process of being founded, democratic processes and procedures were followed and high levels of parent involvement were sought. This helped in the school's creation by securing a wide base of supporters.

The opening of the school in 2008 was both a relief and a joy, but it also meant more work as the processes, structures and relationships for running a school still had to be established (Nicholas, 2010). Parents who had made a huge commitment to the school by enrolling their children, had a sense of themselves as “crusaders” or “new pioneers” as they felt that nothing about what they were doing had been done before. Operating the school without a principal meant that the Board took on extra roles and became “very operational”. Teachers worked above and beyond what was required. In the second year, the school entered into a period of transition, as the initial teacher was replaced by a new Head Teacher. During this time, the school could be said to have experienced an “implementation dip” (Fullan, 2001, p. 40), resulting from staff changes and the heavy workload required by all members of the school community to establish the processes and structures needed to make a new school work.

#### **The Established Phase, 2009 - 2011.**

By the end of 2009, many of the school's necessary processes, procedures and policies had been established through the combined efforts of parents, teachers and the DSM Board. This was needed to gain full registration from Years P-6. Leadership continued to be distributed and, with improved communication and consultation, processes became clearer and more transparent. The school gained increased enrolments, and this, in turn, led to greater resource provision. This meant that during the third and fourth years (2010 and 2011), the new school began to feel more like a “real” school with increasing enrolments, more resources including more staff, better facilities, and a clear brand, which could be marketed. In 2010 it gained full registration as a P-6 primary school from the VRQA, and accreditation from the German Government as a “German school abroad.” These all gave the school Board confidence to plan for the future as a full primary school of seven separate classes for seven year levels, as well as a secondary pathway for its students.

## **The DSM and New School Formation**

There is limited literature available on how a new school is formed (Collier, 2001) and there is no research base upon which theoretical assumptions could be made about new schools (Nicholas, 2010). Much of the focus of research in the field of bilingual education is on whether it is a reliable method for teaching languages and how it works (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009). Eight factors that are important in the successful formation of a new school emerge from this case study, and these may be useful in adding to the existing literature in this area. These factors are discussed below.

### **A Clear Vision**

In creating a new school, the leadership team needs to have a clear position of the school and its future (Collier, 2001). Developing the DSM's vision was undertaken by the first Curriculum group that researched widely to come up with the bilingual, biliterate model of total immersion upon which the school is based. The notion of living and learning in two cultures (German and English), so clearly articulated by the school's founders, was embedded in the school's curriculum through its blend of the Victorian VELS Curriculum and that of Thüringen, in Germany. It sustained the school through difficult times by giving everyone involved in the school a sense of purpose and it has remained virtually unchanged since it was written.

### **A Distributed Leadership**

In the absence of a principal, the school had to set up alternative processes for making decisions that were clear and viable. The tasks that would normally have been done by a principal were distributed amongst the Board, the teachers and the parents. Other studies have shown that this approach to leadership is both practical and may even be more effective than traditional, hierarchical approaches (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008; Cummins, 2002; Spillane, 2006). More recent studies have found a direct link between increased distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities and the improvement of student outcomes (Day, Sammons, & Leithwood, 2011, p. 234).

### **Market Orientation**

From the outset, the very first Marketing group researched potential sources of school enrolments and started developing the DSM as a distinctive brand. The school began



developing a market niche for itself, based on the fact that it was not only a German English Bilingual school, but also one that offered total immersion in the German language. Forming a distinctive identity which is related to the school's ethos was also noted by other researchers as important for successful school formation (Collier, 2001).

### **External Community Involvement**

The school drew on many areas of the wider German-Australian community for support. These included institutions such as the German Consulate General Melbourne, two German churches and a wide range of individuals from the German community, all of whom contributed to the school's formation. This leads directly into the next area.

### **School Community Involvement**

The parent-school partnerships developed by the DSM were strong and effective. Being a small school without a principal meant everyone had to be as involved as far as possible to ensure that all the areas needed for the school's operation were covered. Parents were involved in committees, on the Board and as teachers, which ensured that the parent ties to the school were very strong. This level of parental involvement is regarded as highly desirable by the Victorian government (DEECDa, 2011; DET, 2005) and through this, the level of social capital that the DSM developed and drew on was extremely high (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; West-Burnham & Otero, 2008). This is not always the case in schools, as another study in this area noted (Raihani & Gurr, 2010). The task of building community in a school is not an easy one (Sergiovanni, 1994) and levels of parental involvement can vary (Doyle, 2004; Hornby & Witte, 2010), or may be difficult to achieve (Raihani & Gurr, 2010). The case study of the DSM shows that the school's strong vision helped develop a "community of mind," (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 198), where motivation was internalized and this became a substitute for traditional leadership. The various interactions of the school community provided the motivation, guided the direction and alignment of people and resources necessary to create and develop the DSM (Caldwell, 2006) and have also been identified as central to effective leadership practice (Spillane, 2006) .

### **Working Collaboratively**

Every aspect of the school's creation and development followed a collective process. Careful matching of volunteers' enthusiasm with capability ensured continued progress of the school. High levels of collaboration can be seen in many areas of the school, evident from the time the first Board was democratically elected, to the writing of the school's vision and the final bilingual curriculum model adopted. This was achieved through a series of working parties, drawn from the school's community. The embedding of such foundational documents early in the life of the school also helped to contribute to the school's development (Collier, 2001).

### **Bilingual/Bicultural Focus**

Just as the parents and teachers noted that being bilingual increases a child's ability to problem-solve, so too could the founders of the DSM draw on two cultures to solve problems and overcome the hurdles they faced in establishing a new school. The experiences of teachers and parents from two countries, two curricula and two pedagogies, meant that the school had a huge reservoir of experiences to draw on when confronted with difficulties and this has been noted in studies elsewhere (Baker, 2001; Garcia, 2009; Hunt, 2011). This is part of the bilingual experience and successful bilingual schools make use of this (Baker, 2001; Hunt, 2011). Being a bilingual school, however, added additional levels of complexity and increased the challenges to new school creation, requiring appropriate responses such as described in the next point.

### **Commitment and Persistence**

This was needed by everyone during the school's Founding Phase and resulted from the combination of a strong belief in and commitment to the school's vision. It also ensured a process of constant monitoring, evaluation and feedback that the school followed to determine what was or wasn't working and by asking, "Is it in the plan?" A feature of new schools facing challenges is the need to develop creative and sustainable responses (Collier, 2001). Fullan described the need for leaders to show, "resilience – persistence plus flexibility," and that this combination is necessary for everyone to, "stay on course" (Fullan, 2006, p. 11). The DSM showed it could do this by moving smoothly and quickly from the initial Founding Phase, to an Established Phase. These findings parallel the research by Nicholas (2010) on new schools which

proposes a model of process for establishing a new school. The DSM displayed all of design principles which Nicholas identified as essential when establishing a new school (refer to earlier discussion).

### **Change Management Process Theory**

The formation of the DSM can also shed light on the change management processes needed for successful change to happen. The process used by the school's founders to create the DSM resonates strongly with Kotter's (Kotter, 2007, p. 99) eight critical stages necessary for successful change:

- Establishing a Sense of Urgency
- Forming a Powerful, Guiding Coalition
- Creating a Vision and Strategy
- Communicating the Vision
- Empowering Others to Act on the Vision
- Planning for and Creating Short-term Wins
- Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change
- Institutionalizing New Approaches.

These stages were evident in the way the DSM was formed. Klaus Steinmetz's visit created a "sense of urgency" (Kotter, 1996, p. 35) and planted the seed, helping to convince the people who attended his talk, of the need for a German school in Melbourne. The first public meeting brought together respected and influential individuals from within the German-Australian community, beginning the process of creating a powerful guiding coalition. The second public meeting attracted a wide range of people and, under the guidance of the first Board, numerous working parties were established whose purpose it was to frame the vision and work out ways of turning it into reality.

The school's opening in 2008 could be seen by some as a, "short-term win" (Kotter, 2007, p. 102) , however, the first year also presented many interesting challenges. There was the continual pressure from within the school to get things up and running

in terms of day-to-day management, and also from the outside, to increase the number of enrolments and keep the school viable.

In his study of the change process in education, Fullan noted that, “*all* schools experience “implementation dips” as they move forward (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). If we consider the things that happened in the second year at the DSM, such as the changes in personnel, lower enrolments than expected, lack of resources and a heavy workload, this typifies Fullan’s, “implementation dip”. His definition of it as, “literally a dip; in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and understandings” (Fullan, 2001, p. 40), seems to explain what happened to the DSM in its second year. Perhaps it was also the case that by succeeding in opening in 2008, the school was “declaring victory too soon” (Kotter, 2007, p. 102). It seems credible that the founders of the DSM underestimated the degree of effort needed to fully establish the school.

The school was able to draw on its strong community to provide the support it needed to keep going, as people overcame the various problems they faced to develop the necessary skills to make the change work (Fullan, 2001, p.1). By the end of the second year, enrolments had begun to increase, personnel changes had stabilized and many processes in the day-to-day running of the school had been established. This, together with gaining official recognition from Germany, meant that the school gained renewed momentum, thus consolidating its gains and embedding them into the culture and ethos of the DSM. The last year of the school’s Establishment Phase began the process of institutionalising many of the processes and approaches of the Founding Phase.

### **School Leadership and Community**

Of the factors important for the formation of the DSM, two stand out from the interviews and are discussed in more detail below in this section. They are: high levels of community involvement; a distributed leadership model.

### **High Levels of Community Involvement**

In the case of the DSM and its creation, leadership and community are inseparable. At the DSM during both phases of its formation, the combined efforts of the school community replaced the work traditionally done by a principal. For the DSM, the word, “principal,” can be replaced by “community.” As the creation of the DSM was led by its community in the absence of a principal, this could be seen as an example of what Sergiovanni termed a, “community of mind,” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 198) where the overwhelming focus on the school’s vision and accomplishing the shared goal of establishing a German English Bilingual school, helped to define it as a, “purposeful community”. In the case of the DSM, this “community of mind” became a substitute for leadership in the traditional sense, where a principal leads the school. Believing so strongly in the school’s vision, meant that the whole community was intrinsically motivated and the school became self-managing, self-leading and community-led. Perhaps a question the DSM might ask in the future, is whether and how this can be maintained, particularly as there was a view expressed by some of the interviewees of the need to appoint a principal in the near future. The appointment of a principal should not be seen as unexpected and Sergiovanni noted that leadership itself is redefined as the community grows (Sergiovanni, 1994). Time will tell whether being a community-led school is possible into the future for the DSM as it moves into a growing phase.

### **A Distributed Leadership Model**

The notion of leadership still needs to be discussed separately in relation to the DSM to see to what extent a community can successfully lead a school. From the Victorian contribution to the International Successful School Principalship Project, the Victorian model of Successful Principalship (Gurr & Drysdale, 2008; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006) can be used to analyse to what extent the community of the DSM was able to exercise successful leadership practices in place of a principal. This model locates principal leadership at the intersection between the wider school context and the work of teachers in classrooms, as principals try to influence student learning outcomes. Principals primarily influence student learning through four areas of capacity building:

- Personal Capacity: Self management; Professional Networks; Individual Professional Pedagogy; Knowledge Creation and Construction
- Professional Capacity: Professional Infrastructure; Teachers as Leaders; Professional Learning Teams; School-wide Pedagogy
- Organisational Capacity: Distributed Leadership; Culture of Organisational Learning; Organisational Structures; Building a Safe Environment
- Community Capacity: Social Capital; Community Networks & Alliances; Parent-School Partnerships; Relationship Marketing

The Victorian research showed that successful principals were able to exercise leadership in each aspect of the model (Gurr & Drysdale, 2008). In the case of the DSM, although it was operating without a principal, the school was able to exercise leadership successfully across the four aspects of school capacity building as described below. The order of priority and emphasis placed on each of the four aspects of building School Capacity (Personal, Professional, Organisational, Community), changed according to whether the school was in its Foundation or Established Phase. A brief comparison of the DSM in each of its two phases with the Victorian Model of Successful Principalship is described as follows (See also Table 1).

### The Founding Phase

The priority order for building school capacity at the DSM in this phase was Community, Organisational, Personal, Professional. While the school was in its Founding Phase, building Community Capacity was the most important area. The school drew heavily on its social capital and networks to build and develop supportive relationships, for example, the churches which provided the initial financial backing. It drew on its community networks and alliances, such as the German Consulate General and the German Government, to gain accreditation and build the school's future security. There were also strong parent-school partnerships, which have already been noted. While in its Founding Phase, the community collectively sought to build its own Organizational Capacity. Structures, processes and procedures needed to be established to set up the school. Thus, the first Board was composed of people representing a wide variety of areas of expertise such as legal, building, curriculum

and marketing. Each person headed a committee of volunteers from the wider German-Australian community. These groups had to work out what was required to start the school and then, to maintain it. The school community had to rapidly develop a culture of organisational learning to survive, especially when it experienced an implementation dip after the first year of opening and enrolments slowed. Creating a safe environment was paramount and the DSM held many Working Bees involving the parents to achieve this. Building Personal and Professional Capacities was also done by the school community. Working out what was required to set up a school and becoming compliant for VRQA Registration, was a steep learning curve for everyone involved. People worked collectively in teams and collaboratively built up the necessary skills and knowledge for the school to be created. In the school's Founding Phase, all of the elements to build Professional Capacity had to be managed by the initial teacher, so the amount of personal learning needed to be higher.

#### The Established Phase

The priority order for building school capacity at the DSM in this phase was Organisational, Professional, Community and Personal. Once the school was established, the day-to-day realities of running a school brought the building of organizational capacity to the forefront. The everyday presence of children meant many more safety issues had to be addressed. Structures and processes had to be quickly put into place to support the functioning of the school and all of this was achieved through a distributed leadership model in the absence of a principal. The appointment of more teachers in the school meant that Professional Capacity building became vital as teachers took on small leadership roles such as PD and Professional Learning Teams began. Building Community remained important, but did not receive as much attention, as this area was already well established. Greater priority was given to Marketing with the appointment of a dedicated person in this role to the Board. Personal Capacity building was in fourth place as much individual learning had already occurred and understanding of the pedagogies required by teachers in a bilingual school were already clear.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the DSM community was able to exercise effective leadership in the key area of School Capacity Building, as identified in the

Victorian Model of Successful Principalship and upon which school improvement is based.

## **Conclusion**

The idea for the DSM came from within the German-Australian community in Melbourne which was seeking a broader German connection than existed. Klaus Steinmetz was invited to speak to interested members from that community. Following his “seeding” of the idea, the creation of the DSM was led by members of the school and wider German-Australian communities who wanted to establish a German English Bilingual school in Melbourne. This same community democratically led the creation and development of the school, using a model of distributed leadership. The DSM community also consciously sought to be inclusive and not become a, “German island.” The bilingual nature of the school helped to focus the community to produce a clear, quality vision that served to develop the, “community of mind,” necessary for the school to become a, “purposeful community” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 198). Belief in the school’s vision, high levels of trust in the school’s bilingual model and adopting a distributed leadership process, allowed the school to develop and progress. In the face of enormous challenges and pressures, a strong sense of optimism was maintained by all members of the community, as well as high levels of persistence and commitment to the school.

This case study of the DSM reveals that a school can be successfully created and led by its community. At the same time, it is an example of how a school can create strong school-community integration which is considered highly desirable (DEECDa, 2011; Sergiovanni, 1994). The founders of the DSM followed a constructivist approach in creating their school, placing leadership and governance in the hands of its community to do so (Doyle, 2004). The school was successfully developed and built through careful management of the change process (Kotter, 1996), and attention given to areas where the school needed to build its capacity: Community, Organisational, Personal, Professional (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006).



In its formation, the school passed through two clear phases: The Founding Phase and The Established Phase. The following elements were found to be vital in the successful formation of the DSM:

- A clear vision which was embedded in the school's bilingual, biliterate model of total immersion. This guided the community in making the many decisions needed to establish the school.
- A distributed leadership model in the absence of a principal.
- A distinctive marketing orientation based on offering a total immersion program in German. This was related to the school ethos, helped the school develop a market niche for itself and was embedded in its foundational documents.
- High levels of support from internal and external community members meant that school not only built up its existing base of social capital, but could also distribute the roles and tasks necessary to run the school through that same community.
- A collaborative, democratic process involving the parents in areas of decision-making and operation when creating and developing the school, meant it operated under two of the main principles of education upon which all education in Victoria is based.
- The bilingual/bicultural focus presented alternatives and opportunities for creative problem-solving and community-building although, at times, being a bilingual school added extra pressures.
- High levels of commitment and persistence were shown by the DSM community when confronted with setbacks and dilemmas. Innovative responses achieved progress, increased school capacity and improvement.

These factors are consistent with all of the design principles identified by Nicholas (Nicholas, 2010, p. 89) and many of the general conclusions established by Collier (Collier, 2001, pp. 160 - 161).

The eight stages Kotter identified as leading to successful transformation were also discussed in relation to the formation of the DSM and show how his theory can be

applied to establishing a new school. Further research into the formation of new schools is needed to indicate to what extent Kotter's framework for transformation is applicable in contexts that are new, rather than existing, apart from the DSM.

An analysis of leadership and community in relation to the DSM and a comparison with the leadership model from the Victorian research of the International Successful School Principalship Project (Gurr & Drysdale, 2008), shows that the DSM was successfully led by its community in the absence of a principal in a way that was both self-sustaining and sustainable. School capacity was built in each of the four areas identified in that model (Personal, Professional, Organisational, Community), but in the case of the DSM, a different order of priority emerged for each of the school's two developmental stages.

As the literature available on new school creation is limited, this research provides a comprehensive foundation study that will be helpful in the creation of similar schools in the future. In doing so, this case study also offers a detailed example of leadership practices in a new bilingual school. The German-Australian community that drove the creation of the DSM, also kept it going through its initial formative years. It is one example of how, with the right mix of people providing a guiding coalition, a small school can succeed by being community-led. Further research of the DSM as it moves into a third phase, "The Growing Phase," and on the formation of other Bilingual or community-led schools, is needed to determine if the case of the DSM is a unique one.

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