

## Corporate Managerialism in a Rural Setting: A Contextualised Case Study

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### Abstract

Governments in Australia have become increasingly committed to policies drawn from economic rationalist perspectives. It is now commonplace in Australia to find education managed by two modes of operation originating from the corporate world of private enterprise: devolution of authority and responsibility, and strategic or school development planning. This case study provides an interpretive account of the process of strategic planning in devolved structures in a small, rural primary school in northern New South Wales. It documents and analyses how the school sets about the process of strategic planning. While student outcomes have recently been enhanced as a result of the policies and programs devised and implemented by staff through strategic planning, the case study reveals there are distinctive difficulties in implementing corporate managerial modes of management in a working class, racially-divided, small, rural community.

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## Corporate Managerialism in a Rural Setting: A Contextualised Case Study

This case study,<sup>1</sup> which is contextualised within international, national, state and local contexts, provides an interpretive account of the process of school development (henceforth referred to as strategic and management planning or simply strategic planning) in a small, rural primary school in northern New South Wales.<sup>1</sup> It aims both to document and analyse how one school sets about the process of strategic and management planning under recently devolved structures.<sup>2</sup> The case study reveals that the corporate managerial ethos of the Schools Renewal Strategy in NSW is insensitive to the working class, racially-divided, small rural community in which the case study school is located.

### International, National and State Contexts

Governments in Australia, and western democracies generally, have

become increasingly committed to policies drawn from economic rationalist perspectives. It is now commonplace across the states and territories in Australia to find education managed by modes of operation that originate from the corporate world of private enterprise. These modes are devolution of authority and responsibility (that is, the movement of decision-making and budget control from centralised management to individual schools) to make each school a self-managing unit, and strategic planning, often known as school development planning (that is, planning which is typified by the identification of long-term goals and objectives and strategies to achieve them within set budgetary constraints). They are said to be supportive of efficiency, effectiveness and public accountability,

The New South Wales government has recently implemented its Schools Renewal Strategy to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in the delivery of education. Corporate managerialism clearly underpins this initiative. A finding from a two year management review of education was that the efficiency and effectiveness of public education in New South Wales was being seriously undermined by the existing structures and burdensome operational and administrative procedures. Principals and teachers - those with direct responsibility for education - were not usually able to influence policy or expenditure relating to essential resources: they were delegated very little power to manage for the best outcomes, and received few opportunities to initiate significant and constructive change (External Council of Review (ECOR), 1994: 1, emphasis added).

The Schools Renewal Strategy was devised to 'improve the responsiveness of the public school system to diverse educational needs in a changing socio-economic context' and to 'place schools directly at the centre of education by giving them the means to respond readily to the educational needs of their students and their communities' (ECOR, 1994: 1). The idea was that 'the process of renewal must begin at the school, the place where learning takes place' (ECOR, 1989: 6).

Schools Renewal is claimed to be a 'downside-up' (ECOR, 1994: 1) approach to educational management which has brought changes in roles for schools, regions and the state office together with a set of progressively introduced organisational changes such as school councils, the organisation of schools into clusters, and performance management to 'require the system to become totally committed to supporting the school' rather than vice versa (External Council of Review, 1994: 1).

Under the new structures it was envisaged that schools should:  
Plan educational goals and priorities which reflect the needs of students and the intentions of their executives, staff, parents and community;  
Allocate financial resources in ways which can best achieve their

educational goals;

Select staff whose knowledge and skills best meet the needs of their school;

Support staff through systems of performance management and staff development aimed at maximising achievement of the schools educational goals;

Encourage increasing community participation in educational decision-making through establishing school councils; and,

Evaluate and report on the achievement of educational goals (ECOR, 1994: 1-2).

Two basic approaches give 'schools the power to bring about dynamic grassroots change, to take the necessary educational and administrative decisions to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to assist teachers to reach a much greater degree of professional achievement': first, 'giving schools much greater control over their own resources'; and, second, 'providing system support for school-based development' (ECOR, 1989: 7). Each school, within the framework of overall departmental goals, is required to 'develop its own Renewal Plan as the basis for its on-going program of school improvement and professional development' (ECOR, 1989: 10). The Renewal Plan, which is now commonly referred to as the Strategic and Management Plan, should be

a simple document outlining a program of action for achieving the school's agreed goals and priorities over five years. ... [including] indicative resourcing levels, both financial and staffing, together

with a yearly evaluation program. While the principal would clearly have responsibility for development and execution, the Renewal Plan should reflect the aspirations and intentions of executive, teaching, and other support staff as well as parents and the community (ECOR, 1989: 10).

Currently, the statement of purpose and direction found in Education 2000 (NSW Department of School Education (DOSE), 1992: 29) provides the framework and focus for planning activities at the local level. The finer detail of planning is found in the strategic, renewal and management plans of schools, regions (see, for example, North West Region, 1993, Management Plan 1994 with Strategic Directions, 1994-1988) and management units in state office (NSW DOSE, 1993).

Quality Assurance reviews are a state office initiative announced in 1992, and implemented in February 1993, 'aimed at increasing its capacity to evaluate the performance of the education system as a whole' (ECOR, 1994: 55). Quality Assurance reviews are the mechanism which 'unites two distinct functions of the school system - school development and accountability' (DOSE, 1993a: 1). For its school development function, the reviews 'focus on the way in which the school is providing for its community's education needs'. They focus in the effectiveness of a range of support structures and

processes required for the support of student learning, such as management and leadership, curriculum, training and development, student welfare, communication and community participation within the perspectives and parameters of statewide priorities and resources (DOSE, 1993a: 1).

The accountability function is served by providing the community and the Department of School Education with information about the success of programs and initiatives of schools. Further they place on record recommendations to which individual schools give priority in revising their plans for future development (DOSE, 1993a: 1).

The process of school review is conducted by teams which gather their information through structured meetings with a cross-section of students, school staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the parent community. They also observe throughout the school and analyse documents, such as school plans, budgets and reports.

#### The Local Social Context

Meiki<sup>2</sup> is a small rural town on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range in northern New South Wales. The town has a population of 850 Aboriginal and non Aboriginal (mainly Anglo Australian) people. Aborigines, who constitute approximately one third of town's population, originally lived out of town on a mission. Those who were amongst the first group to come to Meiki school after the closure of the mission school in 1950 recall it as a frightening, traumatic event given their former isolation from non Aboriginal people.

The community is impoverished. Approximately 75 per cent of Meiki's population is unemployed. However, amongst the Aboriginal population the rate is as high as 95 per cent.<sup>3</sup> The two communities are racially divided. According to many parents there is a 'discriminating attitude' evident in 'both black and white' communities. However, the discrimination exercised by Anglo Australians seems to be significant in shaping life in Meiki. One Anglo Australian parent says:

a lot of whites take the attitude they don't want anything to do with the Aboriginal community, they don't want anything to do with anything that's bought by black money. ... to me [it's] archaic attitudes like that which just keep making the trouble.

School personnel have to mediate tensions between these two groups when

they surface within the school. Child to child interactions within the school appear unaffected by racism amongst adults. Some parents suggest this is attributable to the discipline policy rather than an absence of racist attitudes per se: Racial divisions are not the only divisions which require mediation within the school: 'You get different families that fight within themselves, or fight against a different family' (Parent, 1994).

The town has not always been small and impoverished. It was once a thriving mining town. Tin was its main resource. Meiki suffered a serious setback when it was no longer economical to mine the area. There has been no alternative source of work for the community since the final shut-down of mining operations seven years ago.

#### The School

Meiki is a small primary school in the state school system established in 1874. It is the only school in town and caters for 136 to 140 children. Meiki was previously a central school catering for school students up until Year 10. In 1974 Meiki became exclusively primary. Students travel 25 kms by bus to attend secondary school.

#### Reputation

The school has an unenviable reputation with respect to children's behaviour and academic results which bears little relationship to the present reality. The town and the school are stigmatised largely because of its Aboriginal population. So negative is Meiki's reputation that staff report that they encounter adverse reactions from their peers about where they work.

Stigma about the school and the town itself is particularly strong in Dangar, the nearest neighbouring town in which the local newspaper is based. The school has appointed the AST as publicity officer to promote the school through the newspaper because positive items about the school rarely appear in it. Compared to other schools which 'get page features, and photographs - the lot', the principal says. 'We just don't seem to get a fair go'. Moreover: they tend to focus on the negative things all the time, because it fits ... their image of Meiki ... anything that we put in that can be taken negatively, they take it that way. [For example], there was some publicity about our Health and Nutrition program and they made in the headline 'Healthy food good tucker'. Now that's, I mean, that's racist (Principal, 1994).

#### School Environment

First impressions of the school are that it is smart and well kept; an impression which is heightened by the poverty of some of the housing in town. There are a number of signs indicative of the school's developing relationship to its Aboriginal community including an Aboriginal flag which flies with the Australian flag, Aboriginal paintings on the front path leading to the school and a billboard which proclaims the school's status as a Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Education.

Classrooms, with one exception, are spacious and all are attractive. Children's work is displayed throughout the school. The school has a comfortable staffroom, a large library and a small, but pleasant, Resource Room for the Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher (AERT) and the Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA). Perhaps the only major lack is a school hall. The principal is now working with community groups to

attempt to get a multi-purpose unit built.

### Size and Complexity

The school is classified as a P5 disadvantaged school. Wide variation

in the size of P5 schools means that the level of demand on a principal in the same category can vary dramatically depending on the size and complexity of the school. The principal of Meiki illustrates this point by making comparisons between his current and former situation. His former school was located at the lower end of the P5 Disadvantaged Schools range whereas 'we're towards the upper end of the P5 band, so I've still got a full time class, and doing the administration side of the school as well'. Moreover, while he previously had a total of four staff to supervise, he now has 15. Time is an issue because 'if you want things to change and to improve then you need to go and spend time so you can get to know them and worry about their concerns and talk to them'. Racial divisions in the town's population also make time demands. Instead of merely having one parent group to relate to: in a place like Meiki you've got an AECG [Aboriginal Education Consultative Group] and a P&C, and both of those tend to operate very independently of each other, so you need to work with both ... . And they're both very sensitive. You need to be seen to be spending time with both groups, socialising, and getting on side with them, if you like. A little bit of genuine interest shown. If you do that you get a much better response from them. But that entails time.

Social justice programs running in the school also add to staffing and budgeting complexity. Take for example the Disadvantaged Schools Program:

Again that involves submission writing, meetings, getting parents together, staff together, coming up with programs we want to run in the school for the twelve months. Then once you've got the money then you've got to organise the spending of it. Then you need to report on it each twelve months. And every twelve months you need to reapply for the money. So there's a lot involved in DSP. It's ... a big big workload involved there.

Not surprisingly, the principal works long hours before school and at least, four nights a week. In addition he devotes Saturdays to a weekend sports program.

### Budgeting

Budgeting is complex and time consuming in this school. As well as its base operating grant allocated by Regional Office, the school receives the following tied (to be spent as per submission) social justice funding: (i) DEET funding under the Aboriginal Students Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program of \$200 for each Aboriginal student in the school (\$9000 per year); (ii) Priority School funding for a Pupil Parent Support (Aboriginal) teachers aide (\$9000); and, (III) DSP funding (\$12000). In addition, the school also benefits from non-tied

Isolated Schools social justice funding (\$8 600).

The base grant from the regional office needs careful monitoring. Although the official rhetoric is that the school is self managing, and 'regional office assure you that they're not going to take money off you if it's not spent', the principal has a 'sneaking suspicion' that in time unspent allocations will be used to justify giving less money to schools 'so it's important that you spend the money you've got, spend it well, and don't waste it, but also don't have a lot sitting in a bank account, because they'll want to know why it's there' (1993). Although no schools have yet lost an excess, the principal drew attention in 1994 to recent publicity in a Sydney paper in which the Director General expressed concern about 'schools hoarding money and the kids not getting the benefit of it'.

All principals need to monitor their base grant. However, additional factors, such as tied social justice funding, add to the complexity of budgeting and planning since 'there's only certain things you can spend

that on. But then you've got to fit that in to your overall management plan of the school as well. ... So you've got all this tied money that's fitting in the big mesh'. The principal estimates budgeting and monitoring of budgets alone takes him about twenty days a year. His official classroom release time, however, amounts to a mere sixteen days a year.

#### Staffing

A feature of the staff is that few of them have been in the school very long. The secretary and the AST who have been at Meiki 23 years and 19 years respectively, are the exceptions here. Meiki is classified as second least desirable type of location to which teachers can be transferred in NSW. Teachers are only required to stay in the school for three years before they are eligible for incentive transfers. Principals are required to stay for five years. Few principals last longer, 'Because', as the AST notes, 'it's not the school that you retire in. It's a stepping stone to somewhere better' . Although a number of staff are currently eligible to take up incentive transfers, none have. The ET says 'I think the stable staffing has occurred because of the nature of the principal'. Stability is, however, a recent phenomenon. Prior to the current principal's arrival, the ET says 'there was quite a considerable turnover of staff' because staff found the incumbent principal difficult to work with.

Although the school is small there is a teaching staff of nine including a teaching principal who teaches Years 5/6, an advanced skill teacher (AST) who teaches Years 4/5, an executive teacher (ET) who teaches Years 2/3, two teachers who take the morning and afternoon sessions of Year 1 and also perform other teaching tasks, a kindergarten teacher, an IM (intellectually moderately handicapped)

teacher who works in the morning with 8 students who integrate in regular classrooms each afternoon and an Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher (AERT) who is responsible for the Aboriginal Early Language Development Program (AELDP). Additionally there is another teacher who comes into the school one day a week.

There are also three aides; a Teacher Aide Special who accompanies a severely intellectually handicapped child and an Aboriginal Education Assistant who works with the AERT in Kindergarten, Years 1 and 2, in resource making and in community liaison, and a Pupil Parent Support (PPS) aide who works with Years 3, 4/5 and 5/6 for three hours per day and who also provides help with speech problems. This aide is currently doing a preservice teacher education course.

The relatively large staff is a result of extra staff made available to the school by the state department and through social justice programs. For example, the AERT's position is an extra staff resource given to the school on a short-term basis by the Department of School Education to assist in developing the literacy skills of Aboriginal students in K-2 through the Aboriginal Early Language Development Program (AELDP). The PPS aide's position is funded by Priority Schools Funding which is 'Special funding because they consider we're a school in need of extra attention because of our low achievement levels ... So they ... give us money ... to catch up the academic deficiencies in the school' (Principal, 1993).

#### Community Input

Given racial divisions in the community, two groups contribute to the affairs of the school: the P&C, which tends to be exclusively non Aboriginal, and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), which the principal relates to as though it were a P&C. Some of the Anglo Australian community see the P&C as an ineffective body because

few people attend regularly. Those who are involved suggest apathy is a factor in poor attendance. However, it seems that poor attendance partially occurs because the P&C is perceived by some parents as being for professional and business people who are 'top knobs [or] who think they're the top knobs [with whom some parents] don't want to mix'. This is consonant with Arfwedson's (1979) notion that 'there is a 'steering group' [of parents] in each school consisting of the most active and influential parents who have higher status than the average status of the parental group as a whole' (Hatton, 1995: 263). Arfwedson (1979) restricts his notion of a parental 'steering group' to high status schools. However, given the evidence cited here it seems that parents in this working class community are clearly recognising this same phenomenon in their low status school.

Moreover, some of the women say family commitments makes participation in evening meetings difficult. There used to be a daytime Mothers' Club

in the school. This organisation, which was again attended exclusively by the Anglo Australian community, appears to have served as a means of recruiting new helpers for school-related functions. There is some regret that a previous principal closed down this group since those that do contribute feel 'pushed to the limit'. They say the women who can't attend the P&C, and would have attended the Mothers' Club now feel excluded and 'are constantly complaining, "We're left out of everything. We can't come". And then when the P&C do have a function ... they get all stropky' and refuse to help.

Consonant with the Schools Renewal Strategy, a School Council will soon be functioning in the school. A constitution has been drawn up, a joint meeting of the P&C and the AECG has been held to ratify the constitution, and elections are likely to take place soon. While the constitution has been written to ensure Aboriginal and non Aboriginal representation, the three Aboriginal representatives will be a numerical minority.

#### School culture and climate

Relations between staff in the school are characterised by mutual respect and co-operation. Staffroom atmosphere is characterised by relaxed good humour. Relations between the teachers and students are generally characterised by warmth and good humour. Many of the children seek affection, including a cuddle or two, from their teachers. While three children were suspended in 1993, severe discipline problems are less frequent than they were in the past. A major problem facing the school is the failure of the discipline policy to influence a hegemonic male gender regime in which male behaviours are typified by insolent aggressive behaviour in the classroom and violent aggression in the classroom (see Hatton, 1994). This aggressive, insolent behaviour is disproportionately played out on female staff. Male staff are automatically accorded more respect than female staff.

#### Home-school relations

In a small town such as this home school relations can be complicated by community politics, including racial politics, which can create dilemmas for the school which are not resolvable in a manner which pleases all groups. Nevertheless relations between home and school seem to be positive. There is, however, considerable variation amongst parents. There are parents who are thoroughly intimidated by the school, who rarely visit and who see it as a hostile environment. Teachers are treated with suspicion by these parents. Parents do not name the relation between them and teachers as a class relation but it is clear that many experience it as that. By contrast, those who are actively involved in the life of the school claim 'You're always welcome here'. Social distance it seems may be breached by contact. One

parent, who had been intimidated by the school now says: 'I mean, I come here of a morning and they say, 'Come in and have a cup of tea',

you know in here with all the teachers and everything. It makes you feel they're not higher than you or anything, you know. You're the same as them'.

The school has a history in which the quality of home-school relations varies according to the preferences and style of the incumbent principal. The current principal is well regarded by Aboriginal and Anglo Australian groups within the community. Several factors seem to be involved: the principal and his wife's decision to live in the town in the school residence; the principal's decision to join the local football team when he first arrived in Meiki in 1992; the principal's commitment to involve Aboriginal and non Aboriginal parents alike in the running of the school and in its curriculum; the policy of taking major policy changes to the community for input, which is based on the assumption that 'if you haven't got their support well you're wasting your time' and the principal's informal, open and unpretentious personal style which is liked by parents. One parent sums up a view held by many:

I think [the principal] is a wonderful fellow myself. ... before you couldn't go and talk to a principal here. If you had a problem in the school with your kid, you couldn't go and talk to [him] about it. He ... knew everything. Your kid was a bad kid. Your kid wasn't right (1993).

One aspect of home school relations which appears to be problematic is gender relations. Female teachers are not only spoken to disrespectfully by pupils but are sometimes treated impolitely by male adults. The principal says, 'The thing is, in working class communities such as this that the view towards women is not the best. I mean they don't see women in the best light'. The gender issue is of sufficient force that it shapes important decisions. For example, the female ET had been approached by the Regional Director to assess her interest in being the new principal before the current principal applied for the position. Her response was 'if I'd had some male teachers on the staff and I had a guarantee of a male executive teacher, I would have considered it'. The need for males to 'stand up to' males in the community was a recurring theme. When the principal's wife was asked to speculate how Meiki would have responded if she had been appointed principal and her husband as class teacher, she said she would 'have been in for a very hard time ... because ... women in authority don't seem to carry any weight'. She adds, that when the ET was acting principal, 'she did a fabulous job, but the community didn't see her as in charge ... because she wasn't perceived as powerful' as a man. The principal's wife says of her husband, 'I think just the size of him is a good deterrent in a town like this. It is fairly rough and tumble. And, you know, they know he's the front rower and they sort of think twice'. Community members and parents also claimed that a male, preferably a large male, is the only appropriate choice for a principal: 'if there is a fight or anything, it's better to have a man around than a woman, I think'.

An aspect of community relations that worries the principal is that 'in this sort of community a lot of times you don't get a lot of feedback ... you're not sure whether you've got their support or not ... They don't come out and say 'Oh they're doing a wonderful job. They wouldn't say that'.

#### School-wide Planning Processes

Strategic planning at Meiki has been undertaken in two distinctive ways under two principals. The former principal required curriculum

committees to produce copious documentation. However, he took sole responsibility for the strategic plan. It was detailed and complex at some remove from the call in Schools Renewal for the plan to be a 'simple document' (ECOR, 1989: 10). Consequently, staff claim they did not understand the document. Moreover, teachers felt it to be so far removed from their realities that very little of its contents were implemented. Ironically, this Strategic and Management Plan was proclaimed by regional authorities as a model to which schools in local area and beyond should conform.

After the arrival of the present principal during 1992, strategic planning took on a more collaborative nature. Devolution of strategic planning to members of staff is supported by the principal on three grounds: 'if they're involved in it they're likely to do it'; getting many people involved enables 'more ideas' in planning, and, the school is too complex and busy for him to take sole responsibility for strategic planning.

Planning of the 1994 Strategic and Management Plan began in 1993 and extended into 1994. Priority initiatives were derived from the principal's performance management statement. They included devising a new report form, addressing the issue of the school's stigmatised reputation, the implementation of the School Council and the attempt to gain a multipurpose unit for school and community use. These were subsequently discussed at staff meetings.

In late 1993 a pupil free School Development Day (SDD) was held for which a written invitation to participate in one or more sessions was extended to parents. Childcare was made available to enhance parental participation. Sessions held on that day included designing a new report card, options for class allocations for 1994 and budget allocations for 1994.

When the program and curriculum committees, including co-opted parents, met early in 1994 to write their sections of the strategic plan (that is, to put 'meat ... on the frame, on the skeleton') (Principal, 1994), they did so in class release time. The ET worked out a complicated timetable to allow committees release time of one to one and a half

hours, to do their strategic planning. Using this time the committees extended their long term plan to cover the period 1994--1998 and they developed and wrote a detailed plan for 1994 taking into account their previously determined budgetary constraints. The process began with a review of the 1993 detailed year plan and a review of the Program plan for 1994 to generate the current year's program. Committee responsibility for plans is so total that when they are written there is no further debate. Plans are taken to a staff meeting merely to familiarise staff with the contents since to do otherwise would involve 'chasing your tail forever' (Principal, 1994). The principal simply collects finished planning from each committee and 'puts [it] into a booklet'. From that point on, the committees are 'responsible for making sure that they do what they said they were going to do, within reason, you know, unless there's some extenuating circumstances'.

The extent of teacher involvement in strategic planning at Meiki is captured in this remark from a teacher who was an executive teacher at her previous school. When asked if she missed being part of the executive, she said,

No, I don't because everything that I was involved in as an executive I do here. In fact, I think I do more here. ... we're involved with budget, we're involved with discipline, which was a big thing. [The principal] puts everything at a staff meeting that we ever had at an executive meeting.

A major innovation was the involvement of parents in strategic planning both on the SDD in 1993 and on the committees in 1994. A group of approximately eight parents attended the whole school development day, others came for one or two sessions. The school is conscious that this aspect of the School Renewal Strategy, which is currently being emphasised at regional level, poses special difficulties for them: Well ... it's a community based school and we've really tried to [involve parents], but we've got very reluctant parents, because they feel inadequate, you know. School to them is a horrible place. ... And you know, they've got horrible memories of schools, but you know, the only time that - that parents ever get involved in schools is when the kids are in trouble (ET, 1994).

Differences in class and ethnic resources and dispositions showed clearly on the SDD:

You get some that are very confident. We had a [professional person based at Meiki] ... he was very confident. He got up and expressed his opinions ... Of course on the other end of the scale there were several there that you hardly heard boo out of for the whole day (Principal, 1994).

Two Aboriginal parents were present. They according to the principal were 'very quiet':

Yeah, they tend to be - we'll sit back and watch and if you do get a comment out of them it's something you've got to go and seek out. They

won't stand up and say things. Or it's a rare Aboriginal person that will stand up and make a speech.

Most discussion from parents concerned the issues of class size and composition and report cards. The class issue was contentious because teachers say parents looked at arrangements 'from their child's point of view'. Indeed, teachers now believe that one of the skills parents need to develop to participate effectively is to learn to 'think for all not just their own'. The report card issue was more productive. Teachers who are also parents try to provide a parent's perspective on school matters. However, they feel 'to get information from people who are just parents - not teachers' is useful because 'you may be on different paths'.

According to teachers, a lot of the content of the day left parents feeling daunted:

a lot of the things we were doing they didn't feel comfortable with. It was very new. The strategic plan, you know, sorting out the curriculum teams and what needs to be in each area. That sort of thing is fairly foreign to parents, so they didn't have a lot of say in that (Teacher, 1994).

During Semester 1, 1994 the school underwent a four day Quality Assurance Review in three key areas of the strategic plan which they had nominated for review: Reading/Writing, Community Involvement and the Discipline Policy. The team of six reviewers, which included two co-opted parents, observed classrooms, analysed documents and conducted interviews with teaching and ancillary staff, parents, students using a preformed set of questions. Preparation at school level for the review is demanding. It is not simply a matter of the school doing its own evaluation of its key areas including ensuring that the appropriate documentation is prepared. For example, in the 52 page document containing School Review Guidelines (DOSE, 1993b), principals are given a four page checklist of tasks to complete prior to, during and after the review. Despite the intensive four day review, the process did not reveal any surprises or areas of oversight. The school received a report which closely reflected their own evaluation of their endeavours.

#### Staff Perceptions

The time-cost dimension of strategic planning concerns staff: 'I think a lot of times you know we'd wish that [the principal] would do it in the office. Just go in and tell us what we've got to do and get it over and done with' (Teacher, 1994). In addition to staff meetings fully or partially devoted to strategic planning issues, and in addition to the SDD, the principal estimates that it took three full days of meetings to actually - to nut out what was done, then of course you've got your clerical hours. ... I suppose on average each person would have probably put four working days into it, so four times - probably forty working days, I guess that is. That's

just for the curriculum areas. ... Then on the management etc. ... I've done that in my own time, so that's independent of that. A lot of time. Despite the fact that some staff members were reluctant and, to some degree remain reluctant, to be involved in strategic planning, they also concede that involvement in strategic planning is a positive feature of their work: 'I think the ownership that it gives is really worthwhile. You know, people feel that they're not having it done to them. It's a decision that we're all making and we're all having a say'. There is little doubt that the teachers are responding positively to ownership of, and involvement in, the planning process. One teacher claims that compared to what was happening in the school under the previous principal there are now 'Huge differences. Huge differences. In the whole feeling within the staff. I mean everyone is more relaxed but ... at the same time more supportive of their principal'. Part of the teachers support arises from appreciation of the principal's emphasis on streamlined planning compared to the previous principal who allegedly was preoccupied with making everything look good on paper, but then often what was happening wasn't nearly as impressive as what was on paper. So ... whereas now ... what's happening is impressive and blow the paperwork sort of thing. Which is much better. ... Do what you have to do and ... what people are asking for. ... But ... there's none of this spend week after week sort of presenting and binding and, [so on]. ... that isn't user friendly anyway. I mean a lot of the - you know, things like school policies and stuff that we have that were an inch thick and looked magnificent and were so impressive and used to get shown off to every Dick and Harry around, but no one ever used them. No one ever opened them. Whereas now ... [for example, the discipline policy is] so easy to follow and so easy to use. Teachers claim that compared to the former situation in which 'you sort of just got told', currently, 'everyone has a better idea, I think, of what we are supposed to be achieving this year'. While being on many committees means 'everyone has got lots of hats to wear', and that is 'exhausting', it's also 'good because everyone knows what's going on because you're involved in most things'.

The principal, like his staff, also questions the time-cost dimension of strategic planning involving the staff and the community and acknowledges the positive outcomes of staff and community ownership of school-wide planning. He says wide ownership, at a practical level, 'slows it down. ... It would be much easier for me to sit down in the office and write it. ... I reckon I could knock that up in oh probably a week, which is a lot less than forty days'. He concedes, however, the plan is unlikely to 'mean as much' if written by him so 'You're weighing the two things. The advantage is that yes it's more likely to be done. And the disadvantage is it takes a long time to actually get it done'.

Another concern is that there are aspects of planning under devolved structures which he perceives as uneconomical:

I think it's window dressing. I really do. I think ... a lot of the

things that I'm saying in [it] would be very similar to things that have been said in other schools and a lot of it's put there to fill up space, if you like. I think that the process could be shortened a great deal without having any real influence in what's going on in schools. ... I would imagine a lot of the programs - the administration programs, probably even student welfare, human resources - or maybe not human resources - but a lot of the things schools would have in common that you could be sharing in the time and effort involved in it. I know that I say a lot of things that I said in there I know other schools would have said similar things

When asked whether he had in mind a strategy such as a computer disk which schools in one cluster might use, and simply add idiosyncratic material, the principal said, 'That probably that would be a very positive step'. He added, 'I'm sure the purists would tell you "Oh no, it shouldn't be like that". [Nevertheless] ... you could pick up someone else's and in your plan a lot of things would be very similar'.

These concerns are serious given the rhetoric of efficiency and effectiveness which provides the justification for the School Renewal Strategy. It is clear that doing strategic planning within devolved structures has created a context which has significantly intensified the principal's work. Significantly, much of the new work is trivial and, he says, diverts him from more important work:

Like the budget business, ... I mean ... a lot of principals have said it, that they really feel like a bill paying service for the Department ... . I mean I'm now paying the electricity bill that used to be paid by regional office and I'm now paying the rates that used to be... [done by a clerk]. And yet I've got to sit down and come up with these plans and, you know...I mean, you look at most of the administration things that I do - here we go down here - energy, that's gas and electricity, should have been - should be looked after by regional office. Ah maintenance - regional office. Equipment service - regional office. Postage - regional office. Short term relief - regional office. Phone - regional office. Waste disposal. ... all that stuff...[was done] .. by regional office, so ... they cleaned out regional office and ... there's not the same wage bill involved down there, but they put the work load onto us and we're not getting the compensation for it in time. See, what they've done is save quite small wages when you think of the clerks and so on that used to do that stuff, and then they're squeezing more, for the same amount of money, out of principals ... and taking away from what we're actually meant to be doing. They just kept on ... piling things on us and they say, 'yeah, we're saving the money out of education budget', and I guess they are but ... and they're doing that at the expense of the time of principals that have been taken away from what they were meant to be doing (Principal, 1994 - emphasis added).

In this small school it is the principal and the executive teacher who are the first to feel the impact of intensification of work arising from strategic planning under devolved structures. This pattern of intensification is, however, evident for all members of the staff. Consider the case of the AST who not only heads up both the English and the Library Curriculum teams but is also a member of the Creative and Practical Arts and the Computer curriculum committees. Additionally she takes responsibility for school publicity. Of course the distinctive nature of Meiki school also makes its own contribution to intensification. Even without devolution and strategic planning it would be a busy place. Consider, for example, the work involved in preparing submissions for social justice funding. Moreover, there rarely seems to be a week in which something out of the ordinary, such as hosting events as a direct result of the school's status as a Centre

of Excellence, is not happening in this school. Given the unique nature of the school and its clientele which makes it eligible for many sources of funds, the fact that it has obligations as a designated Centre of Excellence, and that the principal is a teaching principal with time-consuming responsibilities under devolved governance, it is not surprising that strategic planning is seen as a mixed blessing by the principal and the staff.

There are some significant negative outcome arising from the intensification of teachers' work, including implications for the quality of classroom level practice. For example, the principal expresses concern that one result of the demands on him is that his classroom preparation suffers, that he often has to cut corners in classroom planning. He worries about the effect of this on his pupils. Some teachers also admit that at busy times, attention and energy may be reluctantly displaced from teaching children to planning. Children might have to be set a task while teachers do paperwork. In addition to these costs, there are other significant ones. Take, for example, the case of the principal and his wife. They have three children under six. The principal's wife finds her personal and professional life is shaped by her husband's work. There is no real possibility of a division of labour at home:

he's over [at school] quite often till midnight. He'll come home and have tea at about six, half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and then he's back over again. So - which means looking after the kids in the afternoon, getting all that dreadful time of bath and all that sort of thing, is left to me, which is difficult because ... I've always got [school-related work] that I have to do at home.

Her own work is necessarily delayed 'until the kids are all in bed' since 'it's hopeless trying to start school work, so I'm sort of juggling housework while they're awake and then when they're in bed I can finally settle down about ten and do something'. The principal is also affected since his participation in his family life is limited.

Other teachers also feel the effects of intensification on their personal lives. It is plausible to assume that hidden, personal costs such as these were not taken into account when School's Renewal was devised. Efficiency and effectiveness it seems are being achieved at considerable personal cost in Meiki (see Hatton, in press).

#### Parent Perceptions

Parents who participated in the SDD offered some explanations of what they saw as poor attendance. One parent claims that the written invitation approach is ineffective in Meiki

if you put out a general notice you'll get the same few that turns up. If you want people to come you have to go and knock on their door and give them a personal invitation to come. ... tell the parents that it is okay to come to the school and to have their say.

Another parent notes that the size of the town makes particular difficulties:

Well bear in mind ... there's 850 people in the town. When you cut out all the kids, you reduce the number of adults and then you break it down further and you largely find that any of the main committee meetings it's always the same people at the meeting. I mean you can have one meeting and just change the name every half hour and you could go through all the meetings in one afternoon, without anyone coming or leaving.

Therefore it becomes difficult 'to get people who actually come to meetings to another meeting, you know, they just throw their hands in the air - "I've had enough of those bloody meetings"'.

Parents who did attend, allegedly had difficulty with 'teacher talk'. One parent's view was that teachers could gain 'a misrepresentation of

what really is going on', since rather than speak up in an intimidating situation, 'most parents just sit in the back and say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes", I've got nothing to say, you're doing a fine job", blah, blah, blah. This, he suggests, is 'the problem of Meiki being Meiki' where to understand what people think:

You've personally got to go and sit down with that person in their house. Even if you got them to come to a meeting they still wouldn't say anything. Uh, you've to sit down there with your problems, over their table, and say, 'Now listen, Joey is having a bit of trouble at school, what do you reckon it is?' Blah, blah, blah. And I realise there's no way [the principal] can do it.

While the strategy of personal approach was advocated, parents were quite pessimistic about the possibility of gaining significantly more parental involvement.

Personal invitation was used to co-opt parents on to planning committees. One parent explains:

I brought the kids to school one day and [the ET] came out and said, "We're ... having a planning day about computers and things. Just come

in and have a sit and listen", sort of thing. That's how we got to come into that one.

Another says that if the invitation had come through an open letter, she 'probably wouldn't have come', however, because of the personal approach, 'I did come'.

The parents were initially nervous, even 'terrified', about participating in committees

Yeah, we sort of didn't know what was going on when we first came in.

It was the first time we'd ever been ... to one. And [the ET] said, you know, "Just come and listen and [ask] if you've got any questions". And then she said, "Next time you'll know what's going on".

Language was again an issue, however, in this context teachers offered explanations in lay person's language instead of 'computer language sort of thing. Which was good, it helped you understand'. In small groups the teachers were perceived as very supportive. Similarly, when parents attended an inservice program on networking they found teachers were helpful. Despite their initial nervousness the parents were excited about the access to new knowledge the inservice program gave them: 'like they said they'd put one main computer in the library say, and they have a little computer in each room, but you can all use it which, you know, I didn't know you could do'.

One parent says she has changed her perception of teachers as a consequence of being involved. She says she now, contrary to a common community perception, sees 'teachers as human people, not stuck ups': Well when I first come up - because I'm one of them people ... sit back in the thing and, "Yeah, yeah, yeah", you know? And you don't like getting up and making a fool out of yourself because if you say something they're down your throat and you think, "what did I say?" ... now I can come and talk to any of them.

She adds that she knows many parents refuse to even approach the staffroom, so strong is the perception that teachers are 'stuck-ups': Well I mean you can go and talk to a parent and it's, "I'm not going over there to the staff room. No way am I going in there." Like if it's - that's a place for them awful people sitting in there or something, you know. ... You know, it's just the way Meiki is really. ... You know, that's the way they were brought up. ... There'd be parents that just would not come in here and face the teachers and say, "Well my child's unhappy".

Obviously, class-based perception of status differences have real implications for community involvement in schooling. While it is obviously not impossible to change parents negative perceptions of

teachers, it will again make considerable time demands on teachers to do so since one-to-one approaches seem to be required.

Impacts and Effects of Strategic Planning at Meiki

Rural location, combined with factors such as poverty and historically

entrenched racism, make Meiki a site in which educational disadvantage is likely. However, according to the rhetoric surrounding the Schools Renewal Strategy teachers have the potential to address educational disadvantage given the control they now exercise over educational decision-making and planning under devolved structure. There are clear signs that this is happening at Meiki. While Basic Skills results may be perceived as a problematic indicator, they do provide a useful benchmark. The 1993 Year 6 Basic Skills results are the best achieved to date with a result that is .2% below the state average in Mathematics and .7% below the state average in Language. Three years ago Year 6 results were 11% below the state average. The Year 3 results are also promising with a result which is 3% above the state average in Mathematics and .2% above in Language. The school has not previously achieved results above the state average. (See Hatton, in press for an account of some interrelated initiatives put in place through strategic planning which account for improved outcomes.) So despite the fact that Meiki's students are amongst those whose academic results are usually poor, these results provide some indication that the school is effectively working towards meeting the educational needs of its client group. Its effective use of social justice funding and state provided extra staff together with its capacity to plan in ways which both harnesses the support of teachers for policy and meets the educational needs of students, seems central to its success.

Perhaps one of the most beneficial effects of involvement in strategic planning has been a major change in teachers' perceptions of their work. Teachers have shed a narrow conception of their work in which : You ... taught your class without any ... any concept of what might be down the road in two years time. You don't really think about that. You just look at that narrow ... little classroom and say, "Well right, I've got to get them from A to B" (ET, 1994).

They now have a broader, long-term view of their work: because staff here are all actively involved in the planning you need to look so much further and you need to look wider. Not only do you have to get the depth. You really have to get in and say, "Well that's my class but what about the whole of the school?" And it makes you really consider the whole school, and then the whole school in the long term process (ET 1994).

It is this broader and longer term view that has facilitated staff commitment to having two Reading Recovery specialists despite costs to themselves:

they were prepared to give up time that should have been theirs. But they could see that it was a long term process, that everyone would benefit. The school certainly benefits (ET, 1994).

Corporate Managerialism in a Rural, Working Class Setting  
Strategic planning under devolved structures is currently, at Meiki, a fulfilling process which enhances the functioning of a school by making teachers feel they have a stake in, and ownership of, developments in the school. In these circumstances, teachers lose the identity of mere

functionary and feel they have a say in the development of the school. The school, as an organisational unit, clearly benefits from the teachers' willingness to commit wholeheartedly to policies. This outcome has been achieved even when even when staff have some concerns about the time involved in strategic planning; when they believed it easier and less demanding simply to do what others say they should. If, as in this case, appropriate policies are devised, enhanced educational

outcomes for students can and do result.

Obviously there must be some lingering concerns about whether the Schools Renewal Strategy is as efficient as it suggests. Certainly, the staff in this school are making the strategy work but it is clear that they are doing it at considerable cost. Of course, it could be argued that it is not that teachers at Meiki are exploited by the demands of School Renewal. Rather it could be that they make a personal choice to work as hard as they do. Aside from the sheer demands of strategic planning at Meiki, it is arguably the case that there is a complex dynamic at work that cannot be explained by attributing it to personal choice. At Meiki, the staff and the executive alike have responded positively to the challenge of school development work. This response has given them all a greater sense of control and achievement in their work than they had previously. This has created its own dynamic. There has been an obvious consequent generation of commitment and a desire to work hard. Moreover, the feeling of being appreciated and respected, which is evident between the staff and the executive and vice versa, motivates staff and executive alike to 'put out' for each other. This too adds to the momentum within the school. So, the coincidence of these circumstances encourages the staff at Meiki to participate willingly in the intensification of their work and thereby their own exploitation. Personal choice as an explanatory category seems to understate this phenomenon.

It is arguably the case that features of the Schools Renewal Strategy are class-biased and better suited to some situations than to others. Many of its features are much easier to realise in middle-class urban contexts in which parents have class-based resources which facilitate confident involvement in the governance of schools. Consider, for example, the time and energy a principal at Meiki would have to expend to make the personal approaches to parents that seem to be necessary to secure an adequate amount of parental involvement in schooling. And consider this in the context of a principal's already highly demanding life. It is clear that if the School's Renewal Strategy is to be effective, contexts like Meiki require extra permanent resources to achieve this. If, for example, the principal's position was a non-teaching one, he might make time to visit families and encourage participation and involvement.

Without this level of attention, it is hard to see how a school in a

small, rural community, which battles to get adequate participation in P&C and AECG meetings, will also manage to achieve adequate participation in a School Council. A recent combined meeting of the AECG and the P&C called to ratify the School Council constitution yielded only 14 community members, six of whom are also employed in the school.

Again the lack of context sensitivity of the Schools Renewal Strategy is clearly evident. Recall the way in which one community member drew attention to the small size of the community. Recall also his claim that if committee attenders in the town were marshalled into one room the name of the meeting could be changed every half hour without anyone entering or leaving. It is likely that of class, gender and race are intersecting with the small size of the town to produce this outcome. Nevertheless, it is likely that a School Council will be difficult to sustain in this context. During the course of this case study another smaller rural community abandoned its School Council because the P&C Committee and the School Council membership included all but one family. This family felt seriously aggrieved and excluded and the problems and tensions which resulted in the community persuaded the principal the School Council was not workable in the context.

It is obvious that the inclusion of parents in planning, particularly in curriculum committees, has had some positive effects. For example, it appears to have the potential to enable some parents to see teachers in less status differentiated ways which in turn results in a more productive relationship between teachers and parents. It is, however, appropriate to ask whether this, and indeed wider involvement in school governance through a school council, is the best form of involvement in schooling for these parents. While parents in middle class communities would bring knowledge and skills to share on, for example, a computer committee, few parents at Meiki come into curriculum and program committees with ready-made resources. To facilitate their effective involvement, the school is sponsoring the involvement of parents in inservice programs. However, the school's base grant is not differentiated to take account of the greater difficulty of making corporate modes of management work in small, rural, working class settings, so the costs involved in inservicing parents are necessarily diverted away from other uses. It is worth asking whether this really leaves the school free to make the most efficient and effective use of limited resources. Rather than place the school under pressure to demonstrate community involvement of the kind consonant with the Schools Renewal Strategy, it might have been appropriate to consider the context and to encourage it to continue to foster the involvement of parents in classrooms for Reading, its Health and Hygiene Days, its extensive clubs program, the Aboriginal Studies curriculum and the like. Many of these activities allow parents to participate in areas in which they feel comfortable and skilled.

Just as many parents are not well placed to advise on curriculum, likewise it is hard to see how the School Council will be well-placed to advise on matters of staffing. Consider, in this latter case, the issue of community prejudices about females. Given the widespread nature of sexist beliefs about women, it is possible that female applicants for a principal's position interviewed by the school council could encounter gatekeeping tactics as bad, if not worse, than those many would have encountered prior to the 1980s in the state system. And imagine the difficulty an Aboriginal female applicant might have.

As is the case in New Zealand, it seems also that the notion of community on which the reforms rest is one which suggests residence in a particular area 'implies both a commonality of interests and a consequent unity of purpose' (Moss, 1990: 140). Communities are treated as 'harmonious wholes' as though there are no divisions by class, gender or ethnicity (Moss, 1990: 140), and 'power is regarded as equally distributed, or at least potentially so, amongst members of the community, and the commonality of their interests ensures that they can come together to articulate uniform and coherent views' (Moss, 1990: 141). Certainly, as in the New Zealand case there is complete oversight of the fact that Australian society is structured by a capitalist economy which is constituted by unequal class, race and gender relations (Jones, 1990). The view that if groups of people are left alone to administer their affairs they will reach 'optimal solutions', ... for all groups ... stands in contradiction with the vast body of scholarly research and argument that shows that, without intervention, the most powerful groups are invariably enabled to reproduce a situation which benefits them. This might be optimal for dominant groups, but hardly for anyone else whose interests do not coincide (Jones: 1990: 98).

This is a flawed utopian view of community which is not sustained by the data. Far from there being a commonality of interest and uniformity of purpose arising from residence in a common area, the data demonstrates the divided nature of interests and purposes in the Meiki

community. Far from being a 'harmonious whole' (Moss, 1990: 140), the community is a site of significant conflict in which power is not shared equally. Despite stratification within the non Aboriginal community, it was evident that this community has more social power to have its needs met within the school than the Aboriginal population. And given that Aborigines will always be a numerical minority on the School Council, this situation is unlikely to change.

Moreover, given the fact that particular kinds of skills and competencies are unevenly distributed among individuals within a community like Meiki, representatives on a School Council are again likely to be confined to a steering group. Those with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) are likely to capture the positions available on the

School Council since these are the people who are most likely to see themselves, and be seen by others like them, as having appropriate skills, knowledge and capacities.

Clearly it is the case that there are conceptual difficulties underpinning the School Renewal Strategy in NSW. These relate both to the fact that the aspects of the strategy are class biased and that the concept of community on which the reforms rest is flawed. Moreover, it is obvious that aspects of school organisation associated with corporate modes of management are difficult to implement when the context is not 'taylor-made' for it. Here the irony of prescribing centrally one approach to 'improve the responsiveness of the public school system to diverse educational needs' (ECOR, 1994: 1) is evident. Schools, such as Meiki, are given no social justice funding to resource attempts to maximise the fit between the demands of the context and the demands of the corporate mode of management. Self-management simply leaves schools to struggle with the demand for high levels of specified kinds of community involvement as though all schools are equally placed to achieve it. This case study indicates that small, rural, multiracial working class communities face considerable difficulties unlikely to be faced in urban middle class communities.

#### Endnotes

1. A qualitative approach, in which the subjective understandings of informants were sought, was adopted. The school was visited on average once a week for a year. Major data collection strategies included informant interviewing parents, community members and staff, observation of staff meetings and various events in the school, classroom observation, the collection of relevant documents including strategic and management plans, DSP submissions, school policy documents and the like and observation of a Quality Assurance process within the school.
2. The usual convention of employing pseudonyms has been employed.

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