

## **A decade of self-management in New Zealand schools: What have we learnt?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A key feature of school self-management was the expectation that it would lead to better learning. There is increasing realisation that this may not necessarily be the case; in New Zealand (Wylie, 1997), in Canada (Summers and Johnson, 1996), in Australia (Townsend, 1997) and in the United States (Smith, Scoll and Link, 1996). This paper will report the findings from a new study of seven diverse schools, which was specifically designed to explore both multiple and cumulative aspects of a decade of school reform in New Zealand. The study was a qualitative one which employed wide-ranging interviews with teachers, senior staff and members of the schools' governing body.*

*This paper focuses on those findings relating to the impact of self-management on aspects of school policy and practice such as, the roles of the principal, teachers and students, teaching and learning, school-community relationships, and on education of Maaori children. The paper outlines how educational debate and policy in and across these areas is actually being interpreted and translated into practice by those in various roles within schools. The extent to which the patterns in these schools simply confirm the findings of previous research or indicate significant points of departure which might warrant further investigation is also discussed*

### **Introduction**

The New Zealand experience of educational reform is now a decade old, and is the subject of some renewed focus in research as questions are raised about its overall impact. It has been rather difficult to gain a good overall impact of school reform in New Zealand. Those studies which have been carried out have differed in focus and intent. *The Monitoring Today's Schools* project (Mitchell, McGee, Moltzen, & Oliver, 1993), for example, had a broad brief but was concerned with the initial implementation of reform and in most areas schooling has subsequently changed considerably. Wylie's postal surveys of primary and intermediate schools (Wylie, 1994, 1997) provide a more recent overview of the multifaceted impact of school reform but this kind of research needs to be fleshed out by more detailed analyses. Other studies have offered richer pictures by including detailed qualitative research approaches but in doing so their focus has been narrower (e.g. Gordon, 1994; Harold, 1995)

This article discusses findings from the "Mapping the Cumulative Impact of Educational Reform Project"; a study designed to address this problem. It took a broad brief in terms of the reform issues examined (e.g. market choice and competition, school-business links, self-management, curriculum and assessment reform, teacher competency and accountability, Maaori education) but set out to build up a detailed qualitative dataset on all of these areas through wide-ranging, semi-structured interviews with 57 teachers, principals and Board of Trustees members across seven Waikato schools.

The sample comprised:

- Tahi - a low SES urban contributing primary school
- Rua - a high SES urban contributing primary school
- Toru - a low SES urban kura kaupapa Maori (1)
- Wha - a low SES urban Intermediate school
- Rima - a middle SES rural contributing primary school, with a teaching principal
- Ono - a low SES secondary school
- Whitu - a high SES secondary school

The literature on self-management highlights the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the restructuring. It was within this context that the present study was undertaken. We were interested to see if the schools' experiences of self-management reflected the issues identified in the literature, and what similarities and differences might be found between the experiences of high and low decile schools. The interviews provided an opportunity to hear a range of perspectives on the concept. Participants were asked to comment on the impact of self-management practices for the principal, staff, students, pastoral care, school-community relationships and on education for Maaori children.

This paper will present a summary of key findings about the impact of self-management in the project schools. The sheer volume of data does not allow for a more detailed account in the time available, but those interested in further information are invited to contact the writer at the address at the end of the paper.

### **Impact on the role of the principal**

A frequently mentioned aspect of self-management was the role of the principal which was seen as a critical element by participants from all schools in the project:

Self-management starts with the Principal. If you haven't got a strong manager as a Principal then you're fighting an up hill battle. (Trustee, Tahi)

Some clear patterns emerged here. Almost half of those interviewed believed that self-management had had detrimental impact on the role of the principal. Principals themselves were more likely to focus on positive perceptions and several talked about personal and professional satisfaction gained from their new role:

Oh, I think it's the freedom. You think, right, what are we going to do now? What's the next thing? Well, let's do that, let's just get into that line of thought;

or let's develop this area of resources in the school; or let's look at this line of staff development; or I'm gonna go and do this now, I'm going to do this bit of teaching now. (Principal, Tah)

Those who focussed on what were perceived as detrimental impacts on the principal's role. mentioned increased workload, stress, a shift from professional leadership to managerial roles, and lower levels of accessibility to staff and students.

The increased administrative workload was the most common perception of change for principals, mentioned by close to a third of participants:

Oh. I think it's had a huge impact on the principal. And in many cases principals who don't have any management skills, that school has suffered tremendously. And I think, like everyone, they needed professional development. Tremendous amount of paperwork. Unbelievable amount of paperwork. And I just think that, especially for a teaching principal, it's almost made the job impossible. (SMT member (2), Wha)

Several responses expressed concern that the principal's role had changed from professional leadership to a more managerial focus. Some saw this as an inevitable new kind of role. At low-decile Wha the funding issue was important:

Well, I'd say his role has changed from actually being a teacher to more of an administrative role. I think that's the changes we've seen, except now that we've very rarely seen a principal sort of teaching - obviously it depends on the school. But he's taken up more like a management role, supervising, getting work done, promoting the school. His job is seeking for sponsorship, you know, for certain school events. (Trustee, Rua)

A more critical concern was lower levels of visibility and access to the principal by staff and students.

I think they're probably so busy that they shut themselves off. I don't think they know - they think they know but I don't really think they're terribly knowledgeable about the actual nitty gritty that's happening in the school. (Teacher, Wha)

They're tied in the office to doing all these other things. Yeah, finding the time to be able to get out, and be the curriculum leader; just even being seen out on the playing fields by the children, its hard for them. (Trustee, Toru)

Within this category a key theme was the principal-trustee relationship. The interpersonal skills of the principal were seen as an important attribute for self-management:

[The principal] invited people in to the school. He's gone out into the community to meet people, and made a point of walking round. He's a good PR man. He knew the right people to contact (SMT member, Ono).

The level of power attached to the principal's role was commented on by participants from all the schools. Some were concerned about the potential for an imbalance of power in the principal-trustee relationship:

I think [trustees] are really well meaning, but sometimes I just wonder exactly if they know what's going on. And I think this allows, and this is no criticism of anyone, but it allows the principal enormous power in an area where boards of trustees don't really know what is going on, and it allows the principal to really manipulate the board of trustees and control it. Not necessarily in a bad way, but it could be. And it also gives the principal huge powers which I don't really think tomorrow's schools really had in mind. (Teacher, Ono)

The principals were aware of their potential for to direct their boards at times:

If you put 10 questions to Board members at a Board meeting, 9 times out of 10 the heads will all turn towards the principal, and what you say holds sway, or is very influential. (Principal, Ono)

However some principals believed that part of their role was to 'educate' their boards on occasions:

Principals have had to 'teach' their boards about some things. With the incoming correspondence it falls on me to ensure that [they] have read all correspondence, and making sure that they carry out their requirements to meet legal requirements. (Principal, Rima)

Although participants were not asked about career patterns, a couple did comment that principal's positions were less attractive now:

We don't have anyone on this staff, to my knowledge, in the over 30 group, with any ambition to be a principal. Nobody. Its not considered a career which is just desirable, or whatever else. People just say, "No, that's too hard". (SMT member, Whitu)

### **Impact on Staff**

Responses in this category related to personal and professional development, vocational perspectives, decision-making, workload, and resourcing. The responses were varied with no clear patterns emerging, and often indicated a variety of perspectives on the same topic.

Where positive responses were noted they were frequently related to higher levels of satisfaction with classroom work:

I see the classroom teacher more able, or in a better position to concentrate on in-class teaching and perhaps to have an opportunity to move some of the administrative matters that not necessarily the teacher needs to worry about, outside of the classroom. (Deputy Principal, Rua)

Some believed that they were more focussed in their classroom work and performing better:

It has allowed us to purchase resources as needed and we are well resourced. The board has handled the money very well. We can address children's needs more capably - resources and teaching and staffing. I'm not convinced that all the new curriculums are a better way. We are all experienced teachers here and tend to use the best of everything. It has given children a lot of different opportunities. They are exposed to varied

experiences. It has allowed us to tailor the whole administration to focus on kid's needs. (Principal, Rima)

The other impact on the staff would be to perhaps free up the skill factor of teachers and allow, with this flexibility, and there is greater flexibility on autonomy, also for the teacher to come out of the classroom and work with other children in other parts, and use the skills which they're probably best at - it might be in music - and perhaps greater flexibility within the staff. I see that as something much greater in today's schools than yesterdays. So it's a 'freeing up'. (Deputy Principal Rua)

Greater opportunities for professional development were mentioned by several of those interviewed. For some this was reflected in a perception of greater professional autonomy, and more opportunities for professional development, budget control and decision making in general. One senior teacher saw this as a 'two-edged sword':

I think teachers are put on their mettle to develop their own professional skills and knowledge, because of their need to implement curriculum, because of the scrutiny within the school and outside school; and because of the nature of the curriculum in the forms of assessment; so that's a good thing [but] we're racing the clock. (SMT member, Tahī)

Greater levels of involvement in policy development was seen as a positive outcome by some. But on the other hand this could become a workload issue for classroom teachers:

The formation of policy making, there's a lot of work that the staff have to be involved in. The writing of the policies, and it just seems to be ongoing. And, as a class teacher, a lot of time's spent at working at overall policies in the school, to do with the school, that hasn't a lot to do with your day to day teaching of children, so it adds to their burden of work. (Teacher Tahī)

Not all those interviewed saw a positive impact on their work from the introduction of self-management. Issues such as fewer opportunities for career movement, higher stress levels, and poor resourcing were mentioned in this category. A trustee from low-decile Toru, for example, thought that it was difficult for teachers to be fully accountable if resourcing was poor:

Yeah, the staff seem to be under more pressure to deliver more in the way of new curriculum areas, like technology and health; to certainly assess and keep much more detailed records, and I know that takes up a huge amount of their time that I would see more productively used in preparing and planning and teaching. I see also that they don't have enough in the way of resources to do their job. I'm very suspicious about self-management being some sort of political ploy to put too much responsibility onto the community to operate the school. I think teachers really are the 'meat in the sandwich' in lots of ways and I think, eventually, the losers are the children. (Trustee, Toru)

A small number believed that self-management had had little impact on their role or that it was difficult to say what the impact had been. The following response was typical:

I think the impact has been less for staff than for people in management positions. Are we just talking about management at the moment? Yeah. I think it's actually the least on classroom teachers. (SMT member, Whā)

It was apparent that staff in senior management positions was developing many new skills however and it seemed that the impact of self-management was felt most in these positions:

Again, [there has been] quite a lot [of impact] on the senior staff, because they're involved in the day to day running of the school as well, and they certainly have a broader, can't think of the word I'm looking for, but the qualifications they have to have to be able to run their departments, and things, are different now to what they were, again because they're involved in the budgetary side as well as the presentation side, and they've got to teach as well. But I think for the rest of the staff, [there has been] not a lot of difference. They still have to tell us what they want, as far as, to see if we can fit it into the budget, but I don't think its a huge difference to the rest of the staff. (Trustee, Rua)

The importance of school culture as an important element in the 'success' of self-management was also mentioned by some. Where there was a strong collegial culture, the impact was more likely to be perceived as positive:

I can see the positives - mainly because I guess I work in a school - no, I don't guess. I do work in a school where it does work really well from the top down. And everybody contributes. And our school functions and self-manages, I believe, really well. I may think differently if I was somewhere else where they were having problems, but then I think there are ways of helping those schools. So, no, I look at it in a positive light, really. (SMT member, Rua)

### **Impact on students**

Participants were asked to comment on the impact of self-management on students overall. Just under a third believed that the impact had been positive. Of these several noted that improved teacher performance (positive attitude, better assessment practice, improved quality control procedures) had made a positive difference for students. The following typified this group of responses:

I think the quality of everything the students get is better. I think it's higher. I think the students, certainly in this school, I wouldn't say in all schools, but certainly in this school, that what the students get out of the school is better than what it used to be. There's a lot more input being put in for the children. (Chairperson, Rua)

Others thought that the ability to better resource classrooms had also had an impact:

It has allowed us to purchase resources as needed and we are well resourced. The board has handled the money very well. We can address children's needs more capably - resources and teaching and staffing. We are all experienced teachers here and tend to use the best of everything. It has given children a lot of different opportunities. They are exposed to varied experiences. It has allowed us to tailor the whole administration to focus on kid's needs. (Principal, Rima)

A third group mentioned that students themselves had become more accountable for their performance, and that students had better opportunities, at least in secondary schools, to participate in decision-making (e.g. involvement in the board of trustees):

Self management, has meant more administration things, so we try to make the pupils aware that they've got to meet certain standards and do certain things, and that the whole system will run much easier if they do that. So I think, to that extent, it probably encouraged the kids to be more organised, more accountable for what they're actually doing; so if they don't do the work then it's their problem, we're not going to chase them. (Teacher, Whitu)

One trustee believed that the inter-school competition had been valuable as staff were more interested in providing a wider range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities:

Competition has a positive effect on students, because schools are trying to do things to make sure students are getting the best opportunities they can. And I'm sure that we're giving our students here real good opportunities. Students going out of here attain very well in all sorts of fields when they go out of here. So as far as saying that Tomorrow's Schools has created that, I guess to some degree it probably has. (Chairperson, Ono)

The majority of responses indicated that there had been little or no impact, or were ambivalent about attributing perceived changes to the introduction of self-management. The following were typical responses:

It's hard to say whether that impact would have been caused by self-management or by the particular management team we've got here. So that's difficult to answer as well. I see an awful lot of change in the school, but whether it's down to Tomorrow's Schools, or other changes, I'm not sure. (Principal, Wha)

Those who were negative or ambivalent about the impact of self-management on students tended to take a more critical view of certain aspects of the school operation. For example, while better resourcing was seen as a positive outcome for the schools, some participants qualified this by stating that it was dependent on the level of funding that the school was able to attract:

I think the impact has been really positive in lots of ways. I think it's allowed us to tailor our programmes very specifically to the needs of the community in the aims of the school. The actual funding, again, has been a problem along the way, to enable that to happen. (Trustee, Toru)

And where the introduction of extra-curricular activities was seen as positive by some, others noted that this had an impact on teacher workload:

I think one of the effects that it has on classroom teachers is that we're under a lot of pressure to provide lots of different opportunities other than what's happened in the classroom. And that has increased their stress when I think about that. You know, like there's always got to be something going on at the weekend, or after school, or something extra like a talent quest or debating or sports or something. Because we know that if we're offering these opportunities then we'll get more students at school. (SMT member, Wha)

Indeed the issue of increased staff workload arising from self-management was seen by some (mainly in secondary schools) as counter-productive to better outcomes for students:

Because the teacher's got so much work to do in some areas, then when a student really needs some help, one to one or whatever, they don't get it

because they just don't have the teacher, or the staff doesn't have the time to do it. Whereas other people relate quite well to that, they're able to get on, and you set them a task and they go and do it because that's in their nature. (Teacher, Ono)

A worrying issue for one teacher was a perceived lessening of support for children with special needs, from outside agencies:

There's been a move away from the agencies that give help to students. I'm talking about places like the Special Education Service. They're slowly being changed. And I think that more and more schools are going to have to supply or set up their own systems for dealing with children with behavioural problems, learning problems. So I think maybe there has been a sort of a breakdown since the changeover that we haven't always been able to get the help that we once did. (SMT member, Rua)

Also of concern to some participants was the effect on students of 'market' ideology. One teacher noted that reliance on 'voluntary' payment of school activities fees (the level of which is decided individually by schools) to cover funding shortfalls could sometimes have negative effects on individual students:

The only impact I would see that its had on this school is that the school tries to get in its own fees, and if it doesn't get in its fees then the kids are stopped from doing certain things. And that's been a hard decision that this school has had to make in its self-management, you know, are they really going to write off \$15,000 or whatever it is in fees or are they going to try and get it in. And what I would think is one of the major effects at this school, is that the children have been stopped from doing certain things. And the staff have been affected because they have the children that haven't paid certain fees. And that has been I would think one of the major self-management [issues]. I mean, in the old system, they could do it anyway, we weren't accountable so much for our money. The whole 'user pays' thing [operates now]. And I think if anything that's probably affected the kids. (Teacher, Wha)

And the impact on some students of an increased sensitivity among project schools to competition and school image was also problematic:

Schools will cope for the majority and the minorities will fall off, as they are already doing all over. This school has a real reputation for looking after, and coping with a whole range of students; but market forces promptly says, "Oh well, this school has all the drop outs and the others, therefore we won't send our bright students there" so it counts against us. So, inevitably, its not just a neutral thing, we could well abandon that policy of giving kids a second chance, which has been our policy because we have lost this year a large number of students who say, "You take on behaviour problems, therefore your school is bad". Parents blindly [take] that [view]. (SMT member, Whitu)

Those in the primary sector, and most trustees, tended to be more positive overall than secondary teachers about the impact of self-management on students.

### **Impact on teaching and learning**

The fourth aspect considered under the topic of self-management was its impact on teaching and learning. About 20% of those interviewed believed that the impact had been either

negligible or negative. A similar number believed that self-management had led to positive gains for students and teachers. By far the largest group of responses indicated that participants were ambivalent about the degree of impact.

While this may seem initially a little surprising, given that improvements to learning were claimed as a key outcome of self-management, it reflects the findings of earlier studies (e.g. Harold, 1993) which indicated that perceptions of change were felt most strongly by principals and trustees.

Several mini-themes emerged from the data in this category. These were school-based systems, programme quality, workload, teacher qualities and opportunities for professional development, and accountability.

### School-based systems

A key factor for many was the ability to develop school-based systems, which allowed them varying degrees of management of teaching and learning. Participants at high-decile Rua and Whitu commented that school-developed standards were an important factor in staff recruitment:

Well I think we pride ourselves on having a good academic standard and as far as that's concerned I think that we've kept up to that standard, if not passed it. I think we've certainly got a high quality of staff here, and we seem to always attract good staff. If there's a vacancy then we seem to have plenty to choose from. It's not the case of just taking whoever turns up. (Whitu, Teacher)

However at lower decile Toru school, difficulties in staff recruitment was a major issue impacting on the quality of programmes for total immersion in Maaori language:

I think the curriculum is broad and appropriate, but we suffer from the things that are structural, like lack of teachers, and lack of teachers with language that are up to delivering the curriculum in a really quality way, and I think that's a government issue. You can't unload that onto schools and say, "your teachers aren't up to it". So I think that professional thing needs to be better resourced. (Trustee, Toru)

Site-based policy development and decision-making, a key feature of self-management made it easier to identify local learning needs:

I think you can identify the learning needs of a school, I think that's really important, identifying those and working hard at trying to do something with that. That would be the big change. (SMT member, Tahiti)

### Programme quality

Several responses commented that self-management had led to better quality programmes for students. For example it had allowed staff to be innovative and to tailor programmes more effectively:

It allows us to be innovative. It allows us to meet the needs of our pupils better, I believe. It allows us to put into place effective programmes for those pupils. It allows us to make changes according to the particular needs of the

clientele that we have. And I think it actually allows us to be more innovative with the curriculum. (Principal, Wha)

The raised expectations however, sometimes brought increased stress for teachers:

And I think one of the effects that it has on classroom teachers is that we're under a lot of pressure to provide lots of different opportunities other than what's happened in the classroom. And that has increased their stress when I think about that. You know, like there's always got to be something going on at the weekend, or after school, or something extra like a talent quest or debating or sports or something. Because we know that if we're offering these opportunities then we'll get more students at school. (Teacher, Wha)

Some teachers thought that training needs and workload had not been adequately taken into account before teachers were thrust into the self-management model with its increased administrative requirements:

I think things have gone too fast, and I don't think we've been given enough time to try and administer them. Because of that, then, I think that they haven't been completed correctly, so we've been invited to do certain things, especially in the [curriculum] area, and as far as being trained or anything like this we just haven't been able to do it I don't think. (Teacher, Ono)

An unanticipated impact on classroom programmes was the conservative approach to school excursions taken by some trustees, conscious of their requirements and liabilities in relation to acts of legislation such as the Health and Safety Act and the Privacy Act:

It goes back to the accountability aspect. Teachers are accountable, but sometimes I think they're so accountable that you are going to cut out some of the things that used to be fun. And that's things like, maybe, walking your class to the museum, if you're close enough to walk. Doing an out of zone trip if you can't get permission from the board who think its not safe for you to travel in cars. (Teacher, Wha)

### Workload

The theme of increased administrative workload was a common one in the interviews. Several people believed that this was counterproductive to good teaching and learning as

the inroads of administrative requirements to the classroom had encroached on time spent actually working with children:

The difference on the children is a negative one, as far as I'm concerned. We're so busy with other things that we have to do now that when I used to teach in a school that didn't have tomorrow's schools or whatever, I'd be here 7.30 until 5.00 and all my work was done in the classroom, putting up displays or working for the children. Now I'd be working those hours and I wouldn't even be in my room, I'd be doing all sorts of other things, or learning songs to fund-raise. (Teacher, Rima)

The negative impact of this kind of workload was felt most strongly by the secondary staff because of the huge change in senior school assessment practice which was introduced early in the reforms. Self-management requirements had reduced the time available for senior staff to focus on professional leadership:

I guess in terms of the teaching staff the self-management has had little impact. It's really at an administrative level that it's had impact. I have a very good senior management team. We have a major building development being handled totally by one of the deputy principals. And that's really good. But it means that their availability to worry about teaching and learning, or my availability to worry about teaching and learning, which is the core function of the school, has been significantly reduced. (Principal, Whitu)

### Teacher qualities/professional development

Another theme emerging from the interviews was that of the impact of teacher qualities and professional development on teaching and learning. This included better teacher performance:

[The impact has been] mostly in teacher performance. Very much so. And in providing for the needs of pupils. They would be the biggest things. (SMT member, Wha)

Improved opportunities for professional development were noted:

I think that the quality of teaching is definitely improving. I think we are becoming more focussed in areas of staff development, where we're really focusing in on specific areas, whether it's English, like it's been technology this year has been a major focus. And we're really looking at that and looking at what we should be doing and developing schemes for within the school based on the curriculums. So I think that can only be positive and a good thing for children. (SMT member, Wha)

The diversity of in-service work available today is vastly, vastly changed in today's schools. (SMT member, Rua)

However there were some caveats expressed here too, particularly in relation to funding:

Well I think you're limited. Because you've only got a certain amount for a budget, for your professional development, you've really got to pick and choose. For next year I'm probably only allowed to go on two courses from the school, but I'll actually go on other courses in my own time. I can see that you're limited, professionally anyway. (Teacher, Tah)

Some of those interviewed were concerned about what they saw as a higher value being placed on certain kinds of teacher qualities, particularly for Education Review Office audits, that did not equate with their own professional perspective:

This is what ERO wants, you know, every time you do a unit you're meant to write down your aims. Well that's good, because you've got to know where you're going. Results, well that's great. Then you're meant to do all these little things like, this person did this and this person did that, and they need to do this, and what I did about it, which means you end up with stacks of paper like this, and that's all they really look at now. That's all they have time to look at.

But I don't think that's necessarily a good teacher. I think a good teacher is someone who goes in there, teaches kids how to think, helps them improve their social skills, gives them the information that they need, and relates to them as people, so that they grow. (SMT member, Ono)

Several of those who expressed ambivalence about the impact of self-management on teaching and learning focussed on the relative autonomy of the teacher regardless of what went on outside the classroom:

For all these changes I don't think there's been a drastic change in what's happening in the classroom, I really don't. I don't think that side of things has changed that much. I still think people are pretty much doing what they've always done. There's a few subtle changes, but in the classroom? No, not a great deal of change at all, except, maybe, in assessment, I guess. (SMT member, Tahi)

Another factor was mentioned by some participants that could also impact on the quality of the teaching and learning programme. The move to self-management dismantled many of the support structures and networks used by teachers for formal and informal professional interchange. The Associate Principal at low-decile Tahi had frequently felt the impact of loss of support structures for teachers of children with special needs:

I feel that we're on our own over some issues. Things like truancy. A lot of the support things have been removed.... In our case like truanancies, though truancy often is a point of concern; [and also] other kinds of support structures that have been in place...Now that's progressively being eroded, and so what you're having is people coming in and giving advice and guidance to teachers who are already, by the nature of their class, pushed to the limit, being suggested that they adjust all of that for the sake of this one child who, in the past, would have been accommodated differently; and that is a real concern here, a real issue for us. (SMT member, Tahi)

### **Impact on school-community relationships**

The research team was interested to hear views about the impact of self-management on school-community relationships. The pattern of responses varied a little from earlier categories. A significant percentage (50) of responses indicated that there had been positive outcomes. A further 40% were ambivalent about its impact and the final group believed that there had been little or no impact. Responses fell into 6 broad categories. These included: a greater awareness by school personnel of the needs and expectations of the community, levels of parental involvement, parental status in the school, lay-professional boundaries, the impact of principal leadership style, and the impact of 'market' policy.

#### *Greater awareness of community needs*

Those in primary schools, possibly because of the normally higher levels of involvement with the community, were more accepting of the change:

Well I think we've developed more of a relationship because we now have to have consultation with policies and curriculum, letting parents know what's going on with the education of their children. And I think many parents have become more involved in their children's education. And once again that can only really be a benefit for the children. (Associate Principal, Rua)

This awareness did not automatically lead to better relationships though. It often required work to develop that:

Rapport with the community is good, but we have to work at it. And as with all things, it doesn't just happen, somebody has to go out and make it happen. And I think we fall down on that a little in terms of basically selling ourselves. We probably sell ourselves just a little bit short, and we say its other peoples fault, but I think we've actually got to make the effort and go and do it. And I think that's the only way you're going to get the good publicity. They don't tend to come looking for you. (Teacher, Whitu)

### Levels of involvement

There were several ways in which some participants believed self-management had impacted in a positive way in school-community relationships. They commented on perceptions of greater parental involvement in the school programme, more community use of the school after hours, more support for curriculum issues, and more involvement in decision-making. Both primary and secondary responses indicated that trustees, principals and teachers tended to be more aware of the value of developing closer links with their community, although sometimes for differing reasons. Those who were ambivalent about the level of impact often commented that 'the same old faces' were still evident.

There'll always be those parents that take an interest, always did take an interest, still do take an interest. The ones who don't, I don't think it's bought any of them any closer to the school. I think, possibly having to sell ourselves a bit has made us a little more visible in the district and the press and that sort of thing. That would be the only way that we've actually got closer to the community I think. In my experience there's always some parents who always support the school, who always did that, they do that regardless. (Trustee, Ono)

There were varied levels of parental involvement evident in the schools. Rural Rima School had always had high levels of parental involvement and staff felt that there had been simply a continuation of that pattern. Some others believed that social changes (e.g. employment of parents) had been responsible in a drop off in active support.

I think it's just a changing of the times. When there's a two parent family, more often both work, and it's that time to come in and support the students activities, or just come in and see what's going on and just generally spend some time in the school. Parents' times are limited now, so I'd say it's more the times rather than the changing of Tomorrow's Schools that has brought that about. (Trustee, Toru)

### Parental status

The issue of parental status was mentioned several times. Two quite contrasting views appeared (in one instance, in the same school) from perceptions of school-community relationships – 'ownership' and 'partnership'. From the 'ownership' perspective, parents were likely to be aware of their 'right' to be in the school, and to have higher demands or expectations of teachers.

Yes I think it has, in that what's happened is that parents are much more aware of their rights for their children and themselves. They're much more comfortable at coming to school; they come to school in greater numbers.

They take a real interest in what's going on. And they've got some expectations of what will happen at school. 5 or 6 years ago we would have seen half the amount of parents that we're seeing now, so they're much more involved in their children's education. Though that can make it difficult for management. (SMT member, Wha)

The 'partnership' model was described in terms of high levels of parental involvement in the school programme, more support for teachers and a culture of shared consultation and decision-making. Some participants believed that the accountability for student achievement fell too heavily on the school side of the relationship, and that students and parents had to take reciprocal responsibility in this aspect:

Tomorrow's Schools just really emphasises the parents rights to [blame teachers] without any regard for the responsibilities of doing that, so that we, and I think this, I had a friend who is a principal, ring up the other day and say, "The job is really unreasonable. You give the parents, you bend over backwards to do these things, and they still make demands the whole time, and its just unreasonable and unfair on what we're trying to do". So that has had a negative effect for us. (SMT member, Whitu)

Within the topic of school-community matters, the issue of parental power was also raised. Prior to the reforms a commonly expressed fear of teaching professionals was that parents would 'take over' and intrude on teachers' professional domain. One teacher reported an instance of problematic use of power by parents:

We had a beginning teacher [who was] definitely conscientious, competent, never going to be a brilliant teacher, but a genuine competent trier with all the normal beginning teacher problems. The parents of her 4th form class, I think with a sense of empowerment from the whole tomorrow's schools process, set out basically to get her dismissed.... That teacher was under extreme stress and to me it all stemmed from this business of the sense of parent power that came in, and it was the worst sort of application of it. That rather turned me off that aspect of tomorrow's schools. (Teacher, Whitu)

Although the potential for interference might be there, there was little evidence of it in the project schools:

I would say that the board of trustees - the whole concept of the board of trustees like a governor's board, does have sway. I think we're very fortunate in our board of trustees. We've been fortunate that they haven't interfered as such with school happenings, with what actually happens in the classroom. I cross my fingers and hope that it doesn't. Because I think that once that happens we've got a real problem. (Teacher, Wha)

Indeed a trustee was concerned that trustees themselves were not necessarily exercising their broader powers, especially if they lacked skills or experience:

One, I think its good that [the board] can actually have the power to make those decisions. But within schools, its also very hard when you've got to look at the socio-economic status [of] the school. Some schools, its easier because they've got the resources, have got that ability to get that and know what it is; others haven't, so its been a very trying period. Getting them to, sometimes, for them to realise that they have also got that say as well. (Trustee, Toru)

### Impact of 'market' ideology

The lower decile schools' approach to school-community relationships was sometimes coloured by concerns about 'market' issues (e.g. sponsorship, and competition):

We tend to be a lot more active in seeking our sponsorship, because there's just not enough money to do all the things we want to do. And, I suppose that influences the relationship between the school and the community. We try to be nicer to them than we did before, probably, instead of just teaching the imposed curriculum, there is a sort of an attempt there to fit in with the community and relate to them. Not necessarily because we survey the community and find out what the needs are, and manage to it, but there's an effort to let parents and the local community know what's happening in the school, and to present it as an attractive place which they can come to and send their kids to, and feel happy about sending their kids to, 'cos they know what goes on here. (SMT member, Ono)

A number of those interviewed commented on the increasing importance of school 'image' and 'reputation', in a competitive environment. This issue was mentioned by both primary and secondary sectors but tended to be of greater concern to those in secondary schools, perhaps reflecting different parental expectations of achievement at this level. Reputation could linger for some time though at any level:

The history of this school [was that it had a bad] reputation. We've had a lot of good things happen [recently] and it shows itself in the increasing roll and people out there saying good things about the school, and people saying - secondary schools, maybe you should be doing what Wha is doing. And other secondary schools saying that, of all the 3rd formers they take in, ours are the best prepared. That was stated in a public meeting. (Principal, Wha)

The need to provide the community with positive information about the school was important here and the role of local media was an element in this. A senior staff member at Whitu school noted, for example, that the local press did not seem to portray the school as positively as others in the region, owing to earlier negative publicity, which was still remembered by the community:

### Principal leadership and management style

A further ingredient in the development of school-community relationships was that of principal leadership and management style. Principals (particularly in the primary sector) took on hugely increased powers under self-management, but across both sectors responses mentioned how principal 'visibility', communication style, accessibility, and listening skills were important factors.

I still think, even with today's reforms, a school might not have good community relationships if [the principal] doesn't go out there and do the spadework. I think you've got to do the work and get your community involved. (SMT member, Ono)

### **Impact on the education of Maori children**

Proponents of self-management argued that it would allow greater opportunities for Maori participation in all aspect of the education system. Some participants in the present study believed that this was the case:

I would have to say that, from my experience, and from my point of view, [self-management] has largely worked for Maaori people. This school wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for those reforms, and to say, well certainly my experience, too, that it gave people, even though there was still a lot of fighting to be done to get the powers that be, and the Ministry, to understand, and to accept that what people were saying was actually good, it gave the mechanism for that to happen. Maaori people could become a Board of Trustees and say, "This is what we want", and if they had all the skills that were necessary in terms of bargaining and fighting, and the determination and all those sorts of things, then they were able to make progress, in developing schools like this one. (Principal, Toru)

Key themes emerging from data on the impact of self-management were ambivalence about how it affected achievement, variation in the ability of different schools to meet the needs of Maaori learners needs, differing levels of parental involvement, and the importance of effective communication between school and home

Many of those who responded to this question were ambivalent about whether self-management had made positive differences for Maaori. The response of the Toru principal, whose programme was based on total immersion in Maaori language and culture, was typical of this group:

Yeah, I think it's generally quite good. It does mean that you can make decisions, you feel empowered that you say, "yes, I'm going to make a decision here". But it also has its flip side. If you've got a Board of Trustees that doesn't have the skills, then you've got big problems because, as a principal, you can't do everything on your own. (Principal, Toru)

I think it's made parents and children more aware of the value of learning Maaori. And that there is opportunities to do it. For some it hasn't made a great deal of difference, because, in tying it up with the home, unless the home sees a value in education then you're not going to achieve a whole lot. And unfortunately, in that sector of our community, there are a lot of parents who don't value education, and therefore it's hard to make progress with their children. And it's tied up with the issues of people's views on those things. (Principal, Wha)

A number of the positive responses highlighted aspects such as greater awareness of the needs of Maaori learners, and greater flexibility in meeting these under self-management:

Definitely. From what I've seen in the two schools that I've been.... it's positive. There's a lot more flexibility, and to be able to do what they want, set things up how they see important. And when you talk about community there's certainly been, on the Maaori side of things, there's been a lot more input from the community. Parents are a lot more vocal now, the Maaori parents are a lot more vocal about what they want for their kids; and that would be a definite thing that I've seen come through in the two schools, definitely. (SMT member, Tahi)

A small number of those interviewed believed that there had been little, or slow, impact of self-management on Maaori achievement. One factor mentioned here was the difficulty in attracting high quality staff:

The problem with Maaori education, and certainly the problem we're working through at the moment, is to find acceptably performing Maaori language teachers, and to find teachers who are acceptable role models for students generally ... I think the problem that's emerged with Tomorrow's Schools possibly is a renaissance of Maaori education and an awareness of the importance of things Maaori in the educational world which is then generated a desire for appropriate role model people, and appropriate teaching personnel, and they're not always there. (Principal, Ono)

We have a terrible job getting teachers... you can't get teachers that are fluent in the Reo ... They're [teachers with te Reo] a reasonably mobile group because they know they are coveted, those that are good, and good and good on them, if you've got an advantage you might as well use it. (Trustee, Wha)

Those who saw benefits for Maaori often couched these in terms of improvements in language, confidence and enthusiasm. However there was sometimes uncertainty about whether this translated into actual gains:

I think they are benefiting from having a role model, a successful role model. I think they're having success about their self-esteem, and being Maaori, and speaking Maaori ... I worry just how fluent they get, for a number of reasons. I wonder about their fluency, written and spoken, in both languages. (SMT member, Wha)

The value of close involvement between home and school was also cited as a key factor in improving learning.

Well at this school of course we've got a very strong whanau group. And over the last few years - since 1989 we've worked really closely with the whanau. And we have developed a bilingual class that takes children in from year four to six - oh, it's standard two to standard four. And we have a very strong relationship with them. And that's really come as I said from the top, from [the principal. He has worked very closely alongside, and I think that means that we have a really positive relationship with the Maaori community. (Teacher, Rua)

On the other hand there were perceived difficulties for some in getting agreement within their Maaori community about the nature of the school programme. The quality of communication was an important factor here:

We don't have a very good liaison with our Maaori community though. I mean that the principal is keen to get its bilingual parents into this school, but for some reason, they don't understand what the principal wants, and the principal tries hard to understand what the Maaori community wants. But they don't actually seem to get it together. They try so hard, and we have tried, [but it doesn't seem to work]. (Teacher, Wha)

## **DISCUSSION**

The reform to the New Zealand education system, begun in 1988 (Taskforce to Review Education Administration) was, at heart, a bold ideologically-driven experiment, underpinned

by the worthy goal of improved educational achievement for our nation's children. It was this principle that drew parents by their hundreds to stand for the first board of trustee elections in 1989, and to work tirelessly during the first few years to implement the new system. It was the goodwill of parents, principals and teachers that kept the momentum going despite early warnings that the pace of change was too rapid. That very goodwill may have muffled the challenges that arose during the last 10 years but now, a decade on, it is time for practitioners, researchers and policy makers to take stock, to judge the degree to which early aims were met.

Brian Caldwell (1989) was regarded in Australasia as perhaps the original 'expert' in the development of self-management practice. Indeed he travelled around New Zealand at the outset of the reforms providing consultancy services to those implementing the new policy. It is valuable to return to some of his early principles of self-management to assess how they link to the realities of school life. Caldwell's principles, which included 'quality, school effectiveness/improvement, equity and excellence, efficiency, accountability, and adaptability' (Caldwell, 1989, pp. 3-5), were essentially predicated on a school administration which was well educated, knowledgeable about current educational policy, practice and research, competent in planning and evaluation and able to work collegially and collaboratively (p.10). The reality of self-management as experienced by many New Zealand school personnel falls far short, in many cases, of this earlier vision. The findings outlined in this paper detail the complexity, idiosyncrasy, and diversity of school policy and practice.

The findings clearly confirm the thrust of Wylie's (1997) data on the New Zealand experience of self-management in primary schools, which indicated tensions in the fabric of reform - e.g. financial, workload, ideological, and professional. Our study has gone a little further and allowed the 'actual' voices of participants to be heard, so that their experiences can be accessed by others in similar contexts. The data indicate both commonalities and differences in how primary and secondary participants experienced self-management, which were to a large extent related to differences in structure, pedagogy and assessment.

### **What have we learnt?**

This is not a new question but one which has been asked in a variety of ways in the last decade, as the reforms moved relentlessly on. This paper has presented findings from research into the realities of educational reform. Much of the present data provide further confirmation of other recent research in the field (e.g. Wylie, 1997; Harold, 1995). The people we interviewed supported and opposed aspects of self-management for a variety of philosophical, technical and pedagogical reasons and this paper has attempted to tease some of these out to provide a context for further analysis. A complex picture emerges as the rhetoric of self-management is balanced by the reality of those who are charged with implementing it. The satisfaction of having local autonomy is tempered by heavier workloads and greater demands for external accountability. There are greater concerns about financial matters expressed by low decile schools but many of the other issues associated with self-management; workload, stress, speed of change, and the skills of trustees, were reported across all types of schools.

We also think it is important to enter the caveat that the project is drawing on a set of interviews rather than observations and that there may be considerable difference between what is said and what is done. For instance at a time when it has become increasingly important to market schools and talk them up, it is possible that we experienced a certain amount of impression management. Other research methods such as participant observation would be necessary to get underneath this.

Nevertheless the study has the potential to provide an unusually rich and detailed account of the impact of reform and how those in schools may be responding to it. Moreover it is able to give voice to those who have been asked to implement the changes of the last decade but who (especially teachers) have often been pushed to the margins of educational debate because of the spectre of provider capture. This is important for reasons of democratic participation but also because it is apparent that the reforms are redefining the work and outlooks of people in New Zealand schools in ways which are not yet fully clear. Only by listening carefully to those involved will we gain better insights into how, and to what extent change is occurring, and what the impact is likely to be.

The data indicate both compliance and resistance to reform policy and also a deep-seated ambivalence about the impact of self-management practice on the achievement of learners.

Alongside reports of professional satisfaction, flexibility and local control, there is worrying evidence that the administrative and curricular requirements of self-management may be counter-productive to both quality and quantity of teacher-pupil interaction in learning contexts.

Those who have lived the reforms during the last decade have shown that its impact is complex, contradictory and idiosyncratic. This is unsurprising when the literature on change is taken into account, but the task has perhaps been made unnecessarily difficult by the tensions between political will and professional reality. It is clear from the data that the wealth of professional experience and knowledge teachers bring to the classroom has been largely overlooked in the haste to control and regulate their work and to get them to 'just do it'. It is clear too that administrative and compliance requirements have fallen heavily on principal's and teacher's shoulders, at a high cost to some.

The Ministry of Education has recently distributed a discussion document 'Legislation for Learning (Ministry of Education, 1999) which suggests that legislative change is necessary to eradicate the current system problems. It seems ironic that some of the 'faults' identified (e.g. lack of co-operation) are by-products of the very policies introduced by the Ministry. An initial perusal of the document indicates a strong 'common sense' aspect to some of the suggestions, but there are underlying philosophical and professional issues worthy of further debate. It is likely that there will be modifications to the concept of self-management but it is critical that these are driven by a collaborative approach to the issues involved. Our data indicate strengths and shortcomings in the concept of self-management as experienced in the last decade. It may be that the concept has reached its most useful extent and it is time to refocus on arguably the most critical element in learner achievement - the quality of the teacher with whom the learner interacts.

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1. Kura kaupapa Maaori - state schools in which Maaori language, culture and values dominate.
2. Senior Management Team member – includes Deputy and Associate principals and Heads of Departments.

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