Self-Management and the Curriculum Framework: What Have we Learnt?

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by

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Abstract

A key feature of the move to self-management of schools in New Zealand was the expectation that it would lead to better delivery of the curriculum and better achievement for students. However, the literature indicates increasing ambivalence about the outcomes of this form of administration for learning. This paper will report some findings from a new qualitative 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 employed wide-ranging interviews with teachers, senior staff and members of the schools’ governing body.

The paper provides recent empirical evidence about the impact of self-management on the implementation of the curriculum framework and, in particular, on such aspects as the roles of the principal and teachers; teaching and learning; school-community relationships; and on education of Māori children.

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 emerging 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, Māori 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 Māori (I)
- 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.

The Mapping Project: Preliminary Analysis

How had the move to self-management impacted on schools overall?

We were interested in participant’s ‘global’ views of a decade of self-management and the first interview question asked them to comment on this. An initial analysis showed some were in favour of the changes, a few were dissatisfied, and the majority were ambivalent in their judgement.

Fifteen participants were in favour of the move to self-management, and of these, seven were trustees. Four principals, three deputy principals, and a teacher were also of the view that the changes had been positive overall. The main theme emerging from these comments was a sense of satisfaction with local autonomy in decision-making.

Some participants believed that the change to self-management had been unsatisfactory. These views were held by trustees, assistant principals and teachers. Key concerns were the workload associated with self-management, and the speed of change. One participant was particularly critical of the changes:
Absolutely, and scathingly critical. I think they're absolute disaster. In broad, I think they were extremely ill conceived. No stage one management student would dream of reorganising an administrative system until they decided what they wanted to do with their organisation... So I just think it was a disaster from the go. My own personal opinion would have been that, if David Lange had said to teachers once a day, "You are doing a good job out there. Hang in, because its important and difficult work for the community", we would have got far better, and more productive changes, than this shambles. I am just very critical of the whole process of go to whoa, ill conceived, and everything that's resulted is just a shambles from that. (Assistant Principal, Whitu)

By far the greatest number of responses indicated an ambivalence among participants about the overall impact of the move to self-management. Over half the participants answered in this category, including three principals, four trustees five senior school staff, and nineteen teachers. Their responses showed wide-ranging views on the dynamics of self-management. This group saw the benefits of self-management as being concerned mainly with local autonomy in decision-making, and greater involvement of parents and the community. Although this group were aware of the benefits of self-management they were also very aware of some disadvantages. The responses fell into seven main categories: the change process, appropriateness of the model for all schools, divisions between school management and teaching staff, workload, marketing issues, relationship with central authorities, and loss of support.

The bulk of the data from this question have been amalgamated with a following one where participants were asked to expand on their understanding and experiences of self-management. The impact of marketing and promotion issues on schools was an aspect that had assumed prominence since the move to self-management. The way in which a school is perceived by its community has become increasingly important in the self-managing environment as schools compete for students. Stereotypical views often impact hardest on low decile schools and Tahi and Ono were no exception:

There's a very strong perception that parents have a choice, we're pushing at the idea that parents have a choice, and that some peculiar equation that's pushed by the media, poor schools is viewed to mean lower decile rating, but the implication is that it is poor, and its not. And, in fact, the media seems to believe that they are the same thing. Right, I think at Tahi School we do well for our clients, or we're much better equipped to, and that the schools that are perceived as rich, i.e. good schools, were the least well equipped, so there is that kind of problem. (AP, Tahi)

[Parents] are not looking at academic standards; they're looking at the type of student that comes here... I mean we've managed to get a lot of resources here, and we're a well equipped school, but, when you're situated in an area like this you can never compete with a school, a state
school situated in an area that's surrounded by extremely good, wealthy properties. I think schools had to improve and tidy themselves up and that, but I still think its very hard for a school that’s in a very low economic area to compete with schools that are in a higher area. (AP Ono)

How is self-management experienced in schools?
After talking about their ‘global’ perspectives on the move to self-management, participants were asked to define more specifically what self-management meant to them. Their views were diverse but preliminary analysis indicated some patterns among the responses. Their comments related to six main categories; planning and decision-making financial matters the principal’s role, political issues, teaching and learning and school-community relationships. Each of these is discussed below.

Planning and administration
A large number of people commented on the overarching dynamics of local administration and its impact on planning and administration. One group spoke of the opportunity to take a longterm view of the school and its programme:

’Cos I think its important that we take our own destiny in our hands, I think that’s important for our children. (Chairperson, Rua)

To me its having a vision about where you want to go, and having the facilities to be able to put that into place, whether they be financial, or staffing, or resources or plant, whatever. (Principal, Wha)

The ‘local control’ element of self-management was a common theme:

The Ministry has got rules and regulations - that has got to be, but self-management to me means 'running it your way'. (Trustee, Rima)

Self managing means to me that we make our own decisions regarding the way we run our schools and pay our people and utilise our money. (Teacher, Rua).

Freedom and flexibility were valued components:

I think it’s given us a greater flexibility. It’s greater autonomy. We’re now able to do the things we’ve always wanted. In simple terms we now can - we have a curriculum structure, that’s fine. But within that we’re able to diversify and use time, resources much more pertinent to the needs of the school. And I think that’s fundamentally an important point with it. (Deputy Principal, Rua)

Freedom and flexibility had some associated costs however. One of these was the speed of the process of change itself:
The curriculum changes I find to be the most astonishing, because it is so rushed. It is so rushed that this view that you have a contract, you get a person in, they do it right, you're right, forget about you now, its done, been there, done that philosophy of the Ministry I think is just astonishing. (Principal, Tahi)

A second cost was increased workload. This was a common theme in responses from all schools:

But an overall assessment is, there's certainly a lot more work. I sometimes wonder what I did with my time. I know how I use my time, but far more of my time now is dealing with administrative matters, I spend time most nights, as well as at school, but I'm not prepared to put another 20 or 30 hours, which I know some teachers are doing, particularly if they've got big classes and on unit standards, which is what we're also involved with, which is another question which will no doubt come up, but my mind boggles at the amount of time some teachers with big classes would have had to spend. (Teacher, Ono)

There was a suggestion by some that the current ‘one size fits all’ model may not be the most appropriate for all schools that the single self-management model was not necessarily suitable for all schools:

With this school its fine, but with a lot of schools obviously it isn't fine because they don't have the personnel or the resources to be able to work on it properly, and the East Coast is a classical example... Where the bulk funding reform, for instance, is something that we're looking at as a Board, which I believe, for this school, will be good; but I don't believe it would be good for all the schools. (Trustee, Rua)

Self-management of funds had allowed some schools to upgrade their resources for teaching and learning:

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The big difference I would have noticed here as Principal was, with the building programme that we've had at the moment, which is a major building programme. It is, its wonderful. I can put that in capital letters. We've actually been given huge leeway in deciding how we spend the money, what we do with it. Whereas, previously under the old
educational system, and I did work in a school where we had a building programme under the old system. (Principal, Ono)

Management and leadership issues were also evident in the data and were often mentioned by trustees. Principal style was seen as an important element of self-management. For the Rima board, the principal’s collaborative approach was valued:

The principal has a lot to do with how the school is run. The type of person is important - if she had not been a 'team' person it might not have worked out. (Trustee, Rima)

An Ono trustee reflected on the changing role of the school under self-management:

The school is becoming a business, so unfortunately we have to start looking for money, well we are looking for money and sponsorship and those sorts of things. The principal has to be more of a business person now, they have to be very much more aware of the money, what money is, and looking at where you can spend it and spending it for best effect. (Trustee, Ono)

However a teacher at the same school was concerned that managerial inexperience could lead to problems:

Well I don't think the senior management really has the expertise to do this accurately. I think that principals and deputy principals come to the situation where they're out of the classroom, and they don't really have that expertise, in my opinion. They don't get any major training. If you went in to a situation such as a corporate business then you'd have management or managerial skills, training, for a considerable length of time; and because of that then I don't think that we get a fair deal because of that. (Teacher, Ono)

The importance of trustee skills for effective self-management was a common theme in responses. The higher decile schools had been able to draw on a fairly wide pool of trustee expertise:

We've had people on the Board that have all been involved in running their own business, or their own farms, and they've been pretty responsible, funding wise. (Trustee, Rima)

The work of the board encompasses a much wider range than financial and legal issues, and the same principal noted that equity requirements were sometimes contested by these trustees:

Do you think they could accept the idea that we needed to have women on the board, that we should have Maori representation! So that was the first battle that went on. They were very skilled people; there was a lawyer, accountant, engineer, and financial manager. So there were some skills there, but it meant there were some interesting battles. (Management team member, Whitu)
The issue of trustee skill and knowledge was an important consideration for low decile schools:

I have reservations about, the effect of Tomorrows Schools, given the fact that we're in a relatively small community; there isn't the pool of people with the abilities and the talents to guarantee that you always have the composition of a Board that you'd like. Having said that, the Board we've got I'm very, you know, they're a very good Board, and they are well intentioned, and they work hard; but there are times when it would be nice to have a lawyer on our Board, somebody with accounting expertise on our Board, and we don't have that. Now we've gone out and co-opted people from the major corporations to sort of plug the gaps, as it were, but you can't always guarantee that you're going to do that. (Principal, Ono)

The level of trustee skill was seen as a key ingredient in the effectiveness of self-management and one trustee deplored the lack of foresight into the implementation of the new system:

With good Board members and a caring community who are willing to put the time and effort into it I guess [self-management] works. But I think [the government] just pulled the rug out from underneath the old system too quickly, and also all these Boards and principals, and teachers who had to cope. Some did, some didn't, and I think there's a lot that didn't. You only hear about the bad ones, but the good schools who are in a reasonably good socio-economic area will cope, usually. (Trustee, Whitu)

Resourcing the curriculum

The second main category of responses related to resource and financial matters. Not unexpectedly, these were mentioned frequently, especially by the low decile schools. There was a broad satisfaction with the opportunity to manage funds locally, but concerns about levels of funding were common across all deciles. The prominence of financial matters was summed up by a trustee:

We have to give the students what is needed, but we also have to have the money to do it. Money is a huge aspect, and it does stop you doing things in a school that you want to do. Its like anything, you can't do it without money. We would broaden, widely, if we had the money. (Trustee, Whitu)

Some expressed frustration that there were still constraints on their decision-making in this area:

[The money is] not always spent in the areas that you would like it to be spent, that's one of the downfalls of it. We might decide that, hey! we need that to be spent somewhere desperately, but like I can't, and its got to be spent somewhere else, and it really isn't needed in that area. (Trustee, Tahi)
Low decile schools experienced particular problems supplementing their budget by local fundraising:

Funding is the big hiccup in the whole system. You know, they've said you can run your school and there's the operational grant to run it, and its not enough. They haven't increased it in line with inflation, or anywhere near in line with inflation. And the 2 little lifts we've had haven't been enough. Its very easy for them to step back and say, you've got to manage it. That's the biggest pressure we've got on the system, so we can manage it within constraints, and when you're a decile 1 school like we are, you can't go to the parents for large sums of money, because they haven't got large sums of money. Just getting school fees is a major exercise. (Trustee, Ono)

But even the high decile schools were worried about funding:

I think we are getting by on a lot less money, and I think certainly it needed to happen. I think we had a lot of fat in the system pre 1989, and we're certainly a lot leaner now, but I think we've gone too far the other way. It seems like in school we're always struggling for cash. We always seem to be in a situation where the boss has got everything as fine tuned as he can make it and if anything extra happens we've got no resources to fall back on to cover it basically. (Management team member, Whitu)

The role of the principal

A third 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)

Several principals talked about personal and professional satisfaction gained from their new role:

I think what it really means for me is that I’m at the cutting edge, if you like, of the running of the school. I work within the parameters of policy as set down by my Board and which I have been involved in. And I suppose that I enjoy the space and the decision-making options that I have available for me. (Principal, Rua)

I find it personally satisfying though. It's yours and the community's school. Each school can do things in it's own way. We can make our own decisions - I like that the best. You don't have to go via the Ministry. They have brought a lot of work for me for a long time but I know a lot more now than I would have known under the old system. (Principal, Rima)
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:

I'm quite happy with the way it's worked in this school. It's a lot to do with the people on the Board of Trustees and an even bigger lot to do with the principal. (Trustee, Rima)

[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. (Management team 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)

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)

I take the time to talk that through with my Board, because my Board keeps changing, so I have to keep reintroducing it to them, and helping them make sense of it. (Principal, Rua)

The Tahi principal had taken a more direct role with his board after they had made a staffing decision with which the principal disagreed:

One Scale A appointment which was made by the Board was the wrong decision I think. But at that point I think I was going with the flow, and letting the Board do it all, and since then I've clawed that back officially, and I recommend to the Board the appointments, and they seem to be a bit happier with that. There's consultation with the Board, but in the end its, I think that idea. (Principal, Tahi)
His chairperson affirmed the principal’s style indicating that it was a negotiated approach and that the principal had the confidence of the board:

The Principal as a Principal has enormous flexibility, and we allow him, as a Board, a lot of flexibility because, at the end of the day, he is the one who has to account for the day to day running of the school. (Trustee, Tahi)

**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 were 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)

One principal believed that staff were motivated to ‘make the system work’ because of strong vocational principles:

Yeah because it has quite an influence is the management team here…. They’re wanting to do things well if you like and wanting to do the best for our kids. (Principal Wha)

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)

There’s more of a different attitude from the principal and staff. The attitude seems to be to get the children as far as they can. (Trustee, 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. (Management team member, Tahi)

Greater levels of involvement in policy development was seen as a positive outcome by some:

After the bulk funding issue quietened down the staff were heavily involved in policy, implementation and curriculum planning. Any new policies were taken to the staff. Curriculum policy and implementation plans have placed a greater loading on staff. They wouldn't have had to do it in the past. It gives them an opportunity to have a say - they're an 'assertive lot' - about their needs in the classroom. My view is 'they're your kids - you make the decision'. There is more teacher independence in their own classrooms, which has included a greater workload, but they have done a lot of learning that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. (Principal, Rima)

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, Tahi)

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. I think it’s actually the least on classroom teachers. (Assistant Principal, Wha)

It was apparent that many new skills were being developed by staff in senior management positions 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 impact of management practices (in budgetary matters for example) could sometimes hinder teachers’ work:

At this school staff have got curriculum budgets. We do have budgets. I actually think of this staff that the administration like to keep that to themselves. They're really tight about letting the money go. I understand part of the reasons for it, but I also think that it takes away from staff who are really competent at managing, it just goes. And we've been very fortunate with the person in curriculum funding this year because she's basically just let us have free rein, but that may not happen again. It depends on the people in management. (Teacher, Wha)

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. (Assistant Principal, Rua)

Teaching and Learning
The largest number of responses in this category reported little or no impact on their teaching and learning. While this may seem initially a little surprising, 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 of the comments 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. (Deputy Principal, Tahi)

In many ways [self-management] doesn’t have any particular effect on me personally. I mean teaching is teaching is teaching, whichever way you do it. (Teacher, Rua)

You come to school and do your day to day stuff, and very often you're not actually aware that anything's changed a lot. And if you're not actively involved in administration then you're probably not aware of the changes that have been made there. (Senior Teacher, Ono)

The Whitu principal was unsure of the impact of self-management on student learning, and was concerned that the administrative workload of the senior staff left them with less time to spend on professional matters:

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)
Some participants did believe that self-management had led to earning gains as 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)

This comment was supported by that of a teacher in Wha school:

> I think since self-management the kids have probably had the opportunity to do far more things. Because it’s meant that the school could make its own decisions as to what it was going to offer. So I think the kids probably have more in the way of curriculum delivery - far more wider scope than what they had before. (Teacher, Wha)

> I think, in a way, its put a lot more pressure on the ordinary classroom teacher. In some ways the responsibilities and the accountability, and all things like this, has dribbled down to us and, in a lot of ways, we have to be very careful now about our accountability and make sure that our records are up to date... I think its kept us on our toes to a certain extent in that area, making sure that we are giving the curriculum as it should be in all ways. (Teacher, Whitu)

The raised expectations however, 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)

Self-management of a capped fund for relief teachers was not always able to meet the actual need in some instances:

> We've run out of relief money at school. Because you don't get a lot of relief money. And 2 of our teachers are, well several of them actually, have had stress illnesses, and you don't get paid for the first few weeks of that. About 4 of them have had that, and there's been a lot of illness from flu, and I think because teachers are stressed out you get ill more often, but we've run out, so what happens now is we have to take all the relief. So what you get is more stressed out teachers, teachers who come when
they're ill because they don't want people to take their relief. (Senior Teacher, Ono)

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

[Teachers] are so busy trying to do all the things that's expected of them in terms of, now I'm thinking curriculum and assessment I guess, that they forget that teaching really is a simple job, and it is to teach kids read, write, have some fun, and do some maths; and I think that that's getting lost a little bit more in all the other things that they need to be doing. (Deputy Principal, Tahi)

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)

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:

There seems to be more administration that we have to deal with than we had in the past. ... just the amount of material that comes to us that we've got to decide what to do with, and do something with, its just phenomenal. And some days you actually wonder, are you actually teaching or are you actually administrating. (Teacher, Whitu)

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:

Its a complex one, because at the same time you have more freedom to make decisions, the atmosphere of the 1990s, with the Privacy Act and all this other bull shit, means that you also feel there's so many things that you can't do. You might say, "I'm going to take my children to the museum, which is a fantastic educational opportunity, we'll have great educational outcomes in the normal situation". But you have to make sure that you've had permission slips go home, and they've been signed, probably signed twice, and all this sort of crap. So while, in some ways self-management gives you more ability to make decisions, there's all this other stuff on the other side which stops that as well. (Teacher, Ono)
Another factor was mentioned by some participants which 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:

Nobody ever discovered what it seems to be self-evident truths that, we had a high degree of networking; it wasn't complete, we didn't have complete teacher support services, but we had a sufficient system that, the people who were interested in making changes, which are your best people, were able to talk to each other; and the Department, if you like, was central to that. And what they're deliberately trying to destroy is that networking, that created network, which has been the strength of the system. (Assistant Principal, Whitu)

The Assistant Principal at low-decile Tahi had frequently felt the impact of loss of support structures on 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 truancies, 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. (AP, Tahi)

Several responses mentioned a ‘division’ between management and teaching staff. Some teachers were concerned about the impact on professional relationships:

I think it’s tended to divorce the admin staff from the rest of us, because they're under a separate contract now. [Principals] seem to spend more time in the office than they do out and about. To see them in the classroom is quite extraordinary. They used to teach the odd class as well, which they find very difficult to do now. Yeah, I think that's my main criticism. (Teacher, Ono)

Others thought that this led to less involvement by staff in decision-making:

We do have more responsibility I suppose for reforms that are made, but in actual fact we don't. It’s the [school] management that do the reforms here. And I don't think they listen to what other people think, or would like to think. They make the decisions and that is it. And that's the power they have now got, to do so. . I can understand why increasingly the self-management is happening at the top and the decisions are just made
because it is far easier that way... But I do think that perhaps it would be nice to ask other people. (Teacher, Wha)

When asked to elaborate this teacher indicated that the sheer pressure of the job meant that involvement of others was not always possible:

I think the people at the top, perhaps, in their strive or perhaps their job is just so busy that they don't have time to do that. I think that they would like to think that they are doing it, but I think sometimes perhaps just lack of time, decisions have to be made daily sometimes, and there's probably not the time. I don't mean every decision to be made, but just some of the more major ones that affect. If people are going to have to wear those decisions and be part of enforcing those decisions, then I think they should be part of the decision-making team as well. (Teacher, Wha)

Two principals though, believed that an important part of their role was to distance’ staff from management issues so that they had more time for curriculum matters:

And when [staff] have said things to me, I say, “You don’t have to worry about that. Leave that with me.” Or, “We’ll interpret that. I’ll interpret that and we’ll summarise it and we’ll tell you where it fits.” And I believe that you can take a lot of pressure off people, if you like, by doing that. I’ve always said to my staff, “Your job is to deliver the curriculum. (Principal, Rua)

I’ve tried to be very careful in making sure that the pressure doesn’t go beyond the senior management team. (Principal, Whitu)

The Education of Maaori Children
Proponents of self-management argued that it would allow greater opportunities for Maaori 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 its 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 its 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.... are 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. (Deputy Principal, 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 Māori education and an awareness of the importance of things Māori 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 [teachers with te Reo] are a reasonably mobile group because they know they are coveted, those that are good and good on them, if you’ve got an advantage you might as well use it. (Trustee, Wha)

Those who saw benefits for Māori 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 Māori, and speaking Māori ... I worry just how fluent they get, for a number of reasons. I wonder about their fluency, written and spoken, in both languages. (Assistant Principal, 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 Māori community. (Teacher, Rua)

On the other hand there were perceived difficulties for some in getting agreement within their Māori 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 Māori 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 Māori community want.
But they don't always seem to get it together. They try so hard, and we have tried, [but it doesn’t seem to work]. (Teacher, Wha)

School-community relationships
A further main theme emerging from the data was the impact of self-management on school-community relationships. There was widespread approval of the opportunities for strengthening school-community partnerships brought about by self-management:

I think its good to have parents there talking for the students in the school; and for, not just the school, not just the students, but the parents in the community. I think it is something that is working, yes. But I also believe that perhaps you need some training into it. (Trustee, Whitu)

There are obvious positives from that, you know, the greater sense we have now of trying to provide a service and being aware of community wishes and parent wishes and having better systems of giving feedback to parents, and the whole greater awareness of that I think is a positive. (Teacher, Ono)

However for some, the promise of strong partnerships had not really emerged:

I think the intentions in a lot of cases are really good, like involving more parents, involving more people in the community, that sort of thing. But in reality I think it’s only happened where there is the will in the community and the will in the school, the involvement. And I think where there was will before there is will now. I don't really think that's changed much. (Management team member, Ono)

Well, with us the community and the school partnership isn't actually a genuine thing...It ends up being a very small handful of parents who are actually involved with the running of the school, and who are prepared to be involved in the negotiation issues. For example, we've just implemented our strategic plan for the next five years and he five Board members were involved with that; but apart from them there may be one or two other parents that were actually involved with it. (Teacher, Toru)

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)

And 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 has, 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)

Discussion

A constant theme emerging from the initial analysis was that of ambivalence about the impact of self-management on the work of teachers and schools. For the most part, however, those interviewed were ambivalent about the impact of reform. Their ambivalence took several forms. First, it was common for advantages and limitations of the reforms to be cited by those interviewed:

I think it’s generally been quite positive for schools. In fact, it’s given them a lot more freedom to do what they want, in terms of budget, money [and] what they want to do in their school, [but] I think in terms of curriculum, I think there’s been an enormous amount of change. I think there’s almost been too much. (Teacher, Tahi)

A second type of ambivalence was present where those interviewed were not sure whether the reforms had had a favourable impact on student learning because they realised the complexity of this question:

It’s pretty hard to judge. Unless you divide your child in half somehow, and teach in one system and the other, and then get results, there’s no real way of knowing, unless you have a controlled group, which is the old
way. It’s a pretty subjective judgement to make isn’t it? So, I don’t know... (Trustee, Rima)

Third, some of those interviewed were unsure whether there had been fundamental change:

I remember, just as an example, I remember someone saying to me, “Could you walk into your classroom without one of your assessment folders and say where the child is?” [i.e. their progress]. And I can. And I could have 20 years ago. I could say, “This child can do this, this, and this, because this is how he does” or “This is what he lacks”, or “This is what he needs work on” And I can still do that now [without an assessment folder] and do at times. (Teacher, Rima)

Ambivalence was also related to perceptions of powerlessness, especially among teachers:

We do have more responsibility, I suppose, for the reforms that are made, but in actual fact we don’t. It’s the [school] management that do the reforms here. And I don’t think they listen to what other people think, or would like to think. They make the decisions and that is it. And that’s the power they have now got, to do so. (Teacher, Wha)

Finally, ambivalence could also be seen where those interviewed weighed up what might have been lost since the reforms began. Some of the main losses were seen to be the former advice and guidance role of the Department of Education and a more collaborative education culture:

I think I miss the guidance that used to be in the Department of Education in terms of curriculum. I think people still feel that when we did away with the Department of Education, and basically the inspectorate and the advisory people there, we sort of lost a bit. We’re sort of slowly recovering I think. (Teacher, Whitu)

I go back to the old curriculum development unit, and the curriculum panels. A lot of stuff was actually trialled in schools. That’s not happening now. It’s all written in vacuum. The expectation for teachers is just “Do it”! (Management team member, Whitu)

Now we’re almost in a competitive environment, that is, people aren’t sharing as much as they used to, and I think that’s detrimental. I think teaching in a classroom should not be a competitive situation, it should be a sharing situation. (Teacher, Rima)

These findings are consistent with other recent judgements of the performance of self-managing schools. In New Zealand, the work of Gordon (1994) Thrupp (1996) and Wylie (1997) has been influential in focussing attention on the impact of self-management. and Sullivan (1993) has drawn attention to its impact on teacher professionalism. Wylie’s wide-ranging surveys of primary schools (Wylie, 1994, 1997) reported that main issues facing self-managing schools
were property and finance, staffing, high administrative workloads, curriculum implementation, and the widening gap between high and low decile schools. On the positive side there was widespread satisfaction with local autonomy in decision-making, and generally high levels of parental satisfaction with the primary system. The majority of trustees were also positive about their role.

A key feature of 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 Australia (Townsend, 1997); in Canada (Summers and Johnson, 1996); and in the United States (Smith, Scoll and Link, 1996). However, Bullock and Thomas (1994) found that principals of self-managing schools in Britain believed that it had resulted in benefits for student achievement.

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented some initial findings from research-in-progress. A more detailed picture will emerge from the next phase of analysis, which will focus on participants’ experiences of the impact of self-management practices on specific areas of school operation. 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.

What is here represents only an initial analysis of the data on the impact self-management collected by the “Mapping” study. We intend to consider our data further in the light of other research findings on the impact of reform from New Zealand and overseas. 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.

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