CREATING A COMMUNITY OF

CARE IN EDUCATION:

the work of a primary school to mitigate social and
economic disadvantage in education in New Zealand

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Christine Lorna Read

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ABSTRACT

The failure of education services to ensure equitable outcomes for all groups of children has been an enduring problem for educators and policy makers in New Zealand. More recently, primary schools have become the focus of policy to ensure that children from low income, Maori and Pasifika homes achieve in formal education at levels commensurate with their peers. This research explores the work of a single low-decile primary school and its community in New Zealand as it navigates the choppy waters of political ideology, education policy and the educational needs of its students.

This research takes a critical realist perspective, which argues that real consequences attend success or failure in formal schooling for individuals, and these can be described in both qualitative and quantitative terms. However, a critical realist approach is also substantively concerned with uncovering structural conditions that lead to success or failure in education, insisting that this knowledge is vital in achieving transformative change. The research therefore makes use of existing quantitative data and employs a variety of qualitative research methods, to piece together an account of the work of the school. This approach allows the school to be placed within local contexts, which shape its responses to the needs of its school community, while also supporting an examination of the effects of wider systems and institutional practices that structure its operations.

Descriptions of the work of the school in this research reveal its intensely relational nature conducted in nested communities of interaction: within the school; within localised communities and neighbourhoods; and within national structures and institutions. Concepts of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care are used as a framework to evaluate the research findings, which in turn coalesce around three issues: attendance; achievement; and behaviour. Crosshatching an issue-based account of the work of one low-decile school with this conceptual framework allows

the complexity of the educational project to be revealed. These complexities notwithstanding, the research also opens up possibilities and spaces for action at the level of the school, the family, the community and the state to support the shared goal of redressing educational inequalities.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Setting the scene

The problem of unequal educational outcomes for different groups of students, defined by ethnicity and socioeconomic status, has been a longstanding focus within the educational sector in New Zealand (Beeby, 1992; Nash, 1997). More recently, it has been cited as the motivation to introduce a range of government reforms, to improve the educative function of primary schools in New Zealand as a precursor to improving student achievement in the final stages of their formal schooling (Longstone, 2012; Sewell, 2009).

This research is similarly concerned with the question of educational inequalities[1]. However, it approaches the question of why primary schools have found it so difficult to mitigate educational inequalities, by working closely with a single school and providing an account of the school's work in the contexts in which it is required to function. The research therefore locates the practices of the school[2] and its relationships with its students, within powerful currents in the extra school environment, arising from wider social conditions and systems, shot through with cultural, ideological and political forces.

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[1] The term educational inequalities, is used to indicate stratified differences in educational outcomes for different groups of students based on characteristics such as socioeconomic status, class, ethnicity or gender.

[2] I refer to 'the school' and 'Watea School' in this research as an entity that encompasses different individuals in differentiated roles within a specific locale, bound together by their common purpose of advancing teaching and learning.

In taking this approach, this thesis owes a debt to the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977), who argued for wider examinations of the conditions affecting the behaviour of individuals (specifically children, when considering their developmental behaviours). He asserted that observations of their face-to-face interactions (micro-systems of interaction), while important, failed to offer adequate explanations for children's behaviour. Better explanations required recognition of the impacts of their interactions within a nexus of localised institutions and practices (meso-systems). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner argued that there are wider societal institutions and structuring practices that, while they do not offer many opportunities for direct interactions, nevertheless shape the manner in which an individual acts (exosystems). Further to this, Bronfenbenner defined a fourth category of systemic influence (macro-systems), described as:

> "…overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations. Macrosystems are conceived and examined not only in structural terms but as carriers of information and ideology that, both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelationships" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515).

This thesis argues for the relevance of his conception of nested systems of influence in making sense of the actions of a single primary school as it seeks to mitigate conditions of social and economic disadvantage on the educational outcomes of its students. However, in applying this conception to the work of an individual low decile[3] primary school, specifically Watea School, I suggest that Bronfenbrenners' conception is overly deterministic in viewing influence and power as being unidirectional in structuring the actions of an individual. The individual, the individual school in this research, retains an ability to resist, subvert and challenge

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[3] Decile ratings estimate the socioeconomic status of individuals derived from census data. School decile ratings draw on census data to identify the socioeconomic status of its student body, decile ten being the highest and one the lowest.

the power of controlling institutions in harnessing its own sources of power and agency. The school and those within in it, therefore retain the capacity to impact on the institutions and systems within which they work, as well as being shaped or constrained by them.

Agency remains possible because systems and institutions, while they encode power in stipulating specific actions, are made real when performed by individuals in relationships with others. The actions that the progenitors of systems envisage, promoted through processes of authority and legitimation embedded in governance roles, continue to be filtered through the thought processes of numerous actors at the level of implementation. All are capable of adding their own subjective (mis)understandings of the purposes and intents of instituted systems (Gerston, 2010; Hebdige, 2012).

The boundaries between the different levels of influence and power that demark specific roles within systems are, to some degree, more porous than a schematic description of function and role can convey. This research, in working with a single school, provides evidence of the way teachers, the Principal and the collective entity of the school, grappled with the demands made of them, but it also celebrates how they achieved some success on their own terms in asserting influence and control over their work. This is not to argue that there were not real effects and costs imposed on them in managing sometimes competing demands, but in demonstrating ways in which they acted to realise their priorities in pedagogy and to implement their views of a socially just education system, they also demonstrated that imposed power is always contingent. The current imposition of ideological control is able to be resisted or subverted, in part at least, by forms of

individual and collective agency, enacted in relationships one to another, through and across structural boundaries.

The descriptions of the behaviours a single school and any subsequent analyses provided are therefore much more complex than Bronfenbrenner's model suggests.[4]

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[4] It should be noted that Bronfenbrenner was using his concept to enable the analysis of the developmental behaviour of children, who, it could be argued, are less able to assert their power and influence within systems in which they have no direct connection to others.

While the school responded to the currents and swells of powerful forces operating upon it in its work, it was also able to strike out purposefully towards its defined goals. These acts of agency were performed in relationships with others, within the school and within its local community, in response to perceived needs.

Adding to these contributing influences at a local level, there were indirect relationships between the school and state institutions sustained by public media discourses, which spoke powerfully to educators and parents. These discourses prompted personal responses, indicating that such communications were not less felt for being conducted at a remove, especially when they were designed to persuade and co-opt compliance with specific ideological standpoints. Ideology intersects with political power in determining how state education systems should be organised and which actions are valued, legitimated, regulated and monitored. The actions of state bureaucracies always have the capacity to provoke responses of resistance and subversion, and often did so during the time of the research, with impacts for the performance of education in New Zealand. The nature of these interactions between the national bureaucracies of the state and localised responses in Watea School, gave witness to the frangibility of systems in practice, at the level of the individual student, parent, teacher and school.

Developing the research project

This research project was shaped by a number of personal experiences and observations, prompting me to focus on educational inequalities in New Zealand. Choosing what to research was driven by a mixture of curiosity and desire allied with opportunity. These factors influenced how my research questions were conceived and framed, which then predicated the methodological choices I made in conducting the research. Accordingly, this research topic and the methods I have chosen for its exploration are highly reflective of my interests, experiences and skills, and I acknowledge these factors as influential in the conduct of this research. In stating the bases upon which I decided to initiate this research project, and have subsequently conducted it, a critical reading of the research is enabled, including an evaluation of the claims made.

Disquieting observations made over many years of working as a health-care professional in hospital and community-based, family-health services prompted my interest in educational inequalities. The first of these observations derives from a period in which I worked in the community with women and their children. I retain enduring images of bright and curious pre-schoolers listening through my stethoscope to their own heart beats and watching intently all that went on in my consultations with their mothers. Their capacity to learn from their experiences and from the explanations provided by their mothers and me, their ability to retain this knowledge and to add to it through subsequent visits, was a source of joy for us all in those moments, and a rewarding part of my community-health work.

At the time of these contacts, I was also a sole parent of a young daughter, the same age as many of the young children I met in my working day. I was therefore, able to observe the progress of some of these children through their formal schooling as contemporaries of my daughter and through my extended contacts with families over several years. I became increasingly disturbed by the differences in educational outcomes for many children from lower income families and those from wealthier families. I saw the growing divergence in some children between their early pre-school confidence and competence in learning during my consultations with their mothers, and their later levels of achievement in formal schooling.

The question for me then, as it is now, was how and why did these differences arise in a state-mandated educational system guaranteeing universal provision? How is it that some children, in an educational system premised on equality of opportunity, fail to realise the social goods that flow from educational success? In other words, what was, and is, happening in education and society that gives rise to educational inequalities, on what basis do they matter, and how can these analyses offer insight into what is being done and could, or should be done?

While these experiences of community work prompted my interest in the topic of educational inequalities, the shape of the research project was influenced by other structural changes I observed in health-care services over the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, I worked across a variety of roles in health services, including management. It was a period of substantial and ongoing reorganisation and change, including initiatives such as: the funder/provider split and the rise of a managerial

culture in health institutions; user pays; patient choice and the diversification of health provision options; the inception of audit culture and formalised risk management; the abolition of national awards and negotiations for wages and conditions and diminished collective bargaining power for many health-care workers. All were designed to develop competitive markets in health, politically argued as necessary to ensure an effective and efficient health service.

The effect of these policies was to create an extended period of tumultuous change. Health workers were challenged by their professional ethics to continue to provide the best service possible to patients, despite the constant levels of upheaval in workplace organisation and clinical practice. While it was undoubtedly a difficult time to be a health-care practitioner, it also opened up new opportunities for different forms of health service to emerge, particularly in the field of Maori health-care provision. Some health-care providers were able to take advantage of the politics of choice operating in the sector, to advocate for services based on tikanga Maori[5]. New and more responsive ways of responding to Maori health needs were developed. However, the same market forces that supported creative health-care solutions, also introduced, over time, regimes of outcome measurement to scrutinise and critique all aspects of health-care provision, in the search for increased efficiencies and greater individual accountability.

The application of these market mechanisms in the health sector created contradictory effects for me as a clinician and manager: on the one hand, the demand for more innovative and creative ways to meet health-care needs supported a climate where new ideas could give rise to new ways of working; on the other, increasingly bureaucratic forms of measuring components of health-care provision lent themselves to levels of hierarchal control and distance in decision-making from those delivering face-to-face care. The demands of these bureaucratic accountings acted to side-line the experiences and voice of health-care workers in determining what services should be provided, the defining characteristics of each service episode, which professionals should provide services, and therefore how services should be most effectively delivered.

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[5] Tikanga Maori refers to the use of Maori custom in determining how practices should be correctly performed.

Systems of data collection, based on measureable outcomes, were developed to meet managerial demands for accountability. These points of data collection failed constantly to capture the complexity of the work of health practitioners in meeting the actual needs of patients. Patient needs were, more often than not, contextualised by clinical complexity and the social, cultural and economic conditions that impacted on patients' lives. These conditions had effects on how care could actually be delivered by health-care professionals.

Measures within data collection systems became dominated by funding concerns, to ensure the viability of services provided. The data demanded by such systems, required complex information to be converted into categories that could be tabulated in terms of time, material resources and professional skill. The flipside of systems dedicated to quantifying and simplifying complex care needs to provide this kind of data, was that considerable resources in time, money and energy were dedicated to the bureaucratic demands of the system; not doing so carried financial penalties, which then impacted on the capacity of the service to meet patient needs. Maintaining these systems took on a life of its own, and in the process, vital activities and care work, which resisted easy capture, became obscured and undervalued.

These past experiences informed the way in which I read the debates and events in the educational sector from 2008 onwards. The discourses used to promote changes in the organisation of education appeared to mirror those used to justify the changes I experienced first-hand in health-care services. This prompted an intense curiosity about how those at the sharp end of the education reforms were responding to them. I wanted to understand the impacts of the social and political environment in the educational sector, and on educators and parents in their joint venture of advancing children's learning.

This desire was enhanced by my perception that politicians and policy makers in the education sector appeared to be at best, selectively listening to the voices of very few teachers and academics in making their policy decisions. Disconfirming and contradictory views, held by many within the profession, were discounted by politicians. At the same time, the success of education policy in redressing educational inequalities was clearly dependent on the work and professional expertise of the wider teaching membership. I was therefore, interested in how

teachers were responding to the challenges in their work posed by the policy changes enacted from 2008 and onwards, and how parents were negotiating their roles given the widespread resistance of teachers to these policies.

I argued from the outset of the development of this research that those who work daily with children in low-decile schools, will have knowledge that arises out of their interactions with them. Teachers, parents and students would offer insights into why educational inequalities have remained so persistent in New Zealand. Accordingly, I needed a research programme and methodology that would capture their insights. I would need to place the data generated in the research within the contexts of political events and structures of power and influence operating on and through all groups working to facilitate children's learning.

Rationale for the research

The benefits of extending educational success as widely as possible are seen as vital within education policy in New Zealand for a number of reasons: as an individual good in enhancing the futures of children across all parameters of their economic, physical, social and cultural well-being (Longstone, 2012; Sewell, 2009); for the enhancement of the local communities in which these children live and will live as adults (Statistics New Zealand & The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010); for the benefit of wider society in New Zealand that demands a well-educated workforce and citizenry for its ongoing prosperity (Joyce, 2010; Sewell, 2009); and to reduce the economic dependency of citizens on the state (Key, 2012).

Educators, parents and policy makers alike, recognise the individual and collective benefits that accrue from realising children's fullest capabilities in learning. Nevertheless, educational outcomes in New Zealand demonstrate high levels of disparity between the highest achievers and the lowest, in the years of compulsory schooling (Longstone, 2012; May, Cowles, & Lamy, 2013; Sewell, 2009). The effect of these differences in educational outcomes is to create future disparities in opportunity for each cohort of students: in access to tertiary education and training opportunities; in employment choices, increasingly dependent on the acquisition of tertiary credentials; and in social and economic status arising from increasing divergences in remuneration between those in the low wage strata of the economy,

with few credentials, and those in the highest wage brackets of the economy (Perry, 2013). These consequences are not irremediable for individuals; opportunities do exist in New Zealand within the education system for students to take up education later when and if individual circumstances allow, but significant personal and societal costs accrue when students fail to achieve their potential during their years of compulsory education.

Defining those who benefited least from the education system in New Zealand was not at issue in 2013 when the research was implemented. There was no debate about the need to do better for children from low-income families, comprised disproportionately of Maori and Pasifika students (Sewell, 2009; Longstone, 2012). However, how these inequalities arose and therefore, what needed to be done, were deeply contested.

Inimical and dichotomous analyses informed differing prescriptions for change during the period of the research. On the one hand, the government retained a primary focus on the behaviour of competitive education markets, schools and teachers, arguing that they were the key to improving educational outcomes. On the other hand, while not denying the need for ongoing pedagogical development and improvement within schools, educators argued that poorer educational outcomes were implicated in webs of social disadvantage, necessitating improvements in the conditions in which many families lived in New Zealand. Thus, while the desire to reduce educational inequalities prompted considerable cross-sector attention during the period in which the research was conducted, and has continued to do so subsequently, the impasse between the dichotomous prescriptions has persisted, despite calls for better relationships within the sector (Hughes, 2013).

The impasse between the stances of politicians and educators in their prescriptions for redressing educational inequalities demanded my attention in this research. I wanted to understand the basis for the mutual antagonism that existed between the parties and to understand the impacts on school function. It seemed that the voices of teachers and parents were often invoked by both politicians and groups representing educators, but few opportunities had been provided for an exploration of how teachers, parents and support workers experienced and gave meaning to their work in supporting the children to learn. This appeared to be an important omission

in the discourses surrounding the issues, and one that demanded more focused inquiry.

Moving from questions and rationale to methodology

The result of these experiences and deliberations gave shape to my approach to the research. A methodology was required that would enable me to interview those working with children in a low-decile primary school, to capture their knowledge and understandings of the problems, challenges and possibilities in education for their students This would include the impacts of government policies on educators, support workers, students and their families in 2013. Accordingly, I determined that a qualitative methodology would be most appropriate. It would assist me to obtain the systemic knowledge that arises from the performance of schooling, from individuals involved in its daily work. This would necessitate the inclusion of educators and support workers within the school, students (a portion of the research that could not be completed for reasons discussed in chapter five), and parents in the research.

In casting a wide net across the roles of the different members of the school community involved in formal schooling, I hoped to be able to illuminate the impacts of political, economic, cultural and social status effects on school function, revealing the relationships between school, community and state institutions. In-depth interviews for adult participants offered opportunities for exploring how they understood their participation in education, and the meanings they attached to their work.

My status as a sole researcher for this project, in conjunction with my desire to privilege a rich account of the responses of participants in contexts of place and time, argued for a sustained focus on a single school. This approach would place the school within the socioeconomic, cultural and historical contexts that contributed to its function within its local community and at a national level. By providing these contexts, readers of the research account would be able to identify where the research findings resonated with, or differed from their own circumstances and experiences.

To provide these contexts, I planned to use texts and discourses derived from news media, political statements and policy documents from Ministry of Education

websites. I also used, with care to protect the confidentiality of the school, some data derived from local government sources. This described the localised conditions in which the school operated. Together, these multiple sources of data contributed to a contextualised account of the school and its community.

Conceptions of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care have offered valuable insights throughout the research process. They were implicated in my desire to pursue this topic and informed the shape of the research project. They offered a means of exploring ideological divides in education and how these impacted on the work of educators, schools and their community of parents. They also presented opportunities for developing alternative forms of envisioning how disparities in educational outcomes could be redressed through improved policy-making processes. Finally, these concepts resonated deeply with the data generated by the research: in the accounts of teachers, support workers and parents; and in the political discourses of policy-making.

Emerging themes

The concepts of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care coalesced around three key issues that comprise the findings section of this thesis. The first issue, poor school attendance and transience, continued to stymie the efforts of students and teachers in promoting effective learning. Watea School undertook several actions in 2013 to improve the attendance of children, but found that many factors remained beyond their control. Transience, in particular, created challenges; many families moved often in search of work opportunities and affordable and healthy housing. Some children did not therefore, remain in Watea School long enough to establish secure relationships with their peers and teachers. This contributed to behavioural difficulties and impacted on their learning and achievements.

The second issue discussed in the findings, takes up the impact of behavioural difficulties on children's capacity to learn in more detail. These behaviours also contributed substantially to difficulties teachers experienced in their work, as they sought to maintain an orderly learning environment for the majority of children in their classrooms. For children, behavioural issues reflected disruptions and distress across all facets of their lives, their schooling included.

The final issue, student learning and assessment, is fundamental to the purpose of education. In the years prior to the research and during, it became a central concern in policy initiatives to improve outcomes for students failing to reach their potential. The student body of Watea School, being predominantly Maori and from low-income families, conformed to two key descriptors of groups failing in education. The school shared the concerns of politicians about the learning and achievement levels of these children. At the same time, events in the education sector revealed key differences in political ideologies and understandings of pedagogy, both of which contributed to turmoil in Watea School. Social justice and care ethics have salience for this issue in explaining why the intentions of government policy proved so unpalatable to the education sector, including the teachers at Watea School. They also offer insights into how processes could be enacted in education that are inclusive and respectful of the effort, commitment and knowledge of all those directly involved with students and their learning.

It was the interrelated nature of impediments to learning that proved so challenging to teachers in Watea Schools, as in other low-decile schools. However, it was their experience and the consequential development of expertise that also deserved greater attention in policy. Teachers, who have worked extensively with children in low-decile schools in New Zealand, should have been key informants in developing policies and planning interventions to assist the learning of children at risk of underachievement. The knowledge these experienced teachers accrued in close, sustained and creative engagement with the problems children faced, offered possibilities for its wider dissemination, in efforts to improve children's educational outcomes.

While this research retains a focus on education as a site of inquiry, educational activities are inextricably linked to all aspects of social life for children. Failing to understand or consider these links will constrain possibilities in action. Thus, while educators do have influence on outcomes for children currently disadvantaged in education, there is also a requirement that all sectors of society acknowledge their collective responsibilities for the social conditions that contribute to educational inequalities. This will necessarily include giving attention to, and enacting support for, children's families.

This research argues that description and critique of current practices in education are necessary precursors to change. However, in applying the lens of social justice and an ethic of care to the education sector, insights are offered into how such changes might be constituted in ways that are more attentive to the needs of students, educators and parents. In the process, the relational and interdependent nature of the educational project is laid bare.

Chapter outline

Chapter two provides some key facts about the school community and its local environs including the socioeconomic characteristics of the community in which it is situated. This profile contextualises research findings presented in later chapters. Viewing the work of a school within this nexus of interactions at a local level, as well as within national events and systemic structures, influenced my conduct of this research. While it was necessary to speak to individuals in the school to gain an understanding of the reality of their efforts to support the learning of children, it was also important to locate their comments within the environment in which they as individuals, and the school as a collective entity, went about their work.

Chapter three explores the literature concerned with educational inequalities. It canvasses the school improvement literature focusing on the performance of teachers and school leaders in education and literature concerned with the impact of families, communities and neighbourhoods on educational outcomes. However, there are additional literatures that place educational inequalities within broader structures of class and ethnicity. These examine educational inequalities within a nexus of economic, classed and racial ideologies that are reflective of wider social conditions, suggesting a need for more systemic responses to effect change. This research argues that this broader view is vital in education to make sense of everyday educational practices, and to drive educational improvements for children who currently fail to achieve their potential in education in New Zealand.

Chapter four outlines the methodological approach to the research in detail, including the difficulties that arose during the research in implementing planned activities. Necessary accommodations were made to unforeseen circumstances and events. Detailing these changes creates a narrative, which lay beneath the research findings, reflecting the times in which it was undertaken. While this may impact on

its generalisability in different political and social circumstances, it nevertheless gives witness to the impacts of the events in education in the years prior to and during 2013 when much of the data was collected.

Chapter five explores the methods used in the implementation of the research and analyses the ethical considerations that arose as a consequence. It also describes the flexibility and responsiveness required of me as a researcher to ensure that this research project could be completed.

Chapter six explores the concepts of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care as they pertain to education and educational inequalities. From the very outset of this research project, it was clear that these concepts were embedded in the organisation and performance of education by all the different groups involved. They suffused the accounts of research participants, pervaded the texts and discourses I examined in the research, offered a lens for analysing the data, and enabled me to draw some conclusions. On this basis, it was important for me to clarify my understandings of these concepts and how I use them in the research.

Chapter seven examines issues of poor school attendance and their impacts on the teaching and learning in Watea School. Poor school attendance and low educational achievement are entwined, creating some of the most vexatious problems for low-decile schools to redress. The direct associations between with conditions of poverty and poor school attendance are explored.

Chapter eight presents the findings on the impacts of children's behavioural difficulties on the work of Watea School. Troubling behaviours were associated with learning difficulties, both as a cause and a consequence, and sometimes both at once. They also intersected with issues of poor attendance. Behavioural difficulties constituted the greatest challenge to teachers in the performance of their daily work. However, teachers drew on some supports to assist them from within the school, from the state and to variable degree, from within their parent community. These supports are explored within a framework of needs, responsiveness and care.

Chapter nine focuses on issues of achievement and learning in Watea School as it sought to redress the impact of social inequalities experienced by its students. The challenges faced by the school and its community are placed in the context of a highly

charged period of tumult and change, coalescing around the implementation of National Standards. However, there was a wider policy agenda in operation, which reflected the dominance of neoliberal ideology in education and contributed to a more diffuse policy programme. This is explored for its effects on both parents and educators.

Chapter ten draws the findings together to give a sense of the wholeness of the work of Watea School. It also summarises the challenges and frustrations that act to constrain the school's work and the efforts the school makes to maintain a broadly-based education, which is built on the strengths of its student body and community of parents. Finally, I make an argument for an altered ideological programme in education, which places care at the heart of educational work across the whole of the educational sector. A sustained focus on how care could be better implemented across all relationships in the educational sector, offers a pathway forward in planning and implementing actions to redress educational inequalities.

CHAPTER TWO

WATEA SCHOOL: A PROFILE

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of Watea School (not its real name), placing it within its contexts. These include a brief account of its history, including the changing nature of its parent and student community. I describe the composition of Watea School in 2013, when the participant interviews took place. This includes the interrelated roles of governance, leadership, teaching, administration and school maintenance, which are required to support its core function of facilitating the teaching and learning of its students. Contributing to and influencing the school's work, is its immersion within webs of external relationships. These are briefly described to enable an appreciation of the complexities involved in ensuring that children progressed in their learning at Watea School in 2013.

A brief history of Watea School

Watea School has provided education services to the community since the late 1800s. Initially, schooling was provided to the children of local settlers in the surrounding farmland and children of men employed in nascent industries and services required to support growth in the wider region. Over time, the population surrounding the school became urbanised. Watea School is now located at the margins of three central suburbs in a provincial city in New Zealand.

Watea School reflected its history in 2013 with buildings that dated from its inception in the late 19th century, through to contemporary (and temporary) classrooms erected in more recent years, to accommodate an expanding roll. New permanent classrooms were planned for the school, which would make better use of the space available on the site, while accommodating the increased numbers of children attending the school.

The majority of families living and working within easy vicinity of the school in 2013, were drawn, in large part, from neighbourhoods of low-cost housing. However, this had not always been the case. Much of the housing was originally built for home owners, in times when manufacturing jobs were more prevalent and families had secure employment and incomes. The loss of manufacturing capacity in this city and region, as in many other provincial areas of New Zealand, has contributed to substantial growth in unemployment, underemployment, insecure work and low wage work. All these income conditions have made home ownership relatively difficult for many. Watea School has correspondingly seen its decile rating drop as private landlords have increasingly acquired homes in the area for low-income families to rent.

The recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008-2010 further affected the number of working families in the wider region. Significant numbers of families made the decision to find more secure employment and better remuneration in other areas in New Zealand or Australia. The movement of workers away from the region had the effect of masking the full effects of GFC on local unemployment figures in 2013, but it was nevertheless visible in the drop in the ratios of adults in the 25-45year age group, in relation to aged residents and the young. The number of children in the region tended to remain steady, despite the loss of families in the area, because of higher rates of parents giving birth at a younger age and a higher (although falling) Maori birth-rate.

The effect of these demographic shifts has been a hollowing-out of the population in the most productive years of the working population, regionally and within the city in 2013. The Principal of Watea School noted that the onset of the GFC corresponded with an initial drop in the school roll as some families left the city to search for work.

However, the school population stabilised and then increased as new families moved into the housing previously vacated. These increases were supplemented by Watea School's effective promotional efforts in local pre-school facilities.

Notwithstanding these changes in employment and patterns of home ownership, there remained some streets on the fringes of the Watea School catchment area of higher cost housing, which contributed to the school's attainment of decile 2 status. Additionally, due to its central location within the city, the school was convenient for parents working for providers of social services in the city. Finally, expertise in Watea School in working with children with learning difficulties, also proved attractive to some parents in making their school choices.

While the rolls of other neighbouring schools in the area also fluctuated in response to these demographic changes and employment patterns, there were additional impacts on school rolls because of parental choices. Some children passed the gates of a nearby low-decile school to attend Watea School, while others within the area, moved to higher decile schools. In general, decile status in the city corresponded well to the ethnic compositions of the student body in 2013: high-decile schools were substantially Pakeha [6]; lower decile schools had proportionately larger numbers of Maori students. While home ownership patterns contributed to patterns of economic and ethnic stratification, this stratification was reinforced in local primary schools through the operation of parental choice.

However, in 2013, Watea School roll was expanding, with almost fifty percent of its pupils drawn from the catchment areas of other schools. The combination of demographic factors and community perceptions ensured that notwithstanding the temporary lowering of the school roll at the outset of the GFC, Watea School breached its capacity by the end of 2013. Watea School resisted pressure to enact a zoning scheme, unlike other schools with similar problems, preferring to explore options for building and revamping classrooms to take on students wishing to attend the school.

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[6] Pakeha refers to citizens born in New Zealand of European ancestry.

The changing patterns of residence and work in the suburbs surrounding Watea School have affected the function of the school. The combination of low wages, unemployment, young families and relatively poor housing experienced by families living in neighbourhoods closest to the school were mirrored in the high levels of transience and the depth of social issues affecting the lives of the children in the school community. These issues not only impacted daily on the work of teachers and the support staff within the school, but also prompted the school to draw on associated services from the wider community. It was this confluence of relationships within a locale directed toward the care and concern for its children that contributed to a sense of community within Watea School and within its surrounding neighbourhoods.

The within-school community

Watea School is a decile two, contributing primary school[7]. It is surrounded by mature trees and sits amid parklands that lend the site of the school a spacious aspect, belying the relatively small grounds it occupies. In 2013, the school was well maintained and attractively presented with access to playing fields, a functional swimming pool, concrete and asphalt playing surfaces as well as climbing play equipment and outdoor covered spaces. The school entrance was open to the street, enabling the playgrounds to be easily accessed by the local community after school hours.

The Watea School student body at the time of the research, comprised in excess of three hundred students. Staff employed in 2013, the year in which I collected the interview data, included the Principal, Deputy Principal, Heads of Junior and Senior Schools and two Senior Teachers. Together, they constituted the educational leadership team within the school. Heads of School, Senior Teachers and the fourteen remaining teachers employed by the school, had direct classroom responsibilities, while another teacher provided targeted reading recovery services. A further teacher provided regular classroom relief for teacher planning and performance development activities. In addition, there were thirteen teacher-aides, three staff provided services

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[7] A contributing primary school provides the first six years of formal schooling, beginning from age five for most children in New Zealand.

to maintain the premises, grounds and equipment, and two staff provided administrative support, supplemented by another part-time staff member employed to deal with attendance issues each morning.

Watea School located its purpose directly within an imperative to care which informed its school motto. This care was expressed in seeking the best education possible for its students and care activities created the scaffolding upon which all its functions rested. Framing education as an expression of care, impelled the school to address all the issues that impacted upon its students' ability to learn in the widest sense. In taking this position Watea School recognised that many children within its community had needs arising from their life circumstances, which affected their learning. In placing a duty of care at the heart of their educational purpose, the school was proactive in redressing those needs. In doing so, they also modelled to their students the care they expected students to extend one to another.

In recognition of its expressed aim to care for children, not only educationally but also in the appreciation of children's wider needs, Watea School acted as a hub or service centre within the wider community. Watea School drew on the expertise of other service providers for issues of health, family well-being and economic resourcing, because they were unable to be disentangled from their educational project. Later stages of the thesis will deal with specific issues that arose from these interactions with other service providers in 2013, but this outline provides some insight into the complexity of issues, the volume of service providers and the multiple interactions and relationships that were nurtured to ensure that services were accessible to families and children when needed. At the same time that Watea School attempted to stem the cumulative impacts that these issues had on children's ability to learn, teachers and children were also required to maintain their focus on teaching and learning.

The teaching staff in Watea School at the time of the research, could draw on high levels of skill and experience. More than 50% of staff had been employed at the school for more than five years and some for significantly longer. While most of the teaching staff were female, the gender ratio of the teaching staff was in proportion

with the gendered nature of primary school teacher workforce in state schools in New Zealand as determined by a national teaching census in 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2005). However, the core of male teachers employed at Watea School was very experienced and had accumulated expertise and strengths in working in low-decile schools.

The leadership team of Senior Teachers, Heads of School, Principal and Deputy Principal all had long years of experience in teaching, many of them at Watea School. They were therefore able to draw on a deep understanding of the educational issues they faced in meeting the needs of students in a low-decile school, and in Watea School in particular. They were also able to use this experience to support less experienced teaching staff. However, it should not be supposed that the difficulties that some children brought with them into the school from their home and community lives were without cost; staff members were often challenged, both professionally and personally in managing the difficult behaviours and learning needs of some children. Supportive networks across the school, including office administration, maintenance staff and teacher-aides, were necessary to sustain teachers' ongoing energy and commitment to meet the needs of some students.

Parental representation and influence in Watea School

Primary schooling in New Zealand is formally structured to recognise the interpenetration of family and school life for children. There are a variety of mechanisms, formal and informal, that seek to foster parental influence on schools, and schools on parents. These interpenetrations occur in recognition that, for children, both home and school are incorporated into their everyday lives.

The localised governance structure of primary schools in New Zealand is designed to include parents of children attending a school. Watea School operates within the New Zealand framework of self-governing, state-funded schools, which was initiated in 1989 by "Tomorrow's Schools" policy. Correspondingly it is governed by the Board of Trustees (BOT) comprised of five elected parents of children attending Watea School, the Principal and an elected member from the teaching staff. The

structure of the BOT is designed to ensure that community concerns are represented in education and that the school remains responsive to its parent community.

The BOT of Watea School is a legal entity charged with school governance. It has a wide range of statutory obligations to meet as: the employer of school personnel; the property manager of the school's physical assets; and the monitor of school performance and educational standards. It is responsible for ensuring that curriculum and assessment policy directives from the Ministry of Education are met, and managing risks to students and staff. It is also required to develop future goals for the school in creating the school's charter and monitoring progress in fulfilling it (Ministry of Education, 2014a).

The management structure created by Tomorrow's Schools draws heavily from the business model of governance. The BOT is required to address the overall performance and direction of the school, while the day-to-day management is assigned to the Principal. The Principal's role is described as similar to that of a Chief Executive Officer in a business corporation (Lange, 1988). Together they comprise the school governance team for the management and planning of both day-to-day activities and in strategising long-term goals.

The aim of Tomorrow's Schools policy was to increase community participation in education and create schools capable of responding to the needs of individual communities (Lange, 1988). Autonomy of school function was accompanied by increased managerial responsibilities as a consequence. While schools could, and did, respond to these new demands that relieved them from centralised forms of control, the statutory obligations placed on BOT's, and the monitoring of their compliance by the Education Review Office (ERO), created an alternative form of control over schools, to ensure that they met their state-mandated obligations.

Watea School has chosen, as have many others, to outsource some of its obligations to specialised providers. Property management and financial accounting tasks are outsourced to companies with expertise in managing these activities within schools. In doing so, they have protected their ability to focus on issues that impinge on educational purposes.

While the BOT was the single avenue for formal inclusion of parents in the organisation of Watea School, there were nevertheless other ways in which parents were drawn into school life. As with all other primary schools, parents were offered twice yearly opportunities to meet with teachers to discuss their children's learning progress. More informally, contacts took place between teachers and parents through the school communication systems including regular newsletters, paper based and electronic, and the plethora of ad hoc communications about events, activities and special education programmes. Additionally, parents contributed by providing assistance for school trips, school events, fund raising activities, sporting and cultural activities. Watea School, through experience and sensitivity to economic conditions in its school community, was careful in the demands it made on its parent body, preferring to fund activities from school resources wherever possible.

Watea School ran programmes to reach out to parents by providing information about how to support their children's learning at home. Of equal importance to parents, was the information imparted to parents through the informal contacts between parents and teachers before and after school. These face-to-face encounters recognised the bidirectional reach of home into school, and school into home.

In all, these communications and contacts between Watea School and its parent body required significant amounts of time and energy to sustain. But, as both teachers and parents interviewed for the research noted, this work was necessary to ensure that the interface between school and community remained functional, and vital for ensuring that Watea School remained responsive to the needs of its children.

The Watea School student body

This section of the thesis outlines the broad characteristics of the student body at Watea School and introduces the key aspects of the school's response to them. Later sections of the thesis findings, offer more detailed analysis of how specific aspects of ethnicity and socioeconomic status combined to create challenging issues for the school in its work of supporting student learning.

Most of the students attending Watea School in 2013, identified as Maori. Watea School had committed to Kaupapa Māori[8] in affirming the validity of its students' Maori identity in line with Ministry of Education's Ka Hikitia strategy (Ministry of Education, 2013a) and Maori curriculum for mainstream schools (Ministry of Education, 2009a). These policy and curriculum directives argue for the value of Maori children learning as Maori; that is, being valued for their Maori cultural, spiritual and social identity. Learning for Maori students, is therefore promoted within a framework of Maori knowledge about the world. Support for Maori language (Te Reo) is a central component of that knowledge. However, this commitment to Maori learning as Maori was a work in progress, as the school sought to expand its capacity to meet the needs of its student body within its resource constraints.

Watea School offered its senior students a bilingual class in years five and six in 2013 and endeavoured to raise the Te Reo content of classroom teaching throughout the rest of its mainstream classes. The processes of enacting strategies to support Maori in Watea School, took place within specific contexts: human resources available to the school; systemic supports and constraints in the education system; and parental expectations in the wider community. It was therefore a site of ongoing development within the school and the challenges faced will be discussed more fully later in the thesis.

Watea School had a significant number of children in its student body from families with low incomes in 2013. The correlation between low-socioeconomic status and high student needs for social support has been identified across government ministerial portfolios. In response to these needs, Watea School received dedicated social-work services via the Social Worker in Schools (SWiS) programme. Social-work needs were addressed by working with the school, the family, and the individual child.

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[8] Kaupapa Māori theory is a critically derived set of principles required to achieve transformation in Maori education (Smith, 1997). The principles are: self-determination; the validation and legitimation of Maori culture and identity; the incorporation of Maori pedagogy; the use of Maori social capital to mediate socioeconomic difficulties; incorporating structures that emphasise the collective in learning; extending these structures to include a shared vision and philosophy.

In addition to social support needs, many families in the Watea School community faced well-defined health deficits that resulted from the confluence of low income, insecure housing of poor quality and family instability (Howden-Chapman, Bierre, & Cunningham, 2012). Watea School liaised with a local iwi-provider [9] of health services to redress issues of affordable health-care within the community. The school provided a space for a free, weekly clinic on school grounds that not only serviced the health needs of children, but also the wider community. The iwi-provider offered regular screening programmes directed toward health risks in young children, such as rheumatic fever prevention, but also offered other programmes for adults in the community. The school worked with the iwi-provider in enabling this work in the belief that improvements in adult health and the health of children are linked; healthy families support healthy children.

Watea School served as a focus for a variety of other service providers. The school dealt with children's health needs, mental health issues and child welfare concerns. Resultingly, the school was required to liaise with a variety of different social service workers including Child Youth and Family Social Workers, Public Health Nurses and medical staff, Dental Health Nurses, specialist mental-health services, police and justice department officials, as well staff from the regional Special Education services.

The centrality of Watea School in the lives of children within a universal and compulsory education system, created opportunities for this range of service providers to identify children with needs and to deliver services to them. However, it also meant that the day-to-day work of educators occurred within a complicated, and often time consuming, web of intersecting service providers. Success in managing to these incursions was important, because failure would have impacted on the capacity of children to fully avail themselves of the opportunities education offered. Watea School, therefore argued that it owed a duty of care to ensure that student needs, once identified, received appropriate care.

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[9] An iwi-provider is a Maori tribally based, health-service provider, contracted by government to provide its services within a specific tribal locale. While iwi-providers are focused on meeting the unmet needs of local Maori populations, they do not deny service provision on the basis of ethnicity.

Watea School and the state

The work of Watea School and its employees intersected with the state at different points, many of which constituted a backdrop to everyday function. Watea School, as a state-funded school, received resources to meet its purposes in education. In return, the state imposed terms and conditions that Watea School was required to meet. These requirements included designated hours of operation, but also legislative terms and conditions to ensure a robust operational framework. There are three key legislating documents involved: National Education Goals (NEGS); the National Curriculum; National Administrative Guidelines (NAGS); and since 2010, National Standards (Ministry of Education, 2014b).

The Education Review Office performs regular audits of all schools to determine their compliance with legislative requirements and processes, making recommendations to focus desired improvements. On occasion, when there are serious concerns about the ability of an individual school to provide a safe and effective education service, the Minister of Education has the power to dissolve the school governance structure (BOT), and appoint a School Commissioner. The School Commissioner is then required to institute a regime of governance to ensure that the school institutes the necessary measures to ensure compliance with the Ministry of Education guidelines, and thereby, provide a safe and efficient educational service. The state therefore retains within its power, the ability to act as a final arbitrator of school quality and performance, via the direct intervention of the Minister of Education.

State power, used to ensure compliance, is little noticed during periods of calm in relationships between the state polity, the Ministry of Education and the school sector. However, the relationship between the state and its institutions of governance in education and the primary school sector was particularly eventful during the period in which the research was planned and implemented. Many issues arose which affected all state funded primary schools: the imposition of National Standards on primary schools; the planned implementation of Partnership Schools; the failed implementation of increases to the size of classrooms; the protracted difficulties in implementing a new payroll computer system (Novopay); a vigorous, sometimes

rancorous and always highly politicised public debate about the "long-tail of educational underachievement" (Longstone, 21012, pp.5), to name but a few. Others were more localised in their effects, such as rationalising primary school education services in Christchurch post-earthquakes, but still elicited considerable support across the sector. In this climate, the Ministry of Education, as the principle state institution responsible for implementing state education policy, sought to negotiate the demands of government policy stances alongside the need to support schools.

Prior to and during the period of the research, the Ministry of Education and two different government Ministers for Education had difficult relationships with educators, often conducted in a confrontational manner in the media. The government's desire to achieve more equitable outcomes in education for children from low-income families including Maori and Pasifika, was enacted primarily through its National Standards policy. However, as a policy initiative it was critiqued by academics, teachers' professional organisations and resisted by many individual schools. In the process, all parties jockeyed for the position of speaking authoritatively about the reasons for New Zealand's relatively high levels of disparity in educational outcomes and debates consequently, became increasingly divisive and abrasive.

The impact of these discourses was not confined to those participating directly in debates and discussion forums with politicians and ministry officials. In being disseminated throughout the sector, they provoked impassioned media responses and reactions from teachers and some parents. They therefore constituted an important environmental context in which teachers, parents and support workers at Watea School went about their daily work with children in their care in 2013. These contexts are discussed in greater detail in the later findings chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter seeks to paint a picture of Watea School in 2013. The descriptions offered are constrained by the need to protect the identity of the school, but enable later chapters, dealing more explicitly with the research findings, to be placed in

context. The research reflects a time of change in the field of education in New Zealand, when government policy had a large impact on how schools approached their work. At the same time, there were ongoing developments within Watea School that were self-directed responses to localised conditions, in which the state was minimally involved. Thus, Watea School's performance of its educative functions during the research reflected both the constraints that shaped its work, and its determination to meets its educative purposes as it saw them.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The sociological literature concerned with inequalities in Western nations in education is large, complex and diffuse. However, there is concurrence in the assertion that firstly, children from poorer families in Western nations are less likely to achieve in education at the same levels as their more affluent peers and secondly, that these children are also more likely to belong to minority, indigenous or migrant cultures (Pfeffer, 2008). The over-representation of Maori and Pasifika in estimations of both low-socioeconomic status and educational outcomes in New Zealand (Perry, 2013), therefore mirrors conditions found in many other Western nations. This conflation of low levels of student attainment in education with issues of both ethnicity and poverty, creates difficulties for disentangling their effects in the literature. Further divisions arise in considerations of which factors of low-socioeconomic status are most important in contributing to educational inequalities. Thus, while the literature is rich in description, it is often confusing in its claims, resulting in conflicting usages in supporting policy and practice.

The first strand in the literature examined, proffers macro accounts in asserting that capitalism, and more recently neoliberal expressions of capitalism, determine the purpose of education and therefore, its outcomes. These stances argue for policy initiatives to introduce system-wide changes in social and economic structures. Achieving these changes is seen as a necessary precursor to achieving greater equity

in policy and practice in education. They therefore suggest, or imply, that a fairer redistribution of material resources would reduce disparities, not only materially, but also socially and educationally; achieving this economic equity would promote greater equity in the distribution of all social goods, education included.

Running alongside this position, are the more piecemeal explanations for educational inequalities arising from current neoliberal economic policies. These accounts focus on aspects of neoliberalism that generate social divisions and inequalities, which in turn promote educational inequalities. This literature, in its critique of the impacts of neoliberalism, gives voice to and advocates for, impoverished groups in society and in education. Policy prescriptions are sometimes opaque, but often argue for fairer redistributive practices in educational and social policy, while also advocating for critical pedagogies to challenge the reach and dominance of neoliberal ideology in Western nations.

Associated, but differentiated, are explanations of educational inequalities based on differences in family and community values and practices, and those of schools and teachers in education. This literature argues that families and communities enact forms of social and cultural practices that conflict with a classed and raced, dominant, educational culture. Thus, educational systems, epistemologies and practices are located within wider social structures, which sustain the dominance of middle-class and majority culture over the cultural practices of minority ethnic and low-socioeconomic groups. Rights-based claims to greater recognition for the encultured nature of educational curricula and pedagogies, are argued as necessary to foster understandings of the intersections of cultural and epistemological dominance and as a precursor to greater reflexivity within the educational sector. This, in turn, creates possibilities for envisioning more diverse and inclusionary educational practices.

The call for greater reflexivity necessitates firstly, a recognition of injuries suffered. Secondly, it requires the acknowledgement of advantages conferred on those belonging to dominant groups. Combined, these critical analyses of classed and ethnic advantage and disadvantage create an impetus to consider other forms of

knowledge and more equitable systems of schooling, underlying a more equitable distribution of educational and social goods.

The most prolific strand is the school-effectiveness and improvement literature. This is a broad tent encompassing many aspects of school function: school leadership; school climate/culture; teaching quality; and curriculum development and implementation. These literatures assert that schools and teachers are responsible for the quality of education they provide and that students have rights-based claims to receive the teaching required for them to reach their fullest potential in learning. This achieved, educational success holds the promise of greater social mobility for those individuals from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who are able to marry effort with ability. It remains however, an intrinsically conservative strategy for achieving change in education, because it offers no challenge to the underlying social conditions or dominant ideologies shaping educational systems.

The final strand in the literature argues that there are integrative accounts that draw together broader analyses of social and cultural conditions with the specific practices of schools, teachers, families and communities. This last strand offers opportunities for exploring not only the interconnections between school, home and community, but also allows the practices of schools and educators to be placed within the broader contexts of power, politics and policy formation.

In bringing these strands together, this review cuts a broad swathe through the educational literature. All strands contribute to a richer understanding of the contours of educational inequality, but I argue, in common with the integrative accounts, that the complexity of the problem of educational inequalities suggests the need to remain open to a wide range of possibilities. This will require thoughtful engagement with the existent literature and its careful use to inform actions. The challenge is to understand both the limitations and the possibilities within the current literature in seeking to advance children's learning and to place this knowledge within the contexts operating on schools, families, communities and wider society.

Capitalism and educational inequalities

In their seminal work, (Bowles & Gintis 1976) argue that the shape of the capitalist economy determines the shape of the education system:

> The economy produces people…. Our critique of the capitalist economy is simple enough: the people production process – in the workplace and in schools – is dominated by imperatives of profit and domination rather than by human need (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.54-55).

The 'people production process' is, in their view, primarily concerned with meeting the demands of markets and industry for compliant workers with the technical and instrumental skills required for the ongoing generation of profit (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002). This overtly Marxist account of how the economy and education system work in 'correspondence', argues that significant educational reform will only arise from the overthrow of capitalism. Hopefully, Bowles and Gintis (1976) asserted that the more widespread distribution of advanced education in society would give rise to a growing perception of oppression in the working-classes and therefore, hasten the demise of capitalism.

While not explicitly concerned to link their analyses with social justice in education, their work is nevertheless permeated with a concern for injustices perpetuated by capitalism, including in the field of education: differences in funding between schools serving poorer communities and the quality of the education they offer (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002); the consequent reinforcement of differences in social standing and employment options that accrue from this educational stratification (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). While their predictions of the demise of capitalism have not yet eventuated, their concerns continue to resonate with much of the literature presented later in this review. Later analyses may not reach as far in arguing for the overthrow of capitalism to redress economic inequalities, but do concur with the impacts of economic inequalities on educational outcomes. They also concur with the work of Bowles and Gintis (2002) in asserting that business interests, working within a dominant neoliberal ideology, define to a significant degree how the educational sector is organised. The effect is to sustain ongoing

inequalities within both the economy and education. The next section explores the impacts of neoliberalism on education as a subset of the wider economic and social ordering of Western and New Zealand society.

Neoliberalism in education

Neoliberalism, paradoxically, argues as forcefully as Marxism that the economic constitution of society is the bedrock upon which all structuring forms of governance rest, or at least, ought to. Neoliberal ideology, as conceived by Hayek (1994) and adopted by many Western governments including New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s, remains primarily concerned with organising economic conditions as the basis of social institutions and government functions (Richardson, 1995). It envisages just governance as minimal government, to ensure the greatest range of individual freedoms. Thus, liberal conceptions of social justice, based on individual rights, albeit limited to largely negative freedoms, are promoted. The role of government is to ensure property rights are enforced to maintain economic confidence, while minimising regulatory and legislative constraints to allow free and creative market practices. This requires a legal system to maintain social order, but otherwise allows individuals to constitute their lives as they see fit within these boundaries. Other forms of service provision are argued as being best left to markets. Through the mechanisms of competitive pressure and consumer choice, services of poor quality will be extinguished, and those meeting the needs of consumers will flourish (Hayek, 1994).

The fourth Labour government ushered in a raft of neoliberal polices in New Zealand in the years from 1984-1990 to reform, deregulate and reconstitute state service provision. Competition, markets and consumer choice were proposed as the means of ensuring ongoing quality improvements in social services, including education. Tomorrow's Schools policy resulted, constituting each state funded school as an individual and autonomous institution to be run along the lines of a corporate business (Lange, 1988). A separate institution, the Educational Review Office (ERO), was created to ensure that schools met their remit to provide an effective education service. These administrative changes profoundly altered the educational

sector in New Zealand, including how formal schooling was understood by schools, teachers and parents.

The literature offering a critique of neoliberal reforms in education is extensive in New Zealand, not least because neoliberal policy in education was enacted so comprehensively and speedily, and with little amendment to its underlying precepts through subsequent changes in government. With the distance of time, Codd (2008) describes the transformation:

> The long-held social democratic values of collective responsibility and egalitarianism, cornerstones of the welfare state, have been subjugated by the neoliberal values of market freedom and entrepreneurial individualism (2008, p.14).

In Codd's analysis, the state relinquished responsibilities for collective well-being, to focus on creating conditions necessary for economic growth. The provision of welfare for its citizens became secondary and contingent upon economic conditions and political will, informed by discourses of individual responsibility.

Education takes a central role in neoliberal conceptions of the state, because demand for skilled labour is a requirement of a market economy. Continued involvement of the state in education is evidenced by the legislative imposition of mandatory education, because it is perceived to be necessary in preparing students for work and the national economy. Educational failure, for aggregated groups in education, has consequences, not only for labour markets, but also for social order. The premise of neoliberalism in educational markets is therefore to minimise state interventions and to encourage educational entrepreneurship, rather than to remove the state from education in totality. (Robertson & Dale, 2002; Glennerster, 1991; Gordon & Whitty, 1997). However, the ongoing presence of the state in educational services creates a poor fit with traditional understandings of free markets (Glennerster, 1991). Elements of the exercise of state control and power sit uneasily alongside neoliberal conceptions of social institutions and social entrepreneurship, revealing the internal contradictions of neoliberalism in education (Robertson & Dale, 2002).

However, there are substantial impacts in framing education within neoliberal economic imperatives, however partial they are in practice. Curricula have been devalued, as has the professionalism of teachers (Codd, 2008; Gordon, 1992). Perversely, in a system of governance that values individualism, and therefore diversity as key tenets of liberality in society, the teaching profession is subsumed within a managerial culture in education, focused on meeting bureaucratic demands. Managerialism and accountability processes require recorded and documented assessments, measures and evaluations, which are then conflated with teaching efficacy; bureaucratic tasks subtract attention and energy from the performance of reflexive, responsible and creative pedagogical practices (Codd, 2008; Gordon, 1992; Wills, 1992).

In addition, the valorisation of accountability in educational services has had a narrowing effect on how educational inequalities are understood. Attention remains focused on schools and teachers and the impacts of their actions on student outcomes. However, this focus concomitantly limits an examination of contributing factors arising from conditions outside the school gates. This confines the reach of both policy initiatives and policy evaluations (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). It is one of the ironies of neoliberal education polices that while they promote creativity and autonomy as the means for ensuring schools are adaptable and responsive to education markets, they simultaneously make demands for accountability in education, on behalf of the taxpayer as funder, which result in increased forms of control in various permutations of assessed efficacy and efficiency in school functions (Wills, 1992).

Tomorrow's Schools represented a paradigm shift in the systemic organisation of New Zealand schools, because so much of the agenda for change was previously untested. Wylie (2009, 2012) argues that Tomorrow's Schools policy, and the autonomous schools it promoted, has not delivered the desired educational results. Most of the groups identified as experiencing the greatest levels of inequality in educational outcomes, that is, children from low-socioeconomic groups, Maori and Pasifika, continue to experience differential outcomes. The exception is female students who have made gains since 1989. However, these gains could be argued to

have arisen from wider social beliefs about gender equity, rather than from changes within the education sector.

Wylie (2009, 2012) is also consistent in also arguing that Tomorrows School's has failed to facilitate collaboration between schools to better disperse existing pools of school leadership and pedagogic expertise across the sector. She argues that the focus on autonomous schools has compromised capacity in the sector to improve educational outcomes for underachieving groups of students. Investing in Educational Success (Ministry of Education, 2016b) is the latest response to this gap in the performance of educational markets. While collaboration is sought between individual schools, accountability and responsibility for performance is now more tightly instituted within the school following the implementation of National Standards in the primary and intermediate school sector. The government continues to foster competitive markets in education in continued support for private education services and partnership schools, and such calls for increased collaboration remain within the bounds of discourses of responsibility and accountability. The call for collaboration therefore remains inconsistently applied within a wider neoliberal policy framework.

The effects of a coterminous focus on competition between schools and the implementation of strategies to apply market conditions to education, have had perverse effects creating some autonomous schools that prosper at the expense of others (Wylie, 2009). Schools are determined as successful, or not, to the degree that they attract and retain middle-class and academically, successful students (Gordon, 2003; Lupton, 2006; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995). Unsuccessful schools, almost always in low-socioeconomic areas, are perceived as schools of last resort for children and families that are unable to marshal the necessary economic resources to attend more prestigious schools. The long-term effects of these policies have been to progressively foster the ongoing stratification of schools, based on increasing economic and housing segregation within the geographical locale of each school (Gordon, 2003; McCoy, & Vincent, 2008; Raffo,2011a; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995).

Neoliberalism and its adherence to individual choice as the means of addressing the quality of educational services provided by the state, has consequences for individual citizens:

> …through successive 'choices', the social sphere and the conduct of each citizen has been circumscribed by, and captured within the economic (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p.249).

The effect of this diminution of citizenship to the economic is to create subjects that view themselves as free to make choices, but this apparent freedom takes place within regimes of Foucauldian self-governmentality (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Peters, 2009) and "responsibilisation of the self" (Peters, 2009, p.61). Collective freedoms and enactments of power are side-lined by discourses and regimes that place social and educational successes and failures within the individual's responsibility to make the correct choices. Poor choices, defined by their negative outcomes, become the means whereby groups are stigmatised by their failure. Conversely, positive outcomes are framed as arising from good choices alone. This discourse of choice serves to exclude from consideration any differences in the appropriation of power, or access to social and economic resources, as contributing to educational success. Risks in choice making therefore become individualised, and failure in education or economic life becomes a decontextualised narrative of poorly chosen options; broader social explanations and possibilities for action remain obscured from view (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gordon & Whitty, 1997).

In equal measure, in attributing good outcomes to good choices, the conditions in which educational success occurs are also occluded. Middle-class schools, families and students are notably reluctant to consider the advantages they enjoy as constituting any part of their success (Thrupp, 2007a). Their preference is for explanations that chime with neoliberal conceptions of individual success being derived from effort, innate talent and exceptionalism. Such explanations preserve prevailing systemic conditions in education, and offer no incentives for middle-class families and schools to pursue changes that could undermine the current advantages they enjoy.

The authors critiquing the focus on outcome measures in education are not suggesting that there is no value to be had in their use; it is the singularity of the approach to educational services that is flawed, and creates the conditions for inequalities to flourish. In failing to consider wider social conditions contributing to educational success and failure, neoliberal ideology maintains social explanations that contribute to its ongoing perpetuation. It also contributes to internal inconsistencies within neoliberal policies in education by imposing state interventions on educational institutions when they fail to achieve the outcomes desired. This unfairly stigmatises some schools, teachers and students and offers little in the way of remediation of the underlying conditions contributing to their difficulties.

Maori have had an uneasy relationship with neoliberal policy initiatives in education. On the one hand, new spaces have opened up for Maori educators to address inequalities in education. On the other, Maori have suffered disproportionate levels of poverty since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in New Zealand and educational inequalities have endured for many Maori in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, neoliberalism has offered Maori some spaces in which they have been able to carve out education services that are more responsive to Maori educational aspirations.

The exercise of choice in education has provided Maori with alternative forms of schooling more consistent with Maori cultural practices. However, Maori educators, despite injunctions for Maori to be supported to learn as Maori (Ministry of Education, 2013a), are still required to comply with the state-mandated standards in education. Much of the Maori curriculum, Te Aho Arataki Marau– Kura Auraki mō te Ako i Te Reo Māori, is a direct translation of the standard curriculum into Maori language, rather than curriculum arising from Maori epistemology (Penetito, 2010). Educational institutions for Maori education are still located within broader structures of Western conceptions of knowledge and the appropriate forms of teaching and learning required to transmit that knowledge. The state:

> …impose(s) a definition of the everyday world of education on Maori
> that is consistent with its interests without seemingly having to exert

overt power (through overt rules and regulations). By installing in Maori a sense of relative autonomy, the official culture of the powerful group functions to legitimate its own tastes, knowledges, discourses and experiences while simultaneously subjecting Maori people to its control and dependence by tying them to a regulated, colonised identity (Penetito, 2010, p.79).

By such means, Maori are perceived as being offered equality of opportunity to achieve in education, without being conceived as being fully equal. Paradoxically, the gains made by Maori in exploiting spaces in education that offer alternatives to Maori in a diverse market of educational opportunities, allow **some** Maori to realise significant gains, but these gains remain partial at best for the majority; schools offering real alternatives to mainstream education remain outside the ambit of most Maori students and parents (Penetito, 2010).

The imposition of 'official culture', including its prevailing neoliberal ideological bases, is intrinsically bound to conceptions of what counts as knowledge in education. These knowledges lie at the heart of educational systems (Apple, 1993a, 1993b; Milne, 2009; Smith, 1999), and if unchallenged, they remain invisible, thus preserving privileged forms of cultural and classed power (Valencia, 2011). It is not until these sources of knowledge are laid open to scrutiny that the conditions of dominance, power and advantage used to suppress minority knowledge can be appreciated. Apple (1993a) argues that the problem of cultural dominance is more substantive than simply enabling minority culture students to gain greater skills in learning within a dominant pedagogy. Rather, a critical pedagogy needs to be aligned with critical learning, to challenge assumptions embedded within dominant cultures in education. In other words, it is insufficient to offer alternative forms of education and curricula based on minority cultural knowledge without also creating safe forums for contesting and challenging dominant cultural epistemologies and pedagogy. By creating spaces in which sources of knowledge can be critically and equitably explored, opportunities are created for forms of knowledge and pedagogy to emerge that offer the potential for social change for those most disadvantaged within current educational and social systems (Freire, 1993).

Inequality and the case for greater social equality

This section explores the case in the literature for a return to more egalitarian economic system, supported by increased taxation, or more effective redistributive policies as a means of reversing both social and educational inequalities. These literatures do not argue for the overthrow of capitalism, but do wish to reverse the extremes of neoliberalism as a means of engaging with the conditions of inequality (Berliner, 2006; Marriott & Sim, 2014; Nana, 2013; Piketty, 2014; Rashbrooke, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Growing economic inequality in society, in their view, accompanies the incidence of other social inequalities, including education, contributing to more widespread social unrest and disorder in society. Therefore, in describing inequalities and arguing for their economic redress, they also assert that other forms of social inequality will be mitigated, to the benefit of not only the most impoverished, but across all classes of society. In this sense, these authors take a Rawlsian perspective of justice (Rawls, 1971) in arguing for the widest distribution of social goods in society, without negatively impacting on the lives of those making greater economic contributions in taxation. Self-interest over the long-term, dictates the need for reducing inequalities, trumping short-term interests in maintaining economic advantages in the present.

In education, this position argues for a return to egalitarianism as an organising ideology and draws on past strategies for containing the excesses of capitalism. The period of post-war consensus in Western nations between labour and capital is mined for insights into how capitalism could be organised differently, to protect against excessive levels of inequality (Piketty, 2014). It becomes a matter of collective will to redress the inequalities that have pervaded most western economies in the present. Lessons can be learned from the successes of past redistributive policies in re-establishing economies after the depredations of two world wars and the Great Depression.

The post war years in New Zealand can also be understood as the decades in which egalitarianism, however imperfectly realised, formed a socially cohesive ideology in society. Beeby, (1992) reflects on past experiences in designing and implementing education policy based on egalitatrianism:

Each generation creates, or simply assumes, its own educational myths and its own unattainable but approachable goals, with at least an appearance of permanence, on which to build its plans for education. No myth can express all the purposes of education, but it provides a criterion by which all other purposes can be judged. To be both acceptable and effective, a myth has to reach certain conditions: it must in general be in accord with some strong – though not always clearly defined – public aspiration; it must be expressed in language flexible enough to permit a reasonable wide range of interpretations, and yet specific enough to provide practical guidance to administrators, planners and teachers: and it must be unattainable in the near future if it is to sustain many years of consistent change without being constantly and confusingly modified (1992, p. 302).

Failures in achieving the ideal of 'equality of opportunity' in education did not negate the power of this egalitarian ideology, because it created a mechanism for evaluating success or failure in policy and practice, and provided a rallying call for change. However, its failures, in the face of repeated challenges of a growing neoliberal hegemony, proved insufficient for its maintenance. Nevertheless, echoes remain of these egalitarian ideals to inform a sense of injustice when children fail to achieve their potential in education. This sense of 'unfairness', arising from inequalities in social conditions, continues to be expressed in the critiques of government policies in education (O'Brien, Dale, & St John, 2011).

The poverty thesis

In contrast with the broad structural analyses offered in the preceding sections, there is a body of literature identifying the specific features of economic inequality that impact on the performance of students in education. They call for specific policy initiatives to redress particular social conditions. For the most part, these policy prescriptions require resourcing dependent on higher levels of taxation, or at least a reset of funding priorities. These literatures seek to identify the effects of poverty in detail, to draw the attention of those in positions of power, and to provoke a response

from the wider community to children's needs. The advocacy involved in this work is perceived as necessary, because impoverished families, and children in particular, are least able to exercise power and influence on their own behalf.

Poverty in the earliest years of children's lives and the duration and depth of deprivation in which families live, are noted to impact adversely on educational outcomes for children (Berliner, 2006; Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003). Within this body of literature, the argument is that while schools can and do act to ameliorate the problems that arise for children impacting on their educational achievements, their efforts will always be limited by the multiple challenges these children face. Children will continue to experience inequalities in education unless there is both recognition in policy of the impacts of social and economic inequalities on the educational challenges that schools face, and/or there are substantive changes to alleviate the lack of economic resources available to the poorest families in highly unequal societies (Berliner, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2011; Rothstein, 2008). The effective redress of educational inequalities is therefore, premised on improvements in social conditions, because they drive educational underachievement.

Poor nutrition and hunger (Dani, Burrill, & Demmig-Adams, 2005; Wynd, 2011), poor quality housing, overcrowding, housing insecurity and transience, inadequate clothing and home heating (Free, Howden-Chapman, Pierse, & Viggers, 2010; Howden-Chapman, Bierre, & Cunningham, 2013), and resultant poor health (Howden-Chapman, et al., 2013; Maani, Vaithianathan, &Wolfe, 2006), have all been implicated in reasons for children failing to achieve their potential in education. Children in poorer families have been noted to have reduced attendance at school for variety of reasons associated with poverty: health problems occasioning increased health related absences; housing insecurity and residential mobility reducing attachments to school and disrupting learning trajectories; increased demands on children to assist with work in the home (Zhang, 2003). Policy responses to redress these conditions are therefore, argued as necessary to improve educational outcomes. Stress, arising from prolonged periods of low income accompanied by instability in family relationships, has impacts on children's social and cognitive development (Evans, 2004; Wadsworth & Reinks, 2012). However, the effects of family instability on children's educational achievements are less severe if they are not also

accompanied by low family incomes (Cavanagh & Huston, 2006). Poverty therefore has a compounding effect for children experiencing the distresses occasioned by unstable and difficult family relationships.

Stress, associated with poverty, is also implicated in the development of parental addictions to alcohol and drugs, with concomitant effects on parenting practices. Maternal addictions in pregnancy, likely as both a cause and consequence of poverty, have long-lasting neurological impacts on children, affecting cognition and behaviour in infancy and childhood (Coles, Brown, Smith, Platzman, Erickson, & Falek, 1991). Notwithstanding the known impacts of drug and alcohol consumption in pregnancy, children from low income backgrounds are more likely to exhibit behaviours in schooling that impact negatively on their achievements (Blanden, Gregg, & Macmillan, 2007). It is in recognition of these effects that schools in low-income communities are required to provide more intensive social, behavioural and learning supports. Stress and its negative effects may arise from sources other than poverty, but poverty alone can be a stressor, as well as an as an intensifier of other stressors, in creating harmful effects for children in learning.

Where children have been consulted in research, they have proven able to identify the impacts of poverty on their lives, schooling included. In New Zealand, the Office of the Children's Commissioner has generated a series of reports into child poverty with children as research participants. The findings of these reports largely mirror similar work with children overseas. Children from poorer families are able to identify themselves as different from children from wealthier backgrounds when their parents are unable to afford school-related costs: school fees, and requirements for stationery and computer equipment (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2010a, b; Horgan, 2009a; Te One, Blaikie, Egan-Bitran & Henley, 2014); school uniforms and/or socially desired items of clothing (Egan-Bitran, 2010a; 2012; Te One et al., 2014; van der Hoek, 2005); equipment required to take up opportunities to play sports or to participate in leisure activities (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2010a; 2012); contributions toward school trips and other enrichment activities sponsored by schools (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2012; Te One et al., 2014).

At a more basic level, experiences of poor nutrition, hunger and poor quality housing that is overcrowded and insecure, have all been identified by children as creating not only direct forms of hardship for them in their ability to learn in school, but as having impacts on the quality of relationships they develop and sustain with their peers in school (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2010a; 2012; Horgan, 2009a; Te One et al., 2014; van der Hoek, 2005). These effects on children's relationships are magnified when children also move school frequently (Brown, 2012).

Differential access to material goods can lead to stigmatisation and bullying of children from impoverished families in school (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2010a; 2012). Children, without access to goods that are socially desirable, find it more difficult to form sustaining friendships with their peers at school. Lacking these friendships, is accompanied by disengagement from schooling in some children's accounts (Brown, 2012; van der Hoek, 2005).

In addition to the direct impacts of material deprivation on children's social relationships and their health and well-being, children describe heightened anxieties about their family lives and the ability of parents to cope with poverty (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002; Egan-Bitran, 2010a; Horgan, 2009a; van der Hoek, 2005). Witnessing the stresses placed on parents and parental reactions to these stresses, creates conditions in which some children take on responsibilities beyond their years. These responsibilities, while they offer opportunities for children to grow in some ways as they take up the challenge of looking after younger children and household management tasks, can at the same time, subtract from the energy they bring to their educational goals (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002).

Creating opportunities for children's voice in research into poverty, brings to life the impacts of poverty on children. In placing children's experiences front and centre of the "plethora of income and employment based statistics relating to adults in households" (Crowley & Vulliamy, 2002, pg.1), a direct challenge is issued to thinking that continues to regard poverty as an individual and adult problem to be solved within the confines of each family. Attention on the outcomes of poverty for both parents and their children, offers insights into the conditions in which they

operate, including the direct relational impacts for children within all their social networks.

These social impacts of poverty have geographical dimensions (Lupton, 2006; McKoy & Vincent, 2008; Raffo, 2011a; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006; Thrupp, 2007b). It is suggested that 'neighbourhood effects' result in peer relationships and cultural norms that are inconsistent with school culture as well as a lack of knowledge within localised communities about specific parenting practices required to support learning (Ainsworth, 2002; Crowder & South, 2003; Fergussen, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2004; Flessa, 2008; Sheldon, 2002). Raffo (2011b) asserts that in such neighbourhoods, students develop identities as learners that are inconsistent with prevailing middle-class educational culture. Willis (1977) offers a similar analysis of incongruence between working-class culture and educational culture. The effect of such cultural disconnections is that capable students are handicapped by their lack of knowledge and understanding of educational culture and therefore, knowledge of how to advance their educational careers (Nash, 1997).

This disconnection is evidenced by middle-class perceptions of schools located in poorer communities as failing or inferior in the educational service they deliver on the basis of the low-socioeconomic status of their student body (Thrupp, 2007b). The decile[10] system for apportioning funding to schools in New Zealand, recognises an increased need for remedial and support programmes for students in low-decile communities (Ministry of Education, 2016a). However, funding for low-decile schools is estimated to fall short of the funds that high-decile schools collect from parents in fees and from fundraising activities (Wylie, 2012). Schools in low-decile areas struggle to provide access to the enrichment activities and equipment available in more affluent schools, adding yet another layer to parental perceptions of the inferior nature of the services offered (Thrupp, 2007a). Despite these limitations,

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[10] Estimations of school decile rankings are derived from the collation of census data about the areas in which students live. These areas (meshblocks) are examined for five characteristics: household income; occupation classifications and employment status; measures of household crowding; educational qualifications; and being in receipt of government benefits as a main source of income. The scores are weighted and provide a total for the school student population. All schools are then ranked into deciles and funding formulae are applied. Decile one schools receive the most funding in recognition of their greater need, and decile 10 the least, being located in the most affluent communities (Ministry of Education website, 2016b).

Thrupp (2007b) argues that these negative perceptions may bear little relation to the quality of teaching offered in low-decile schools.

Competitive school markets in education in New Zealand, intersect with housing markets to create educational enclaves at either end of the housing market: of poverty in areas of low-cost housing and low-decile schools; of affluence in areas of high-cost housing and high-decile schools. The result is that in larger urban areas in particular, opportunities for students from different classes in New Zealand to mix within the everyday world of school life are increasingly less likely to occur. Given that Maori and Pasifika are also disproportionately represented in unemployment figures, low-wage and insecure work and are more likely to live in areas of low-cost housing, classed segregation between schools is also coloured by ethnicity (Henare, Puckey, Nicholson, Dale, & Vaithianathan, 2011; Wylie, 2012).

Family resource theory

Family resource theory argues that much of the difference in educational performance between students from low and high-socioeconomic status families is directly attributable to the lack of cultural and educational resources available to low-income families to support their children in education (Nash, 1997). This is evident in lower standards of school readiness at entry into the primary school system (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldefogel, 2004) and lower levels of participation of low-income children in Early Childhood Education (ECE) (Biddulph et al., 2003). These lacks are also accompanied by lower parental expectations for success in education for their children (Biddulph, et al., 2003; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland 2004; Nash, 1997), a lack of supplementary out-of-school enriching experiences in the home, including access to computers in the home environment (Bidulph et al., 2003) and a fewer resources to pursue gifts and talents in sports and arts outside school hours (Wikeley, Bullock, Muschamp, & Ridge, 2007).

Cultural disconnection between home and school and unfamiliarity with school culture on the part of parents contributes to the inability of parents from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to provide educational support to students (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Marks, Cresswell, & Ainsley, 2006; Nash, 1997). Low-income

parents are less likely to participate in school activities with impacts on student achievement (Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzo, & Pituch, 2009; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001). However, Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) suggest that the quality of parental support provided to children in education is reflective of the relationship between parent and child, and improved participation by the parent in school processes may not lead to better results in learning. Parental interest in the learning of their child needs to be accompanied by a level of understanding of learning processes, rather than a focus on learning outcomes as the primary measure of parental involvement. It is therefore understandable that higher levels of parental achievement in education, especially maternal achievement, will have positive correlations with the levels of achievement children attain when parents have fluency and knowledge of school-based learning (Biddulph et al., 2003; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Chevalier, Harmon, O'Sullivan, &Walker, 2013).

Parenting styles have been implicated in supporting children to learn, or otherwise. Authoritarian parenting communications, reliant on direct orders over encouraging participation in conversation, have been noted to offer fewer opportunities for children to develop an enriched vocabulary and expressive language skills (Evans, 2004; Flouri, 2007; Rothstein 2008). Authoritarian parenting styles have, however, also been associated with role and resource strain in families experiencing poverty (Evans, 2004) and may therefore, be a result of social and economic circumstances, rather than an expression of encultured difference in family attitudes and interactions.

Disentangling the impacts of cultural practices and parenting styles from their social and economic contexts in accounting for educational outcomes is difficult. Family behaviours are enacted within contexts of social relations and these are embedded in economic resources a family is able to command and determine where a family lives, what material resources they can access to support family life, and who they interact with in their daily lives. While some families may have established links with family and friends across socioeconomic divides that enable them to access additional social and material resources, those concerned with documenting growing economic inequalities in most Western nations note the increasing stratification of economic classes in residential enclaves (Piketty, 2014; Thrupp, 2007b; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Under these conditions, poorer families are more

likely to live with others experiencing the same or similar levels of resource constraint, solidifying family disadvantage within communities and diminishing opportunities for families to connect across classed and cultural divides.

There is another strand in the literature that has directly examined the impacts of poverty and the stresses it induces in children for its impacts on learning. These impacts are agued as independent of parenting styles and parental educational achievement (Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009). Neurological changes arise in children as a result of stressors related to the conditions of poverty. The impacts of these conditions manifest throughout the child's life-course. Fortunately, they are also amenable to forms of care and support, targeted toward reducing instability and uncertainty; changes in circumstances and related practices of care and nurturance can progressively remediate neurological changes. Nevertheless, research indicates that the earlier in the child's life-course that poverty is experienced, the more pernicious the effects on the child's educational achievement (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Evans, 2004). Additionally, the longer the duration, the greater the impacts on the child's well-being and later educational progress (Duncan et al., 1998; Evans, 2004).

This literature also suggests that interventions in early childhood, such as ECE programmes, designed to increase school readiness by focusing on increasing attentional skills of children with application to literacy and numeracy, have later, positive impacts on educational achievement (Duncan, Dowsett, Claessens, Magnuson, Huston, Klebanov, Pagani, Feinstein, Engel, Brooks-Gunn, Sexton, Duckworth, & Japel, 2007). These findings are often used to argue for parental and child education as means of mitigating negative effects of poverty on children's learning, but equally, they could be used to argue for policies to improve family incomes as a more direct route to reducing poverty-related stresses and consequent educational outcomes.

Policies that provide stable forms of income support for families with young children in poverty have demonstrably ameliorated the impacts of early childhood poverty on children's life-courses and educational outcomes (Brookes-Gunn & Duncan, 2000). Some support for this position is also provided by the work of Dahl and Lochner

(2006), when they noted that increasing family incomes through taxation relief in the 1990s improved children's educational outcomes. The effects were greater for the most disadvantaged families with younger children, and more pronounced for male children who were deemed most at risk of the consequences of educational failure.

These literatures make a compelling case for social action. Even when considered within the frame of neoliberal ideology, the costs to the economy and society in failing to support children to reach their potential in education are considerable. However, New Zealand has generally chosen to favour a mix of solutions to the problem of educational inequalities centred on school reform initiatives, improved participation in pre-school education and improved school attendance. Calls for higher levels of income redistribution are able be resisted, as long as individual parents, schools and teachers are held accountable for educational inequalities.

In-school factors

The description of New Zealand's educational system as being "high functioning and low equity" (Longstone, 2012, p.5), prompted intense discussion about what schools in New Zealand could and should do to narrow the disparity between high and low achievers in 2012-2013. Government policy remained concentrated on school performance as the site of effective remediation, drawing on literatures that argued that effective schools are characterised by effective educational leadership, effective teaching practices and classroom management, and effective engagement with parents. I have attempted to briefly summarise the main characteristics required of leaders, teachers and schools, to give insight into the multiple demands on them, all of which in this formulation must be replicated in each autonomous low-decile school in New Zealand.

There is a large body of literature concerned with the quality of leadership in schools. This literature stresses the need for leaders to demonstrate specific personal qualities: expertise in effective communication (Hallinger & Heck, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Pont, Nusche, & Hunter, 2008; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009); sensitivity to context in the school and wider school community (Hallinger & Heck, 2006; Mulford, 2003; Thrupp, 1998); commitment to forms of distributed leadership (Mulford, 2003; Pont,

et al., 2008); and leadership that embodies democratic processes of inclusion across school personnel and students (Mulford, 2003). Effective school leadership is therefore posited as central in creating the school culture/climate required for effective teaching and learning.

The leadership literature details specific leadership characteristics necessary for success in low-socioeconomic communities. These characteristics include: a relentless concentration of the core purpose of education to advance learning (Ciuiffetelli, Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Robinson, et al., 2009; Suba, 2011); advocacy for students and teachers to support them to pursue learning goals (Robinson et al, 2009); effective analysis of social factors that support/impede learning in students and responsive pastoral and educational support programmes (Suba, 2011); the capacity to create conditions for effective planning and strategising from deep knowledge of problems, constraints and strengths within the school and its community (Ciuffetelli et al., 2011; Flessa, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009); the ability to harness community support for the school (Ciuffetelli et al., 2011; Flessa, 2007; Robinson et al., 2009); focused support and mentorship for professional development of staff (Ciuffetelli et al., 2011; Mulford,2003; Suba, 2011) the ability to create a stable and coherent environment in the school (Mulford, 2003; Robinson et al., 2009; Suba, 2011) the ability to retain skilled staff (Mulford, 2003; Suba, 2011). This list of requirements is daunting in its responsibilities, especially when the number of schools requiring exemplary leadership is considered in New Zealand.

Exceeding even the school-leadership strand within the school-effectiveness literature, is the literature concerned with effective teaching. Children from backgrounds marked by poverty and educational underachievement require better teaching and more of it to meet the demands of an educational system based on middle-class modes of communication and knowledge transmission (Bowers, 2000; Delpit, 1988, 2006; Haberman, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997). The argument these authors make is that a deep engagement with the realities of the lives of children enables teachers to find ways to build on the knowledge that children bring with them to school and create meaningful learning contexts to enable them to acquire and master vital skills.

This engagement is a taken-for-granted feature of education systems for the middle-class, who come to schooling with significant amounts of knowledge derived from immersion in the culture in which school systems are embedded (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Nash, 1997). However, children beginning school without this knowledge are required to acquire and adjust to a culture, which is foreign to them. Negotiating this unfamiliar culture makes additional demands on students, over and above the tasks of formal learning, contributing to an increased learning load.

The quality of student-teacher relationships is brought into stark focus in situations where social and cultural differences arise between teachers and their students. When these differences are accompanied by status effects, relationships are coloured by differences in agency and power, which act to assert and maintain dominance and subordination. More often these relationships and their effects are normalised features of school life, and uncontested by both the dominant and subordinate groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The effects of the hidden systems of power and control are described by Bourdieu and Passeron as visiting symbolic violence on children from lower-status backgrounds. These systems devalue the knowledge and skills that children from low-income homes bring with them to school in the imposition of the arbitrary sources of knowledge and skill sets favoured by the dominant educational culture and class.

In presenting their analysis, teacher reflexivity is argued by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as being the necessary for identifying the hidden workings of power and a required precursor to change. They argue for a movement toward critical learning on the part of the teacher as well as the student, which includes raising awareness throughout society of the arbitrary nature of privileged knowledge encapsulated in dominant cultures. Thus, while teachers and students remain as the principle focus of their reformist agenda, it cannot be contained within the educational institution, but must also be translated across all social structures to achieve its aim of eliminating the symbolic violence enacted upon some children, forced to learn within a foreign and dominant culture.

Other authors take up the question of the quality of teacher–student relationships in arguing that respect and care lie at the heart of effective teaching, resulting in

improvements in student achievements (Bishop, Berryman, & Cavanagh, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Freire, 1994; Hattie, 2009; Noddings, 2003; Smith, 1991). Such relationships begin in care on the part of the teacher for the student (Noddings, 2003). Engagement with an individual student prompts a desire to understand the individual student and willingness to work with the student's culture and social background, rather than demanding conformity with the predetermined cultural values the teacher brings to the classroom (Bishop et al., 2007). When teachers come to the classroom from different cultural and classed backgrounds than those of their students, these differences must be traversed to create the connections needed to sustain children in learning.

Establishing and maintaining effective student/teacher relationships is less challenging when both parties have fluency with school culture based on similarly classed and encultured values. However, the alternative to adapting students to the demands of school culture is to require school culture to adapt to that of the child (Valencia, 2011; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). In large part, this is the key tenet of moves in schools in New Zealand to enable Maori to learn as Maori; that is to be able to continue their learning within their culture and language, to support the ongoing development of a secure cultural identity (Bishop et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2013a; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005).

Improved teacher training is envisaged as one means of better preparing teachers for cross-cultural teaching. Teachers need to better understand their own cultural practices, which often remain invisible to them as normative in a society based on dominant, cultural practices (Banks, Cookson, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, & Stephen, 2001; Bishop et al., 2007; Carpenter, 2010; Delpit, 2006; Milne, 2009; Valencia, 2011). This is surmised as a necessary step in helping students to do likewise in a climate of respect for differences (Carpenter, 2010; Smith, 1991; Smith, 1999). The alternative is that teachers may act to define different cultural practices as culturally deficient when their own cultural practices remain unexamined (Bishop et al., 2003; Penetito, 2010; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

However important it is to concentrate attention on the ways in which minority cultures are devalued and excluded in education, the examination is incomplete without also examining the bases of advantage that attend to membership of the dominant culture in education (Delpit, 1988, 2006; Freire, 1994; Milne, 2009; Thrupp, 2007a). In not including these insights, disadvantaged communities will always be at risk being of being defined and stigmatised by their differences from prevailing social and cultural norms. Furthermore, claims for social justice in education are likely to fail to redress invisible structures of power and control in education embedded in class and ethnicity (Delpit, 2006; Milne, 2009). These literatures go to the heart of racism.

One strand in the literature argues that schools geographically differ in the quality of education offered, depending on the socioeconomic and ethnic status of their locales. Schools are described as differing in the teaching expertise they are able to access and therefore the quality of education they offer to students (Haberman,1991; Kozol,1991; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Thadani, Cook, Griffis, Wise, & Blakey, 2010); in the composition of their student bodies with effects on the classroom environment and peer effects impacting on student learning (Thrupp, 1998; Thrupp, Lauder, & Robinson, 2002); and in the enrichment experiences that schools are able to provide to supplement student learning (Haberman, 1991). This literature, while essentially concerned with improving school function, notes that the disadvantages students experience outside the school gates may be compounded by the quality of education offered by schools situated in disadvantaged communities. The exigencies faced by impoverished schools are more likely to result in impoverished forms of education for their students (Bowers, 2000; Haberman, 1991).

However, the delineation between perceived deficiencies in schools in disadvantaged versus wealthier communities and actual teaching performance, is less certain in New Zealand, where funding streams give recognition to the greater needs of low-decile schools and teacher quality remains high across all schools (Thrupp, 2007b). This is not to deny that differential levels of funding do exist between schools in poorer and richer communities in New Zealand, or that low-decile schools continue to experience difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled staff due to the significant challenges teachers face in meeting the needs of their students (Gordon, 2003;

Lupton, 2005; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). It does suggest that the combined effects of these differences make schooling in poorer communities in New Zealand a more challenging task on multiple levels, even if the expectation is that schools will deliver similar outcomes in student learning.

Despite the many descriptions of the challenges low-decile schools face in the literature, more often stigmatisation and condemnation, publically and politically, occurs when schools draw attention to the difficulties of their work. In fact, attempts to assert that poverty has direct impacts on learning are disputed as being excuses for inadequate teaching and poor school leadership in New Zealand (Parata, 2014a). The maintenance of such a tight focus on in-school factors in policy has negated much of the educational literature that could have informed education policy, while privileging some forms of research that are consistent with predetermined policy directions.

These school-improvement and effectiveness literatures offer both challenges and opportunities for educators to develop critical faculties in their pedagogical practices. Perspectives on teacher education and professional development, with regard to educational inequalities, have had a sustained focus in New Zealand on issues of culture and ethnicity. Demands for schools to respond to the needs of minority culture students highlight the structural changes required within schools in New Zealand, but these sometimes ignore the impact of low family incomes on educational outcomes (Bishop et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2005). In contrast, others arguing along similar lines (Valencia & Black, 2002, Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999), assert that both cultural and economic factors should inform teachers' understandings of their students.

Undoubtedly, individual teachers and schools are required to respond to minority and low income students and their families with openness and a willingness to analyse and critique their current modes of practice. These qualities should be distributed across the educational sector to support improvements in teacher education and professional development to develop effective forms pedagogy. But, this should also necessitate a culture of engagement with the teaching profession on the part of educational bureaucracies, policy makers, politicians, academics and the wider

public, in recognition of the embeddedness of formal schooling in wider social conditions and our shared collective responsibilities for the schooling of all children as present and future citizens.

Integrated school and society explanations of educational inequalities

This the final stream in the literature considered in this review. It marries both broader poverty alleviation with the need for change within schools. This literature argues that change in educational inequalities cannot be achieved by an in-school focus alone, or by a singular focus on improving the economic, social and cultural conditions of families outside schools (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Iachini, Plaspohler, Bean, & Wade-Mdivanian, 2010; Aubert, 2011; Flessa, 2007; Levin 2007; Raffo, 2011b; Rothstein, 2008). These authors marry the analyses of all literatures concerned with educational inequalities. They observe that children in their schooling cannot be isolated from the circumstances of their lives in schools, families and neighbourhoods.

Changes in service provision to low-income children are argued as being more likely to be effective and long-lasting when they include responses to issues arising within and outside schools; that is, in the social and economic conditions faced by schools, students, their families, communities and societies **and** in improving the quality and efficacy of teaching within schools across all domains of pedagogy and leadership (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010 ; Flessa 2007; Carpenter & Thrupp, 2011; Raffo, 2011b; Sahlberg, 2011). Research programmes conducted in this space are complex to formulate, and difficult to conduct in light of the uncertainties that accompany such open-ended research goals. At the same time, they also appear to offer opportunities for considering problems in different ways. It was this combination of qualities that drew me to consider a research proposal that involved multiple participants across different sites of action and interaction in education.

Locating this research project in the literature

The relative lack of research that crosses the boundaries of both school-based accounts and community perceptions of educational inequalities in New Zealand prompted my interest. While there are influential ethnographic studies that offer

insights into school life for students from low-socioeconomic families (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Nuttall, 2007; Willis, 1977), and explore the everyday practices of parents and teachers in supporting their children's education (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Lareau, 2000), they are relatively few. Many of their descriptions resonate with conditions in education in New Zealand, but there are findings which remain specific to the countries in which they were conducted.

The research I did find that explored the multiple contexts impacting on school function, often failed to elaborate on either the ideological and political contexts in which schools operated. The ethnographic study of Richmond Road School (May, 1994) provides an instance of research in New Zealand into the specific practices of an inner-city school, as it sought develop pedagogical responses to its multilingual community and incorporate a shift toward bilingualism in education. This research offered real insights into the work of the school in developing and implementing innovative pedagogies. However, in its concentration on teaching and leadership practices, many of the ideological, political and social contexts remained in the background and unexplored.

As I explain in the next chapter, I was interested in the impact of policies and political events on the work of schooling in New Zealand during a highly politicised period within the education sector. Policies were enacted to redress educational inequalities during the time of the research development and implementation with impacts on the work of schools, teachers, and parents. Developing a research project to explore the nexus of policy and practices within a specific locale, offered possibilities for new insights that incorporated the views of educators, parents and polity in relationship to one another. Chapters four and five outline how this research proposal was developed and implemented, to include these contexts through all the complexities and challenges involved.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: ACCOUNTING FOR CONTEXT AND COMPLEXITY

Introduction

This research began with question: why and how do inequalities in educational achievement arise? In my preparatory reading for the development of this project, it was evident that this question has generated a great deal of research and commentary in terms of gender, class, race, culture and economic status. My reading suggested that disparities in educational outcomes are woven into conditions of wider social inequality, rather than standing apart from them, and educational inequalities are characterised by multiple social contexts. These contexts create complex conditions contributing to educational inequalities, defying the search for either a singular causation, or solution.

However large bodies of the literature focus on specific practices performed by individual students, parents, teachers and school leaders within schools and their communities in efforts to improve educational inequalities. In determining how best to achieve change in the field of education in New Zealand, the emphasis in both research and policy has favoured explanations that lie within this school effectiveness and improvement literature, contributing to a focus on the actions of school leaders and teachers, but often decontextualised from the differing conditions in which schools in richer and poorer communities operate (Thrupp, 1999).

As my preparation for this research progressed, my questioning became concerned to understand why inequalities have proven so persistent, despite the efforts of so many. I also became curious about how educational inequalities are experienced by those working with groups most at risk of educational underachievement on a daily basis; that is teachers, students, parents and support workerscomprising a low-decile school community. I surmised that their analyses of how and why educational inequalities occur, and persist, could be informative. These groups experience the realities of educational inequalities in their work, which necessarily coalesces around the constraints and supports they experience in their teaching, learning and parenting. I was therefore anxious to speak with them about their perceptions of what could, and should, be done to assist them in achieving the best educational outcomes possible.

I understood that information provided to me by participants in response to these lines of enquiry would need to be placed in contexts that acknowledged both the relational nature of education and its historicity (Angus, 1986; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Considerations of how educational inequalities arise and why they endure, suggest the need for critical explorations of the many relationships embedded in compulsory education and these relationships have histories, which in turn contribute to the shape of present structures and conditions:

> …any understanding of present contexts in which continuity and
> change are negotiated or contested requires an understanding, also, of
> the relevant history which led to those contexts (Angus, 1986, p.74).

To provide a description of the present state of education alone, either quantitatively or qualitatively, obscures an account of both the contingencies embedded in the present as well as continuities with the past. Power relations, utilised to assert current conditions and implicated in planning future agendas, then remain unexamined (Smythe, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2006). The effect in totality, supports a socially conservative agenda in education, which ensures the ongoing reproduction of educational inequalities.

Critical realism: a theoretical basis for the research

A critical realist position, as proposed by Bhaskar (1989) appeared to me to be best suited to the shape of the enquiry I envisaged, and the knowledge and understanding I desired. Critical realism recognises the real consequences of success or failure in formal schooling for individuals, but additionally, it seeks to understand the reasons why some groups are predisposed to either condition. Descriptive and quantitative data enable the contours of the problem of educational inequalities to be defined, and are valued for this function, but critical realism asserts that other forms of analysis are also needed to explore why and how these conditions have arisen (Clegg, 2005). It therefore offers opportunities for generating knowledge commensurate with the complexities inherent in educational inequalities, while also creating a space for considerations of why it matters that some groups of children underachieve in education. In acknowledging the reality of social injustice in educational outcomes, critical realism is concerned to support transformative change, based on the fullest appraisal of current conditions. This stance appears congruent with the transformational impulse of a universal education system, which argues children's access to knowledge in formal schooling can enlarge their opportunities for learning beyond those available to them in their families and communities.

Critical realism seeks to achieve its aims by arguing for a nuanced conception of knowledge generation based on:

> … an understanding of the relationship between social structures and human agency that is based on a *transformational* conception of social activity, and which avoids both volunteerism and reification. At the same time, they (critical realists) advance an understanding of the social as essentially consisting in or depending upon *relations*. This view is in opposition to both atomistic individualism and undifferentiated collectivism. (Bhaskar, 1989, p.3, italics in original text).

In incorporating a consideration of structural constraints within the methodological approach to the question of educational inequalities, their real effects are acknowledged. Concommitantly, situating these structures in relationships and

interconnections between individuals and groups, the capacity of individuals to act with purpose and creative agency is recognised. In giving witness to individual and collective forms of agency, possibilities are signalled for disrupting the status quo and transforming the structural contours currently shaping educational inequalities.

Such an epistemological approach argues for a multifaceted research methodology, capable of generating both breadth and depth of data to support its aims. This approach supports the use of quantitative data and empirical research methodologies, but demands a critical approach to the knowledge generated. It specifically challenges the dominance of empirical science as a scientific ideology, by arguing that its findings are often communicated in ways that mask their social basis:

> For both experiences, together with the facts they ground, and the conjunctions that, when apprehended in sense-experience, provide empirical grounds for laws, are social products (Bhaskar, 1989, p.22).

When such empirically derived facts are positioned as definitive, they become solidified and reified as existing beyond time and across all circumstances. In doing so, the social ideations and motivations generating the initial enquiries are rendered invisible, and so too, the links between the questions asked, the social conditions giving rise to the questions, and relationship of both questions and conditions to the facts generated. The findings of empirical research, promoted as the source of truth, or as providing the only compelling explanations, become stretched beyond their explanatory capabilities when social complexities and ambiguities are rendered opaque.

The way in which empirical measures of achievement become equated with learning in education provides just such an example when policy makers, educators and parents elide the two unproblematically. In doing so, the socially constructed nature of such measures becomes lost from view, other forms of learning fail to be acknowledged and some forms of learning and knowledge become privileged, most often in accordance with a dominant social and cultural structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). For example, while the empirical data concerned with student achievement says many things about teaching and learning, care must be taken to

excavate that knowledge in terms of the historical, cultural and social contexts in which measures of achievement are developed and implemented. Furthermore, relying on the certainty of "known facts' to act, without careful examination of their bases, may lead to their misapplication. This in turn is likely to amplify the risk of unintended consequences and/or failure to achieve intended goals.

In closing down avenues for exploration about how some actions work in achieving specific ends, the ability to act responsively in different environments becomes compromised. Bhaskar (1989) argues that applying forms of knowledge derived from specific, controlled and closed experimental systems, to uncontrolled, open and contingent systems operating in the real world, is epistemologically suspect. Acting as if facts in social science are immutable, inevitably limits possibilities for both generating knowledge and appreciating its significance for social action. Critical realism, in contrast, argues for the validity of knowledge generated by inquiry, but directed to opening up possibilities for scrutiny, which then contributes to an ongoing critical position.

The implications of this stance on my research and on my methodological choices was considerable. I was impelled to read widely, not just the descriptive data concerned with the incidence and correlates of educational inequalities, but also their history in relation to educational and social/cultural systems of the past. The centrality of education in the development of Western nation states, its part in the identity formation of citizenship and civil society, the embeddedness of educational systems in the economic order and in systems of social/cultural reproduction, argued for the need for close examinations of context in any claims made. While setting out on the research with these ambitious aims resulted a complex research project, characterised by an uncomfortable level of uncertainty, it also offered opportunities for learning. In implementing the research, the care expressed by participants, both for the processes of teaching and learning and the needs of the children they encountered in their day-to-day interactions, their thoughtful engagement in the research process and the wealth of information they provided, also demanded no less.

This rest of this chapter explores the impact of events in the field of education on my research planning and its implementation. In doing so, it offers a means of explaining

the relationship between political ideology and policy formation, and the development of this research project. I discuss how ideology impacts on an ontological understanding of the world, and how this in turn dictates which forms of knowledge about the world are sought and created. In this manner, ontology, including ideological understandings of how the world should and could be ordered, is then related to the epistemological basis of research agendas. In critiquing the current dominance of neoliberalism as an ideology, I argue for alternative ideological space informed by care ethics, to enable issues embedded in educational inequalities to be explored more fully in the research.

At the same time, I also include some analysis of my own position in relation to the research processes I initiated. It is important for me to acknowledge the impact of my own past experiences and modes of thinking on my approach to the research. These contributed to the types of questions that preoccupied me at the outset of the research and the organisation of the research project. Experiences, and my reasoned and emotional response to them, helped to develop my ideological stance and this informed my perceptions of the unjustness of differential educational outcomes for children, based on ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. They also motivated a critical engagement with policies and processes directed to achieving a more equitable education system. I therefore seek to elaborate my position as clearly as possible in order that others might make a reasonable evaluation of how I came to the questions I asked in the research, how the research was implemented and the findings that resulted.

Policy, ideology and the research programme

Preliminary reading of events in the media in New Zealand prior to 2012 -2013 gave witness to the contested ground in which education policy was formulated and implemented. The research, in its phases of planning and implementation, took place during a period of open resistance by many teachers to policies designed expressly to address educational inequalities. The principal policy plank controversially rested on the implementation on the standardised assessments of achievement in primary school years (Key, 2008; McKinnon, 2010; Tolley,2008).

Over this time, all agreed about the reality of educational inequalities, the population of affected students and the need for the state to respond effectively. However, it was clear that despite this agreement, deep divisions existed in how educational inequalities should be addressed. In the debates and challenges to official power and government policies, the ideological bases of policy positions became visible. The deep, structuring effects of neoliberal ideology on the educational system were revealed in the contention that improvements in the performance of individual schools, teachers and school leaders were the solution to the underperformance of children from Maori, Pasifika and low-socioeconomic backgrounds. These contentions align with neoliberal conceptions of an ideal society comprised of autonomous and responsible individuals allied to an accountable public sector, which efficiently uses public money to provide social services.

In the early phases of planning for the research and in my readings of media accounts of events, I was led to the substantial literature critiquing the impacts of neoliberalism on the education system. These readings enabled me to make sense of the divergent positions taken by the various groups promoting, or resisting, government policy. However, this critique, while immensely valuable in determining why various aspects of the education sector failed to meet the needs of students, schools and their parent communities, did not offer pathways for viewing how, and on what basis, the system could be better ordered.

The exception to this position was the literature arising from the policy initiative Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2007). The key elements of this programme of promoting deeper engagement with Maori students, supportive and respectful relationships between students and teachers and the development of teaching practices based in tikanga Maori, located processes of learning within a nexus of care. Teachers, in offering challenge and critique to students within established relations of care, positively supported changes in student learning behaviours and cognitions. Care was initiated and modelled by teachers in the first instance, drawing responses from students in the second, which enabled teachers to foster students' perceptions of themselves as capable and competent learners as a consequence. The requirement for teachers to initiate and support this climate of individualised relational care recognised their greater power within the education system over their students.

While this policy tended to remain within the paradigm of school improvement, it nevertheless pointed to ways in which respect and care in relations across power differentials in the education sector could provide pathways to change. It promoted the beginnings of an alternative ideological basis for understanding the education sector and how processes could be enacted to model ethical behaviour in the wider education sector.

Locating education within a paradigm of care enabled me to envisage the research within an interactive and interdependent network of actors, and as a collaborative project from beginning to end. Collaborative efforts based in caring relations appeared to offer a challenge to the dominance of neoliberalism as an ideology in education and prompted the search for an alternative ideological position within which to frame this research. This had implications for my methodological approach to the research, and is explored in more detail in the following section.

Ideology and research methodology

The impact of ideology in research concerned with educational inequalities influences methodological approaches chosen by researchers and research sponsors (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). Demands for research utility to be demonstrable, tend to favour projects directed toward providing descriptions of, and explanations for, specific behavioural practices and processes, to render them amenable to prediction and control (Angus, 1986; Christians, 2000). However, by excluding from consideration research projects that critically examine the cultural and social structures shaping the relational field of education and the relations of power and dominance that support their maintenance and reproduction, research questions remain lodged within a dominant neoliberal ideology. Smythe et al., (2006) argue that this contributes to an inherently conservative research agenda, which substantively legitimates the structural conditions of the present in education. The effect is to severely limit opportunities, which likely contributes to the relative stasis in achieving change in remedying disparate educational outcomes for different groups of children. The utilitarian research questions favoured by neoliberalism in

its quest to manage educational outcomes, privilege forms of knowledge generation that fail to engage with issues required for substantive change.

Neoliberalism's focus on the creation of competitive markets in education, comprised of autonomous schools, further promotes research conducted within these parameters. Efficient school function, based on efficient pedagogy, is envisaged as improving educational outcomes for students while concomitantly ensuring that each school remains competitive within an education market (Gordon & Whitty, 1997). However, the goal of efficiency can never be assumed in a competitive market. It must always be proven in performance (Ball, 2003). Consequently, research programmes that enable teaching and learning to be defined and refined in measurable terms, are deemed fit for purpose because they putatively offer this proof. Outcome measures are developed and applied, and thereafter taken as evidential shorthand for teaching performance (Ball, 2003). They also become a proxy for student learning in assessing school function, because they enable comparisons between individual students, teachers and schools (Thrupp & White, 2013).

These measures and comparisons then become the basis of the ongoing reproduction of competitive markets in education. They achieve this by excluding other contributing factors from consideration, creating a closed system of definitions of educational success and the means of evaluating successful teaching and learning. For successful schools operating within the system, there is little incentive to examine other contributory factors for their apparent successes (Thrupp, 2007a), while the repertoire of strategies for assisting less successful schools are narrowed and constrained by the necessity of improving results within the terms of existing processes of evaluation.

Neoliberal conceptions of education may be happy to harness demographic data to describe the problem population in educational inequalities. These sources of data suggest that educational inequalities are linked to the social conditions of different communities in which schools are located. However, neoliberalism continues to place its remedies within the sphere of the school and practices of teachers and school leaders. It therefore assumes that the direction of practice and influence in the field of education is substantively unidirectional; the actions that matter are those that are

instituted by schools and those who work in them, thus stripping their actions of situational contexts.

In contrast, more communitarian ideological stances pose different approaches to the issue of educational inequalities in acknowledging:

> We are born into a sociocultural universe where values, moral commitments and existential meanings are negotiated dialogically. (Christians, 2000, p.144).

Correspondingly, ethical inquiry ranges from interrogating the contribution of systemic factors to educational inequalities, to exploring the constructed nature of the educational project. These approaches steer research activities toward social transformation by working with communities, and the individuals that comprise them. They offer the potential for scrutinising and critiquing oppressive power relations (Christians, 2000). Drawing on Freire, Christians argues that only when those groups who lack power, are viewed as vital in co-constructing solutions, will true reformation and transformation occur. To do otherwise limits possibilities for either identifying the real nature of problems, or the range of remedies required.

The questions that arise from communitarian and critical ideological standpoints in research, therefore elaborate on, and challenge how power works to produce and reproduce inequalities in education. As a vital adjunct to this critique, they also include an examination of how power is resisted, subverted or co-opted to offer possibilities for transformative change (Angus, 1986; Bhaskar, 1989). Ideology and its political expression are not therefore, confined to the choice of topic and the framing of research questions; they also exert their influence on the methodology and methods chosen to research these questions, thereby impacting on the kinds of data and findings obtained (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The predominance of modernist accounts of scientific endeavours in Western cultures has tended to begin from an assumption of positive progress, arising from increases in universally applicable scientific information. The certainty conferred by

this knowledge is used to advance greater freedom in learning, which is also steeped in discourses of individual rights. In combination, they create a research ideology termed as "scientism" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.11). This ideology claims to offer universally true explanations for empirically observed and measured phenomena, which transcend the boundaries of class, culture, place and time. Research methods, which make no claims to either certainty of findings, or the possibility of universal applicability, provide thin gruel for a polity and public wanting definitive answers. Accordingly, research findings, which make universal claims, are legitimated and accorded greater value for the certainties they offer (Angus, 1986; Denzin, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

This is witnessed by the promotion of evidence-based practice, prevalent in medicine, as advantageous in education (Hattie, 2009). Evidence-based practice creates a hierarchy of research methodologies in terms of their contribution to 'true' knowledge and the trustworthiness of findings. The empirical, double blind, randomised, controlled trial is at the apex of this hierarchy of methodologies, representing the pinnacle of research truthfulness. At the same time, such evidence of "what works" is argued as being not only the gold standard of practice, but as vital in informing education policy development (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.1).

Research questions, methodologies and findings that do not conform with scientism are less valued, if not devalued entirely, not only because are not congruent with the prevailing scientific ideology, but for the challenge they pose to the epistemological basis of empirically based research findings (Denzin, 2009; Denzin Lincoln, 2008; Hammersley, 2001). They introduce elements of complexity, which destabilise the certainties of empirical research, challenge the completeness of empirically based explanations, and insert alternative possibilities in reasoning how empirical research reaches its conclusions (Smythe et al., 2006).

Locating the ideological self in the research

This section identifies how I have ideologically approached this research and the implications for its design. I was concerned to develop a project that offered a means of incorporating the different viewpoints of the range of participants in the

educational programme. I understood this as being crucial in any attempt to examine how educational inequalities occur and why they are perpetuated. I wanted to draw on the observations and experiences of those most intimately engaged in supporting children to learn. But, I also recognised that there are valuable insights to be derived from data generated by quantitative research and reports that describe the contours of educational inequalities in New Zealand. I understood that these data should be used critically and with care, but believed that they would nevertheless contribute to a broad understanding of how and why educational inequalities are sustained in the field of education. It became clear that a qualitative methodology, incorporating existing descriptive data from quantitative approaches, would be best suited to the research aims.

In making decisions about my research approach to the question of educational inequalities, I also recognised that I was not a disinterested and neutral observer. I had brought with me some suppositions of my own about why this topic was important and what sorts of data would generate knowledge about the topic. Janesick (2000) argues that every research project is conceived, planned an implemented within ideology and no researcher can claim to be disconnected from the world as they know it, or from their favoured explanations about how it does, and should, operate. In recognition of the impact of these standpoints, it is important that they are stated in the research, to enable research findings to be read critically by others (Anderson, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

My subjective responses to media accounts and concerns arising from past experiences, combined to make research into educational inequalities a compelling topic for me. I had experienced the impacts of neoliberal ideology, including its characteristics of efficiency, measurement and audit in identifying best practice, as necessary to good health service provision, but I had also experienced, as a clinician and middle-manager in health, the shortcomings of these foci in accounting for the aspects of good health-care embedded in the relational experiences of patients, nurses, midwives and aides. Their work together, in emotionally intense, embodied, communicative and caring relationships with one another, created the framework within which medicalised tasks and the work of promoting healing and well-being were performed. The importance of caring relationships as a framework for health

work, was most evident in its absence; dissatisfactions expressed by both health-care workers and patients about the quality of health-care aggregated on perceived failure to fulfil patient needs for caring and responsive interactions. Such complaints reinforced the fundamental nature of relational care in health service provision.

I therefore came to the question of educational inequalities from communitarian and relational ideological stance, which asserts the need for critical, attentive and caring engagement with the conditions of service provision. My ideological stance also contained a degree of scepticism about neoliberal orderings of social institutions. I had experienced the difficulties of ensuring that resource allocation recognised the prerogatives of care work within systems focused on efficiency in the performance of tasks and procedures as the preeminent mark of quality health-care provision. This standpoint predisposed me to be curious about how the relationships of care in education were being supported or constrained by policy initiatives similarly concerned with efficiency as the principle construct of efficacy in education.

My critical standpoint also draws on feminist analyses, which interrogate the hidden workings of social power (Harding, 1993; Smith, 1999). As a female health worker, the gendered nature of health-care work was inescapably present. It permeated the workplace relations between managers, medical staff and the overwhelmingly female workforce delivering face-to-face health-care. These relations derived from a mix of past, gendered, power relations that privileged the voices of male medical staff, and recent managerial developments in the organisation of health-care. In combination, they struggled to measure the quality of the care-work performed by a substantially feminised workforce. Feminist critiques and analyses have proven essential in revealing the silencing of women's voices in social organisations, the constraints on their capacity to act on their own behalf, and the devaluing of the work they undertake on behalf of others (Kittay & Feder, 2002; Tronto, 1993). In the process, feminist accounts have illuminated the disparate workings of power across gendered social groups.

Such processes have proven useful in examining the silencing of other voices as well, provoking examinations of groups characterised by a lack of access to mechanisms of power. These groups are largely, although not exclusively, analogous with those

experiencing educational inequalities: minority ethnic groupings including migrant populations (Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999); indigenous peoples marginalised by the effects of colonisation (Shields, et al., 2005; Smith, 1999); and working-class families and communities in poverty (Anyon, 2005; Horgan, 2009b; O'Brien, et al., 2011; Pfeffer, 2008; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Such analyses have been used to argue for more inclusive and responsive practices in education as well as calling for an amelioration of the effects of classed and raced poverty, which act to stigmatise and exclude groups from sources of social power.

Revealing the devaluing, side-lining or silencing of voices of groups offers not only the means of identifying discriminatory structures in society, but also points to mechanisms maintaining and reproducing privilege in education (Ball, 2002; Thrupp, 2007a). In giving critical attention to the workings of power and differentiating all the groups similarly excluded or advantaged, the ideological, political and social contours of educational inequalities are explicated.

My critical engagement with the problem of educational inequalities also compelled an affiliation with humanism and the embodied rights of individuals within a society. This critique gives recognition to the real effects of differential educational outcomes on the lives of individual men, women and children. These effects then create a demand for social justice within a framework of differential access to the social goods that both contribute to educational success, and arise as a consequence of it.

The demand for greater equity in education, extends across groups disadvantaged by their classed, gendered and ethnic identities. However, achieving this equity and obtaining rights, necessarily occurs in practices enacted in relationships with others in social institutions at the level of the family, neighbourhood, school, region and nationally. The quality of these relationships, across the full range of different social identifications and associated gradations of social power, becomes central to transformative change. The embeddedness of education within wider social, cultural and economic conditions suggests that transformative change in education will not only have impact on more, or less, equitable access to social, economic and cultural resources, but the field of education itself will be transformed by systemic changes, reflective of greater, or lesser systemic egalitarianism.

Conclusion

The ideological standpoint I bring is therefore not a singular, cohesive, and all-encompassing view of how I understand the world to be. Rather, it draws on several conceptions, which influences choices in methodology and methods as evidenced in the following sections of this chapter. The shape of this research project could very easily have been different, but for me, coming from where I stood at the outset, a qualitative methodology that reached into relational nexus of polity, policy and everyday praxis in the field of education offered opportunities for fleshing out the quantitative and descriptive accounts that predominate in educational research. I envisaged that such an approach would enable me to explore how and why educational inequalities are produced and reproduced in New Zealand, and what constrains and supports possibilities for transformational change within the nexus of day-to-day relationships in schooling.

In considering how best to investigate this question, the predominance of research focused on a single locus of enquiry and specific remedial actions appeared to obscure the complexities inherent in the incidence of educational inequalities. Research focused on the efficacy of specific pedagogical approaches or styles of school leadership, decontextualised from systems and conditions operating locally and nationally, seemed likely to continue to offer the prospect of piecemeal and partial responses at best.

My background in health-care undoubtedly informed my sensitivity to this point; the delivery of health services in New Zealand has also been plagued by persistent health inequalities, despite a focus on raising standards of evidence based practice and its competent performance by health-care professionals. However, inequalities in health-care outcomes arise from a myriad of factors. Without understating the importance of improvements in performance of individuals within systems of health-care, such improvements are known to be insufficient to address the underlying drivers of ill health for groups of people who experience cultural and/or social stigma, especially when accompanied by economic hardship. Effective changes in the health in the most disadvantaged cannot be achieved by improvements in health-care practices alone, but require changes in the social conditions in which many live.

I was therefore predisposed to the consideration that a wide array of factors in and out of schools could contribute to educational inequalities. By seeking to place the performance of education within all these contexts, I understood that this would necessarily create a challenging level of complexity in the research. But, I surmised that it could enhance its validity, if I elicited the depth of information I sought from research participants. When supplemented by appropriate textual data, critically analysed and written with sufficient skill, there remained the possibility that the research could offer a valid and useful account of educational inequalities, which could then inform the wider education sector.

To achieve this aim, a wide angle methodological lens was required to gather in the variety of factors, events, interconnections and interrelationships impinging on the work of schools as social institutions. At the same time, creating a coherent account would necessitate a consolidating focal point to illuminate these contexts. Consequently, I surmised that working in depth with a single low-decile primary school would provide a vehicle for demonstrating the complex and multifaceted contexts impacting on the performance of schooling in a low-decile community.

A qualitative approach to the research, piecing together a number of different methods, appeared to be best placed to create the kind of knowledge I was seeking. It offered a means of elucidating the interconnections, relationships, particularities of place and time, situations and events that inform the performance of teaching and learning in a low-decile school community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As a researcher, I would be able to retain the capacity to respond during the implementation of the research to unanticipated lines of enquiry arising from the data. Equally, should the chosen methods prove unequal to their assigned tasks, I would be able to recalibrate my research strategies within the range of ethically sanctioned research activities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

This qualitative research approach is described Denzin & Lincoln (2008, p5) as "bricolage". It allows the researcher to be led through the process by the research participants, rather than seeking to confine and limit participant responses to specific and predetermined topics for consideration. I viewed this as a means for highlighting

the knowledge attained by those most intimately involved in caring for children in the years of their formal primary schooling and of gaining insight into how parents and educators understood and responded to the needs of their school community. At the same time, it allowed me to remain flexible and responsive to the possibility of unforeseen directions arising in the research process.

Acknowledging the knowledge and experiences participants could bring to the table in the research, still required me to exercise my critical faculties. An ongoing process of interrogation into the workings of power was necessary to understand how educational inequalities have arisen and been reproduced in New Zealand. The data generated in the research could then be placed in contexts of events and interactions within and across the field of education, to elucidate the ideological underpinnings of power: the forms of action that power promoted; and the chains of circumstances and actions that were provoked. Such an approach inevitably raised questions of social justice for consideration in a critical analysis of the outcomes of the workings of power, and offered the prospect of identifying both strengths and weaknesses in the performance of education across the sector (Anderson, 1989; Smythe, et al. 2006).

Adopting this stance in research methodology, therefore privileged the everyday praxis of students, parents, teachers and support workers as a source of experiential knowledge of schooling. It did not exclude actions from critique; rather it placed them within their contexts (Smythe, et al. 2006). Crucially, it also placed these actions within the nexus of supports, challenges and constraints shaping all individual performances of educational work, not just teachers and students (Angus, 1986; Smythe et al. 2006). At the same time, critique recognised and valued the intentions, service, and effort expended in the professional work of performing day-to-day teaching and learning, and looked to build on both successes and shortcomings in achieving identified goals.

In recognition of the complexity of the research process in its implementation, the following chapter outlines the challenges, changes and adaptations made in the conduct of the research. The narrative provided bears witness to the messiness and uncertainty accompanying a state of unknowingness in social research. Explorations

of 'how' and 'why' questions take on a life of their own in opening up some areas for examination as others come to a close.

CHAPTER FIVE

MOVING FROM METHODOLOGY TO RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The processes of research planning required decisions about which methods would be required to generate the kinds of knowledge I wanted to pursue. However, planning also required an iterative process of negotiation between the understandings I hoped could be generated by the research, the kinds of resources I could draw on to accomplish it, the degree to which I could gain the trust and participation of skilled and willing informants within a school and its community, and events and issues that arose in the research in the field of education during a time of change and upheaval.

As discussed in the previous section, the depth of data I sought argued for a qualitative multi-method approach in working with a single school. I gauged that this would allow me to remain flexible during an uncertain period in the education sector. I pursued ethical consent for a variety of research methods: face-to-face interviews; document analyses; observations derived from time spent within the school by invitation. This process of adapting methods of inquiry to the circumstance is described by Denzin & Lincoln (2011, p.4) as piecing together "sets of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation". This description most clearly describes the responsiveness required in the research process in this chapter, when I discuss each method and the ethical issues that arose for different groups of participants. It is further reinforced when I describe issues that

arose in implementing the methods chosen and how I had to adapt the conduct of the research in response to events and ethical dilemmas.

Face-to-face interviews

Planning for the research relied heavily on in-depth, face-to-face interviews as a means of gaining insight into the factors that supported or constrained the work of those working within the school and its community. In this section, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face interviewing, followed by an account of the specific issues that arose from interviewing different groups of participants: teachers; parents; and support workers. I also include issues pertaining to interviewing children, despite not including them in the research for reasons explained later in this chapter. The work I did in planning to include children in the research influenced how I understood schooling and its future impacts, and served to guide much of the work I did complete.

In-depth interviews offer opportunities for researchers and individual participants to explore the research topic. It enables the interviewer to draw on the lived experiences of participants and to present their understandings and perspectives of the research topic (Johnson, 2002). Giving voice to individuals engaged in the work of education appeared important to me given that debates had often, in my view, lacked such direct input. Teacher and parent groups had responded to events and policy changes in education, but the views, arguments and proposals of unions and professional groups representing teachers and principals, were derogated as "ideological" (Radio New Zealand, 2009a), and as providing partisan and self-serving analyses. This effectively side-lined the critiques offered by these groups and I envisaged that this research would provide opportunities to willing participants to redress this situation.

In-depth face-to-face interviewing creates opportunities for exploring difficult and emotionally-laden issues:

> But if one is interested in questions of greater depth, where the
> knowledge sought is often taken for granted and not readily articulated
> by most members, where the research question involves highly

conflicted emotions, where different individuals or groups involved in the same line of activity have complicated multiple perspectives on some phenomenon, then in-depth interviewing is likely the best approach, despite its known imperfections (Johnson, 2002, p.105).

In providing opportunities for participants to talk about the issues they faced on their own terms and in light of their own experiences, I hoped that within the bounds of research confidentiality, they could discuss the realities of their day-to-day work in a low-decile school.

The value of in-depth interviewing lies less in its ability to identify truisms pertaining to a topic, and more in its ability to generate richness of data. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the topic by generating accounts that resonate with the experiences of others, exploring complexities and opening up possibilities for viewing a topic in different ways. A productive dialogue between an informant, an interviewer and research readers is stimulated, which mitigates against its limitation as a research method (Johnson, 2002). It gives the informant, the interviewer and readers of the research the opportunity to explore topics of interest in ways simply not possible within more structured interview formats, where questions are predetermined. For these reasons, in-depth interviewing appeared best suited for the exploration of the complex issues embedded in educational inequalities, at a time when polarised and simplistic positions explaining them predominated in the public sphere.

Despite the advantages of in-depth interviewing, there are caveats that can be attached to its value. The quality of the material an in-depth interview generates remains very dependent on the ability of the interviewer to establish a good rapport with the research participant (Johnson, 2002; Opdenakker, 2006). Achieving the aim of an enriched understanding of the research topic demands commitment from the interviewer to create intimacy, by listening attentively and framing questions to prompt and open up the interview topic (Johnson, 2002). Maintaining this double focus is demanding of the interviewer, potentially leading to missed opportunities in following up on aspects raised by the participant. It therefore requires a degree of both confidence and dexterity to maintain the flow of information from the

interviewee, giving space for unexpected insights to be generated, while also being in tune with the research topic and directed toward its aims.

The conduct of a face-to-face interview leaves little time for the participant to consider questions posed by the interviewer (Opdennacker, 2006). The spontaneity of the interview can therefore limit the responses provided. This limitation can be ameliorated, at least in part, by providing opportunities to revise, delete or add to the material provided in the interview (Appendices 4 and 8). However, this makes additional demands on the informant and the offer may not be picked up.

The incidental demands of in-depth interviewing on time and resourcing generally result in small sample sizes (Opdennaker, 2006). In addition, the representativeness of samples is also difficult to guarantee, where participation in the research is premised on volunteering. These factors combine together and suggest that such findings will not have the power of a large-scale survey in being generalisable to a whole population, but this lack of generalisability is offset by the richness of descriptions and the depth of insights offered.

I envisaged teachers as being key informants in identifying both constraints and supports for their educational work. They experienced the realities of teaching students from Maori and low-socioeconomic families daily. I surmised that they would be able to speak with authority about the issues they faced, based on their familiarity with them. Their expertise and knowledge would be invaluable in gaining an understanding of the complexities involved in efforts to redress educational inequalities and respectful engagement with them was vital to the research.

My status as a professional outsider in the field of education raised issues in interviewing educators in the school. In thinking through how I would approach these interviews, I felt it was important to ensure that prospective interviewees understood that I was not undertaking this work to make direct evaluations of their teaching practices, an activity I was ill-suited to perform. Rather, I was asking for them to tell me about the conditions of their work that impacted on their educational mission: where they felt they had developed successful strategies to mitigate the difficulties they faced; where resources and supports were lacking for them to achieve their best

work. Providing these explanations to me as an outsider offered the possibility of an account of their work that could also be usefully disseminated more widely to others, both within and outside the field of education.

I did envisage that issues of trust would be extremely important in seeking to interview teachers. Media coverage of issues surrounding the introduction of government policy in education had been prominent and relationships between primary school teachers, politicians and Ministry of Education officials had been difficult. I therefore anticipated the need for an extended process to ensure that potential participants understood the research aims, my motivations for undertaking the research, and how it would be conducted, including the ethical dimensions of consent and confidentiality.

Accordingly, I explained my motivations for the research in two meetings prior to undertaking the interviews and extended an invitation to potential participants to contribute to the research design. In addition, every interview was preceded by both written and verbal explanations of the research before obtaining written consent (Appendices, 1, 2, 6, and 7). Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the process at any stage in the interview. I explained that I would then submit to them, if they wished, a transcription of the interview, derived from an audiotape where consent for audio recording was forthcoming (Appendices, 2, 4, 7and 8), or from notes taken during the interview where consent for audio recording was withheld (Appendices, 2 and 7). At this point the participants could amend or delete material as they wished, or once again withdraw entirely from the process. In fact, while all the teachers wanted to review a transcript/written up notes, only one teacher made a minor amendment to the written notes provided.

I was careful to explain that the research consenting procedures included protecting both their individual identities and that of the school in all subsequent research writing. Where they provided personal details that would have acted as identifiers, I have not used this material in either feedback summaries or written representations. I explained that I would also submit final writings to the school to guard against inadvertently beaching their confidence. I was hopeful that given these provisos,

teachers would value the opportunity to talk about their work on their own terms with an interested and sympathetic listener.

Finally, in each of the interviews with teachers, I began with biographical questions that could be answered easily by participants. This allowed the interview to gain momentum, while also focusing attention on the interviewee. In the case of teachers, I asked them to explain to me how they came to be working as a teacher and working at Watea School. For most of the interviewees, little else was required to prompt an exploration of what drew them to teaching and how that was being expressed in their current roles within Watea School. It created a reflective space in which I could then simply ask for elaborations of the frustrations, difficulties and challenges they faced, as well as those aspects of their work within Watea School that they valued.

The interviews with teachers took place over a single day. The Principal organised teacher cover in the school, allowing me to conduct seven interviews over nine hours. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this plan. On the one hand, I could explore themes in the research with a deepening immersion in the issues as they were raised. On the other hand, with no breaks at all through the day for me, it demanded a period of sustained concentration. That this was possible at all is a tribute to the skill of the participating teachers and support workers as communicators, in providing accounts of their work that were impassioned, entertaining and illuminating.

In the case of the Principal, participation was an ongoing process. Discussions took place throughout the research period, some of which were not audio recorded. I took notes each time we spoke together and ensured that these notes were reviewed by the Principal, gaining his consent for any material used in the research. In addition, I have submitted chapters both in draft and in completion for review to ensure that confidentiality has been preserved, both for the school and the individuals involved in its work. We therefore had the opportunity to revisit the topic over months, offering opportunities for clarifying or expanding on the information provided. This level of commitment to the research process significantly enlarged the quality of the data, enabling the research to remain responsive to events as they were being played out within the sector.

I understood that it would be equally as important to the research to speak with parents. They also support their children in their schooling on a day-to-day basis, and therefore, would be able to draw on these experiences in evaluating the work of Watea School. This would provide information about parents' perceptions of the value of education and their expectations for their children in education.

In approaching the interviews with parents, I was mindful of their status in education. Parents are both agents and consumers of education services. They can have a vital impact on their children's achievements in education, for good or ill. They are therefore, individually responsible for the choices they make on behalf of their own children, but they are also envisaged as having a collective responsibility to the whole school community. This is formally recognised in their participation in democratically elected parent representatives to BOTs, but is also informally recognised in the school's expectation of parents that they will ensure that children are sufficiently socialised to the demands of formal schooling. The role of parents in education is therefore one of responsibility, which requires a depth of knowledge to ensure it is discharged with conviction and competence.

Supporting children in education is also just one of many parental responsibilities, some of which are discharged in complex and difficult conditions for families in low-decile school communities in New Zealand. Privileging children's education when there are anxieties about the sufficiency of household resources, is often difficult and requires considerable skill in managing day to day exigencies. The immediacy of present needs competes with the long-term project of education, creating difficult dilemmas for parents. I was therefore interested in how parents sustained their support for their children's education under these circumstances, how they perceived the school as working with them in educating their children, and their views on what could be done to enhance their children's learning.

Parents, in addition to demands posed by their social conditions, were also being asked to discharge their role in a period of dissent and confusion in education in 2012-2013. The conflicting claims to expertise of politicians, academics, media commentators and educators during the time of the research, and the different options

they offered for supporting children in education created a difficult environment for parental decision-making.

Not being a teacher was an advantage in interviewing parents. In one sense, I operated as an insider, because I too had shared their experience of negotiating the education system. My past experiences had given me some appreciation of what is asked of parents and how complex it can be for them to negotiate their responsibilities when, on the one hand, they are perceived as vital to educational success, and on the other, they operate substantially outside the day-to-day work of the school. At the same time, I was careful to acknowledge that my experiences were in the past and I could not assume that the conditions that prevailed in the 1990's could be simply read within current conditions.

In addition to my own parenting and educational experiences, I could also draw on my years of working in communities as a community health professional. I therefore, felt confident about my ability to establish rapport with parents as the necessary precursor to the interview. I began in each of the interviews by carefully explaining the research aims, consenting procedures and confidentiality requirements (Appendices, 2 and 4). I then began by asking parents how and why they choose Watea School for their children to attend. Again, this opened a space for exploring their expectations of the school, their hopes for their children in education and how well these were being met. It was equally effective in creating a flow within the interview, which then allowed me to explore more intimate questions with parents, such as how their past experiences of schooling had impacted on their relationships with Watea School and their roles as parents in education.

While parents were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews, only one participant took up this offer. In practice, anxiety about being included in the research and issues of confidentiality were not prominent in for parents. The interviews went well because parents were anxious to share their concerns for their children in education, their understandings of processes of learning and their perceptions of the school and its work.

Recruitment of parents to the project was accomplished with the assistance of Watea School. A brief outline of the research was published in the school newsletter alongside an offer of a grocery voucher in lieu of the time taken to conduct an interview. My contact details were provided for any parent wishing further information. Simultaneously, every fourth parent on the school database received an invitation to take part in the research, an information sheet (Appendix, 1) and consent form (Appendix, 2) delivered to their household address. The sample of parents approached to take part in the research was largely random. However, I also suggested to each of the interviewees that I would welcome the opportunity to interview anyone with a child at the school. All but two of the parents interviewed were recruited to the project from the letter drop; the remainder were referred to the research by other participants. Parents initiated contact with me, indicating their willingness to take part by landline, text or e-mail. All eighteen of the parent interviews took place in the interviewee's own home or at a local café. While I had been offered space within the school to conduct interviews, parents chose not to take this option. Accordingly, I travelled to their chosen location.

The parents who agreed to be interviewed were not representative of the school population, but did capture its diversity. 10 of 18 interviewees identified as Maori with a further three respondents describing their partners as Maori. The sample is therefore less representative of the school community, where around 80% of the students are identified as Maori. In addition, four interviews were conducted with migrants to New Zealand, a much higher proportion than exists in either the school population, or the region. However, these parents used the interview process as a means of exploring their experiences of education in both their countries of birth and New Zealand, bringing to light differences that they perceived both positively and negatively. They therefore, provided interesting insights, drawn from their specific experiences of education systems in their home countries and those of their children in New Zealand.

The sample of parents was disproportionately female – 15 mothers to three fathers. While most were partnered, there were two female sole-parent participants. It was not possible to extract exact data about the incidence of sole parenthood in the school, however, it is likely to be much higher given the high levels of sole parenthood

regionally. The preponderance of female parents and partnered parents is a somewhat unrepresentative sample of the school community.

The sample of parents interviewed, included both employed and unemployed participants at levels broadly consistent with the community. While it is difficult to be sure of the overall rates of employment within the school community, regionally, high levels of unemployment predominated in 2012. Four participants were not employed, but only one reported actively seeking employment, due to commitments in the home arising from a variety of circumstances.

In general terms, given the vagaries of recruiting participants to a qualitative research project that asked for considerable engagement with the research process, I was pleased with the number and diversity of parents who responded to the invitation to take part. More importantly, the range of research participants created opportunities for exploring parental experiences in the education of their children across different life circumstances, and each of the parents gave insightful and rich accounts of issues of education in a low-decile school.

In addition to teachers and parents, I sought to include participants drawn from the diverse array of support workers assisting the school in its work. I surmised that this group of participants would generate insights into the school's interactions with other agencies, in supporting the education of children. It would enable the complexities of facilitating children's learning to be revealed in a community where issues of welfare and well-being accompanied their formal schooling.

Within this groups of participants, there were clear divisions between those who were happy to provide interviews in line with other adult participants, and those who were happy to contribute only if their comments were regarded as background information for the project. The first group comprised the school social worker, a health-service provider and two school employees with support roles in the school. These participants contributed to the research in the same manner that teachers did (Appendices, 1, 2, and 4). The second group spoke freely on the proviso that discussions were off-the-record. Their concerns were not about how Watea School would regard their comments; rather, it was a response to the highly politicised

education sector within which they performed. They were anxious to ensure that any comments about their concerns could not be attributed to them. Given their often specialised roles, this concern was entirely valid, and while they contributed a great deal to my understanding of the interrelationships in the sector, I have honoured their request. These background interviews provided important information, which helped to define key issues and enabled me to ask more pertinent questions in later interviews. Additionally, their 'off-the-record' comments informed my appreciation of the degree to which the field of education was riven by divisions between a polity and ministry and those actively involved in delivering or supporting education in face-to-face relationships.

Given the differences between those who felt able to contribute to the research 'on-the-record' and those who could not, the interviews took different courses. Nevertheless, I began by asking questions about their specific roles and how they came to take them up. This was effective in opening up a space of talking about how they interacted with Watea School and their views of how the school responded to the needs of children, the parent community and other agencies interacting with the school. These groups of workers offered unique perspectives of the school, being both a part of its performance and yet, distanced to a degree from the direct responsibilities of day-to-day teaching.

I planned to interview children as the other distinct group of participants able to offer a specific view of the school and its work. I understood children as having unique experiences and knowledge of schooling (Alanen, 2009; James, 2009). While parents and teachers could speak about their perceptions of how their children were affected by the schooling offered at Watea School, only children attending Watea School could speak about the experience of being a student at the school in 2013. This group of participants exercised the greatest anxiety on my part in planning the research. I developed a participatory process involving all children in the senior school, which asked them to create multimedia representations of their perceptions of Watea School. This was envisaged as forming the basis of participation in later interviews. While materials would be supplied to all children in the population, their participation in all stages of the research would be voluntary. Participation in interviews required the consent of both children and their parents.

The vulnerability of children as research informants, allied to the need to ensure a full understanding of the implications of participation in the research including consenting procedures, involved a great deal of care (Appendices, 6, 7 and 8). As outlined later in this chapter, this portion of the research was abandoned because of events impacting on its timely implementation. However, my efforts in planning for the inclusion of children in the research had the effect of placing their needs at its heart and permeated the conduct of the research.

I planned to gather information from all groups actively involved in the performance of education, on the basis that each group would derive insight into the work of the school arising from their different roles. The range of their different experiences would collectively contribute to an understanding the scope of factors embedded in Watea School's work to redress inequalities in educational outcomes. By gathering information from a variety of informants and privileging their voices in describing their actions in the work of Watea School, I hoped that the substantive issues faced by this low-decile school and its community would emerge more clearly, thereby pointing to possibilities for their redress.

Document and media commentary

All research involves an engagement with what has been previously written about the research topic. However, it generally relies on a review of the academic literature, including research reports that have relevance to the topic (Bowen, 2009). My use of document and mass media commentary extends this use of literature on the topic of educational inequalities to include other sources of the written and spoken word as active components of the research data.

The use of these forms of data enables the research question to be explored in greater depth. They promote broader understanding of the conditions and contexts of the research phenomena (Bowen, 2009). In the field of education, they contributed in several ways to my understanding of prevailing conditions and contexts: documentary sources enabled the ideologies that informed discourses and practices in education to be tracked over time; they enabled the common-sense of the present to be teased apart to reveal which aspects of the education service were highlighted

and valued, and those that were excluded or devalued; they provided evidence of the contested positions occupied by different groups within the sector and the mechanisms of power they utilised to advance their views; finally, they provided an insight into the emotional 'climate' of the time in which all the protagonists in the sector were required to operate. They therefore contributed to a richer understanding of the research question in its formation, and the development of the project in suggesting lines of inquiry. At the same time, documentary and media analyses provided assistance to me in the real-time conduct of the research (Bowen, 2009). Working iteratively between the data generated by these analyses and the responses of participants during interviews, I was able to both keep abreast of events in the educational sector in 2013, and to be sensitive to the concerns of research participants during a time of considerable upheaval.

The writing phase of the research continued to be informed by document and media analyses. With a little distance from events in education in 2013, they have enabled me to place my research findings within the specificities of time and place, and to identify how the present shape of education continues to be debated, made and remade in ongoing changes in the field of education policy.

Documents and media commentary are used, by those who create them and the researcher analysing them, to form a narrative. This narrative will always involve a degree of selectivity in the research about which pieces of data can be assembled to formulate a coherent, convincing and compelling account. It is therefore incumbent on the researcher to provide some detail about which accounts are used in the research, and on what basis they contribute to the research argument (Bowen, 2009). Just as the researcher is required to critically evaluate all sources of documentary and media data, so too is the research to be read critically by its readers. The task of the researcher is to ensure sufficient transparency about the sources of data, and selection of specific documents for analysis.

Most of the contextual data I used was obtained from publically available records. Local government websites provided detailed information about local social and economic conditions including demographic characteristics derived from census data. Ministry of Education websites provided policy documents that outlined

regulatory procedures governing specific practices in education, but also provided evidence of policy directions and changes more generally. They provided links to reports that outlined international measures of achievement in comparisons of the efficacy of educational systems in different nations.

A daily review of public statements in news media, professional magazines and web based commentary outlined many of the issues that arose within the sector and the debates and contestations that ensued. These statements canvassed government positions on policy, including the positions of minority party members of the coalition government, statements issued by Ministry of Education officials, and those of groups representing teachers, principals and parents. Newspaper editorials, letters to the editor and opinion pieces offered by commentators and academics also provided insight into how such debates were framed in public discourses about education. These sources of data contributed to both shaping the nature of the research and contributed to the contextual understanding of events in, and accounts of, education. Finally, web-based content of Watea School policies and procedures and school newsletters also offered insight into day-to-day issues and practices in the school. In combination, all these sources of data provided a rich view of the work of Watea School and the environment in which it was performed.

While access to these sources of data was unproblematic, there were nevertheless, ethical issues related to its use in this thesis. Respect for the confidentiality of research participants and the school, demanded careful use of locally derived data. I have therefore described the economic, social, cultural and geographical characteristics of the school community in general terms, and have made careful use of the data generated by Watea School. As much as possible, I have attempted to extract the relevant data from these sources without including details that would identify neighbourhoods, communities, the school or individuals.

Observation

Observation as a research method is used in many ways. It can be viewed as existing on a continuum, from strictly controlled laboratory based observations generating quantitative data, to fluid and exploratory observations involved in qualitative,

participatory, ethnographic projects (Angrostino & Mays de Peréz, 2000). The observations that took place in this research project fell within the latter end of this continuum.

Participant observation did not therefore, comprise the bulk of the research data. However, I was concerned to acknowledge that I would inevitably be forming impressions of the school, its community and the individuals with whom I interacted, during this research. In effect, I envisaged a 'lite' version of participation observation, where I acknowledged the impact of my perceptions when I was within the school and its environs and in conducting interviews with participants. These observations served to prompt lines of inquiry in later interviews and provided contextual data to aid better understanding of material discussed in interviews. They also assisted me to maintain a position of self-reflexivity in the conduct of the research; in writing up observations, I was often prompted to question my responses to participants in my interactions and what meanings could be attached to the events I witnessed. While it was not therefore the primary method of data collection, it was nevertheless an important adjunctive method in supporting the interviews.

At each interview, I completed supplementary notes to support my recall, not only of events and surroundings, but to provide some evidence of the emotional colouration of the interview. This has been important in bringing to recall the individual participants when later using the interview data. These notes allowed me to reconnect with the substance of the interviews, and to retain a sense of each individual participant in a manner that made the data fresh to me in later rereading and writing.

I took the time before commencing the research to walk the approximate boundaries of the community in which the school is located. This enabled an awareness of amenities in the vicinity, the kinds of housing in the area and the distances children could be expected to walk or drive to get to school. Later, I undertook some voluntary work for the school in a holiday literacy programme, which involved travel to the actual, and substantially more scattered school community. This voluntary work generated additional conversations with children and parents. While I did not include

these conversations as data, they also contributed to my understanding of the issues raised in interviews.

While I describe observation as an adjunctive method, it was nevertheless very helpful in generating a feel for the school and its community. Taking the time to not only research the school community in the data sets available to me, but to actively walk and travel its streets and experience something of its physical characteristics was especially important in a research project that argues for the impact of out-of-school factors on educational inequalities.

Ethics and the conduct of the research

Ethical considerations were woven through every stage of this research. Most explicitly, in gaining university ethical approval for the project, but no less importantly in the accommodations to events and circumstances in its implementation and in the writing phase. Chapter six is entirely concerned with examining conceptions of social justice and ethics and their relation to ideology, the purpose of which is to create an analytic framework for the research findings. The extended examination of conceptions of ethics illuminates both the moral basis of the educational project and its central position in political ideology.

In this section, I provide a more limited review of the intersections of ethics and research practice in undertaking this project. I focus on the methods used to ensure the ethical conduct of the research, beginning with university processes to support me to develop and sustain an ethical approach in the research. I then outline the methods used to ethically implement the research programme.

The process of gaining the university's ethical approval for the research has several functions: to ensure that research conducted under its auspices is ethically sound in its treatment of research participants; to provide a framework to support researchers to develop the necessary skills to ensure that they can conduct an ethical research project; to ensure that all parties in the research, including the university are protected from harms resulting from the research (Massey University, 2010).

University processes support the researcher to develop an ethical project in three ways: in teaching ethical processes of conducting research; in giving sustained attention to its ethicality in its ethics approval processes; in providing research supervision. Gaining ethical approval for this research project was based on the research proposal as it was presented, that is, on predictions of possible outcomes and events in the implementation of the research. This resulted in a series of 'what if' questions to myself to reduce the possibility of either failing to recognise ethical issues in the conduct of the research, or of being blindsided by unanticipated ethical dilemmas.

However, not every eventuality could be visualised in advance and sensitivity was required to address ethical issues as they arose. It was in this sense that the ongoing provision of experienced and expert supervision provided by the university was essential. This oversight, support and mentorship occurred across all phases of the research project, beginning with preparation of the proposal and continuing through its implementation and writing phases. Being able to discuss and explore options in the research with experienced supervisors proved its worth to me time and again in negotiating the twists and turns of conducting research in the field.

The inclusion of multiple groups of participants required me to consider the different characteristics of each group in anticipating ethical issues. I present these ethical considerations separately for each group, but note that there were some overlaps between them. Thus, actions taken, for example, to ensure participants were informed about the research, which lie beneath issues of consent, also shaded into issues of preventing harm to participants. In concert, they all contributed to respect for the autonomy of individuals.

 I took the view in this research that participants had much to offer in identifying risks to their safety in the research, being most familiar with the environment in which it was being performed. This did not abrogate me from responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research, but did support the need for me to develop a relationship of care that was attentive to the situation of participants. Developing this relationship enabled me to become more knowledgeable about the contexts and conditions within which the research was to be conducted, and to be sensitive to the

needs of research participants, including how best to ensure that they were as fully informed as possible about the research and its implications. Informed participants are better able to evaluate benefits, risks and the possibility of harms arising from their participation, and more knowledgeable researchers are better able anticipate the possibility of benefits and harms to participants. The combined effect is to better ensure the safety of all participants in the planning and implementation of the research.

All the adult participants were provided with information outlining the research and its aims. For some groups of adult participants, this occurred on more than one occasion prior to the interview. I met with teachers and support workers employed by the school twice before the day of interview, provided written information twice and discussed the research again before proceeding with the interviews. Parents approached for interview received an invitation to take part in the research with an adult information sheet (Appendix1) delivered to their letterbox. They then contacted with me by telephone, which provided a further opportunity to discuss the research. I also discussed the research and consenting procedures with them once more, before gaining written consent and beginning the interviews.

The remaining support workers, employed by outside agencies, were approached in person and by email. I explained the aims of the research to them at these contacts, and again when they agreed to be interviewed. Only after their concerns had been addressed and they were happy to give written consent, did the interview formally proceed. Some participants, as has previously been outlined, took part in the research without concern, while others spoke to me on the proviso that any information provided be used as background only. I did not record these interviews and have not used the information they provided in the writing.

Consent was obtained for audio recording most of the interviews (Appendix 2). Again, for most adult participants, this was without problem. A smaller number did not agree to this, preferring that I should take notes. In this instance, I made rough contemporaneous notes, which I wrote up more fully the same day. All audio recordings were transcribed as soon after the interview as possible. I also made notes to accompany each transcription to add context to the interviews for my own use.

In all, adult participants were offered multiple opportunities to withdraw from the research, partially or wholly, once written consent was obtained. They were able to refuse to answer particular questions in the research, to delineate material that they did not want to be used by the researcher in written accounts and could terminate the interview at any time. Additionally, they could withdraw from the research process any time within a two-week period, post interview. When they wished to view transcripts, or written-up interviews, I undertook to return these to participants within the two-week period in order that they might fully reconsider their participation.

As previously detailed, including children as participants in the research involved searching ethical considerations. I envisaged a series of meetings with teachers and parents of those children who were potential participants. This would ensure that all parties understood that children were required to give their own consent to participate in the research in addition to parental consent for them to do so.

Additionally, given the staged nature of the inclusion of child participants and the multiple methods used elicit data from them, I envisaged that this consent would be ongoing. Thus, consent to take part in the project at the outset, would not prevail over the need for consent to view or use any materials children created about the school at the time children presented them to me. Final consent for interview from children would also be gained at the time of the interview.

All children within the senior cohort of students would be offered materials to create their representations of the school, but accepting these materials would not be taken as consent to participate in the research. I was particularly concerned to ensure that children, and the adults supporting them, did not view their participation in the research as a school project, but as a freely chosen opportunity to offer their views of their school and its function in confidence. I anticipated that I would have to be especially vigilant in ensuring that negative views of the school were used with care, to protect the identity of children in the school. Thus, even where children consented to the use of material, I would be required to be watchful of possible consequences on their behalf.

As with adult participants, I would not use children's real names in written representations. I planned to ask children to choose a pseudonym for use in the

research. The materials they created would be labelled with this pseudonym, offering an additional degree of protection to them in the research process (Appendix 7).

It became evident that due to the loss of time at the beginning of the year set aside for data collection, I no longer had time to implement all preparatory stages to ensure that children's ethical participation. This situation is more fully outlined in the next section of this chapter. After discussion with my supervisors and the school, I made the decision to not attempt to implement this section of the research. The need to ensure that this part of the research was conducted ethically trumped the inclusion of children in the research.

The school in this research was viewed as an entity, as a research participant in itself. This accords with university guidelines that require the researcher to protect communities from potential harms in research (Massey University, 2010). I have therefore, followed similar procedures to protect the confidentiality of the school as with any of the other groups of participants: I have not used the school's real name in the writing; I have taken care not to use information that would lead to the identification of the school and I have repeatedly referred chapters in the thesis back to the school to ensure that I did not do so inadvertently. This stance recognises the collective work of individuals within the school, adding another layer of protection for the individuals comprising the school community.

In all, these measures to protect the confidentiality of adult participants and the school in the research were particularly important during a time when relationships within the education sector were fraught. The power that politicians and policy makers exerted within the sector over teaching professionals was overt in some instances, and this understandably prompted anxiety in some research participants. It was therefore important to acknowledge and respond to these realities as a matter of ethical research practice.

Planning and implementing the research: a story in flexibility

The processes of planning and implementing this research project comprise a narrative that includes fortuitous events and unexpected setbacks. The preparation of the research proposal, required to gain ethics approval, appeared to suggest that that such events could be negated by good planning; the reality of this research project

soon disabused me of notions of my ability to fully control and confine the research to the plan as it was outlined in preparation for the research. In part, this was due to the extremely fluid nature of events in the educational sector during the period of data collection; lines of inquiry arose that had not been anticipated and yet had importance in exploring educational inequalities. However, in the main, it was events and circumstances within the school that necessitated a flexible research approach.

The implementation of the research became an iterative process of negotiation between what I could manage as a single researcher within the sets of skills and resources available to me and the mix of circumstances and events outside my control. I was required to be both flexible in my approach and able to hold firm in my purpose to better understand the work of Watea School and its community as they worked to redress educational inequalities.

Due to the delays occasioned by events, one part of my data collection proved simply too difficult to implement in a timely manner and I was required to adapt my research plan yet again. However, despite these setbacks, flexibility in the research process offered its own rewards; there were beneficial outcomes that arose from my ability to create space for the different directions that presented in the research. Being open to the research participants' concerns enabled different directions to emerge in the data and gave additional insights into the challenges faced by the school and its community in supporting children to learn in a low-decile school.

Having confined the research to locus of enquiry and embarked on a programme of reading as widely as possible, I began the process of developing the research proposal. My earliest intuitions and reading suggested that schools operate within communities as well as comprising a form of community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Osterman, 2000). The educational purposes of schools and parents that coalesce around the desire for children to be successful in learning, create a bond of affinity and care in the school community. Success in "creating a community of care in education" and the enhanced relationships that result from this care, are necessary to support successful education (Osterman, 2000).

Having settled on a methodology, and the need to focus on the work of a single school, the first step I took was to initiate discussion within the educational sector to ensure that the approach I was considering would be useful. I therefore contacted the regional Chair of the Principal's Association who kindly gave me time to discuss possible directions for the research. At the conclusion of our conversation, I was given the names of three principals in the region who were "*doing interesting things in education in low-decile schools*." The Chair felt that at least one of the three would be likely to consider the prospect of participating in research.

With this encouragement, I rang the first principal on the list and outlined the broad direction that I envisaged for the research project. I included my provisional title for the research: "Creating a Community of Care in Education" and outlined my interest in developing the research proposal with the school. Given that I was not a teacher, the research would not evaluate specific pedagogical practices; rather I was interested in how the conditions in which the school was required to operate impacted on the school community and their educational work. Consequently, I would be seeking to speak with educators, support workers, parents and students about the supports, challenges and constraints they faced in working in their joint task of advancing children's learning in a low-decile school.

The response from the Principal was immediate in giving support to the project. The school ethos of fostering care was explained as central to the school's mission: care about the educational outcomes of its students; care for the well-being of others within the school; care for self. As a low-decile school, enacting this care in relationships with their students was perceived as vital in creating a positive working atmosphere within the school and as essential to learning.

The Principal asserted that this research would offer opportunities for participating staff to review current school practices. In addition, gaining independent feedback from parents and students would offer insights into the features of the school they valued, and highlight areas for improvement. To this end, the Principal offered to facilitate opportunities to interview school employees and assistance in recruiting parents and students to the research. Access to any relevant school documents was also freely offered, although many were publically available online. I was

additionally offered access to the school for direct observations of school operations if required, to supplement data drawn from interviews and texts.

Following this open and generous offer, I made several undertakings: I would develop an outline of the research and make this available for review and amendment by the Principal; I volunteered my time to present a research outline to both the BOT and the school staff for their consideration and input; I would be available to meet with students and parents to discuss the research as the school schedule allowed; I would provide information about the research for publication in the school newsletter once planning had been finalised. I saw these steps as important in demonstrating my willingness to work with not only the school, but also the wider school community.

The Principal, in turn, undertook to discuss the prospect of the research with the BOT and to forward the outline onto them for consideration. A meeting with school staff, on receipt of the research outline, was proposed and accepted by me to facilitate the school's input into the research design.

I completed a draft outline of the proposed research (Appendix 10), indicating that I wanted to include all groups working in the school in a series of interviews. This was forwarded to the Principal who duly organised a time to meet with all school staff. This occurred in October, 2012, at their daily morning meeting prior to beginning classroom teaching. Following an introduction by the Principal, in which my independence from the Ministry of Education and its research programme was stressed, I took up the invitation to briefly present the research in outline. I outlined my desire to speak with teachers, support workers, parents and students and related this desire to my belief that those working at the coalface of education in low-decile communities had knowledge and experiences that could inform efforts to redress educational inequalities. This research would therefore offer them an opportunity to present their issues, challenges and successes in educational work within a low-decile community.

I referred to my perception that political and media commentary located disparities in educational outcomes as solely the consequence of teacher actions. I also proffered my view that there appeared to be a lack of dialogue with teachers in low-decile

schools about their experiential knowledge of the everyday and practical difficulties of teaching low-income, Maori and Pasifika students. This lack of dialogue had resulted in inattention to the intersections of poverty, ethnicity and educational underachievement.

I acknowledged the proactive attempts by their union in representing and publicising their issues. I also noted that media and government responses to these attempts tended to gloss union commentary as arising from ideological differences and as therefore being unreflexively reactive to government policy, rather than as a considered position. I then positioned this research as offering an opportunity for their voices to be heard directly, as arising from their daily, face-to-face teaching relationships and interactions within the school community.

This overview of the research and its aims took less than ten minutes, after which I asked for feedback and questions. The only response from the meeting was to ask if the interviews would be confidential. I then explained the measures I would take to ensure the confidentiality of the school and research participants in more detail.

When no further questions were posed, copies of the written outline of the proposed research were distributed (Appendix10). I provided my contact details and stated my availability to discuss further any aspects of the research with any groups or individuals within the school. I explained that the research was still in the planning stages and I was anxious to ensure that it would be responsive to their concerns. At this point, it was clear that my time was concluded, and I left the meeting.

This remained my only in person contact with the staff in 2012, although I continued in intermittent e-mail contact with the Principal. The BOT decided that the outline as drawn up for the presentation to the staff provided sufficient information to allow the research to proceed. Formal written consent was obtained from both the Principal and the BOT to indicate the willingness of the school as an entity to be a focus for the research. This was presaged by my assurances that I would consult with the Principal at each stage of development of the research to ensure that any identifying information was either generalised so that the school and individuals would not be inadvertently identified, or omitted altogether.

Concomitantly with these consultations with the school, I also continued to work on my research proposal to ensure that it met the demands of the university's ethical consent standards and confirmation processes. The dual task of working with Watea School in the development of the proposal while completing the university processes created time pressures on me; both sites were bounded by the work/holiday rhythms and I had to work to strict timelines. The university year asserted its control over the planning processes as the most urgent pressure in the research at this stage. I was mindful of necessity of completing consenting and planning processes before the close of the university year in 2012, to be ready to begin the interview programme in 2013.

I therefore worked steadily through the requirements for creating information sheets, consent forms and transcript release consents, for both adult and child participants. Given the time constraints and the tempo of school activities as they approached the end of the school year in 2102, opportunities for meeting with teachers and the Principal proved difficult to organise as I had envisaged. In discussing this issue, the Principal asserted that the school would trust the research process and I should persevere in planning processes. I, in turn, decided to include as many research methods as possible in submitting the research for the university's ethical consent, reasoning that this would retain flexibility within the research implementation. This decision did however make for a complex planning and timetabling process.

Timetabling the programme of research interviews in 2013 was planned as a staged process. I envisaged that the interviews with school employees and support workers would take place in the first and second terms, parents in the second and third terms and children in the fourth term. The inclusion of children as the final group to be interviewed was timed to allow for the more complex information and consent procedures for child participants and to implement an unrushed and age appropriate data collection processes. I deliberately followed this graduated approach to ensure that teachers and parents had some knowledge of the research before children were recruited. I saw that gaining their trust and support would be vital in including children in the research.

On completion of these planning activities, I contacted the Principal for the final time before the end of the school year. I confirmed the completion of university processes and that research activities in the school could begin in 2013. I sent the proposed timetable for data collection (Appendix 11) and a copy of all the information sheets consent forms and release of transcript consent forms. We agreed that I would establish contact again in the second week of the school year, allowing time for the school to settle into its work before commencing research activities.

In the interim over the school summer holiday break, I maintained my routine of collecting contextual research data with a daily review of events, commentaries and debates reported in news media. I canvassed the public information available on policy issues in education on political party websites and the Ministry of Education website, and I surveyed the data available from local and regional government sources that described the economic and demographic composition of the school's community and the wider region within which it is embedded. At the same time, I researched the history of Watea School and schooling in New Zealand to better understand the genesis of more contemporary issues. I also began the review of school documentation available on the school website. Finally, I set aside two days to walk the school zone to better understand and research the built and natural characteristics of the school community. These sources of information were then incorporated in an ongoing and iterative process of examining the relevant literature. I viewed this process of immersion as the necessary preparation for the interviews that I planned to conduct in the following year.

I approached the advent of the 2013 school year with a mixture of trepidation and excitement. There was an underlying anxiety about the processes of engagement with the teachers in Watea School, given reports of the time pressures on teachers in integrating National Standards into their daily classroom practices (Barback, 2012; Clark, 2010). It was also evident that teachers and the policy arms of government were operating in an atmosphere of mutual distrust. When I recalled that the only concern raised during my initial presentation was with confidentiality, I worried about the impact this distrust would have on recruitment of teachers to the project. However, it seemed even more important to capture the voices of teachers during a

time when they reportedly felt themselves to be beleaguered by the imposition of policies, which they had no part in developing (Ihaka, 2010).

Notwithstanding these diffuse anxieties, I contacted the school as agreed. I was informed that the Principal would be absent for the whole of the first term, and the Deputy Principal had taken over this function for the duration. The school leadership team had been reorganised and duties and tasks were reassigned. It subsequently took some time to meet with the Acting Principal, given the demands occasioned by the Principal's absence. This caused me some concern, as the Principal had been the key contact established with the school. While I remained profitably busy in compiling contextual data and background information, the weeks were passing. Contingency time built into the timeline appeared to be disappearing before I had begun the preliminary actions necessary to recruit participants. I was therefore relieved, when I was finally able to meet in person with the Acting Principal and begin the process of initiating the research implementation.

The Acting Principal provided a generous amount of time to discuss the research. However, it was evident that the only knowledge the Acting Principal had of the project was derived from my initial presentation to the staff. E-mails and material about ongoing projects had been forwarded on, but the Acting Principal focused on the most urgent tasks associated with the onset of the school year. My research project had not initially presented as a priority.

In light of these disclosures, I verbally outlined the project and promised to resend the proposal and timeline by e-mail. At the conclusion of our meeting, the Acting Principal undertook to ask the Team Leader of the Senior School (years four, five and six) and the Team Leader of the Junior School (years one two and three) to provide time for me to speak at their weekly staff meetings. I was advised to contact each of the Team Leaders by e-mail to set up times to meet with each team.

It took another three weeks for these meetings to eventuate. The discussions held were varied in their responses to the research. The Team Leader of the senior team indicated that they were extremely busy and I was given a few minutes to present the research. I provided an information sheet with my contact details supplied and the

proposed interview schedule. I then gave a brief verbal outline of the aims of the research and the interviews I hoped to perform. There was little discussion beyond a desire to know what questions I would be asking and how long the interview would take.

The meeting with the Junior Team in contrast, provoked considerable discussion, but concern was also expressed about exactly what questions I would ask and how I would maintain the confidentiality of the school and individual participants. The usefulness of interviews as a research method was questioned by one teacher. The kinds of research responses that I was seeking were equated with opinions, and as having no real relevance across the sector and findings would be ignored by the Ministry of Education.

I was then able to address their concerns by explaining the case for a qualitative approach to the research. Discussion then followed about the value of surveys and more quantitative methodologies. I discussed the shortcomings of surveys versus the opportunity to explain the issues in their work more fully. When I argued that surveys often captured very limited amounts of information about complex questions, some expressed their scepticism that knowledge about their work would be valued in any other format. Others disagreed and appeared to understand that they could provide an informed analysis of their work that, at the very least, could contribute to an understanding of their work in a low-decile community.

As with the Senior Team, they ended the meeting with me by speaking about how busy they were in their work. I thanked them and handed out printed information sheets with contact details and the interview schedule (Appendix 1 and 5), while assuring them of my availability at any time to talk further about the research or to conduct a formal interview.

On reflecting and writing up notes about the meeting, I felt very grateful for the opportunity to discuss the research more fully, but anxious about my capacity to successfully recruit teachers to the research as it stood. Equally, the option of instituting a more formal form of survey research could not be developed without revising ethical consent procedures and I was sure that it would not give me the

nuanced and in-depth accounts of their work that I was seeking. I felt unable to withdraw from Watea School to work with another school in the absence of the Principal. I therefore determined to wait the return of the Principal in the second term, and to then review my position.

Both these meetings resulted in a number of impressions: teachers were more comfortable working within a quantitative research paradigm, regarding it as more scientific and its findings therefore less able to be contested; they perceived risk in talking freely with me about their views, but at the same time, felt that their views would not be valued by those with power over their work at a national level; new policies had been developed and implemented without consultation, increasing their workloads substantially without adding anything of value to their teaching. It appeared to me, and was later confirmed in the interviews with teachers, that morale had been compromised by changes in work requirements, compounded by an inability to assert their professional autonomy and control over their work.

Equally, I was struck by the degree to which fear and anxiety characterised their relationships with the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Education. This appeared to contribute to a generalised sense of anxiety and distrust about the consequences of offering any critique of the educational system. Paradoxically, it seemed even more important that I continue to seek and give value to their accounts of their work, as a means of valuing the knowledge and experience they accrued from their daily immersion in the issues they faced. If these issues were to be addressed, it was important that they were understood more widely, not just within the profession, but by the wider public in ways that opened up their reality, and the consequences that followed on from systemic failures to address them.

As I waited for the Principal to return to work in the second term, I reviewed my timeline. Should work continue with Watea School, then I needed to reconsider my decision to begin the interviews with teachers. I also thought about the eventuality that the research could not proceed with Watea School and therefore, what other activities I could profitably undertake to support work with another school. Accordingly, I began contacting and speaking with a variety of people involved in supporting primary schools and teachers within the region. These conversations

included representatives from teaching support services including the local branch of the Ministry of Education and NZEI- Te Riu Roa (the largest teachers' union), the Watea School Social Worker, and health workers offering services to primary schools.

These interviews canvassed a number of themes: the impact of student non-attendance and frequent changes of school on learning and achievement; the impact of behavioural issues on teaching and learning environments and consequent achievement in education; the interconnected nature of low-socioeconomic status and Maori cultural identity in combination with the aforementioned factors; the impact of frequent changes in policy without reference to those working in the profession on teaching morale and performance; the impacts of complying with increased levels of reporting in education that have little relevance for teachers, but do increase their workloads and contribute to time pressures; the toxic nature of political discourse in the educational sector and the failure of politicians and the Ministry of Education to engage respectfully with teachers.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative view of relationships between polity, policy makers and teaching professionals, every person I spoke to exempted the local branch of the Ministry of Education and provider of regional Special Education services from critique. All commented favourably on the relationships fostered by these local ministry officials and specialists with teachers and schools and the quality of service they provided. However, resource constraints in the provision of services also accompanied these commendations.

I greeted the return of the Principal in term two with relief. While it did not result in immediate progress of the research agenda, I did receive an affirmation of continued commitment, alongside a request for additional time to allow school functions to be stabilised, before offering teachers the opportunity of release time to be interviewed. This release of teachers for interview was organised in the third term.

In the interim, I went ahead with the process of recruiting parents to the research. The Principal ensured a notice was placed in the school newsletter about the research. I was also given access to the school roll, which included parental contact addresses.

I randomly issued an invitation to participate in the research to every fourth parent. Alongside this invitation, I included an information sheet with my contact details (Appendix1) and the offer of a grocery voucher in recognition of the time and commitment to the research process. These steps were immediate in producing parents willing to be interviewed. While I had not envisaged conducting parent interviews before interviews with teaching staff, the changes in the timeline enabled me to explore the teacher-parent interface more thoughtfully in teacher interviews.

In the third term, it became evident that I no longer had time to complete the processes for including children in the research before the end of the school year. These required interactions with teachers, parents and potential child participants to ensure their ethical inclusion, and I lacked the financial resources to extend the period of data collection beyond the completion of the 2013 school year.

I discussed this situation with my supervisors and the Principal. Following these discussions, I concluded that although the research should take a different shape, it would still provide an account that was inclusive of all the adults working in education to support children's learning. The effort expended to better understand the participation of children in research as participants, with their own views of their world, remained important. I continued to view children as having rights in education that could be either be supported or impeded, and as possessors of their own justice claims including an entitlement to care and consideration in education. These conceptions continued to impact on my thinking throughout the research process and the time spent in a detailed review of the needs of children in research continued to inform the research activities.

Analysis of the data

Analytic and evaluative activities permeated all aspects of this research. These activities comprised an ongoing and iterative process of sense making in the planning, implementation and writing phases of the research, much as (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) suggest is appropriate in qualitative research. Information, derived from media and policy accounts of educational inequalities, was analysed alongside data derived from interviews and observations in a back and forth manner; insights

from one source prompted lines of inquiry in another and both instigated repeated returns to the academic literature.

Nonetheless, I did make a methodological decision early in the process of data collection to use thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It appeared best suited to create a coherent narrative from a widespread corpus of data I was compiling and would enable an account of the real effects of educational inequalities to emerge. At the same time, it allowed an examination of the way ideological frameworks contour how we think about educational inequalities. It offered means of using the data to move beyond a solely descriptive account of who said what, and to whom, in generating theoretical insights into educational inequalities. This, in turn, supported the creation of an account that encompassed complexities and uncertainties in the field of education. Finally, the articulation of themes assisted me to organise the data across multiple sites within the educational sector: to identify areas of both commonality and difference; to explore the underlying tensions arising from differing ideological stances; and to pose some tentative opportunities for bridging current schisms in thinking about educational inequalities.

Performing thematic analysis is a multi-step process (Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). It begins with immersion in the data achieved through deep, considered and repeated readings. Where interviews are used, as in this research, transcription aids this process because it encourages careful listening to audio recordings. I would add that writing up contemporaneous notes into a full account, such as occurred for interviewees who did not want to be recorded, served a similar function, as did my practice of writing supplementary notes of reflections and observations for each interview. When using policy documents and news texts, close reading, filing activities and note taking supported ongoing engagement with the materials (Kelsey, 2003). In combination, these activities assisted me to begin to recognise patterns in the data and to identify categories or codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further review of the whole data set, supported the grouping of coded material into overarching themes that served as the beginnings of a structure to inform the final account of the research findings.

I was assisted in the research to perform these tasks by a commitment to provide summary feedback at the completion of each group of interviews to the school and any participants who wished it. Providing this feedback carried risks that I would prematurely truncate my analytic work, but it also offered opportunities for extending conversations with the school and participants about some of the themes identified in the research. It also enabled Watea School to consider issues raised in the research and for me to respond to concerns and act on them in a timely manner. I was at pains to stress the provisional nature of this early work and I reaffirmed my commitment to provide later drafts of findings chapters to the school.

Continuing to write and to review the literature in relation to the themes prompted to a second return to the data. I began to question the adequacy of the theoretical constructs I had initially identified as important for ordering the data. I sought to create another framework that would offer a better fit and allow me to develop a more coherent account. While the findings continued within a similar thematic format in the organisation of the data, the work I did at this later stage used more robust theoretical constructs to understand the meaning of the data and offer a richer and deeper analysis. This framework is outlined in chapter six. The final writing therefore represents continued iterations between the data, literature, and review of theoretical constructs used to frame the research findings.

Conclusion

The research, as I envisaged it at the outset and throughout the planning processes, became, in practice, something different. Where I had placed children centrally in the research as research participants, data collection became more focused on the dynamic interactions and interconnections between groups working to support children in their learning. I did regret the loss children as participants in the research, but at the same time, the work that I did manage to complete, offered all the richness and depth of data that I had imagined.

I was required to proceed with care in the interviews with teachers and educational support workers. While I understood that the education sector was fraught with conflicts that had played out over several years, I was surprised by levels of anxiety

and distress experienced by the participants. Establishing a sense of trust with the participants was vital in the interviews in these circumstances. However, once underway, all the participants, including teachers with reservations about the research, provided thoughtful and insightful accounts of their work in supporting the learning of children in a low-decile school.

Parents interviewed for the research, provided moving accounts of their desires and hopes for their children in education, often in marked contrast with their own experiences of schooling. These accounts fulfilled my hopes for generating for insightful and rich descriptions of how educational inequalities are contoured in New Zealand and the factors that give rise to them.

The shape of this research project was necessarily coloured by the uncertainties and contingencies that accompanied its implementation. My actions in this research were also shaped by my limitations in knowledge and skill in responding to events thrown up by the process of conducting the research, the analytic work required of me and my capabilities in representing the data in the final writing. All of this could have been done differently as the work embedded in this thesis is time and person bound and the result of my learning to date. While I have made decisions in the conduct of the research and my analytic work that appear to be justified, they are not the only ones possible and the data does not say all that could be said about the topic of Watea School's work in mitigating educational inequalities. Neither do I argue that the data could not have been interpreted in any other way. But, I do argue that I gave my best efforts to conduct the research as responsively and responsibly as I could in the circumstances, and my representations of the findings are justified within the framework that I outline in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND AN ETHIC OF CARE:

AN ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter explores the concepts that I have found most useful for understanding the data generated by the research. Indeed, as previously described in the methods section, these conceptions played a role in driving the research process from the very beginning. For this reason alone, they bear closer examination, but the manner in which concepts of care and fairness suffused the accounts provided to me in participant interviews, demanded my deeper engagement during the phases of analysis and writing.

Ideological standpoints were less obviously described in participant accounts. The exception to this was in media discourses that used 'ideological' as a descriptive term to denigrate the views of specific groups critical of government policy within the education sector. This charge of ideology, with its connotations of an inflexible and false view of social life inverts the original Marxist intention: what was intended as a means of revealing the invisible, but nevertheless dominant nature of the ideas of the ruling classes, in determining, sustaining and reproducing the organisation of social life, becomes used by the ruling class to derogate challenges to its dominance. However, once the capacity of a dominant ideology to conceal itself in an ontological and common-sense idea of how the world is and how it operates is understood

(Apple, 2013), this application becomes explicable. Ideology, like culture, is something that dominant classes, in their view, do not have: they have normal, common-sense and real perceptions of the world, in contrast to ideological others who subscribe to false readings of the world. Ideology is therefore, most invisible to those who are fully, politically and powerfully immersed in its operation.

The job of ideological critique is to reveal that "… in our societies, everything is soaked in ideology whether we realise it or not" (Mészáros, 2005, p.3). All subscribe to some form of ideology, dominant or otherwise, which contributes to our perceptions of how the world is and how we believe it should be. Our ideological conceptions contribute to how we care for, and form our identifications with others, in practices that feed back into our understandings of how we should act justly towards others in our world. These are drawn from a multitude of practices that are performed in conformance with the normative demands of everyday common-sense, but also in a myriad of creative and novel acts that subvert and transgress the boundaries of common-sense in the performance of life (Hebdige, 1983).

Teaching and learning in primary school education remains immersed in a dominant neoliberal ideology in New Zealand. However, individuals acting within it are able to critique its hegemony to a greater or lesser degree, on the basis of their everyday performance of supporting children in their formal schooling. The relationships of care that are established with others in education, as parents, teachers support workers and students, offer opportunities for reviewing the real and systemic effects of neoliberalism (Apple, 2013). In seeking to understand and mitigate neoliberalism's negative impacts, our collective practices in sustaining this dominant ideology are opened up for view.

The examination of relationships, practices and cultural expressions of the work of the Watea School community, allowed me to critique the solidity of prevailing ideations of educational practices in primary schooling. In this chapter, I offer an outline of the concepts of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care that inform this critique. I explain how each concept, individually and in concert, is worked out in the field of education and I review each of the concepts to give clarity about the way in which I use them in the research analyses. I also outline my proposition that

conceptions of ideology, social justice and an ethic of care are bound together in the field of education through a shared concern for the failure of some groups of children to achieve their potential in education, and the desire to remedy this condition.

Setting out the theoretical bases in this manner allows me to draw explanatory links between these concepts and the research findings. By exploring the concepts and how they constitute a framework for the analysis, I provide a means of understanding the complexity and relational nature of the work of supporting children in their learning at Watea School. This framework allows me place the work of the school in the context of multiple relationships and structural influences across different levels of interaction: in the face-to-face and intimate interactions at a micro-level; the interactions and relationships at a meso-level with other local institutions and organisations working either to support and sustain the school, or to constrain its practices; the exo-level comprising institutions of governance and control, which do not generally interact directly with educators and students in the school, but nevertheless have real impacts on their performance and practices of teaching and learning; and finally the macro-level comprising ideological, political, and cultural contexts of schooling in New Zealand, in the years during which the research was planned and implemented.

Ideology and education

Ideology is explored as a concept in this section for its relation to power in determining agendas for action in the field of education. An ideology becomes powerful in education through its widespread adoption by groups holding sufficient social power to implement its visions. When an ideology achieves the status of common-sense, these actions appear to be logical and necessary, and obscure the possibility of any alternatives. This has implications for entrenched social problems such as educational inequalities.

Education of the young is an ideologically saturated project (Apple, 2013). Decisions about what should be taught to children are covalent with prevailing ideologies; which forms of knowledge are valued, how they are taught and to whom, provide the means for producing and reproducing social systems (Apple 2002; Ball, 1998;

Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Government policies in education are therefore developed by those with social and political power, which allows them to gather support for their ideological views of society and education. This power enables them to initiate and enforce actions commensurate with their precepts.

Furthermore, the tools of government enable those in power considerable latitude in setting the terms and conditions of discourses and debates in social and education policy (Apple, 2013). While control is not complete and policies and their bases are often challenged, it is more often the prerogative of power to identify which issues are considered newsworthy and to privilege discourses promoting them, over those not considered worthy of attention (Chomsky & Herman, 2012).

It is in exercising government power that repertoires of strategies are promoted and enacted by those involved in education services in New Zealand, from the Ministry of Education and down through individual schools, classrooms, families and children. Where education policy connects with other government services and institutions, these too become co-opted to its projects by adherence to prevailing ideologies.

The field of education is vitally important in sustaining ideology. It has the capacity to ensure its transmission over time and across generations. Education acts as a principal means of 'incorporation', enabling alternative and oppositional practices to be subsumed into the dominant social order (Williams, 2012, p. 19). It achieves this through a number of mechanisms, the most basic of which is to refuse to give recognition, attention or status to ideations at odds with a dominant ideology's precepts.

However, education offers opportunities, which if realised, are capable of destabilising dominant ideologies. Pedagogies, directed toward systematically seeking to stimulate critical thinking, have the capacity to challenge the social orthodoxies of a dominant ideology. Freire (1994) argues that critical pedagogy can benefit those with the least social power and the most oppressed by dominant classes in society. The oppressed, in learning that the forces of power that confine and control their lives are neither natural nor inevitable, arrive at a revised forms of self-

knowledge as agentic subjects. In understanding that these forces are unjustly applied, possibilities emerge for visualising social relationships that are not predicated by the assumption of power by one group over another.

This process is described by Freire (1994) as arising from a pedagogy that values and affirms the realities of social experiences of powerlessness and oppression, while arguing that there is nothing essential or predestined in the condition of oppression. Critical pedagogy promotes forms of self-determined resistance to, and critique of oppressive conditions; it supports agentive action, but victims are not blamed for their condition, in recognition of the real effects of power that dominant groups exert over others.

Education is an important site for ongoing ideological contestation precisely because it is so centrally located, as a means of either support for, or challenge to, ideological dominance (Apple, 2013). Battles fought and won for ideological ground in the past and present will reverberate across future configurations of the field of education, with flow-on impacts for all sectors of social organisation. It is therefore entirely reasonable that governments of both the left and right in New Zealand have sought to make their mark on educational policies and to extend their control over educators, pedagogy, school leadership and bureaucracies of governance and management. The basis on which governments, bureaucracies, educators and the public contest the power of a dominant ideology, is most often related to an ideology's social justice effects as they are played out within the educational sector. The relationships between ideology and conceptions of social justice therefore, remain integral to attempts to contest or endorse ideology in education.

Ideology and its relation to justice

Ideology functions as a collective call to action, based on specific views of socially just actions. When an ideology is dominant, then these conceptions of just actions become normative, legitimated and validated by institutions of governance. Claims to justice can then be made on the basis that they are natural and unexceptional expectations within society. Individuals and social institutions gather around the precepts of a dominant ideology to collectively organise and realise specific systemic

goals and social purposes, which in turn are determined by specific views on how things should be done in the world (Foels & Pratto, 2015; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Under these circumstances, ideology reflects not only a collective understanding about "what exists and why" (Foels & Pratto, 2015, p.342) but also provides collective justifications for how things should be. In its organising capacity, an ideology becomes directly implicated in views of justness and fairness in relation to the ideal state of affairs it seeks to justify as natural and promotes as desirable. This necessarily includes the means for resolving the inevitable disputes that arise in social life, when competing claims are made by different groups, promoting different views of socially just actions.

The straightforward account of the uses of ideology tends to obscure the complexity of power relations that operate in, and through, ideology. In simply acknowledging the normality of a dominant ideology, the manner in which this normativity contributes to the lack of visibility in the just workings of institutional power is lost and with it, any critical engagement with the underlying precepts and practices it organises. Practices take on the appearance of common-sense (Apple, 2013), becoming invisible to individuals enmeshed in a world of shared actions and purposes. The effect of power over others is also included in this common-sense view of how the world is, serving to obscure areas of injustice, particularly for subordinate groups. It is therefore psychologically advantageous for powerful groups within an ideology, to maintain a position of uncritical acceptance and to continue to resist explanations that might challenge the reality of their representations of the world.

When ideology is accepted as an unproblematic representation of reality, such as when it achieves this dominant and common-sense status in social organisation, collective assumptions held about the nature of the world become axiomatic facts. This statement of the 'facticity' (Meehan & Woods, 2003, p.36) of the world is achieved via mechanisms that operate at both the level of the individual, and in the collectivity of groups, but always with the aim of maintaining ideological constancy.

Edifices of ontological belief are constructed across the interplay between individual and group support for an ideology. These constructions enable beliefs and values to attain the status of "incorrigible propositions" (Mehan & Woods, 2003, p.36). Once

an ideology is received as true in an ontological sense, it becomes incontestable for those who continue to live within it, because it generates the order and stability necessary for adherents to act with confidence and certainty in their world. To do otherwise, is to live in a condition of unknowingness and uncertainty about reality, which in some degree invokes the prospect of displeasure, discomfort and distress. There is therefore, a strong psychological advantage for remaining within the confines of a dominant ideology and its perceptions of just actions.

Confirmatory evidence of the reality of an ideology is accepted without question. Paradoxically, disconfirming evidence can also reinforce certainty through processes of 'reflexivity' (Mehan & Woods, 2003, p.38). In the desire to maintain order, constancy and stability in the world, reflexive practices are directed toward finding explanations for the occurrence of these apparently anomalous experiences and events; not by questioning the validity of the initial assumptions, because that is unthinkable, but by creating "secondary elaborations" (Mehan & Wood, 2003, p.38).

These elaborations draw from a repertoire of explanatory possibilities that are nevertheless, still bounded by of the ideation of the world as it has been conceived. My research provides instances of these processes in later chapters. I offer descriptions of education policy, which, despite being challenged and critiqued on its outcomes, continues to draw on familiar secondary elaborations to explain policy failures. These elaborations tend to be gathered around common tropes: poor professional performance by individual teachers, school leaders and schools; curricular deficiencies; and specific attributes and failings of individual families and students. As long as an elaboration can be accommodated within the dominant conception of the true nature of the world, then it will serve as an explanation for educational failures for actors in positions of power operating within a dominant ideology. The influence of economic inequalities on educational outcomes, so well established in the literature, provides an example; the links between poverty and poor educational outcomes become subsumed within explanations of individual failure, accompanying a concomitant contraction of possibilities for ethically redressing educational inequalities. In this manner, those with social power and standing, continue to maintain a sense of certainty in their experience of their world, feeling confident of the justness of their actions in maintaining the ideological status quo.

For each individual, continuing to align their experience of the world with a dominant ideology creates other positive effects: it supports their identification with others satisfying needs for sociality and belonging within a group that has power and status; it defines the parameters of rightness and justice in social structures; each individual is therefore encouraged to hope that their membership of a powerful high status group and their conforming actions will result in the benefits of this membership accruing to them and their children. The appeal of conformity to a dominant ideology is therefore substantial for each individual, and directly related to the degree of power wielded by the dominant groups in social organisations. But, this conformity is also enabled in part by ideology's adaptive capacities to respond to a changing world while retaining a sense of its timelessness, achieved by accommodations and emendations (Williams, 2012).

What is ideologically possible is always determined within relations of political power:

> …there is a process, which I call the *selective tradition:* that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as *the* tradition*, the significant past.* But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and parties are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and parties are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support, or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture…. (Williams, 2012, p.119, italics in original text).

Political power enables a dominant ideology to draw on popular forms of communication, discourses and cultural expression for its own purposes. Because a dominant ideology communicates its precepts and programmes as arising from the world as it really is, any reinterpretations and dilutions, required to maintain constancy, are also accepted as rational and reasonable responses within ideology. Having achieved hegemonic control across many forms of communication and

cultural expression, dominant groups assert their favoured elaborations for disconfirming events in an uncritical manner.

Hegemonic control in social life is achieved through practices of "incorporation" (Williams, 2012, p. 119), which contain and mute alternative ideological possibilities:

> It is not only the depths to which this (hegemonic) process reaches, selecting and organising and interpreting our experience. It is that it is continually active and adjusting: it isn't just the past, the dry husks of ideology which we can more easily discard. And this can only be so, in a complex society, if it is something more flexible than any abstract imposed ideology. Thus we have to recognise the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative sense of the world can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture (Williams 2012, p. 119).

In this manner, powerful ideologies serve paradoxical purposes: they are able sustain a capacity for responsiveness and adaption to events, even a degree of contradiction, while they support ontological constancy; they create a sense of continuity in tandem with a certain degree of creative capacity to respond to changing circumstances and encompass and encapsulate other ideological positions. Crucially, for the groups and individuals living within an ideology, tensions between the demands for constancy and responsive change are resolved by unconscious desire for an ideology to be true: to offer certainty in the face of constant change and instability; to offer moral rectitude and sure paths for acting justly; and to offer totalising explanations for how the world is, or should be ordered. These desires provide powerful motivations to retain an allegiance to ideology in the face of the inevitable contradictions that emerge.

Hegemonic power has, by definition, great reach. However, it is never complete and compliance cannot be completely assured. Practices at the fringes of social orthodoxy ensure that the consent of the dominated majority cannot be assumed:

… (it) has to be won, reproduced and sustained… The symbiosis in which ideology and social order, production and reproduction, are linked is then neither fixed nor guaranteed. It can be prised open. The consensus can be fractured, challenged and overruled, and resistance to groups in dominance cannot always be lightly dismissed or incorporated (Hebdige, 2012, p.129).

While ideological change is often slow to emerge, the leakage of subordinate ideologies is possible. Older forms of knowledge about the world and newer forms of creativity in human expression can emerge and combine, to challenge present forms of hegemonic control. The operation of power through ideology and its collective capacity, is always subject to resistance and subversion at the level of everyday practice and experience. Events have the capacity to overwhelm our ability to contain them within our ideological conceptions; finding other ways of knowing, understanding and representing the world remain as possibilities on an individual and group basis. It is on this basis that critique serves a counter to the dominance of any ideology, most pertinently for this thesis, neoliberal policies in education in New Zealand.

Most often, resistance to neoliberalism in education has remained focused on the unjust impacts of specific policies, rather than seeking to dismantle the broad reach of neoliberal ideology. Thus, regimes of measurement and accountability in controlling the work of educators have been contested vigorously by educators, without necessarily understanding how this direction in policy feeds into existing conceptions of learning for the wider public. It is the signature achievement of neoliberalism that there are so few other avenues for understanding learning, other than viewing education as being an instrument for preparing their children for examination success and the competitive market economy. Success in education is equated with the conformation of learning activities to current market needs and the future attainment of highly paid employment.

This impoverished understanding of education fails to support the current challenges that we face locally, nationally and globally in a rapidly changing world. In a future, which contains both unknown and partially understood threats to our well-being,

presentism in educational systems, which offers conformance with current forms of economic social organisation, is likely to prove inadequate. Increasingly, the costs to societies of growing social distance across classed and ethnic divides are being questioned. Environmental degradations resulting from the consumerist practices instituted by neoliberal ideology are also becoming visible. The need for critical thinking in education and innovative pedagogies that privilege creativity and ethicality, are more than ever required to provide forms of knowledge that acknowledge the connections between individualised and localised practices and their wider social and environmental impacts.

Predicating a 'knowledge economy' on past and current economic understandings of social life, is already insufficient for the present needs of many young adults seeking to move into working life. It therefore seems unlikely that a return to past orthodoxies in primary school education in New Zealand, which stress measures of reading, writing and numeracy as the sole determinants of achievement and preparation for their future lives, will be sufficient to meet the future needs for critical thinking skills in a potentially, very different world. This in no way decries their importance of these primary skills to advance learning, but it does assert that learning is a vastly more creative and complex activity than the mastery of these skills alone.

One method of critique is to excavate the everyday concerns and anxieties of those intimately engaged in education work in the present (Apple, 2013). Drawing from Gramsci, Apple argues that alternatives to neoliberal practices should arise from the concerns of educators, students and parents at the level of their daily practices, to illuminate inconsistencies in neoliberalism's claims and highlight specific forms of injustice. This research project has very much been framed with this object in mind. I also argue that the concerns and work of parents and educators in education, need to be understood within the relations of power that act to promote, or curtail and constrain their practices. This enables an analysis of how power fails to serve the interests of those most in need, and serves the interests of dominant groups in maintaining the status quo.

Given the common-sense workings of ideology, where both dominant and dominated groups may give credence to claims that inequality of educational outcomes are

deserved and naturally occurring within a world that cannot be otherwise ordered, it remains important to resist simplistic explanations that fail to give an account of differential access to social power. A conscious effort to review the workings of power from the alternative standpoint of those most beset by forms of deprivation, is therefore, an essential first step in revealing both needs within an educational system and the unequal access of different groups to its goods. In this sense, when one, or some, groups are plainly ill-served by the current orthodoxies in systemic organisation of pedagogical practices in education, it is reasonable to look beyond an examination of individual differences to broader reviews of social structures. This need for systemic review suggests moving beyond a singular focus on the individual performances of communities, schools, educators and students, to a purview of these performances as situated within ideological contexts. In doing so, the systemic operation of power is revealed; it becomes evident that educational inequalities are not an isolated instance of social deficit, but often connected to other deprivations in webs of disadvantage.

Seeking this broader review of educational inequalities necessitates an accounting of systemic strengths as well as shortfalls for their impacts on the practices of all parties in the field of education. This will identify the conditions, which systemically benefit some, as well as the impacts of those conditions on those who do not benefit from the status quo. This more inclusive process of critique does more than set up oppositional positions in response to the effects of neoliberal policies; it seeks to expand conceptions of the social world to identify what a dominant ideology reveals as well as conceals. The attractions of the 'incorrigible assumptions' that comprise ideology in an ontological sense are then able to be explored for what they offer as well as exclude from consideration. Critique, and any actions advanced as a result, are more likely to be better considered in a widest possible consideration of all possible aspects of social reality.

In its explorations of social reality, critique also provides a basis for identifying social injustices: how they are enacted and perpetuated; which groups and individuals are affected by them; and the ongoing effects on individuals and wider society. In short, effective critique both identifies and offers reasons to care about unjust conditions creating differential outcomes in education. To fail to identify how some needs are

met within a dominant ideology risks setting up a politics of opposition, which derives more from proving others wrong than giving attention to the needs of those suffering injustices.

Once critique becomes dislocated from care for those suffering from socially unjust conditions, it too easily becomes an exercise in the acquisition of power over others. Competing ideologies are asserted and co-opted to the uses of power: as a justification for either retaining the status quo in power relations; or as the active pursuit of power to establish an alternative ideology as dominant in social organisation. In the process, the social justice and care issues that informed the critique may become overwhelmed by political practices in the pursuit and exercise of power. It is therefore, vital in contesting a dominant ideology that these same processes of domination are not enacted in internal relations with others when seeking to develop and establish an alternate ideology (Freire, 1994). It is only through a relentless determination to place social justice concerns at the heart of social organisation and by making the links between unresolved injustices and complex forms of social need that alternative ideologies will effectively contest the power of neoliberal dominance and offer prospects for transformative change.

This form of critique, focused on the needs of those groups disproportionately suffering the negative effects of an ideology in practice, allows the relations of power that maintain the status quo to be exposed. To focus on practices without explicating the underlying ideology and justice claims achieves at best, change that is contingent upon the continued visibility of a need. Such programmes can just as easily be rescinded when public and political foci abate. At worst, the needs of groups of students failing in education remain invisible, or are explained away by elaborations designed to conform with ideology, offering justifications that lead to the ongoing reproduction of educational inequalities.

Either way, the effects of today's educational inequalities are reproduced and projected forward through the social power, or lack of it, conferred by measures of educational success. Failure to redress educational inequalities in education restricts the emancipatory transformational power of education, curtails present and future capabilities of children in learning, and limits children's ability to transcend their

current economic and social status to contribute fully in meeting the challenges that are likely to arise in a future world. Ideology, education and issues of social justice cannot therefore be disentangled from concerns about educational inequalities. However, it remains important to identify why such inequalities are perceived as unjust and on what basis, to ensure a sustained focus on the fullest examination of needs of those experiencing educational inequalities.

Conceptions of social justice and education

Conceptions of social justice pervade most aspects of social and political life. They colour our interactions with people in everyday encounters. At the same time, they also inform how we view those institutions that shape and regulate our lives at a remove. The social justice implications of many of these encounters and interactions are so embedded in the performance of daily life that we are often unaware of them. Nevertheless, giving attention to why we perceive some actions and events as just and unjust, offers opportunities for uncovering how our thinking and actions are being shaped by ideological conceptions of fairness, and for imagining how things could be otherwise.

One factor upon which to build concerted action on educational inequalities is the universal acceptance of the right of all children to receive an education. At a common-sense level, the persistence of educational inequalities appears to be a straightforward social justice issue of decreased opportunities for children to realise their potential, impacting on the lives of individuals and on the function of wider society. The intergenerational nature of educational disparities is well described in the literature and easily observed in everyday life; poor scholastic achievement is more likely to lead to fewer employment opportunities and reduced income, which then predisposes the next generation of children to lower levels of educational achievement.

There is little argument across the political spectrum about the unfairness of this cycle in reproducing social disadvantage in New Zealand. There is unanimity in the belief that not only do individual children benefit from taking up educational opportunities and effective teaching and instruction, but there are wider societal

benefits to be gained from its provision. In advancing market solutions to educational issues, a succession of ministry officials and politicians have argued for the need to improve the educational achievements of Maori and Pasifika and other students from low-income families as vital to meet the demands of the economy for suitably socialised and skilled workers (Joyce, 2010; Longstone, 2012; Parata, 2012; Sewell, 2009). However, it has also been argued as necessary to as reduce the future dependency of students on the state economic resources (Bennett, 2010; Key, 2012). Thus, in framing the needs of the economy and the world of work as being the principal purpose of education, the economy also becomes the primary means of understanding our participation as citizens in society; financial dependency represents a deficit position of stigmatisation and exclusion from full participation in society.

Alternatively, taking an individual perspective, education policy has, since the inception of universal education, argued for the right of all children living in New Zealand to receive the education they require to unlock their capabilities to learn and prosper in life (Beeby, 1992). Both these purposes of education are embedded in the status quo, in economic life as it is currently supported by existing social institutions and practices (Labaree, 1997). Labaree argues that a third educational purpose exists, with benefits for both the individual and society; education has the capacity to assist the development of critical thinking, which then offers opportunities for deeper engagement with issues of social organisation and governance, potentially enhancing the distribution of power in participatory forms of democracy.

The possibility of stimulating forms of enhanced and participatory citizenship resonates with the critical pedagogy advanced by Freire. However, Freire (1993, 1994) also argues for the need to challenge and transform existing relations of social dominance and the subordination of the impoverished and disempowered. Such pedagogies offer possibilities for unleashing creativity in thought and action on the part of groups previously disengaged from sources of social power (Giroux, 1992). Critical pedagogy therefore offers the greatest benefit to those who benefit least from current orthodoxies and offers them opportunities to redress the social injustices they endure by challenging existing sources of power and its distribution. By explicating the forces that give rise to unjust actions and conditions, possibilities for

transformative change can emerge. However, it is precisely in this space, where determinations of how and why unjust educational outcomes arise that debates rage; differences in assigning causes, give rise to inimical prescriptions for change, and these prescriptions are themselves deeply implicated in the contested exercise of power, based on differences in ideological affiliation.

Children are least able to exercise social power in their condition of dependency on adults. In experiencing disadvantage in any, or all of its forms, including educational inequalities, children do not get to choose the circumstances they are born into. They cannot therefore be held responsible for the justness of what happens to them and this fact provides a compelling reason to think carefully about social justice considerations in efforts to achieve changes in the conditions of children's lives.

A conception of social justice is required that explicitly identifies when and how power is exerted on the behalf of others, such as children, who are limited by their dependency on adults. This will enable mechanisms adopted for the exercise power to be transparent and allow evaluations of validity of the underlying ideological assumptions prompting its use to be instituted. Identifying needs and their remedies requires a sustained focus on working with those most intimately affected: educators; support workers; parents; and where possible children themselves. Social justice concerns in education, directed to ensuring more equitable outcomes for disadvantaged children, must also privilege the concerns of the groups living and working directly with them. To fail to do so, argues for an artificial separation between the lives of children and those who surround them and make up the world they live in.

For this reason, I examine three influential conceptions of social justice for their impacts on policy and practice in education: justice as fairness (Rawls, 1971); capability theories of social justice (Nussbaum,2011; Sen,1992); and an ethic care (Engster, 2007; Kittay & Feder, 2002; Noddings,2003; Tronto, 1993). These theories permeated media and policy discourses as well as participant interviews within the period of planning and implementing the research, often without making specific reference to the justice ramifications of educational practices and policy. I suggest that a more explicit analysis of justice concerns, opens up ideological debates; it

creates another language, other than the economic, for considering what would signify more equitable outcomes in education and what should be done differently.

Rawls (1972) creates a straightforward account of the need for just action to address educational inequalities. All citizens are entitled to equality of opportunity to the "primary goods" defined as: the means to ensure and maintain health and nutrition; political freedom and freedom to pursue life goals; educational equity; freedom to pursue occupational goals and achieve them equally on the basis of ability; equality before the law; freedom to own property (Rawls, 1972, p.10-11). Education is recognised not only as a primary good in itself, but also as being embedded in the pursuance of occupational and life goals, and therefore assumes a central importance in the Rawlsian conception of a just society.

Rawlsian justice does recognise that social justice claims occur within social contexts, when it argues for the concept of the 'original position' (Rawls, 1972, p.10-11). Primary goods are those considered necessary by a person 'in the original position' (p. 10-11); that is those goods which a reasonable man would proscribe as being necessary for life from 'behind the veil of ignorance' (p.10-11). The veil of ignorance in Rawls' account describes a state of imagined lack of knowledge about the status, wealth, or life circumstances of any individual, and therefore assumes that primary goods could reasonably be appropriated by, and extended to, any individual under any circumstance. Fairness is identified via the process of a reasonable individual proscribing social goods for others, based on an expectation that the reasonableness of this proscription is sufficient to ensure that she/he can reciprocally enjoy these same primary goods. Rawls recognises that existing material inequalities impact on life chances, but asserts those who are most disadvantaged are to be privileged in the redistribution of primary goods and resources within the nation state, such that all are ensured access to a minimum level of primary goods. This he terms as "difference principle" (p.13-14). However, this proviso holds only as long as those who are giving more, do not have their life chances impeded by the demands made upon them.

On this point, Rawlsian justice fails to deal with the realities of competition in education. Widening the pool of competitors by raising the achievements of children

currently failing in education, will inevitably impact on the chances of some children who currently enjoy success in competitive education markets. The redistributive calls, argued by Rawls as protective of both materially advantaged and disadvantaged groups in society, are somewhat more constrained in practice when parents are reluctant to advance the life chances of others in competition for limited educational and later employment opportunities.

Rawls' social justice conception does enable the less privileged in society to make claims on others in society, by asserting the primacy of autonomous individuals as rights holders in accordance with the tradition of liberal concepts of social justice. However, a central paradox persists in justice claims based on individual rights; such rights can only be assumed in relation to others, and are therefore are only able to be conceived within a unit of collective identification, most often the nation state in modernity. Personal individualism is asserted in comparison with others who are alike in their humanness, but also in recognition of difference in personhood. For this reason, individual rights confer on the self the same rights that are attributable to others, but are also unalienably attached to each person. This stance acts to conceal the degree to which we are necessarily associated and dependent on others for our well-being and for our self-identifications as individuals. Our interconnectivity with others remains obscured within rights-based discourse, when individual rights remain as the focus of whether justice has been achieved.

Social justice theorists since Rawls have taken up the challenge of exploring the implications of this paradox. I briefly canvass the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum as they explore the tensions between rights-based conceptions of justice and the necessary condition of our sociality. Their work has fleshed out how justice can be viewed as embedded in our relatedness to others and therefore, is not a reified state that sits over and above social and cultural considerations, but must be worked out within them.

Sen (1992) is concerned to recognise the social nature of justice enterprises and the impact of cultural and social contexts on how socially just actions are conceived, but argues that justice claims can be rationally determined within these contexts, without compromising individual rights and without making explicit claims about how such

rights should be expressed. He prefers to talk about human rights in terms of an individual's right to develop their capabilities, which will then enable each person to function well in society.

The state's responsibility to support the education of its citizens and children is a key component in Sen's conception of social justice. Education ensures that children can develop their capability to learn, which enhances their well-being and functioning in society. While critique of an educational system will reveal when children's educational needs are not being met, each state and society is best positioned to utilise their resources within a framework of cultural strengths and knowledge. It is therefore for each state to work out how to best support children's capabilities in learning, within the context of its culture(s) and existing resources.

Nussbaum (2011) concurs with much of Sen's analysis, but argues that there are rights-based claims that can be universalised as human needs, because they are absolutely necessary for individuals to flourish in life. She asserts that this can be done without being overly deterministic about social and cultural practices of different communities and societies. Nussbaum nevertheless, argues that cultural and social practices must be challenged, when they inhibit access of specific groups of people to social goods and services that are necessary for individuals to flourish and live well. In this manner, she is free in her conception of social justice to challenge gender-based differences in the provision of education services and other social goods as being unjust, even when socially and culturally sanctioned.

Nonetheless, for both Sen and Nussbaum, the claims of justice remain as distillations of rationally-determined behaviours, sanctioned by universal recognition for the rights of each individual, based on respect for their human dignity. Cultural and social contexts are seconded to the development of an autonomous subject as a rights-bearer in conceptions of a just society.

Viewing social justice in terms of individual rights creates opportunities for individuals and groups to make claims to justice. It enables structures of power to be challenged, when an individual's ability to attain their potential is curtailed. However, because justice is abstracted as a universal constant, and rules for social

conduct are legitimated as reifications of social justice, rational argument based on these rules becomes the only means of adjudicating competing claims for justice.

Debates about children's needs in education expressed in New Zealand in rights-based terms bat back and forth in contestations of the role of the state, autonomy of the family, the rights of parents, parental responsibilities in meeting children's needs and the nature of children's rights. While the rights of a child may prevail when a child is subjected to forms of obvious and severe physical and/or emotional harm, how such rights are balanced against parental autonomy in family life is more debatable where harms to children are less certain. It is exactly in this space that contestations arise about the boundaries of rights and responsibilities when social and economic circumstances have negative impacts on children's education. The intervention of the state into the lives of children becomes a balancing act between the rights of parents to assert their autonomy in child-care practices and the rights of children to receive an education that will enhance their capabilities and future life opportunities.

Debates about rights and responsibilities and the role of the state are exacerbated by the prevalence of neoliberal ideologies in governance in New Zealand. Neoliberalism offers a determinedly individualistic view of social life. It valorises competition and market forces as the means of shaping social institutions and socially desired behaviour (Hayek, 1994; Richardson, 1995). Neoliberal governments argue for a reduced state with a primary function in providing a framework of legal sanctions to support personal security and the protection of property. Individual citizens are then enabled to pursue their own purposes with relative freedom. It is the freedom of the individual to act autonomously within a minimally constituted state that is valued as evidence of a healthy, just and well -functioning society.

Under such conditions, children, by reason of their dependence on the adults, are understood to be primarily the responsibility of their parents. This responsibility remains in force unless there is an egregious dereliction of parental care, resulting in acts of harm or negligence, at which stage, the vulnerability of children and their relative social powerlessness are highlighted. It therefore becomes reasonable and rational for the neoliberal state to intervene in education matters, such as when

parents repeatedly fail to ensure that children attend school regularly without good reason, but this stance does not place pressure on the state to take responsibility for economic conditions that may equally impact on children's school attendance, such as family income inadequacy, unemployment, ill health and housing issues.

In contrast, proponents of a more communitarian conceptions of the state espouse state intervention in the form of increased economic regulation, income distribution and state service provision. They argue that the neoliberal state has failed to adequately support children to attain their rights as citizens, or to realise their potential in both their present and future lives, due to a preoccupation with avoiding practices that could increase parental and family dependency on the state.

While proponents of increased state intervention also support action in the case of parental negligence and irresponsibility, they argue for an expanded role for the state to improve underlying economic and social conditions for disadvantaged parents, families and children. Their arguments arise from a consequentialist view that to fail to do this, impinges on the rights of children to equality in educational opportunities. As a corollary to this argument, they assert that the capacity of parents to achieve success in the performance of their parental role is undermined by an inequitable distribution of economic and social resources. Family income and resources are therefore, indubitably the business of the interventionist state focused on reducing economic inequalities in a socially just response to educational inequalities.

The difficulty is that the distance between these two positions cannot be resolved when both make rights-based claims for the adults and children involved. Both parties make their claims to rightness based on ideological positions, rationally developed, held with fervour and vigorously promoted within the networks of power and influence available to them. Rights-based discourses therefore, become bogged down in their respective positions when there are competing demands for social justice by different groups with different explanations for their needs, impelling different expressions of, and priorities for, social action.

It is the centrality of this dilemma that is pivotal to understanding the data generated by my research project and my own desire to do more than simply report on the

ideological and policy differences. There is no disagreement about the need to improve the educational services for economically, socially and culturally disadvantaged children, but profound disagreement about how and why these disadvantages have arisen, why there are such negative impacts on children's formal schooling, and consequently which actions could best remedy educational inequalities. Finding no means of reconciling the disparate explanations for educational inequalities, the protagonists within the education system, principals, teachers, parents, academics, policy makers and politicians, find great difficulty in working together to improve educational systems, despite their co-dependence and interconnections with each other.

These interconnections and dependencies often go unnoticed in the politics of education, but they are real. Government ministers and policy makers have no choice but to rely on the efforts of educators and schools to implement their policies. Educators are reliant on politicians, policy makers and bureaucrats for the essential functions they perform to support the work they do with students. While politicians and bureaucrats may be able to exert control over schools and educators, by implementing regimes of measurement and reporting and sanctions around practice, they are nevertheless, totally dependent on teachers to give motivated effort and expertise to facilitate student learning in classrooms.

Teachers, in turn, operate in relationships with each other, inclusive of their school leadership and governance structures inside schools. They work with other government departments, ministry officials, parents and community services in supporting student learning. Parents and families entrust the care and teaching of their children to all those involved in the field of education, most directly at the level of the individual teacher and school, but just as importantly, in the confidence that the system will work fairly in meeting the learning needs of their children.

Above all, parents and teachers work daily through relationships with students and children in their homes and school classrooms. Students live and learn within a nexus of relationships with their peers, friends, teachers, support workers, parents and extended families. Providing opportunities for students to learn, therefore requires functional relationships across multiple levels of engagement and connection. This

suggests the need for an extended view of social justice as it applies to education. It argues for an account of just action that encompasses more than adherence to rules, rights and contractual obligations. In short it argues for a conception of social justice and ideology that includes the relational and interdependent nature of the educational project at its heart.

Recently, there has been a degree of recognition of this interdependence, evidenced in calls for greater collaboration within the educational sector in New Zealand (Hughes, 2013; Wylie, 2012). I argue that understanding is also required of the characteristics of collaborative relationships that work best to solve educational inequalities. This requires a view of social justice and ethical, social action that is based in the recognition of the importance of interconnection and interrelatedness encapsulated in caring actions, which should ethically extend across all relationships in the educational sector, not just those between teachers and students or parents and their children. The next section of this chapter draws on an ethic of care as a means of outlining a conception of social justice, grounded in recognition of these interdependencies and interconnections. It argues that inserting an ethic of care into our conceptions of socially just actions in education, could offer possibilities for reconceiving educational inequalities in different ways, offering alternatives for their redress. This will also contribute to the development of ideological changes in understanding how society could be better organised to achieve our educational goals.

An ethic of care: a scaffolding for social justice in education

Ethic of care theory places human relatedness, connection and human dependency as integral to, not only human survival in life, but to the moral life well lived (Engster, 2007; Noddings, 2003; Tronto, 1993; Slote, 2007). In placing our dependence on others at the heart of caring, and therefore central to conceptions of morality and social justice (Engster, 2007), possibilities arise for bridging gaps that arise from conflicts in rights-based claims, offering alternative ideations of socially just responses to educational inequalities.

Arguing for an ethic of care as a basis of social justice is not reliant on emotional responses to need alone, and does not preclude the use of social rules and rationality in efforts to negotiate conflicts. Rather, an ethic of care offers new ways of envisaging descriptions of problems and explanations for them, when accepted rules fail to mitigate social conflicts. In the field of education, this may be at the level of policy formation and political debate, in school and community relationships and in the interactions of individual school leaders, teachers, support workers, parents, and students.

Social justice conceptions rooted in care, bring to light the ubiquity of human dependency lying behind rights-based discourse (Tronto, 1993). Respect for human dignity is an expression of care that is based on individual rights, but these rights only have meaning in their attainment in relationships with others. However, in retaining a singular focus on the autonomy and atomistic nature of each person to assert their individual rights, and obscuring the relationships in which these rights are exercised, not only is the universality of our dependence on others concealed, but also possibilities in thought and action (Engster, 2007; Tronto, 1993).

An ethic of care, in restoring conceptions of our dependence and interconnection with others in just actions and a moral life, offers an expanded vision for negotiating difficult social issues (Tronto, 1993). The abstractions of justice and rights are not abandoned, but become anchored to the need for well-functioning social relationships, rather than as an edifice of rules to maintain social order. The use of rules is not negated by this stance and it would be naïve to suggest that a degree of order is not vital in the classroom, school and wider society to allow effective social functioning, but an ethic of care argues that these rules remain open to interrogation as to how well they meet both their social justice claims and express care for all social participants. By retaining an ethic of care at the heart of social justice, opportunities are offered for developing other ways for communicating across differences and in respect of motivations to act well for the benefit of others. In doing so, the abuse of power to advance self-interest, or to maintain of enclaves of privilege, is exposed and recognised for its lack of ethical care.

I have drawn on a small number of care theorists, to illuminate the personal and more distant relationships embedded in structural systems in the educational sector. The work of Noddings (2003) is prevalent in education because she has argued that face-to-face relationships between people are central to the development of ethical care in education: as a feature of caring relationships between teachers and children that are vital for children's learning; and as a requirement in education to assist children to the develop their potential to think and act as fully realised and morally sensitive individuals. Her focus on personal relationships does not preclude an examination of more distant forms of care, which she differentiates as "caring about" rather than "caring for" (Noddings, 2003, p.xv), but she has less to say about the nature of these relationships, other than to assert that those involved in caring at a distance must always encapsulate the attentiveness and openness to the other, which characterises face-to-face relationships of care. To do less is to risk enacting an imposition of power and control over others, thus contravening the ideals and practices of care.

This research suggests that a more expanded conception of care is required in education. Identifying a role for care ethics across the domains of personal, social and political life in the field of education is essential, to make visible the interrelated needs of those engaged in the day-to-day work of education. This includes the needs of students, parents, teachers, support workers, schools and their communities, acting within the social institutions that govern and define their work. It is also necessary to identify how care needs cannot be confined within a specific field such as education, but interpenetrate across multiple social domains, as is evident in the research findings I present in later chapters.

Care work, while always directed to positive ends, is also always challenging in its reach:

> On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web (Tronto, 1993, p.103).

In this definition, care and relatedness are transcendent in the activities and projects directed toward the achievement of ethical conduct and the attainment of a good life. As such, the ethical performance of care is implicated in both intimate relations between individuals, including their interactions with the material world, but also in the interface of politics, policy, and social institutions as collective expressions of care (Engster, 2007; Tronto, 1993). It is therefore necessary to identify expressions of care that encompass both the realm of face-to-face relationships and the less overtly visible care activities that are ethically important in institutionalised relationships.

An ethic of care is a vital component in redressing justice claims in social issues, because it uncovers areas of social life that have remained hidden from view in liberal ideologies informing accounts of justice (Kittay & Feder, 2002; Tronto, 1993). This analysis has its roots in feminist thought, which observes the gendered, classed and invisible nature of a great deal of care work conducted in private space of the home. The separation of work and home and the rise of industrialism in capitalist economies, accompanied the development of liberal accounts of the human nature that essentialised freedom and autonomy as the most important facets of human functioning. In the process of asserting individual, human rights to self-determination, the degree to which dependence and interconnection pervade all aspects of social life was minimised or occluded from view. However, by restoring the centrality of an ethic of care to understandings of morality and justice in our relationships, in both the private and public spheres, opportunities are created for reconceiving our world and how we can ethically act in it (Engster, 2007; Kittay & Feder, 2002; Slote, 2007; Tronto, 1993).

In propounding this broader definition of care as an ethical practice, caring continues to be other centred in its primary focus, but it enables responsibilities for care work to be shared. This is important in enabling care-givers to attend to their own needs when there are high demands for care. Recognition that it is not possible for an individual to meet every need for care they may encounter and that the capacity to collectively organise care work is necessary, enables overwhelming care needs to be met through collectively organised systems of care. This is to the advantage of both the cared-for and care-giver (Engster, 2007; Kittay & Feder, 2002). Resultantly, care

ethics argues that a collective failure to respond to overwhelming needs constitutes a double injustice: damage to care-givers attempting to meet impossible demands for care; and diminished care-giving that compromises the well-being of care-recipients. Thus, a focus on care needs of all participants in the provision of face-to-face care is integral in systematic reviews of care-giving.

On this basis, governments are centrally implicated in care concerns involving large groups of citizens and/or big issues: the care of those with high levels of dependency including infants and children, the elderly, disabled and sick; those struck down by misfortune, such that they are unable to meet their own needs; and environmental issues with wide impacts (Engster, 2007). Abdicating such responsibilities to markets is an inadequate response, because it creates inequities in care provision as private providers inevitably privilege those sectors that are more profitable over those with the greatest need.

Issues of economic affordability will always present in determining priorities in the provision of collective forms of care. However, inserting an ethic of care into considerations of social justice, insists that needs be evaluated as the first principle in driving policy debates. Efficiency and accountability issues are subjected this end, rather than being viewed as the endpoint in policy. In insisting on the primacy of responsiveness to need in policy development, implementation and evaluation, all avenues for redress remain open for consideration, creating possibilities for cutting across political differences (Tronto, 1993; Engster, 2007). It does however, require some shared understanding of care and processes of ethically enacting care in response to need.

The processural nature of care

Care, is usually understood as an affective and motivating state. It initiates and supports sympathetic and empathetic engagement with others, with objects, or with abstract issues. This emotional engagement promotes actions to support and enhance the well-being of the cared-for, or the cared-about (Kittay & Feder, 2002; Noddings, 2003; Slote, 2007). While affective concerns and identifications are certainly a feature of care, I draw on the work of Tronto (1993) to determine how care work

achieves its aims of ethically redressing the needs of the cared-for in seeking socially just ends. This excavation of how care is enacted is vital to ensure that our actions are truly other directed, rather being assertions of social power over others in their state of need and dependence.

Applying an ethic of care to issues of social justice, most often requires an ongoing process of care practices enacted in phases, rather than a single instance of care in action (Tronto, 1993). The first phase in Tronto's schema of the process of care is "caring about" (Tronto, 1993, p.106). In this phase, our attention is drawn to someone or something, through a process of recognition of a need for care. This phase is argued by Tronto as arising from our social and cultural conditioning, because it is defined by our self-identifications that are developed within our social worlds. In other words, what we perceive as a need, depends on processes of socialisation and enculturation, including the recognition of socially inscribed rights and responsibilities. In this manner, care ethics draws on liberal conceptions of rights and human dignity as a correlate of caring concern and attention.

The second phase outlined is "taking care of" (Tronto, 1993, p.106), which includes planning and decision-making activities that signal an intention to respond to a need for care. While an affective state, including negative emotions such as anger, sadness and distress, may act to motivate action, purposeful care requires rational thinking to identify what should be done to meet these needs and how these can and should be enacted within the resources available. Taking care of identified needs can necessitate deep debate and difficult decisions, but recognition of the complexity of needs in troubling circumstances offers opportunities for widening the pool of potential solutions.

The third phase, "care-giving" (Tronto, 1993, p.107), involves the actual labour involved in meeting needs, generally face-to-face. It may be devolved to others on the part of those "caring about". In such cases "taking care of" becomes a directed activity performed by people with specific skills and expertise. However, in devolving the performance of care work to others, such as teachers in education, it is vital that their insights and knowledge also inform previous phases; those performing caregiving will be able to identify needs for care that only become obvious in the

intimate space of face-to-face interactions, offering insights to better inform planning and decision-making activities.

The final phase is defined by Tronto, (1993, p.107-108) as "care receiving", which describes responses to the care given, by the recipients of care. This is a vital step in ensuring that care has been effectively provided; if responses from care-recipients indicate that needs have not been successfully met, or other needs have arisen from care-giving actions, then earlier care-planning and care-giving phases must be revisited.

Although this description appears to be a linear presentation of care in action, the processes of enacting these phases is more complex. Multiple feedback loops across the different phases are required to ensure the ethical enactment of care. This means that while some individuals may be primarily concerned with planning and resourcing activities, and others with delivering and receiving care, all parties are required to be in communication with each other to ensure that needs are identified, attention is correctly focused, planning and decision-making are appropriate and care activities are sufficiently and competently provided.

Throughout the phases of care described in the previous section, there are key "elements" of care (Tronto, 1993, p.127). These elements of "attentiveness", "responsibility", "competence" and "responsiveness" define the quality of care and its moral worth. They thread their way through care practices, back forth between phases of care, such that if an act of care is devoid of one or more of these elements, it is unlikely to meet its intended purpose, or to be sufficiently attuned to the needs of those who require it.

Attentiveness is implicated in all phases of care processes. Inattentiveness to need in the first instance will fail to create a condition in which "caring about" is instituted. The reasons for this failure may involve several conditions: ignorance arising from a lack of knowledge and opportunities to acquire it; wilful refusal to take up opportunities to acquire knowledge by listening to others and/or acknowledging expressed needs; a failure of imagination required to activate empathetic concern.

The capacity to respond emotionally to the needs of others, supports attentiveness and serves to motivate necessary action (Slote, 2007). The work of emotion is to engage our attention; when a need activates an empathetic response, we become other directed in our attention and prompted to act (Holmes, 2004). These emotions may also include feelings and expressions of sadness and anger about a perceived need that remains unaddressed. In this sense, negative emotions are associated with feelings of love, care and empathy, all serving to energise motivations to act with care. Thus, emotion work is necessarily complex, especially when directed toward responding to perceived injustices and complex needs.

However, rational thought is also brought to bear in analysing the sources of unmet need and possible solutions for redress. It is through an act of will and intention that we give our attention to others' needs, allied with rational explanations for our reasons for doing so. It is in this sense emotionality and rationality are married in care work: in the work of giving thoughtful effort and engagement to initiate the first element of care: in the work of planning and decision making about how best to meet needs; most obviously in the tasks that must be performed to meet those needs; and finally, in receiving care, which asks the recipient to indicate whether needs have been met (Slote, 2007).

The second component of care, responsibility, is defined in Tronto's schema as making a commitment to act with caring to meet a need, once it is identified. It resonates with the conception of empathy advanced by Slote (2007) as being central to an ethic of care, because it encompasses a degree of motivation to act. However, Tronto's schema argues that the identification of a need for care creates a deontological obligation to act, whether empathetic connection is activated or not. In Tronto's conception, it is morally perverse to fail to commit to acting, once a need for care is identified. She is reluctant to highlight the parameters of this obligation to act, noting that it is not in the same category of contractual reciprocity that Rawls offers as a founding plank of social justice. Where there is no hope of reciprocity, such as in the case of a child born severely and irrevocably disabled, Ralwsian justice is less clear about why one should act. Tronto (1993), however, unequivocally asserts that care and caring relations will still be required, and sees no need to argue the basis of the obligation, except as an imperative of care.

In contrast, Engster (2007) and Kittay and Feder (2002) assert a contractual obligation to act on knowledge of a need. The obligation does not reside in the reciprocity of two individuals involved in giving and receiving care, but results from a general recognition that the experience of dependency is common to all. Perception of the needs of others and taking responsibility for meeting needs is obligatory on the basis that we have all been recipients of care from others: in meeting our survival needs, at the very least in infancy and childhood; and in our likely continued dependence on others in maintaining our lives, especially in times of misfortune, illness and old age.

Basing social justice claims on reciprocity does provide a compelling rationale for ensuring all children have access to education. However, it does not appear to offer a sufficiently compelling reason to ensure that all children achieve their potential in education. This is especially so when qualifiers are applied about the extent of our obligations, and the degree to which existing structures of power determine which children are being provided for adequately by the status quo, and which children are not. Setting limits, based on either the capacity to reciprocate, or to be bounded by perceptions of what can be currently afforded, seems to bed in existing levels of disparity in resources, social power and educational outcomes.

The alternative is not to discount the very real effects of resource inadequacy on educational services. However, it is important that a current state of resource shortage is not normalised or minimised, which would ensure that the effects of these shortages are likely to be accepted as the best that can be achieved. The state of Maori immersion education offers a case in point as a positive government response to need. The lack of fluent Maori language teachers has constrained the capacity of schools to offer full immersion programmes and/or bilingual programmes. However, it remains a government priority to continue to develop Maori language teaching capacity. It therefore continues to evaluate its progress toward the aim of realising sufficiency, rather than accepting past or present deficiencies as the best that can be achieved. The choices the state has made in a condition of resource constraint are recognised as inadequate in the face of current and future need. In framing the need in such terms, there is ongoing pressure on the state to meet its requirements as soon

capacity improves. At the same time, attention and energy continue to be directed to seeking solutions for the problem of this resourcing shortage.

Determinations of what we should care about and our priorities for acting justly, are more than simply contractual, and while our relationships offer us reciprocity in rewards on many occasions, care based on the expectation of reciprocity remains self-centred, not other-centred, in supplying reasons to act. When care fails to be other-centred, it is likely to be less attentive to needs, incomplete in its planning for those needs, less competent in the giving, and it is more likely to evoke responses from recipients that reflects its shortcomings (Tronto, 1993).

By retaining a focus on obligation as the basis of care, even if it may be acceptably not reciprocal, Engster (2007) provides a rationale that marries obligation to our shared experience of being in need. In continuing to argue that needs retain a contractual element that remains embedded in reciprocity, Engster remains preoccupied with establishing the limits of our contractual obligations to meet different levels of need. Tronto, in contrast, resists closing down questions of the limits of ethical care and places greater trust in instituting caring processes and retaining other-centredness across the spectrum of human interactions, when dealing with difficult issues of resourcing. While resourcing issues may result in deficient care responses, these are recognised as such and pressure to continue to seek solutions is maintained.

The third element of caring described by Tronto (1993) is competence, which is vital to the performance of care work in meeting needs of others. However, it is also threaded through other elements of care as well. Attentiveness and taking responsibility for instituting caring actions will not meet needs for care if there is an insufficient level of competence in performing assessment activities (Tronto, 1993). Competence is also implicated in the initial phase of 'caring about', because sufficient knowledge of a situation or issue, when a demand for care is made, determines competence in setting priorities and planning for care. The competent use of knowledge to determine which actions are most appropriate and what resources will be required, is essential in planning activities. It can be especially difficult when needs are complex. Expertise arising from practices, honed through deep knowledge

and derived from the attentive and thoughtful past performances of care activities, increases the likelihood of competence in both planning care activities and their eventual performance by care-givers.

Openness to receiving responses from recipients of care and possibilities for dialogue with others involved in similar work, offers opportunities for deep knowledge to be shared amongst those providing care and to enhance competence in care-giving. Instituting care practices as the basis of ethical action and the means of attaining greater social justice in education, demands knowledgeable educational leaders across all domains of practice, who demonstrate attentiveness to others through respectful listening and the capacity to foster dialogue across divergent views. Competence in face-to-face care-giving resides in getting the necessary information to plan effective actions by giving focused attention to, and remaining responsive to the needs of others.

The final element of care is responsiveness to others (Tronto, 1993), without which other elements of caring practice are unlikely to be perceived as successful by the recipients of care. It is the element of care practice that above all affirms the importance of the care recipient in care work, because it respects the personhood of the other in the ubiquity of our universal condition of dependence in human life. Responsiveness focuses on the needs of the other, rather than needs as they are perceived by the caregiver, enabling care-givers to avoid paternalistic practices. At the same time responsiveness to care on the part of care-recipients, contributes feedback. Positive feedback is necessary to sustain ongoing motivation and commitment to care processes and reinforces effective caring actions; negative feedback refocuses attention on the needs of others, to assist in re-evaluating planning and decision-making, offering new possibilities for improved actions (Tronto, 1993; Noddings, 2003).

An Integrated Process of Ethical care
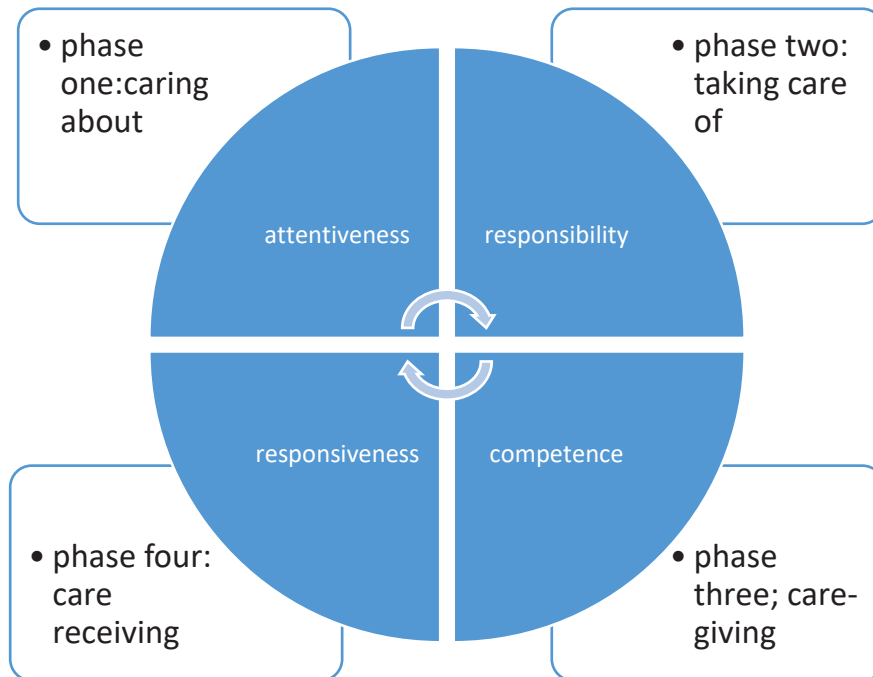
Figure 6.1 derived from text in Tronto, (1993).

The phases of care and the elements of ethical care provision illustrated in figure 6.1 are not discrete entities, but integrated and interdependent processes enacted in a network of ethical, care practices. Each element ideally suffuses each phase of care as individuals enact their roles together in the competent performance of care work. Each individual is dependent on others in care processes: for understanding the needs they are seeking to meet; for developing plans for meeting needs and for evaluating the impacts and outcomes of actions taken. Care work is therefore intensely relational in its determinations of the needs of others, and in activating and motivating individuals to act to meet them.

While an ethic of care requires other-centredness in relationships, this does not supplant conceptions of justice based in rights, reciprocity and rule-giving. However, in locating the centrality of our relationships and connections with others at the heart of more abstract formulations of justice, and in reinstating an ethic of care as intrinsic to conceptions of justice, competing claims to social justice can be understood in

different ways, offering hope that new solutions will emerge to intransigent problems.

Conclusion

It was strikingly obvious to me from the outset of this project that educational work is grounded in care: care for children in their present and future learning and their capacity to achieve a good life; care for the health and well-being of society in the future when the children of the present become those with the influence and power to determine its shape and function; care about how best to organise educational systems to best meet the needs of children. All parties within the education sector articulated care about children's educational outcomes. However, some participating teachers described instances where they perceived care as lacking for them and children on the part of the both the Minister and the Ministry of Education. It was evident that this lack of care was felt to be unfair in the disrespect it implied for them as individuals and as a profession and as failing to encompass the full range of needs of their students and for the deleterious effects on the work of teaching and learning. And yet, politicians argued that these policies were determined by their 'care about' educational inequalities and their care for groups of children failing to achieve their potential in education.

I argue in this thesis that it was necessary to find a means of analysing these competing claims to care and social justice. The application of Tronto's conception of an ethic of care, asserts that 'caring about' educational inequalities is not sufficient to ensure that just and ethical actions ensue. Ethically, caring actions have particular qualities, which once identified, enable the formation of a framework through which competing claims can be judged. This allows an examination of what could and should be done in acting to redress entrenched and complex problems.

It is precisely these qualities which challenge the dominance of neoliberal conceptions of individuated responsibility and accountability in seeking answers to educational inequalities. An ethic of care argues that framing problems as arising from individual choices made, whether at the level of an individual school, teacher, parent or student, fails to give attention to the relationships and social conditions in which such choices present. The clarity of neoliberal prescriptions for the redress of

educational inequalities in 2013, masked a paucity of analysis in determining the scope and reach of factors that contributed to them. In failing to give attention to the fullest range of possibilities and/or actively excluding some analyses from consideration, opportunities for identifying both the causation and redress of educational inequalities were lost.

The application of an ethic of care to an entrenched problem, such as educational inequalities, cuts to the heart of the values that lie beneath our intent to act justly and with care for others. It offers a mechanism for evaluating why care sometimes fails, despite our intentions. It is in this respect that an ethic of care, and a critique of neoliberalism provided a framework for analysing key questions that arose from the data generated by the research. It gave notice of where, and in what ways, care failed in its intentions to redress needs and, in acting with care, what could have been done better to ensure that desired ends were met.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ATTENDANCE ISSUES

Introduction

> …if you have got an average attendance rate of 82%: that means that
> your children on average attend 82% of the time. Let's translate this
> into realistic terms: that is just on two months of each year that they are
> not in school learning. Damned hard to teach when they are not there
> (Interviewee, Radio New Zealand, National, 2008).

The simplicity of this statement makes plain the link between attendance and learning in school. It was made during an interview with a principal, an educational academic and a secondary school teacher discussing problems in teaching reading to children (Radio New Zealand, National, 2008). The reason this principal makes this statement so baldly, is to challenge the insistence of the academic and secondary school teacher that it is sufficient to change teaching practices in one way or another to remedy problems in literacy. The argument he makes is that there are many factors affecting children's learning, and poor attendance is one of the most basic.

In like manner, the Principal and teachers at Watea School expressed their frustration with the patterns of poor school attendance and transience within their school community. Attendance issues were attributed to a mix of adverse social conditions impacting on families and children and to modes of family function that failed to

support regular school attendance. While the Principal and teachers made determined efforts to improve attendance and utilised services to reach out to families, they were unable to significantly impact on many of the social conditions contributing to disrupted forms of school attendance.

That said, contributing factors to poor school attendance do not lie outside schools alone; rather they comprise a mix of relational factors affecting individual children, families, neighbourhoods and communities**, and** schools (Ainsworth, 2002; Anyon, 2005; Crowder & South, 2003; Flessa, 2007). These factors are, in turn, influenced by government ideologies and policies of the day, which both inform, and are informed by, social and political concerns within wider society. Thus, while school attendance attracted attention in government policy in 2010, the focus was largely to address school processes and parenting behaviours. The direction of government policy was in accordance with its neoliberal conceptions of attendance problems as arising from the performance failures of individual schools and families. It therefore remained focused on establishing robust measures to hold both accountable for their failures, while providing targeted support to assist individual families and schools in ensuring children's regular attendance.

This chapter examines issues of disrupted school attendance using the categories devised by the Ministry of Education (2011). These categories enable the differences and complexities of attendance issues to be examined in light of state policy and services available. In the process of disentangling the actions of policy makers, politicians, school leaders, teachers, support workers and families in their roles of supporting children into regular school attendance, the complexities and difficulties accompanying poor school attendance are revealed. While the issue of poor school attendance can be simply described, as the principal does in the opening quotation, the causes of poor school attendance are anything but, deriving from a complex mix of family, school and wider social factors.

Much of the literature concerned with issues of poor school attendance focuses on the actions of parents. However, reasons given for parental failures are embedded in socially constituted conditions: parents' own experiences of school as a site of failure and alienation resulting in negative views of schooling in general (Sheldon, 2002;

Wylie, 1999); parents lacking the social capital, confidence and institutional knowledge of school systems to overcome problems that arise for their children in learning (Ainsworth, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Willis,1977), or to enable them to resolve difficulties in relationships with teachers (Flessa, 2008; Reid, 2004); and class and cultural differences between teachers and parents impacting on parent teacher relationships (Aubert, 2011; Bordieu & Passeron, 1990; Sheldon, 2002; Willis, 1977). These parental difficulties also implicate schools in poor school attendance, because of classed and cultural differences impacting on the quality of relationships between them.

However, some literature also draws direct links between poverty and patterns of poor school attendance. Conditions experienced by impoverished families impact on family health, well-being and stability (Ainsworth, 2002; Crowder & South, 2003; Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearse, Abbott, 2002; Huston, Duncan, McLoyd, Crosby, Ripke, Weisner, & Eldred, 2005; Reynolds, Temple, Dylan, & Mann, 2001) all of which contribute to increased absences from school. These analyses suggest that while parents and schools can work together to achieve better patterns of school attendance, attendance issues will persistently arise as long as current levels of economic and social inequality continue.

It is likely that the complex and interrelated nature of attendance issues has contributed to their long history in formal schooling. I include a brief examination of the historical dimensions of each category of poor school attendance. This enables a longer view of putative causations and consequent remediating strategies, bringing to light the persistence of discourses of blame placed on individual families, and sometimes individual children. More recent attributions tend to accompany these familial explanations with school-based causations and solutions. I argue that despite broadening the scope of these attributions, conceptions of causation and remediation remain firmly ensconced within neoliberal discourses, acting to conceal the impacts of wider social conditions on parental decision-making and on the ability of schools to support children and families in improving school attendance.

Defining patterns of disrupted school attendance and their distribution

The incoming National government in 2008 stated their intention to ensure that parents complied with their statutory requirements to ensure children's regular, school attendance (Tolley, 2008). Consequently, the Ministry of Education provided schools with definitions of absence, enabling consistent measures of non-attendance across the primary and secondary school sectors. These are diagrammatically represented as follows:

The Constituent Parts of Poor School Attendance

unjustified school absences, unsanctioned by parents and school (truanting)

parentally-sanctioned, but unjustifiable school absences

parentally-sanctioned absences, justified by school policies

transience - frequent changes of school
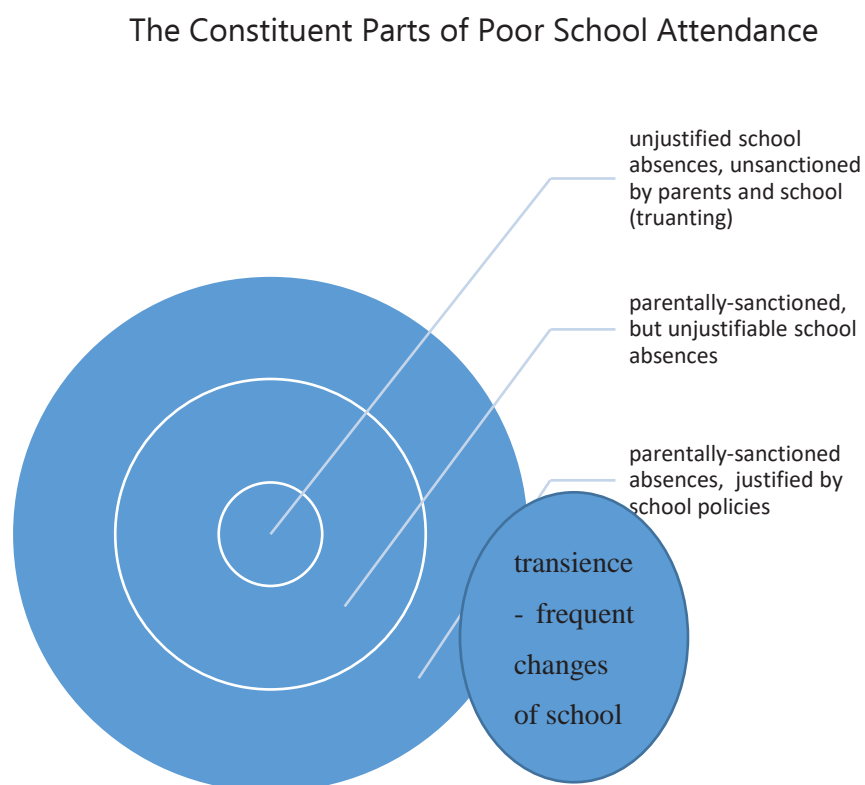
Figure 7.1. Diagram drawn from text, Ministry of Education (2011).

The definitions provided by the Ministry of Education (2011) classify absences as justified in light of school polices and legislation, or unjustified. Justified absences are understood as reasonable by both parents and the school. However, this decision also includes an alternate assessment of whether absences result from parental decisions to keep children home from school for unjustifiable reasons, in which case remedies lie within the school/parent relationship and possibly the power of the state to enforce school attendance. Alternatively, when a child makes the decision to

absent themselves from school without parental knowledge, this is described as an unjustified and parentally unsanctioned absence, more commonly understood as truancy.

Sitting alongside these three conditions of school absence, I also include transience as a pattern of school attendance that has negative impacts on children's experience of schooling. Frequent changes in school contribute to difficulties in ensuring children receive consistent teaching, and the development of functional relationships with peers and teachers. Transience therefore, is attended by consequences of failing to attend school regularly and can be viewed as a form of disrupted school attendance.

The establishment of cross sector definitions of school absences has been accompanied by the development of a national database. This enables robust descriptions and comparisons to be made across regions and schools, and allows the incidence of different categories of school absence to be described. It has also enabled the Ministry of Education to provide advice to schools, based on the different categories of absence.

In referring to actions to redress poor school attendance, more often it is secondary schooling that is the focus. Primary school attendance issues figure less prominently in number, are perceived as less likely to result in problems within the community in terms of public disorder, and the links between absenteeism, educational failure and future unemployment are less direct. However, poor attendance during primary school years creates more entrenched issues of poor attendance in later years (Reid, 2002, 2004). Certainly, the Principal of Watea School accorded attendance issues a high priority, on the understanding that patterns of poor primary school attendance were likely to increase in later years with more damaging effects for children's educational prospects. Additionally, the Principal argued that poor school attendance compromised the ability of teachers to teach and students to successfully learn, thus making schooling a more difficult process for both.

Unjustified, parentally-sanctioned absences.

This form of absence informs much of the literature, policy and public commentary concerned with poor school attendance. It has featured as problematic, alongside truancy, since the introduction of compulsory and universal education in New Zealand in 1877, mirroring descriptions of universal systems of schooling in other Western nations (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Tyack & Berkowitz, 1977; Zhang, 2010). Early descriptions of children's non-attendance at fledgling schools in New Zealand still resonate with current discourses in media. Then, as now, poor school attendance was most commonly attributed to negative family and parental attitudes to formal education, family dysfunction and disorder, or to characteristics within the individual child (often attributed to poor parenting practice), which make them resistant to formal education. In other words, poor school attendance was, and is, most often defined by the failure of certain children and families to be adequately socialised into the state's educational project.

In assigning blame for unjustifiable school absences to parenting practices and decisions, they are also most often publically censured. Parents' deficiencies and the need for methods of legal compulsion have barely changed in over a century of universal education:

> There are several parents who will not send their children regularly unless forced to do so. About twenty of these chronic offenders will have to be proceeded against, as warnings have ceased to have the desired effect (Papers Past, The Dominion, 1910).

Over a hundred years later, the Northern Advocate (2012) notes that the work of children in families is a reason for children not attending school:

> Sometimes kids are away for simple reasons like being kept home to look after younger ones…. Many children are repeating what their parents once did and the problem starts early at primary school.

A recent newspaper editorial offers a more expanded view of reasons parents keep children from school:

> The propensity of some people to take their children away from school in term time is staggering…. Some of it is caused by poverty, when pupils are kept at home to care for younger siblings so that parents can go to work. But it is not confined to the poor. Better off parents sometimes think nothing of taking their children away from classes for a holiday. These people are not thinking at all (New Zealand Herald, 2013).

The editor in this final instance reserves his ire for those parents apparently frivolously taking children out of school for holidays and is less censorious of poorer parents with child-care problems. However, the editorial does not discuss the qualitative differences that arise from the two scenarios. There are enrichment opportunities that arise from holidays and travel, and the disruption in educational progress is singular. In contrast, issues of affordable child-care for families remain constant in a low-wage economy and are likely to result in frequent absences with corrosive and ongoing effects on educational progress. In focusing on holidaying families, other issues that arise for poor families are not considered as requiring change; the impacts of a low-wage economy and unaffordable child-care, on the educational prospects of older school children caring for siblings, remain unexamined and unaddressed.

The Ministry of Education (2011), as the agent for implementing government policy, reflected a greater awareness of the interconnections between school and parents in guidelines to schools concerning school absences. These guidelines recommend a suite of measures for schools to implement: good record keeping so that patterns of absence can be identified; establishing dialogue with the individual student and with parents in order to ascertain causes and solutions for absenteeism; making contact with families at the earliest possible time to facilitate the establishment or reestablishment of regular school attendance as a routine; talking with parents about the learning needs of their children and possible solutions so that parents can feel confident that the school is responsive to their child's individual needs; working with

social workers and attendance services to support families in difficulty. As a last resort, the guidelines recommend the use of powers of prosecution to force parental compliance in ensuring children attend school (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Government policy has also reviewed and changed the way it has contracted out Attendance Services, previously known as District Truancy Services (DTS). Attendance Services, like DTS in the past, is tasked with providing support and expertise to schools in following-up and reintegrating children back into schools and into learning, when it has been disrupted by non-attendance, whether it is parentally sanctioned or truanting (Ministry of Education, 2010, 2011). However, revised service contracts argue for less reliance on enforcement of the legislative requirement that children attend school and more on working with families and schools to identify and redress the causes of the relational disruptions and discords.

During the period of the research the Ministry of Education perceived the relationship between school and home as vital to the success of efforts to establish and support regular school attendance. The state did recognise that conditions in low-decile school communities intruded on parent's capacity to ensure children's school attendance when it provided increased levels of social worker availability. However, the state remained largely unmoved by calls to address the material conditions of impoverished families, preferring to rely on private sponsorship, charitable efforts and local school initiatives to assist families and children failing to attend school occasioned by the lack of adequate clothing and food. Similarly, they remained resistant, to calls to substantially improve conditions of employment and housing, and the costs of child-care. The government's welfare payments remained comparatively low, in efforts to ensure that incentives to work remained in place in a low-wage economy. Thus, for many parents, conditions in low-decile school communities remained difficult.

Watea School leadership and governance were concerned to improve school attendance in 2013. The processes and procedures used by the school were compliant with practices recommended by the Ministry of Education and were effective in identifying which children were absent, when, and how often. The data collected generated an understanding of the impacts of poor school attendance on children's

learning and informed the Principal's ongoing efforts to redress high levels of school absence.

Watea School staff kept a school roll count each morning in 2013 and a part-time office worker contacted parents by telephone when there was an absence without explanation. The data for all absences and late arrivals was then collated and contributed to both the school and national databases on school attendance. This system had a number of functions at a local level: it ensured that children arrived safely in the advent that they walked to school unaccompanied and it reassured parents that the school was mindful of their duty of care; it reminded parents to keep in contact with the school if children had valid reasons for not attending school; it reinforced the importance of each child to the school and that the school had an interest in the child's education; it enabled accurate record-keeping for each child to highlight how much school was being missed; it enabled the school to make correlations between attendance and achievement collectively and individually; it facilitated conversations between the school and family as to possible reasons and solutions for poor attendance; it assisted the identification of problems in other areas such as the need to access health, housing, and economic entitlements where social support could be of assistance; and it shed light on situations within the school such as bullying and poor teacher/child relationships.

The social worker, employed under the Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) programme at Watea School in 2013, noted that attendance issues were one of the most common flags for identifying families in need of her services. Her ability as a social worker to move easily between home and school offered opportunities to redress attendance issues arising from either sphere. While this capacity was appreciated by Watea School, it should be noted the school previously employed their own social worker to work with families on attendance issues, because they had been long accorded importance in supporting children to learn in the Watea School community.

Under the aegis of new government funding for social work in 2010, Watea School received targeted funding for social worker support. Consequently, the SWiS social worker was contracted to work across three low-decile schools including Watea

School. She described herself as being overextended. Even allowing for a period of time to establish her position, the level of need at Watea School exceeded the 2 days available to her each week in 2013. The effect of this disjunction between time available and the work required, was that she had to prioritise and ration her interventions. The neediest families in her care also required the most time to establish effective relationships, because of their poor past experiences and relationships with state institutions. She therefore found herself juggling her workload, in an effort to achieve the greatest positive impact in her work under time-constrained circumstances.

Establishing effective relationships was contingent upon the SWiS worker's capacity to establish a genuine dialogue with parents and children. Creating trusting relationships enabled the underlying issues surrounding poor attendance to come to light and effective strategies to be identified and implemented. The SWiS social worker therefore, carefully maintained her independence from the school, in order to establish these relationships. This did not negate or override her communication with school personnel, but allowed her to work independently in the space between the school and family. She could then be seen by parents as working on behalf of the child's best interests, rather than as primarily an enforcing agent of state laws.

The instance of bullying provides a case in point in arguing for the need to maintain a degree of separation from the school in social work practice. Bullying is correlated with absences from school at primary school age on the grounds of ill-health when children appear to suffer a greater number of minor illnesses that keep them at home (Woulke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karlstadt, 2001). These absences are therefore, often categorised as justified absences. Frequent absences for minor illnesses were followed up by the school and the SWiS worker, because they could indicate poor peer relationships implicated in bullying or other forms of social exclusion. For socially excluded children, school could therefore become a place of failure and social ostracism, contributing to children's anxiety and desire to avoid attending school. Thus, creating safe processes for effective dialogue between school, parents and children were important when frequent absences from school were identified.

In 2013, the Principal made it a priority issue to improve school attendance rates, which had remained fixed at relatively high levels over several years. In concert with his Board of Trustees, an intensive campaign was instituted in the second and third school terms. School attendance issues were raised in communications with parents via school newsletters, and a programme of home visiting with parents of children with high levels of absence was implemented. One account given by a participating parent in the research, who was also visited at home by the Principal, exemplified the way in which respectful dialogue could facilitate supportive and cooperative relationships between school and parent, when attendance was an issue.

Yolande, described her experience of withdrawing her child from school to attend a family tangi (funeral). Her situation was complex in terms of family circumstance: family breakdown had preceded her recent relocation to the area and she had no close family or friends living locally; she had to travel at short notice to the tangi at some distance; she was not familiar with school procedures for notifying her child's expected absence from school after hours and did not know that she could leave a message at the weekend. Having arrived at the tangi, she soon exhausted her current funds and had to wait some days before she could afford to return home. The school was therefore unaware of the circumstances of her child's absence on the Monday of the tangi and for the two weeks that followed.

The Principal met with Yolande at home when her child returned to school. Explanations ensued and Yolande was relieved that the Principal understood her need to take her child out of school for the week of the tangi. Her subsequent difficulties were received sympathetically and advice given about after-hours messaging. Subsequently, Watea School added a free-call number and publicised it weekly via school newsletters over two terms in 2013. Limited telephone access has always been a feature of poorer communities in New Zealand, which has not been entirely remediated by the wide availability of low cost cell-phones and cellular text messaging. Making calls on cell-phones to landlines is expensive. Watea School's institution of a free-call number reflected their understanding of this cost.

The care with which the Principal handled this interview was appreciated by Yolande. While she felt that the Principal had initially assumed a need to assert the

importance of school attendance in ensuring her daughter's learning, she also believed the social and cultural imperatives for attendance at the tangi were understood and accepted. She felt the Principal respected her dignity and standing as a parent during their discussion and at the time I interviewed her, she perceived herself to be working with the school in the joint task of supporting her daughter's education. The positive nature of this exchange was supplemented by the support she received from her daughter's classroom teacher in dealing with the impacts of her traumatic family breakdown. The Principal's decision to speak with her and to create a space where they could both contribute to an understanding of the issues at stake, reinforced their mutual commitment to the well-being and learning of her child. I would argue that the face-to-face dialogue was a critical factor in reaching a positive outcome in this case.

During conversations with the Principal over the course of the research, the issue of poor school attendance often arose. The tone of these conversations was reinforced in the repeated injunctions by the Principal in weekly newsletters to parents, exhorting them to get children to school and get them there on time. The links between poor attendance and low achievement were also outlined several times. Parental failure to ensure children's school attendance was described as "*depriving children of a right to an education* and alternatively, as "*depriving them (children) of the opportunity to achieve as fully as they can.*"

This rights-based discourse was repeated several times in newsletters and in my interviews with the Principal. However, the Principal did take a broader approach on other occasions in newsletters:

> *If there are problems causing such Absenteeism – clothing, food, then come and talk confidentially to me. We help many families with needs, but can only do this if we know. There is no reason to feel whakama (ashamed, shy) about this. All of us need help at some stage in our lives.*

There are three consequences that result from taking this broader approach in recognising that children's absences from school are embedded within family relationships and social conditions. Firstly, the focus on the child's right to education

is affirmed, but these rights are extended to a consideration of other factors in children's lives disrupting their access to schooling. Secondly, children's rights in education are acknowledged as embedded within familial circumstances and adverse social conditions, a fact often ignored in discussion of children's rights. Thirdly and crucially, the Principal gives recognition to need as a universal condition, which can then be read as a requirement for ethically responsive actions to meet the needs of both parents and children. Providing this recognition creates opportunities for generating dialogue between school and families, contributing to a greater understanding of conditions within the wider school community and increasing possibilities for redressing attendance issues.

These acknowledgements of parental needs, run counter to more widespread public and political discourses of individual responsibility, which serve to occlude the conditions in which low-socioeconomic families perform their parenting. In giving recognition to the needs of families which impact on children's school attendance, the Principal sought to diminish effects of social shame felt by parents in poverty; needs were recognised as part of the human condition, rather than being used as a stigmatised and discursive marker of material and social deficiency.

It is within this space that the SWiS social worker also sought to work; not to absolve parents from responsibilities, but to work on the issues that prevented them from achieving their best parenting work. The home visits undertaken by the Principal, and the feedback provided by the school social worker, led to greater understanding of some of the reasons for parents keeping children home from school: lack of food to provide lunch; lack of suitable clothing such as raincoats in wet weather; transport difficulties; and tangi and other cultural expectations. Many of these conditions are directly related to the lack of economic resources. However, the lacks experienced by families also point to the competing responsibilities society places on parents in poverty: they are responsible as parents for their family's economic condition and at the same time their inability to fully meet standards for economic independence are to be put aside in the interests of their children when they require assistance. Within a society that regularly extols personal responsibility for oneself and one's children, their failure as parents is laid bare and parents are opened up to the possibility of

shameful stigmatisation and disciplining practices (Charlesworth, Gilfillan, & Wilkinson, 2004; Larner, 2000).

The reality is that there is gulf between the needs of those in poverty and the better off in New Zealand. For those in poverty, operating on the margins of economic sufficiency, ends cannot be met under either everyday circumstances or the frequent events that precipitate crises. More affluent families can take it for granted that basic ends can always be met within their current resources. Small, unexpected events do not plunge them into crisis; they may require assistance if their child has special needs, but they are not exposed as failing to meet a fundamental parental function - to adequately provide basic material resources for their children. It may be a universal experience to require help from others in raising our children, but we do not experience our need in the same way and with the same consequences for our sense of agency and power.

This was exemplified in a narrative provided by the Principal of another home visit made during the year, when a child was absent from school without reason. In this instance the family lived some distance from the school and the mother had recently given birth. The logistics of getting her older children to school regularly overwhelmed her. With no transport, no raincoats for children and wet weather frequent, and the care of a new born child, she found it difficult to ensure their attendance. The school responded by providing raincoats for the children with some effect on their attendance. However, the Principal was disappointed that getting the older children to school had remained a relatively low priority for this mother.

There are other issues raised by this story that speak to conditions of poverty over and above the obvious material deprivations. Poorer communities are often characterised by transience, as accommodation costs are constantly weighted against housing quality (Gilbert, 2005). Transience in housing not only has direct impacts on the education of children when they are required to move school frequently, but also weakens the ties within communities (McCoy & Vincent, 2008) and limits opportunities for the kinds of social capital that can offset material disadvantage. This mother evidently did not, or could not, call on neighbours and friends to help

her get the older children to school. She, and her children, appeared isolated in their community.

This story contrasts with an account given by a parent interviewed for the research. She too had a baby and a child at school. She also lived some distance from the school in an area of low-cost housing. In this story, the mother described herself as living within a network of families known to her for several years, due to the stable tenure of families in their street and nearby. They supported one another, in getting their children to school and she could count on them for assistance as they also could rely on her to reciprocate. She felt that the advantage of having these relationships was more important than living in a more convenient location, or in better housing.

In instances where the Principal made home visits, opportunities to meet with parents provided valuable contextual information that enabled some important differences in family circumstances to emerge. However, in the normal course of events, the spheres of home and school do not interpenetrate in ways that offer this understanding. The difference in income between school employees and many of the families living in a decile-two school community, meant that all the teachers and most other school staff did not live within the school community. Contacts between school staff and families in the school community arose out of the work of education alone, rather than from a shared experience of the reality of life in the community in which the school was sited. While the school often encouraged parents to come to the school to meet with staff and created opportunities for parents to be involved in school life, this did not always translate into understanding the corrosive effects of poverty in daily family life, the impacts of poverty on education in general, and on attendance in particular.

Yet, the account given by Yolande suggests that on an individual basis, dialogue can be powerful, because it recognises that a parent does have knowledge about where the problems lie in ensuring regular school attendance. Directing energy to these problems through better connections between home and school, may ultimately prove less frustrating and more effective in ensuring improved school attendance. It falls heavily on school leaders to create the conditions of dialogic relationships as a means of redressing problems of poor school attendance. In a school community

with high levels of mobility and poverty, this will be an ongoing challenge, to be negotiated over and over again with parents and families, as they move in and out of the area.

Truanting children

Truanting children are a subset of the groups of children with poor school attendance. These children are unjustifiably absent from school, without their parents' consent or knowledge. While some accounts fail to make distinctions between truanting and parentally sanctioned, unjustified school absences in their descriptions of consequential outcomes for children, this lack of distinction fails to identify the differences that attend each category of absence. Truancy has serious impacts on children's future life-courses, including their integration into society as law-abiding citizens (Fergussen et al., 2002, 2004).

In this sense truancy is a subset of the troubling and difficult behaviours that some children exhibit in education, (explored in greater detail in chapter 8). However, while there are overlaps between truancy and difficult behaviours, there are also areas of difference. Not all children who exhibit difficult behaviour truant, and neither do all truants demonstrate other forms of difficult behaviour. Truancy therefore constitutes an issue in formal schooling in its own right.

This section of the thesis explores past attitudes toward truancy, arguing that they continue to exert an influence in the present. Policy initiatives initiated by the government have sought to move on from simply enforcing compliance with mandatory school attendance, although the threat of legal sanctions remains and processes for activating sanctions have been streamlined. Current policy perceives truancy as arising from disturbed relationships in families and in schools, or between the family and school. Consequently, interventions are also directed toward improving the quality of these relationships and creating more inclusive school environments.

From the outset of compulsory education, children were noted to be absconding from school without parental approval. This group of children was regarded as a source of disorder and therefore, concern within the community:

> After nearly a quarter of a century's experience and after dealing with thousands of boys, I am impressed with the fact that truancy is the most prolific cause of juvenile crime. Nine out of every ten who come here owe their fall to this great evil. Stamp truancy out and you will ultimately largely reduce crime and empty the reformatories and gaols. The neglected boy, if not taken in hand at a proper age, too often takes a fearful revenge on society by ultimately growing up into criminal manhood (Papers Past, Otago Daily Times, 1896).

Again, these sentiments are replicated in 2012, albeit expressed in slightly less florid language with more clearly stated links to later unemployment as a precursor to criminality:

> The Secondary Principal's Association warned that regular truants were more likely to become criminals…. If they're absent for a long period, they are missing out on their education. They're less likely to complete level two NCEA, and therefore not get a job, or lead on to an apprenticeship or work (Northern Advocate, 2012).

That these links do exist is well documented in the literature for precisely the reasons listed. The duration of formal schooling in secondary school is directly related to the acquisition of secondary school qualifications (Withers, 2004), and truanting is associated with higher levels of engagement with the criminal justice system (Fergusson, et al., 2002; 2004; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Willson, 2007). However, framing the problem of truancy in terms of its associated outcomes in children's lives, without further exegesis, fails to engage with the complexity of the problem (Christle, Jolivetter, & Nelson, 2005).

Failure in learning is implicated in early disengagement from further effort at school and a driver of truancy. The linear processes, described by Withers (2004) in the title

of his report on truancy as, "*Disenchantment, Disengagement, and Disappearance*", can also be understood as a more circular process. Absence from school can be a reason for disenchantment and disengagement as much as an outcome. Falling behind in learning and disruptions in social relationships through school absences, can prompt processes of disengagement and disenchantment implicated in other problematic behaviours, apart from truancy, in school. Children, who have experienced more disruptions to their schooling, are more likely to experience suspension, expulsion and exclusion (Darmody, Smythe, & McCoy, 2007; McClusky, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2011; Withers, 2004), further reducing educational attainment and increasing the prospect of a downward spiral.

There are higher rates of truancy at secondary school and correspondingly, more resources, energy and attention are devoted to it. This is understandable considering the clarity of the links between educational failure, non-attendance and truancy at this level. However, some authors suggest that the most serious episodes of truancy and non-attendance are those that occur during primary schooling, because they set up patterns of poor school attendance that become the most resistant to intervention in later years (Darmody et al., 2007; Garrison, 2006; Reid 2002, 2004).

When children do not feel they have a secure attachment to school and a sense of belonging, negotiating school routines takes a disproportionate amount of energy, detracting from their capacity to learn. Osterman (2000) argues that children's learning is social behaviour and it is achieved in the nexus of school relationships with peers and teachers. A failure to establish functional and satisfying relationships, or actively experiencing exclusions, results in diminished motivation and resilience in learning and an increase in the likelihood of truanting behaviours. School attendance and by association, learning, become activities that create discomfort, anxiety and pain, rather than being sources of accomplishment, validation, reward and pleasure (Ministry of Education, 2011; Reid, 2002; Withers, 2004.)   Once learning is disrupted and the effects of failure accumulate, substantial effort is required on the part of students, teachers and the school system to make up the losses sustained during absences. School absences, if repeated and prolonged, lead to more entrenched disengagement. The argument for greater attention to be paid to

attendance issues as soon as they begin is compelling, to ensure that the cycle of poor school attendance, low achievement and increasing disengagement is disrupted.

All the measures previously outlined as state responses to poor attendance also apply in the case of truanting children. The state requires schools to monitor truanting episodes and to respond to them with a careful examination of possible causes. The Ministry of Education's policy and support for schools, aims to maintain a stable school environment for children. Their advice to schools is to work with students, rather than using suspensions and expulsions as a means of disciplining truanting children, or as a way of exporting problem children to other schools (Ministry of Education, 2010, 2011). They encourage schools to use the resources and supports provided by the Ministry of Education such as Resource Teaching Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) teachers to assist teachers to identify effective teaching strategies for children with difficult behaviour, in the instance that learning issues are impacting on truanting behaviours. As a corollary to the RTLB service, systems such as The Incredible Years[11] are promoted as a means of accessing help and support for teachers, children and their families with the behavioural difficulties associated with truancy. These measures are instituted in the belief that each time an attendance issue is not addressed, or a student is rejected by a school and suffers periods of time out from formal schooling, attachments to ongoing education are weakened.

With the implementation of Attendance Services, the state has revamped regional truancy services to assist schools struggling with truanting children. Discussions with the Principal revealed that the regional branch of Attendance Services has not been used by Watea School, because it is understood as primarily a resource for secondary schools. Indeed, when I attempted to make contact with the contracted provider, to gain a better understanding of their role in supporting primary schools in 2013, I was unable to do so. There were no publically available numbers at that time and the local Ministry of Education offices confirmed that their role was primarily to assist secondary schools.

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[11] The Incredible Years is a programme to support children to develop prosocial behaviours through positive reinforcement. This programme offers specific training programmes to teachers, children and parents to maintain a consistent approach across the domains of home and school.

The Principal of Watea School took responsibility for managing episodes of truancy. Mechanisms to redress it involved similar processes as for any other form of non-attendance in attempting a diagnostic review of possible reasons for the behaviour. This required: discussions with parents to both notify them of the problem and to ascertain their knowledge of possible causes; monitoring all forms of absences, including those for repeated illnesses to look for precursors to truanting episodes; a review of relationships between staff and child and how they were coping with the work of learning; careful observation of the child's relationships with other children and examining the possibilities of peer bullying; careful work in speaking with the child to establish their reasons for absences; and providing advocacy and linkages with social support agencies where families and children required social assistance or specialist services.

Difficulties in relationships emerged in many cases of truanting behaviour in children in Watea School: in family relationships; school relationships with teachers and peers; and in some a mix both. In this sense truancy was regarded as a communicative behaviour, signalling a child's distress and unmet needs, requiring the school to act. Within the school, these actions were directed toward creating a sense of belonging and acceptance, which could then be translated into a safe learning environment. Conversely, it also follows that when relationships did not function well within the school, children felt the effects in their lack of desire to attend school.

One parent in the research, Delia, described her discomfort with the changes she noted in her child's attitude to school after moving to a new classroom and teacher. Previously her child had enjoyed school and learning, but then began talking about not wanting to go to school and the possibility of being home schooled. This was in response to a new teacher with a more direct, authoritarian style of teaching and communication. Delia argued that this style of communication influenced relationships, not only between the teacher and children, but between children as well. Delia enlisted the help of her aunt to speak with the teacher and the school about her concerns. Following her aunt's discussion with the teacher, she was reassured that her concerns had been noted and the problems subsided to a level that no longer impacted on her son's motivation to attend school, or his learning. She perceived the success of this interaction with the teacher as evidence of a positive

response on the part of the school to her concerns, accepting that problems would inevitably arise in classroom relationships, but the willingness of the school to address her concerns was viewed as evidence of a healthy school culture.

The Principal's understanding of the need for inclusionary school practices informed the school's policy of avoiding school exclusions as a means of disciplining children for attendance issues. This commitment to persist in working with truanting children (and other forms of disturbed behaviour) finds support in the literature, which argues exclusion exacerbates truancy; it confirms children's fears, feelings and beliefs that they do not have a future in education and that they are therefore excluded from its benefits (Withers, 2004). In the Principal's view, continuing to work with truanting children remained vital in resetting their previous negative experiences of schooling; failure to achieve this could result in a cascade of ongoing negative effects for their educational achievements and social well-being.

An interview with Mark, a support staff member in 2013, described the measures he took in liaison with the Principal and Senior Teacher to keep a truanting child safe. The child ran away from school when an incident of bad behaviour was addressed. Mark was not involved in classroom activities and he was charged with following the child at a distance, to allow him time and space to calm down. At the same time, he ensured the child's safety. Eventually, Mark was able to sit alongside the child in the park neighbouring the school, keeping him company. In time, he talked him through a return to school, which was accomplished calmly and quietly for all parties.

Mark's understanding and empathy for the difficulties this child faced in his life suffused his account and his actions. He argued that this management of reactive forms of truancy by the school had proven effective: children remained safe; behavioural guidelines were consistently maintained; children were supported to establish sense of belonging within the school. During the time I spent at the school, this 'running away' occurred on three occasions and on each, the child was safely monitored and supported, effecting a return to school for the child with a minimum of disruption and distress. Parents were informed of events, but were also supported in an atmosphere of calm to reflect on the issues embedded in this reactive form of truanting. This allowed school to adopt a positive, problem-solving approach in

collaboration with parents. The Principal asserted that, given time at the school, most children overcame their need to run away from situations that challenged and upset them, once they understood that they would be treated with respect and fairness. However, their efforts as a school were often disrupted in supporting some children when families continued to be highly mobile and children did not remain long enough to allow them to develop secure attachments to the school.

Justified absences

This chapter has focused to this point largely on school absences that are deemed to be unjustified by the school and the state. There are however reasons for school absences that are legitimated, but still impact on children's schooling. Participation in important cultural events such as tangi, described earlier in this chapter, can offer experiences that contribute positively to children's development. However, other forms of frequent, but legitimated absence, have the capacity to disrupt progress in learning and contribute to disengagement in the schooling system in much the same way as unsanctioned absences from school.

The impacts of poverty, realised in poor nutrition and housing conditions, affect the incidence of justified school absences (Free, et al., 2010). Poor quality housing conditions are directly correlated with the incidence of acute and chronic illness in children, resulting in frequent episodes of non-attendance. While Watea School sought to access to services for illnesses likely to result in prolonged absence, frequent short term absences tended to be more difficult to accommodate in sustaining progress in children's learning. However, the school did attempt the address the wider social conditions implicated in these absences through the provision of services: a weekly, free health clinic; milk and fruit in schools as well as free lunches for children when needed; and raincoats and clothing on occasions.

Excepting the health clinic, which ran year-round, these provisions remained as stop-gaps in assisting families. As the Principal asserted, feeding children at school to compensate for families' lack of resources did not address the nutritional issues families faced during weekends and school holidays. Thus, while government policy focused on schools and families as responsible for poor school attendance and as the

consequent site of intervention for its improvement, it did not feel compelled to address the social and economic conditions experienced by impoverished families with impacts on patterns of disrupted attendance.

Transience

Transience, as a form of disruptive school attendance, concerned both teachers and the Principal of Watea School for its effects on student learning. In contrast, the Ministry of Education appeared somewhat unconcerned with transience, except to ensure that information about student achievement and learning difficulties was appropriately tracked from school to school. Their operating definition of transience is:

> Students that move school twice or more over the period from the 1st
> of March to the 1st of November (Ministry of Education, 2014d).

This definition excludes the expected changes of school in transitions from primary to intermediate, to secondary schooling. This method of measuring transience absolutely fails to capture the frequent school movements experienced by some children. Using this definition, it is possible to move schools six times during the six years of primary schooling without ever being counted as transient. Yet children experiencing this history, would have been required to repeatedly establish themselves within different schools, with consequent disruptions to their relationships with peers and teachers.

An alternative approach in defining transience is to focus on the experiences of schools and the impact of high rates of transience on school function (Wynd, 2014). A survey of the rate of roll turnover in schools in Auckland confirmed the relationship between low-decile schools and higher rates of churn in their student body. These schools were also characterised by high rates of Pasifika and Maori students from families living in privately owned, rental housing. Watea School's experience of roll churn mirrored the accounts provided by schools in this research.

The problems arising from multiple movements between schools in the literature are located in their difficulties in developing attachments to place and people (ERO, 2007; Gilbert, 2005; Gilbert & Bull, 2008; Osterman, 2000). The impacts of transience on children's measured achievements are nevertheless, noted to be relatively small when averaged across all children moving between schools and they are difficult to disentangle from confounding social factors impacting on families' decisions to move (Gilbert & Bull, 2008; Xu, Hannay, & D'Souza, 2009). Movements between schools can signal improvement in the social and economic conditions of family life and/or represent proactive choices to improve access to a better quality of schooling. In these instances, improved educational outcomes can result. In contrast, changes in school can also represent a mix of social and economic factors, signalling increasing levels of family distress, dysfunction and instability.

Research, which derives its analyses from the accumulation of the impacts of all school movements, cannot therefore give an account of the effects of transience in some school communities with high levels of social need and family instability. It is in this space that schools such as Watea School can contribute to the development of knowledge about transience, by drawing on their experiential knowledge of the effects on children's learning in situations of family poverty, instability and distress.

The Principal of Watea School argued that moving to a new school is always accompanied by its own stress for children seeking to establish themselves within a new school community. Energy is required to adapt to new school conditions, peers and teachers. Children may cope well with this stress when they are not subject to other sources of stress and when it is an infrequent occurrence, but Watea School received children who moved many times from school to school. The scope of the problem was illustrated when the Principal asserted that less than one in ten children in their final year in 2013, had completed all six years of their primary schooling at Watea School.

The Principal noted that while the school had expertise in supporting children to integrate into the school and in maintaining a welcoming school culture, the movements of children were source of frustration for teachers. This was especially so when children required extra learning supports and remedial programmes. In this

instance, progress in learning would be advanced, only for a child to move on before programmes were completed and learning consolidated. Some parents, being mindful of the need to keep their children at Watea School on moving, continued to transport them to Watea School until the either the end of the school year, or the school term. However, not all families had the resources to allow their child to remain in Watea School in this circumstance, and many children were required to adjust to the shifts between schools as best they could.

Transience also impacted on the relationships between parents and teachers in their joint work of supporting children in education in Watea School. When children were enrolled for short periods, teachers had fewer opportunities to establish trusting relationships with parents. These relationships facilitated the easy transfer of information between home and school, and created a dialogic space in which both parties could contribute to a better understanding of children's needs. However, time is required for trust to develop, and the frequent movements of students in and out of the school had negative impacts on teacher's capacity to initiate and nurture effective teacher/parent relationships.

Watea School had little ability to influence the underlying drivers of transience for most children. The factors contributing to the movements of families were almost always located within wider social conditions, such as insecure employment and housing, and family instability. While the Principal could describe the problem, and understood how and why transience persisted within the school community, this could not lead remedial actions within the school to address the underlying causes. The frustration expressed by the Principal in being unable to effect improvements, was compounded by the lack of official recognition given to issues of transience by policy makers and politicians, except to recommend that schools ensure robust systems of information transfer between schools and advice to maintain a welcoming and inclusive school climate (Education review Office, 2007).

Watea School staff ensured that they addressed the need to facilitate the transfer of information to new schools when children moved on. However, at times, staff were not aware that a child had left school when parents failed to notify them. While they rang parents about unexplained absences daily, this presupposed that the school had

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correct contact numbers. Tracking the movements of children between schools took time and energy and sometimes persistence. It also depended to some degree on the robustness of the administrative efficiencies of other schools when children enrolled in a new school. Administering such movements, while important, remained as reactive responses to transience; effective transfers of information did not substantively alter the underlying conditions contributing to children's movements, or negate the impacts on children's learning occasioned by their recurring need to establish themselves in new school communities.

For some parents, the movements of children in schooling were seen to be disruptive for the impacts they had on their children's friendships. A sense of sadness accompanied Samuel's account when he contrasted his own experience of schooling and that of his daughter:

> *Yes, what does concern me is that there is such a high turn around with the kids... I have lifelong friends from school and that's what I think of, when I think of school. Even now, I am still friends with people I went to primary school with. We went through six years of primary school together.*

He went on to describe his sense of loss for his family when neighbours, who were also close friends, moved and friendships between their children could not be sustained to the same degree. While he did not relate this to learning specifically, he understood it as a loss of community for his children in their development and experience of schooling.

For other parents, transience accompanied by severe family instability and trauma had severe effects on their own educational histories. Shona, a mother of three, noted that she had moved multiple times in her schooling and gave a description of the impact of this mobility:

> *Oh it sucked! Because we were never stable. In my life, this is the most stable I have ever been staying in our house down the road for two years. It is the most stable I have ever been! I was known to social*

welfare as a three-monther girl. Every three months I would get up and have to leave. This is the most stable I have ever been since I have been here, which is seven years. And I wish that it had been that I went to a school and had been safe there and just stayed there and just made a home of it, but we just jumped everywhere.

She went on to later describe the impacts of these multiple disruptions in her life on her educational achievements, which were characterised by difficulty and underachievement. This informed her determination that her children would not suffer the same disruptions. While she did not yet feel *at home* in the area in which she lived, she had decided to stay, because this was home for her children and would enable them to engage with schooling in a way she had not been able to as a child.

When learning in schooling is viewed as relational between teachers and children in relationships of care as envisaged by Noddings (2003) or Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham (2011), disruptions in teacher student relationships, occasioned by movements between schools would seem inevitable. An additional consideration is disruptions in peer relationships, which Nuttall (2007) argues as contributing to the learning of individual students. If such moves are accompanied by improvements in family function, social and economic conditions and improvements in the quality of schooling, it may be that these negative impacts are ameliorated or negated, but in the account given by Shona, it is clear that the negative social conditions that accompanied multiple moves in school and the disruptions in both her schooling and her home circumstances, created accumulations of educational disadvantage and emotional distress.

Conclusion

I opened this section of the thesis by quoting a school principal in making the simplest and most direct statement about the link between school attendance and achievement in formal school based learning. The state recognised the importance of regular school attendance in 2013 in its provision of advisory services, and by instituting and range of measuring and monitoring activities to enable both schools and the Ministry of Education to better understand issues surrounding disrupted

school attendance. Watea School complied with all these requirements and implemented the services available to it. It collected, collated and analysed data about school attendance, identifying those groups of children who failed to attend school regularly and suffered correspondingly poorer learning outcomes. The Principal sought to establish a dialogue with parents to better understand why children did not regularly attend school, to ensure that families received any supports available. Watea School was therefore well placed to understand the descriptive contours of all forms of disrupted school attendance, and to use this information to make sure that exclusionary practices were addressed within the school.

There can be no doubt that Watea School was performing all the actions recommended by the Ministry of Education to improve school attendance and gave these issues a high priority in its efforts to improve the learning and achievement of its students. However, the successes of Watea School were hard won and contingent; the same problems had to be faced and dealt with, over and over as families moved in and out of the locale or moved through to the next stage of their education. Issues of low income, insecure employment, insecure and low quality housing remained a feature of the local community, contributing to ongoing issues of poor school attendance and transience. Being substantively unable to improve these wider social conditions and the failure of policy and governance at a national level to effectively address them, ensured that social and economic inequalities continued to impact negatively on school attendance.

This refusal to engage with the impacts of more widespread social inequalities as having impacts on school attendance, indicated the ideological inability of politicians and policy makers to consider the full range of contributing factors. Their reliance on discourses of parental and school responsibility and accountability persisted, even in the face of disconfirming descriptive research affirming the links between social conditions and disrupted forms of attendance. This persistence not only undermined the social justice claims made for policy, but actively sustained socially unjust conditions, contravening children's rights to education, even as they were minimally understood by a neoliberal government.

Within a more inclusive care ethics framework, children's attendance issues remain within an appreciation of their rights to education, but are also understood to be embedded within relations of care. This care extends to children's families, neighbourhoods and schools. Needs, once identified within an ethic of care framework, cannot then be ignored. In planning and implementing actions, all parties involved are required to work together to contribute to a shared understanding of the full range of conditions contributing to disrupted forms of school attendance. This necessarily requires that attention be paid to the contexts of poverty impacting on the poor school attendance, to ensure that the full range of possible strategies for redressing school attendance are considered; failure to do so ensures that redress can only be partial at best.

Additionally, when the assignation of blame to either parents or schools is internalised by both parties, failure leaves both with fewer options for change. Schools are led to assume that when their committed efforts fail to improve school attendance, parents are at fault; the converse applies for parents. This diminishes the capacity to open up dialogue and for parents and school staff to work together in mitigating and advocating for systemic changes in the underlying conditions affecting school attendance.

Watea School initiated processes of care and dialogue in working patiently and carefully with the group of children struggling with attendance issues. They created spaces where parents could freely initiate dialogue with the school about the issues that impacted on school attendance. When this happened, as the interview with Yolande demonstrated, all parties felt validated by the process: Yolande perceived herself as a partner in her child's education; this relationship was carried through to her dealings with her daughter's classroom teacher; and the aims of better attendance and learning outcomes were successfully achieved. The action of speaking with Yolande in her own home about the problem of her daughter's attendance, created a dialogic space that facilitated ongoing bidirectional communication, with some success for both parties. However, neither school nor parents could successfully control all the factors impacting on school attendance and these conditions had to be mitigated or endured within the resources available to both.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEHAVIOURAL EXPECTATIONS

Introduction

There is a significant strand within the educational literature that pragmatically notes links between low-socioeconomic status and greater numbers of children exhibiting disruptive behaviours (Reid & Morgan, 2012; Rogers, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 2011). These behaviours are deemed significant because they impact on their own and other children's progress in formal learning, posing significant challenges for teachers in the day-to-day management of their classrooms and their teaching efficacy (Reid & Morgan, 2012; Rogers, 2003). However, defining a problem behaviour can be difficult, because the management of children's behaviour in schooling is so closely aligned with the normative socialisation of children within a dominant, social, and therefore educational, culture.

This research argues that children's behavioural problems are more than a simple failure to be adequately socialised into educational culture. Children's behaviours are communicative acts directed towards those with whom they interact in face-to-face relations: parents; peers; educators; support workers; neighbours and wider family members. These others are embedded in relationships and communications with policymakers, government officials and the wider public. Understanding the behaviours of children within the networks of those responsible for meeting children's needs and the power to act in their interests, places children's behaviours in education within socially contextualised parameters of care in formal schooling. Their communicative behaviours are read within the bounds of an established culture of formal schooling, but with some forms of expression that are adapted to the

specifics of each school and its community of parents. Thus, the behavioural expectations of children in Watea School, conformed in general with the dominant culture of formal schooling in New Zealand, but the school retained a degree of flexibility in being able to respond to the localised needs of its students.

Educational success or failure is perceived to not only have future consequences for the individual student, but is deemed important in appropriately shaping and preparing workers needed for a future economy (Hughes, 2015; Longstone, 2012; Sewell, 2009), and in creating citizens who are invested in New Zealand's future social and economic well-being (Sewell, 2009). Successive governments in New Zealand have therefore invested heavily and hopefully in education services, based on their belief that education not only enables students to learn in ways that promotes their individual well-being, but will also support them to become collectively socialised and aligned with economic and social goals.

Education services therefore, lie at the heart of future social and economic planning in New Zealand. Issues that disrupt the attainment of educational goals for both the good of the individual student and collective good of the future economy, as they are currently understood, demand attention from policy makers and educators. For teachers in low-decile schools, the conflation of low economic status with an increased incidence of difficult behaviour is also problematic, not just at the level of daily management within the school, but in frustration of their future hopes for the children they teach.

Changes in school culture and teacher behaviours, offer some strategies for developing schooling that is more inclusive of Maori and Pasifika cultures. In doing so, it also offers opportunities for conceiving more inclusive and nuanced understandings of citizenship. However, schools are also required to support students into a competent performance of learning within an existing culture of schooling. This remains resolutely aligned with a prevalent orthodoxy of learning as covalent with individual attainment within a system of measureable outcomes. This exerts conformist pressures on teachers and students, narrowing possibilities for understanding what constitutes learning and therefore, how students can express the learning they achieve. Watea School constantly sought to negotiate the tension

between the need for changes in school practices, to better align with differing cultural needs of its students, and its desire to improve student outcomes within an existing system of schooling. The complexities involved were worked out in the day-to-day performance of education, in relationships with its students and in caring recognition of their needs.

The next section of this chapter explores the turn to culture in education in New Zealand, including its intersections with neoliberal ideology in education. I explore the growing awareness of culture, its impacts on questions of epistemology, the resultant organisation of education systems and the confluence of these factors in addressing the behaviours of educators and students in addressing educational inequalities in New Zealand. I outline how the foregrounding of culture and choice has obscured the impacts of classed differences in educational outcomes.

I argue in this chapter children's challenging behaviours were not only a classed and encultured failure to be socialised to a normative school culture, but were also often expressing and communicating forms of individual distress (Freeman, Perry, & Bebko, 2002). When behaviour conforms to behavioural expectations, it is experienced as normal and unproblematic and its communicative functions become largely invisible in the daily conduct of school life. In contrast, non-conforming behaviours disrupt this sense of ease, creating opportunities on the one hand for misconnection and misunderstanding, but also possibilities for understanding the exercise of power in socialising children within a normative and dominant culture and ideology.

Watea School, driven by an imperative to care in its mission statement, sought to address children's needs as they were expressed in their difficult behaviours. In doing so, teachers and support workers within Watea School had to address the social and cultural disconnections between home and school and institute a range of appropriate teaching responses. They were also required to facilitate services to meet the specialised needs communicated by some children's behaviour.

In this chapter, I canvass a range of children's behavioural issues that were described by teachers, support workers and the Principal at Watea School. I outline the factors

they perceived as contributing to these behaviours, and their actions in responding to the needs these behaviours communicated to them. The impacts of some children's behaviour on teachers' work is discussed, including the support (or otherwise) that they drew on from their colleagues, support services, parents and the wider education sector. Issues of care and social justice are explored for the way in which teachers responded to children's needs, and advocated for them to be met. They also inform analyses of how education systems responded to the needs of students, parents, teachers and the school, in performing this demanding work.

I then draw on the accounts of parents to explore their attributions of children's difficult behaviour. Parents largely shared teachers' understandings of children's behaviours, but also differed on occasion. The quality of school and parent relationships in support of children came to the fore, including the communications between individual parents and teachers.

Finally, I explore some recent state policy initiatives that have impacted on how behavioural concerns were managed in Watea School. In bringing to light the interactions of socioeconomic factors, social conditions and cultural dissonances in the field of education and in the practices of Watea School, a more complete picture emerges of the difficulties faced by the school in its work to redress educational inequalities. It also creates space for imagining possibilities about how things could be done otherwise to improve educational disparities arising from the nexus of low-socioeconomic status and behavioural issues.

The turn to culture in education

The straightforward narrative of low-socioeconomic status, leading to educational underachievement via the pathway of maladaptive behaviours, is muddied somewhat in New Zealand by ethnicity. Higher proportions of Maori and Pasifika students than Pakeha and come from families in poverty in New Zealand (Perry, 2015). The impact of low-socioeconomic status and its contribution to classed differences in schooling in New Zealand, is therefore shot through with issues of cultural difference, which in turn are embedded in histories of immigration, indigeneity and colonialism. These histories include the efforts of Maori and Pasifika to assert their right to cultural

integrity in the face of a dominant Pakeha culture, challenging previously unreflective views of, not only what should be taught in formal schooling, but how it could be otherwise organised and performed by both teachers and students; that is how teachers and students behave in relation to one another in education and how these relationships could be improved across cultural differences.

Resurgent Maori cultural awareness in New Zealand has found expression in demands for schooling be more responsive to the cultural identities and learning needs of Maori children (Bishop, et al., 2007). New Zealand's Pasifika communities, noting the experiences of Maori, have similarly sought recognition for their cultures as repositories of valuable knowledge and social practices (Ministry of Education, 2013b). For both Maori and Pasifika children, the right to learn within their culture has been asserted as vital in developing, not only a secure social identity within the bounds of family, community and nation, but also a means of establishing a successful learning identity in the field of education. This identity potentially enables all facets of learning to be integrated in definitions of educational success, redrawing the boundaries of how Maori and Pasifika children define their learning capabilities, including how children and teachers should behave toward one another in the relational work of their teaching and learning (Bishop, et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2013a).

Issues of culture and ethnicity have predominated in attempts to redress educational inequalities in recent decades, as a corrective to a past histories of either repression or neglect. The provision of state services, including education, has been placed within a framework of Treaty of Waitangi obligations between Maori and the Crown as foundational partners in the New Zealand state. Accordingly, alternatives now exist for Maori children to be schooled in state-funded schools, either in classrooms taught fully in Maori language, or in bilingual classrooms conducted in a mix of Maori and English. Both options exist in mainstream schools and in Partnership Schools[12], while Kura Kaupapa[13] operate as full immersion Maori language schools.

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[12] Partnership schools bring together business, community groups and government to develop new and more flexible models for educating priority learners, that is Maori, Pasifika and students from low-income families (Ministry of Education 2015).

[13] Kura Kaupapa are Maori language primary schools based on principles of self-determination, immersion in Maori cultural practices and pedagogies. They give recognition to the shared social and

The focus on ethnicity in education, as a site of previous state harms and current state obligations for educational redress, has therefore driven considerable changes within the educational sector. Attention to issues of culture and ethnicity pervade Ministry of Education directives, policy initiatives, political commentary and the academic literature available on the Ministry of Education website. However, these are not matched by advice to schools about developing pedagogies responsive to classed differences. The assumption is that the measures advocated to support Maori and Pasifika in education will also offer benefits for all students from low income backgrounds. This assumption takes on additional significance in the current Minister of Education's mantra that 'decile is not destiny' (Jones, 2013; Parata, 2014b, 2015). The focus therefore remains firmly on cultural dissonance as the site of remediation for the educational underachievement of children from Maori, Pasifika and low-income families.

In pursuing this course, political discourse and policy have remained preoccupied with achieving improvements in teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills around tikanga Maori and Maori language (Bishop et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2013a). More responsive teacher practices are argued as resulting in improved teaching/ student relationships, enabling Maori students to learn as Maori (Bishop et al., 2007; Ministry of Education 2013a). Students are envisaged as being able to learn and live within a secure cultural identity that augments their learning progress, rather than being required to step outside culture and culturally sanctioned ways of behaving, to achieve educational success. Greater proficiency in teaching practice is posed as the means of achieving greater equity in educational outcomes; changing deficient teaching behaviours of a predominantly Pakeha teaching workforce in relation to Maori and Pasifika children is the foundation upon which it is envisaged that Maori and Pasifika children will build their future academic success.

This position challenges an education system that in its teaching practice is perceived to be unreflexively dominated by Pakeha culture. However, in advancing this analysis, the poorer educational outcomes for all children from low-socioeconomic

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economic realities and work with whanau in alongside students in adhering to a shared vision for driving their educational mission (Smith,2003).

backgrounds become glossed: the government is relieved of the responsibility for the economic settings that contribute to the levels of poverty in Maori and Pasifika communities; economic factors are not directly considered for their impacts on children's behaviour in education; and schools retain responsibility for dealing with behavioural issues in education and interrupting forces of intergenerational transmission in educational underachievement.

The reality is that Watea School, as a decile two school with a largely Maori student body, is required to give attention to issues of both ethnicity and poverty in its daily work. In the accounts given by teachers and parents, the effects of both contribute to difficulties in schooling for children. As outlined in chapter seven, high levels of residential mobility, employment insecurity, economic insufficiency and family instability and dysfunction combine in a toxic mix that contributes to transience, poor attendance and low achievement in formal schooling. The account given by the Watea School Principal asserts that these factors also contribute to the incidence of children's troubling and challenging behaviours that make schooling a sometimes, difficult experience, for both teachers and children.

Watea School: setting expectations for behaviour

Managing children's behaviour within the classroom concerned all the educators interviewed for this research project. Teachers described behavioural issues as arising from differences in behavioural expectations of home and school and as the result of deficient parenting practices. The attribution of behavioural problems to parenting and parental deficiencies has a long history in public commentary provided by educators. Writing in 1915, a school principal states this prescription for parents:

> Discipline is what is wanted. Not rough shod, unreasoning discipline, but discipline in which the parents put the welfare and upbringing of their children before their own pleasure, and discipline in children to recognise that duty, however irksome it may be, must come first (Papers Past, Northern Advocate, 1915, p.2).

His injunction to parents would resonate with teachers today, including the belief that the outcomes of such discipline for the child is in "learning the value of self-restraint"; this internalised attribute he argues will increase the capacity of the student to do well in education and in future life.

Physical punishment was commonly espoused as an essential method for instilling desired behaviours in students in the past. These behaviours were linked with success in learning and future employment opportunities. A principal, sets out the agenda for the use of physical punishment in schools:

> …. children were sent to school to learn habits which would fit them for the duties of life and industry and as far as obedience and promptness are concerned, if they (schools) neglected those, they must be shown that such neglect was against their present and future interests (Papers Past, Wanganui Chronicle, 1905, p.7).

It is notable that while time may have changed the methods sanctioned by the state for instilling the desired behaviour in schools, the essential components of these behaviours remain entirely recognisable in the present, in their stated purpose of fitting children for a future in employment. Such goals for education sit in uncomfortable tension with purposes of education that have more critical emphases; conformity and compliance are not necessarily behaviours to advance an active form of citizenship, or helpful in promoting the creation of a future society based on greater equity in its social relations and responsiveness to environmental concerns.

Notwithstanding this tension, between the critical capacities of education and its socialising functions in creating compliant and conforming future employees, both teachers and students require an environment that supports them to achieve their work of teaching and learning (Hattie, 2009). This classroom environment needs to be sufficiently ordered and consistent to enable predictable, responsive and trusting relationships to develop between teachers and students and students and their peers. The achievement of such an environment promotes opportunities for students to learn (Creemers & Reezight, 1999; Hattie, 2009), and while all contribute to the classroom environment, teachers remain primarily responsible for ensuring its efficacy.

Teachers in Watea School accepted that dealing with the behavioural issues of some children in the classroom was vital in creating a positive learning environment. There were significant commonalities in the descriptions they gave of their work in managing children's disruptive behaviours. Most often, they expressed their concerns about the levels of distress some children's behaviour conveyed, but also referred to issues of classroom management. Within these commonalities, there were also differences; children's pre-school experiences, their age and years of previous schooling impacted on how their behavioural issues were perceived. Thus, in the first instance, the 'school readiness' of children transitioning into formal schooling had specific behavioural concerns, in addition to more generalised concerns that ranged across all years of primary schooling. Problem behaviours in older children were accompanied by greater teacher anxiety for children's future educational outcomes.

Interviews with teachers and the Principal also revealed issues of dissonance between the behavioural expectations of a largely Pakeha middle-class workforce and Maori student body, drawn from a low-decile community. Finally, interviews with teachers gave an account of their work with some children with diagnosed behavioural conditions and the implications of these conditions for teaching and learning. These sections cover the daily work of Watea School, as they sought to ensure that their behavioural expectations were correctly aligned with children's capabilities to support success in formal schooling, across domains of both social and academic achievement.

Beginning formal schooling

Beginning formal schooling in New Zealand is premised on the developmental readiness of children to have acquired specific skills and behaviours that 'signal readiness to learn'. While children are not legally required to attend primary school in New Zealand until they turn six, most children do so on, or soon after, their fifth birthday. This attendance is now taken for granted by both the education sector and parents as indicative of developmental readiness for schooling. However, in practice, the readiness of children, cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally is by no means uniform (Campbell & von Stauffenberg, 2008).

Children's experiences prior to admission to school play a part in preparing them for formal schooling, but there are also effects that arise from the dispositions and personalities of children as they negotiate the transition to life in school (Campbell & von Stauffenberg, 2008; Farkas & Hibel, 2008). The development of an individual child prior to beginning primary school represents a mix of social and cultural interactions, enacted within the context of family and friendship networks and relationships. These interactions are interspersed with specific practices and attitudes toward learning, which pervade parent-child relations and modes of communication (Lareau & Weininger, 2008). The result of these interactions combine in a unique constellation of emotional and cognitive attributes and capabilities for each child, which can be used to negotiate their first experiences of school. Within the uncertainties each child faces, the New Entrant teacher seeks to support children to navigate this novel environment in safety, while at the same time, also establishing the basis for ongoing formal learning (Mortlock, Plowman, & Glasgow, 2011).

This section explores some of the tensions that arose for teachers working with students beginning school. It reflects on the way that teachers sought to respond to the needs of its community in supporting children to be inducted into formal schooling, and how respect and care for children were particularly important in assisting, not only children, but parents to manage this transition.

Attending primary school for the first time represents a new stage of development in the life of a child. While it may be experienced differently by individual children, common to almost all children is the need to adapt to a significantly novel environment populated by large numbers of unknown people operating by different rules (Mortlock et al., 2011). Children, therefore face considerable challenges in establishing their place within formal schooling in the early days, especially when beginning school may also represent the first significant period away from their primary caregiver. While many children do experience periods of time in the care of adults other than parents, due to changing patterns of maternal employment and a much higher uptake Early Childhood Education (ECE), children are still leaving established relationships to forge others on different terms. Thus, while regular attendance at ECE offers benefits in easing the transition to formal schooling

(Barback, 2014; Mortlock et al., 2011), school remains a substantively new environment for most children.

Children are less likely to regularly attend ECE in poorer communities for many of the reasons that they struggle to ensure regular primary school attendance: issues of access to service providers; transience; and health issues (Ritchie, Harvey, Kayes, & Smith, 2014). High levels of private provision in the ECE sector does not guarantee equity of access across all communities. Some communities are serviced by oversubscribed ECE providers with no guarantee of placement for newly arrived children (Ritchie et al., 2014). Poorer urban communities and rural communities are generally not as well served by ECE providers as more affluent urban areas (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Taylor, Caulcutt, Kalavite, Kara, & Paki, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2014).

The unequal distribution of ECE provision is also accompanied by concerns about the quality of service provision (Barback, 2014; Education Review Office, 2015; Ritchie, et al., 2014). These concerns involve the degree to which services providers respond to the cultural needs of Maori and Pasifika children (Education Review Office, 2013, 2015) and more general concerns with the educative capacities of some providers to prepare children for formal schooling (Education Review Office, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2014).Thus, notwithstanding government policy to promote attendance at ECE as a means of redressing disparate outcomes in education by ensuring that children are school-ready and behaviourally attuned to formal schooling from the outset, there remain considerable difficulties in ensuring all children equitably receive the benefits of ECE.

In common with many other low-decile schools, some children began their formal schooling at Watea School in 2013, without having consistently attended ECE. While there were several ECE providers within the school community, this did not necessarily correlate with regular attendance for reasons previously described. As Patsy, an experienced New Entrant teacher recounted, this had impacts for children adapting to the new environment and the teacher attempting to facilitate the incorporation of a child into the classroom:

And this little boy, who I had to keep close to me for a week, who was lost without his mother and had no pre-school and no idea, I called him my wild child, and I had to keep singing and teaching while he cried for hours and I held him to keep him safe and try to keep the others calm and to keep him safe.

While Patsy suggested that separation anxiety contributed to this child's distress, and that it could have been alleviated by prior ECE attendance, not all forms of ECE provision are equal in this respect.

The ECE sector is comprised of different types of institution. Some forms of ECE, such as Kohanga Reo and Parents' Centres remain highly dependent on parental/caregiver input, and children who attend them continue to learn in their presence. Primary school for these children, represents a break from past learning interactions within a familiar environment populated by known adults, and propulsion into an unfamiliar learning situation populated by largely unknown children and teachers. In the case of Kohanga Reo, it also represents a transition from learning primarily in a Maori language medium to English. This transition therefore represents a source of language loss and separation with impacts for the child, parent/caregiver and teacher:

... the little boy who started school the other day and he had spent five years at Kohanga Reo and he came to school with his Mum. I took him off his mother and held him like this because he was upset (demonstrates holding him in her arms). She left him with me and she watched through the window after she had left and I wasn't aware of that, and he was more upset and she came back in and took him away from me. And I was really upset. It upset me more, because I needed him to make that transition. Today I spent more time with him than doing assessments with the kids like I planned, because that is my priority.

Patsy's account gives a good sense of the emotional work of a new entrant teacher in facilitating this child's transition into schooling, and the responsiveness and

flexibility required of her to achieve the goal of successful integration into formal schooling. Giving time to care in this circumstance, denotes the value she placed on his acclimatisation to the classroom and school environment and this defied processes of rational planning. It did however, have to be contained within an increasingly time poor teaching schedule, regulated by the assessment activities now proscribed in National Standards that also imposed uniformity of expectations in learning outcomes. Successful integration of a child into the classroom environment, including the development of supportive relationships with other students and teachers, is not measured in National Standards, and yet in Patsy's account, was vital to enabling children to fully activate their learning capabilities.

However, just as there were difficulties that arose from being responsive in the short term to the needs of children, Patsy also noted that this work enabled children to develop prosocial behaviours that could save time in the long run:

> *They can help each other to cope with their needs. And like today, with this five-year-old, who came to school yesterday, by organising the older kids to come and help, well, oh what bliss. The attention that I have given them in the past, they can pass it on to him.*

Children, having experienced a level of empathetic and responsive care in their first days of schooling, took responsibility for helping others. It reinforced the mutuality of positive behaviours in relationships between children, which contributed to their ongoing socialisation into the school and classroom culture.

Patsy's responses to children exhibiting signs of distress and anxiety mirror responsive maternal behaviours that are essential for emotional, behavioural and cognitive development. Thus, holding, talking, singing and acting responsively, but calmly, to alleviate children's distress were within the range of maternal behaviours to assist children to cope with separation and anxiety. They served the purpose of relieving the activation of stress responses, which in turn, is deemed necessary to facilitate effective cognition in the child (Lupien, et al., 2007). However, in meeting these needs, Patsy had to make time for this emotion work at the expense of her own planned teaching activities.

Patsy placed a premium on establishing her classroom as a safe and secure environment for children. Only then did she believe that children would be able to give their best effort and attention to learning. Thus, her responsive behaviours, while seemingly operating at the level of a caring response to distress, can also be perceived as important in supporting children's learning. When Patsy was successful in this work, other children could contribute positively in helping children to manage their transition to school. These friendships between peers are described by Mortlock et al., (2011) as being the most significant area of concern for children starting school and as a necessary precursor to effectively unlocking children capabilities in learning.

Patsy argued that she needed to demonstrate and model the behaviours required by Watea School of children. She gave an instance of this when she talked about how failure and mistakes could be accommodated within a learning framework, rather than being felt as socially devaluing and demotivating:

> *Patsy: But there is learning to be made in boo boos. But I like to say,*
> *'Hooray! Here, we celebrate these things! We learn from mistakes.'*
> *And often I make a mistake and then I apologise.*
> *Interviewer: By doing that, it is role modelling?*
> *Patsy: Yes, and being honest about mistakes, because we all make them.*
> *And that's life isn't it, learning from mistakes.*

This position offered ways of behaving in response to failure that minimised threat to children's self-perceptions as capable learners, and the negative emotions that accompanying this loss (Boekaerts, 1993). Mistakes were accommodated within a conception of learning that proposes value in making mistakes for what they can teach. Patsy, in demonstrating how she accommodated this form of learning in her own work in the classroom, provided a template for children to include these behavioural responses to mistakes and supported children to remain hopeful and resilient in their future learning efforts.

Teachers are not the only role models in children's lives. Children come to their schooling having already developed patterns of behaviour arising from their relations

in family and friendship networks (Anthony, Anthony, Glanville, Naiman, Waanders, & Shaffer, 2005). For some children in the Watea School community, these relationships did not always foster behaviours that were congruent with the demands of formal schooling. Creating a classroom environment that is in the first instance, one of safety and security, enables children to begin to gain fluency in how to perform formal schooling. Once children gain a sense of certainty about how the classroom will operate and what is expected of them in their interactions, then greater attention and energy can be directed toward other learning tasks. Having also established relationships with peers, future transitions to new classrooms within the school do not provoke the same levels of anxiety and stress. However, this is also determined by a degree of contiguity in responsiveness to the needs that children communicate in their behaviours, across the whole school.

A whole-of-school approach to behaviour

The behaviours that Watea School expected from its students remained consistent in their general quality, but included an additional expectation that students would develop a trajectory towards emotional self-regulation and autonomous decision-making. The boundaries of expected behaviours were therefore envisaged as becoming increasingly internalised, requiring diminishing degrees of direction by teachers, as children became socialised to the demands of formal schooling. For this reason, developing a whole-of-school response was perceived as essential in creating the conditions in which children could meet the behavioural expectations placed on them by Watea School.

In developing a whole-of-school response to behavioural issues, Watea School placed care at the heart of its educational mission, seeking to embed it within all its relationships. Watea School used The Incredible Years Programme (Webster-Stratton, 2011) of positive parenting as a framework for managing children's difficult behaviours. Watea School asserted the centrality of positive relationships in effective learning and in supporting the growth of emotional self-regulation and self-control. The combined effect of positive relationships, emotional self-regulation and self-control were understood as contributing to an upward spiral of greater motivation to learn, the ability to sustain concentration, resilience in effortful learning, improved

learning outcomes and enhanced self-perceptions of learning capabilities. In totality, they contributed to an ongoing motivation to learn (Webster- Stratton & Reid, 2004).

The Incredible Year's programme recognises that emotions have the capacity to motivate and focus attention on material to be learnt, but if clouded by negative perceptions of the task, can impede performance in learning (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Therefore, learning to manage negative emotions through self-talk is a key strategy in the programme, enabling children to develop a capability for subjecting emotions to cognitive purview, allowing past failures to be reconceived as learning situations (Webster-Stratton, 2011).

 As children developed, there were continuing expectations that they would comply with teacher led instruction in Watea School, but there was also an expectation that they would develop an increasing capacity to be self-directed in both their formal learning and in taking responsibility for their relationships with others. Children were expected to have growing reserves of resilience to enable them to persevere in the face of difficulties and to facilitate problem solving skills across all facets of school life, including their relationships with other students and school staff. These greater expectations correlated with a perception that they would exhibit greater numbers of prosocial behaviours in their relationships within the school. When these expectations were disrupted, a careful exegesis of the factors underlying children's behaviours was required, to plan school responses and/or to facilitate additional help for children.

Teachers and support workers tended to emphasise the impact of parenting practices, including inconsistent and harsh forms of discipline and instances of neglect and/or abuse on children's behaviour. However, in making these attributions, the school was still required to safely manage and contain these behaviours, while responding to the distress of the child. This was for the benefit of both the individual child 'acting out' and the well-being of other children in the classroom. Effective classroom management and structures to support consistent approaches across the school were therefore vital. They sought to create sure boundaries, within which children could safely learn and develop healthy relationships with peers and teachers. Teachers were required to recognise children as individuals with specific needs, but also to view

them as belonging within the school community. In seeking to act with care, empathy and fairness in their relations with children, teachers hoped to model the social skills they expected of children.

The Principal's commitment to pastoral care was closely tied to concerns for children's progress in learning. This commitment was shared by the teachers interviewed, who described highly stressed and distressed children as having less energy and cognitive resources available to devote to the rational and effortful processes of academic learning. However, the mechanisms whereby children had developed unsocial behavioural responses to stressful situations and therefore, how teachers could better support children to develop behaviours that would facilitate children's integration into formal schooling, has demanded ongoing development within the school. The Principal devoted time and resources to increase teachers' understanding of the physiological processes underpinning children's behavioural responses to stress and challenge, and the implications of these patterns of behaviour on classroom management and student learning. This knowledge, in the Principal's view, supported teachers to implement more creative responses to children's difficult behaviours.

Somewhere between five and ten percent of the student body, exhibited behaviours that were described as extremely disruptive, indicating both a level of student distress and a need for additional support. The Principal identified the most troubling and difficult children to manage as those who did not fit within designated guidelines for special education support. Children with diagnosed conditions such as autism and ADHD, required skilled teaching and empathetic and consistent support, but they also attracted funding that enabled the school to respond to their needs. A larger group of children within the school exhibited behaviours that were disruptive in the classroom and impeded their learning. These behaviours often defied easy classification or diagnosis, and therefore, did not always attract individually targeted funding. It was this group of students that required, not only practices for managing their behaviours, but careful examination of the factors contributing to them. For this reason, I briefly explore the literature emerging in the field of stress activation in children, as a means of understanding how some children's behavioural issues

manifested in Watea School, and the success of a number of strategies they employed in dealing with them.

The attribution of troubling child behavioural responses to family stresses and parenting behaviours associated with poverty is well documented (Conger, Wallace, Sun, Simons, McLoyd, & Brody, 2002; Evans, 2004; Evans & Kim, 2013; McLoyd, 1998). Poverty is similarly associated with higher incidences of neglectful supervision and care of children, often in association with harsh and controlling and/or inconsistent parenting practices (Vitaro, Barker, Boivin, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2006; Knutson, De Garmo, & Reid, 2004; Knutson, De Garmo, Koeppl, & Reid, 2005). No matter how such practices are labelled, the implication is that parent/child relations have been disrupted by either a lack of parental attentiveness in the first instance, and/or a lack appropriate caring and responsive actions in the second.

Disruptions in caring parent/child relations can be attributed to distractions that intrude on familial relations: the exigencies of poverty (Evans, 2004; McLoyd, 1998); addictions (Coles, et al., 1991); family violence (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003), parental discord and separation (Flouri, 2006). Evans (2004) argues that when stressors are unrelieved, as in long term poverty, all family resources, emotional, social and material, become diminished. As a result, parental caregiving behaviours tend to favour more reactive, directive and controlling interactions with children in situations of perceived crisis, and relative inattention to children's behaviour at other times.

Parental stress levels may therefore, drive parental responsiveness to children's needs in ways that do not favour considered approaches. Considered approaches require time for reflection, to explore what lies beneath children's behaviour and which strategies are likely to be most successful. Strategies involving explanations and negotiation are time consuming. A family stress framework suggests that parental energies and coping resources are limited by the demands on their time; actions that are directed toward maintaining a sense of control and possibly dominance over children are time saving, when compliance is achieved.

Stress responses, such as fright, flight or freeze in children are argued as arising from their early life experiences and home environments (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012; Lupien et al. 2009). Disruptions in parenting relationships with children, therefore contribute to forms of behavioural response in children that are more reactive and hostile in the face of threat, or conversely result in excessively passive, anxious and withdrawn behaviours. Relational contexts between parents and children, set up ongoing patterns of behavioural responses, but they are also exacerbated by conditions of poverty (Lupien et al., 2009). It is this nexus of stressed family relationships, within stressful life circumstances that contributes so powerfully to the difficult behaviours that some children exhibit.

Improvements in parent-child relationships through parenting programmes (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004), or improvements in families' economic and social resources (Dahl & Lochner, 2006; Huston, et al., 2005) have positive impacts on children's behavioural responses. The success of these interventions suggests that the neurological bases of children's behavioural responses are amenable to forms of care and support that reduce instability and uncertainty. While Watea School could influence on the quality of relationships children developed within the school with peers and staff in 2013 and it was able to initiate some forms of support for families in need through the interventions of the school social worker, it was unable to redress or ameliorate the underlying economic conditions of family poverty in any substantive manner.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Watea School took the pastoral care needs of its students very seriously, and viewed care as integral to its successes in supporting children to learn. It responded to the challenge of becoming an inclusive school by accepting all children seeking to attend, including children excluded from other schools in the region. It did so with some confidence in its skills and expertise in managing children exhibiting difficult behaviours. Underlying this expertise was the belief that some children come to the school, having experienced adverse life events that are both undeserved and unfair and these events contribute to their disruptive behaviours. Addressing children's needs was therefore an issue of justice as well as care. If Watea School failed to act on these needs, they too would have contributed to the sum total of disadvantage experienced by these children.

Conceptions of social justice permeated my conversations with the Principal, who in contrast with some teachers, was keenly aware of the difficult economic conditions that were most prevalent in the school community. The Principal felt compelled to attend to these issues in the knowledge of the poor social and economic outcomes that attend academic failure in low-decile communities. In consideration of the issues many children faced in their home environments, the Principal felt driven to ensure that Watea School provided pastoral supports to children, as an expression of ethical and human response to need. These supports included material support such as food in schools, raincoats and clothing where necessary and access to a free health clinic within the school grounds, but also advocacy and facilitation of specialised services to support families and children for their specialised physical, mental and learning needs.

The Principal often referred to the need to provide an inclusive school environment for all children as an issue of social justice. This also perfused the accounts given by teachers of their work, making particular sense for children who had experienced disruptions in their schooling due to their difficult behaviours. Yet, at the same time, these children taxed the skills and resources of the school and its staff to the greatest extent. Their behaviours often acted against children's own needs and desires to be accepted as Paul describes:

> *What I find, is that most kids really want to be part of something, to belong. And the more damaged they are, the more they want to belong to something. But their behaviour, but their own way of doing things is so reactive that they can't work out how to do it (Paul, Senior Teacher, Resource Teacher for assisting boys exhibiting difficult behaviours).*

Developing systems to support children to 'work out' how they could behave in ways that supported their social integration into the school community was therefore, understood as central in supporting children with behavioural difficulties in all facets of their schooling.

The staff of Watea School, in subscribing to The Incredible Years programme, argued that some children have only experienced attention in response to negative behaviours in their day-to-day parenting. Authoritarian responses to negative behaviours, coloured by anger and threat, offer a perverse incentive to children to continue with these behaviours when they are more used to receiving attention for infractions and little attention otherwise (Webster-Stratton, 2011). Boys are described as reacting to situations perceived as threatening or frustrating with expressions of anger, either verbally, or through aggressive behaviours. These behaviours often result in more intense and angry exchanges in efforts to establish parental dominance and authority, resulting in harsher and more punitive forms of parenting discipline.

However, because parenting responses under stress depend upon their own emotional responses to infractions, they can also be inconsistently applied: sometime resulting in punishment; sometimes not; sometimes with severe consequences; sometimes with minimal consequence. Inconsistent responses to behavioural infractions become ineffective because they never define precisely where the boundaries lie for children, which continue to be tested in efforts to know what is expected of them (Knutson et al., 2005). The effect is to create a climate of increased uncertainty and anxiety, serving to increase children's stress and the likelihood of reactive behaviours.

The Incredible Years programme argues that that in offering liberal amounts of praise for valued behaviours, children are provided with an alternative means of gaining the attention they need (Webster- Stratton, 2011). In tandem with this positive reinforcement, the programme asserts that the withdrawal of attention when negative behaviours arise, is often all that is required to change patterns of behaviour. Patsy gave an illustrative account of the benefits of praise and acceptance, accompanied by gentle challenge:

> *I had a child a few years ago when I was teaching year two and three,*
> *and he had been removed from a previous school, because he couldn't*
> *socialise. For a term and a half, and he still couldn't socialise! So I had*
> *to be flexible with my programme and not demand things, other than he*
> *not do things that would hurt others, and allow him to take ownership*

of his behaviour. There was a lot of love shown to him. We tried doing
all sorts of things and then a term later he was much better and a new
child came to the school and I heard him… this new child had problems,
behavioural problems, and I heard him say to this kid, "Oh no, you
don't do that here. We look after each other." And it was like, "True"!

The use of positive reinforcement approaches to behavioural infractions enabled this child to find his way into forms of behaviour that were empathetic and careful of the needs of others.

Nevertheless, staff described times when these approaches were insufficient for effective classroom management. Paul, as a senior teacher with expertise with boys' behavioural issues provided support for other teachers in the school. He noted that many children come to the school having been excluded from other schools with "*sheaves of paper",* detailing behaviours that have led to their previous school exclusions. The first response of the school was to set aside these accounts and to allow students to start with a clean slate. More importantly, the school acted with consistency and care from the first day. Paul argued, "*consistency gives certainty"*; it lets children know "*that they are not alone in the wilderness".* Each child could then begin to work out how the school functioned and its rules, enabling them to develop a sense of social competency, acceptance and belonging in their social relations within the school.

When rules were infringed in ways that repeatedly breached these boundaries, the need for consistency demanded that these breaches were managed. Paul described his work in supporting other teachers to manage the reactive behaviours of children in some detail:

> *Paul: They get their name on the board, then the teachers will do this,*
> *one, two, three times, and then it's me. So the teacher must write a note*
> *explaining what they've done. So I will get a hostile kid in there and*
> *they're all pumped up and they come in and I sit them in the back room,*
> *shut the door and go away and I go finish off whatever I was doing, give*
> *them a chance to....*

Interviewer: Calm down?

Paul: No, mostly they're too angry. Most of them don't know how to. I pull out my book and explain that with the behaviour book, it has a list of all the naughty kids in the school. It's my naughty behaviour account going back a 100 years, something like that you know? I say, "It's shame to put your name in there because you look like a reasonable sort of fella" I have said that and been told to "fuck off" on numerous occasions. You just go, "Oh that's interesting, that's something you say this time, because you don't know much about me. I'll let this one go, because you don't know me." And then they might just keep going and I say, "But if it happens again…" And then I'd say "Righto, I'll give you another chance because you don't know me, but this is the last warning." Because you want to give them a bit of room to manoeuvre, but I say, "This is your last warning. You don't ever want to come back here again. And if you don't, if your name doesn't appear in this book for 10 more days, I won't remember that because I can't remember anything. 'Cause I can't remember a bloody thing." (Laughs)

Interviewer: Ok, so they have a chance to redeem themselves?

Paul: Oh yeah, yeah. It's very important. In the next week, I will pop in at least twice a week to check how they are going and usually that's it.

His account of managing the extreme behaviours of some children, demonstrated key attributes: there were multiple opportunities for children to understand which behaviours would not be tolerated prior to, and during Paul's intervention; Paul remained calm and refused to react to provocation; he used humour to lighten the situation and defuse the child's anger; and he offered a clear pathway for redemption and an opportunity to move forward without sanction. The result of the actions he took, and the way he undertook them, served to wind back the stressful nature of the interaction and create a space to allow the child to access rational responses to the behavioural boundaries set by the school. In refusing to be drawn into reactive and angry responses himself, he modelled alternative behavioural responses to frustration and disappointment to the child.

The Incredible Years programme argues that modelling desired behaviours is valuable in counteracting the learnt behaviours that children may bring with them into their schooling (Webster-Stratton, 2011). Patsy made a similar observation about the behaviours some children see in their homes:

> *Half the time children are watching adults perform appalling behaviour and this is what they are seeing. I know that when I am tired and I haven't had an early night the children are affected. I think we need to be able to recognise that how we are, has an effect on the child and that is what they are learning.*

Patsy went on to described her belief that parents require support to better understand the impacts of their parenting interactions on their children's experience of formal schooling. She asserted the need for parents to have more knowledge about how children learn and this knowledge would enable parents to avoid replicating behaviours that they themselves have experienced as harsh and harmful in their own childhoods. It would support parents to understand the links between their modes of communication with children and the quality of their family relationships on children's cognitive and emotional development. Finally, she argued for it as necessary for parents themselves:

> *We need to pick people up who are hurting and they need that healing so that they can be the parents they want to be.*

Thus, the expressions of care that lay beneath her understandings of the sometimes, difficult behaviours that children enacted in their schooling also extended to their parents, who were perceived as also acting from their own place of hurt and pain.

While Patsy saw parenting as amenable to change through programmes to teach alternative forms of parenting behaviour, other teachers tended to confine their work with troubled children within the school. In this sense, they viewed Watea School as offering an alternative to the parenting some children experienced at home. This position acted as a spur to motivate their continued efforts to support behavioural changes in children, which were perceived as necessary to give children a better

chance of success in education and to offer them possibilities for realising their potential.

None of the teachers lived within the locale of the school during the time of the research, making it easier to sustain a view of school as a place apart. While Erica and Tina, both senior teachers, suggested that parents often lacked the confidence to approach them when they had concerns about their children's behaviours, because they had previous *negative experiences of schooling*, this could not be confirmed in their interactions with parents. Barring Patsy's analysis, it did not prompt the kinds of questions about of the complexities of life for both parents and children in some families living within the locale of the school.

School contacts with some parents occurred almost solely as responses to children's misbehaviours. Meeting with teachers and the Principal under this condition could engender or worsen parental anxiety and contribute to negative emotions regarding their children's schooling. This was even more likely if these parents did not receive more positive evaluations of their children, because they failed to attend parent/teacher conferences, school events and did not initiate informal contacts with teachers before and after school. In the belief that parental attitudes to formal schooling were important in the success of their children, the Principal always contacted parents following these meetings, to give a subsequent report of improvements in children's behaviour. This was perceived as necessary to create opportunities for parents to develop more trusting relationships with Watea School, to offer encouragement and support to parents and to thereby, bridge gaps between home and school.

The provision of social work service to Watea School offered further bridging opportunities between the school and parents of children with behavioural issues. However, both the social worker and the Principal confirmed the inadequacy of the time available for social work assessments and interventions. In the Principal's estimation, Watea School required at least one and more likely two, full-time social workers to fully address the needs of children attending the school. The lack of social worker availability beyond two days each week, resulted in fewer children and families receiving targeted, proactive and preventative programmes to support

behavioural change. It often fell to teachers and the senior leadership team to pick up the burden of responding to behavioural issues and interacting with families, which in turn contributed to a daily performance of crisis-led interventions as described by Thrupp (1998, 1999).

Watea School did seek to assist parents to support their children in education through the provision of a variety of school-based programmes over several years. Most included elements of parenting advice directed toward more consistent and positively framed parent-child interactions as recommended by the Incredible Years programme. They also recommended the parenting component of The Incredible Years programme to parents and supported staff members to attend The Incredible Years teaching programme as part of their professional development. In this manner, the school incrementally increased the skill base of its teachers and teacher-aides in positive behavioural management. In line with the developers of The Incredible Years, the Principal asserted that the best results were achieved when both home and school were involved in the programme; that is when parents attended the programme designed to address their parenting behaviours, when children received programmed support to assist them; and when the teacher and school maintained practices to support agreed behavioural goals. However, this coordinated response was not always able to be facilitated, and in this circumstance, both the behavioural issues and the relationship between home and school had to be negotiated as best pareants and teachers could.

Watea School sought to maintain a collaborative and collegial culture in sustaining an effective 'whole of school' response to behavioural issues. In employing this approach to the difficulties posed by troubled children in the school, teachers could, in the main, rely on colleagues for support when dealing with difficult behaviours. In developing a shared understanding of behavioural expectations within the school, it was easier to also maintain a consistent approach to behavioural expectations for children moving from classroom to classroom. The Principal asserted that this did not institute conformity in teaching practice; rather it supported teachers to act within a set of negotiated approaches to behavioural infractions, which could be encompassed within individual teaching styles.

Specific roles in the senior teaching team included responsibilities for ensuring consistent responses to children's behavioural issues. The Principal, Deputy Principal and Senior Teachers all had considerable experience and skill in managing children's difficult behaviours. The concerns of classroom teachers could be discussed with senior teaching staff, and at times, their expertise utilised, to complement the efforts of the classroom teacher. Most of the teachers interviewed for the research stressed the value of these collegial relationships, and as Kyriacou (1987) argues, supportive collegial relationships buffer stress, provide mentoring and contribute to the overall development of skilled behaviour management in staff.

The Principal, Deputy Principal and Senior Teachers also acted as a resource for staff in determining when and how to go about obtaining extra support for children from Special Education services. Determinations of whether children qualified for support and what kind of support they required, were complex processes requiring experience and skill to navigate. While all those interviewed maintained that local Special Education services were highly valued, resourcing constraints were also a common refrain, given the level of need within the student body.

Watea School invested heavily in teacher aide support for children with behavioural difficulties. While some children were funded for this support through the Ministry of Education, based on diagnosed special education needs, Watea School employed other teacher-aides from within its general budget to meet the needs of children who did not meet the criteria for designated teacher aide support, but were nevertheless, assessed within the school as requiring it. For example, within the period of the research, a teacher aide was employed to support boys with problem behaviours. He brought a range of skills to this work, derived from his past life experiences, including considerable sporting achievements. He worked extensively with groups of children to develop their sporting capabilities, giving some children, in the Principals' words, *a taste of success* they would not have previously experienced in schooling. This success impacted positively on children's attitude to school, creating conditions of acceptance and validation and supported more widespread positive behavioural changes.

Watea School's willingness to take on children with behavioural issues and their commitment to finding support for their needs required careful planning, budgeting and a level of financial risk. Overall numbers of students attending the school, increased in the years before and during the research, enabling the school to retain or increase existing teaching staff, but the number of children attracting teacher aide funding was somewhat less predictable. Watea School had to grapple with the complexities of managing a fluctuating demand for teacher aide services, alongside the need to retain their expertise and skills. However, because Watea School had an established track record of successfully working with children exhibiting difficult behaviours, the number of students requiring support tended to increase over the school year, as placements were sought for children excluded from other schools. Watea School management preferred to retain skilled teacher-aides in the early weeks of the school year, in the expectation that their skills would be required at later stages. Experience and knowledge in managing these complexities, lay behind the imperatives of face-to-face interactions between teachers, teacher-aides and students and their families.

Transience posed additional difficulties for teachers and the school, in establishing school wide behavioural foundations. As chapter seven argues, changing school, especially multiple times, created its own burden as children were required to establish themselves within different groups of peers and teachers with each move. While there are substantial similarities in how all schools operate, there are nevertheless subtle differences in how relationships and interactions are conducted within each school, and these have to be negotiated anew with each move. Integrating into each school was stressful for children and for those moving with histories of difficult behaviours, this stress did little to facilitate an easy transition between schools.

The interview conducted with the teacher responsible for bilingual classroom at Watea School provided a more ambiguous account of her behaviour management than those provided by other teachers within the school. Some aspects, definitely not all of Watea School's management strategies for children exhibiting difficult behaviours, were challenged by Anna as an experienced Maori language teacher. In broad outline, Anna's behavioural management strategies were in line with

mainstream classrooms in Watea School, and as such, she described her practices of supporting positive behaviours:

> …I would go in there and I would look for positives. It was hard to find them sometimes. I would say, "What a beautiful smile you have got. How lovely of you to put this stool here" and slowly over the years, they became powerful kids.

However, Anna also described her differing expectations of the Maori children she taught in her classroom. She was challenged about her management of children's behaviour by another teacher:

> Why are your kids so in your face? Why do you let them?

She responded:

> Because, they are allowed to be who they are. They are allowed to be Maori. They are allowed to be Maori. That is the only thing I can say."
> Because of them being Maori, I let them <u>be</u> Maori without … You know, the teacher will come into the room and the kids will ask me something, and the teacher will say, "Say, please!" and I don't notice.
> Interviewer: So what you are saying is that it is not the words, but the doing, and it's the behaviour that matters?
> Anna: Yes, it is the doing that matters.

This stance taken by Anna defied the belief held by other teachers in the school that direct communications are necessarily correlated with educational deficits. Erica, a senior teacher in the school with many years of experience in assisting children to transition to school, described the communications employed by some parents with their children in the school community as *directive and controlling.* Parents in her view, often demanded compliance from children, but failed to give explanations for the demands they made. They did not use language to explain and explore their responses to events and experiences and thus, to assist children to develop learning capabilities that facilitated success in formal schooling.

However, Anna had herself experienced a form of parenting that combined high parental expectations for academic success combined with very directive forms of parenting communication and discipline:

My mother ruled with a rod of iron. Because my Mum never asked us - there was never 'please' and 'thank you'... But, for my Mum, education was the thing. And my older brother was very intelligent and because of that, we were expected to excel at school, whether we liked it or not. So education was a part of our upbringing, and to follow rules.

Her mother's authoritative use of power and direct communication was unabashed in its demands. It arose from a personalised exercise of power and mana.

Delpit, (1988) contrasts this clear use of command with the middle-class use of role based power, which assumes compliance as its due and does not directly demand it. Parents and teachers, in assuming the mantle of a middle-class role, may not express their commands assertively, but will continue to expect compliance. Thus, when parents and teachers, frame a request as "Can you please …", or "Would you like to ….", middle-class children understand that this is a command, despite the language in which it is framed. Delpit argues that children of colour and working-class children are likely to misinterpret the intention of indirect forms of communication and view compliance as discretionary. In contrast, communications that are direct and clear in their expectations, are more likely to result in the desired actions.

More importantly, where others place a negative construction on such forms of communication in their capacity to promote learning, Delpit argues otherwise. She asserts that direct forms of communication and commands present no barriers to learning, so long as teachers maintain a critical, pedagogical stance. In doing so, teachers use their power to work within culture by giving attention to, caring about and incorporating examinations of the conditions of poverty, class and racism experienced by students into their teaching practices. By these means, the knowledge students bring to their learning is valued and learning and achievement in formal schooling is not divorced from the lifeworld of students. This supports the

development of functional relationships based on respect, which enables teachers to open windows to the wider world for their students (Delpit, 1988).

The second difference in Anna's account of her work involved her perception of isolation in the school and the limits of collegial support available to her. As outlined earlier, other teachers interviewed for the research could count on support from their colleagues to manage their workloads and to review and manage difficult issues. The caring support they received was instrumental in sustaining them in their own ongoing efforts to deal attentively and carefully with difficult students. Anna, in contrast, as the only bilingual teacher within the school, described her situation differently:

> *But it is lonely. I can't go and talk to someone about, you know, the wairua,[14] and know that they are feeling what I am feeling, and know what I know. You know there is that Pakeha whaikorero[15] and they just forget that there is a Maori dimension.*

Anna's Maori identity and the cultural framework within which she taught, affected the degree to which she could discuss and explore issues in her work with her colleagues.

Anna, like many other Maori teachers with expertise in tikanga Maori in mainstream schools, acted as a resource to the school in producing materials to explain aspects of Maori cultural practices. As the only Maori language teacher with an especially heavy workload in being required to meet assessment activities in two languages, Anna described feeling wearied by the demands of her work despite a responsive relationship with the Principal, who ensured she had good teacher aide support. She

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[14] Wairua is the non-physical, spiritual aspect of a person (Maori Dictionary, 2016: Retrieved January 15, 2016 from: maoridictionary.co.nz). Connecting with the wairua/spirit of others supports knowing others and being known by them more deeply and meaningfully.

[15] Whaikorero is the formal speech of introduction and welcome to visitors to the marae followed by like responses from visitors (Maori Dictionary, 2016: retrieved January 16, 2016 from: maoridictionary.co.nz). In using the term 'Pakeha whaikorero', Anna refers to Pakeha discursive practices that are used to organise social interactions. The dominance of Pakeha culture ensures that these forms of discursive management remain normative and invisible in everyday life.

sought further support from a local group of Maori teachers, but these measures did not compensate:

> *I have found that there is a Maori teachers group that I have found and we meet. We have meetings that I can go to now and we can share about what we are facing. And we can talk, and they can understand me, but they don't know about what it is that I deal with here. They are not here where I am; I am the only Maori here.*

Anna could not count on an easy appreciation of the challenges and difficulties she faced in her work. The cultural framework in which she lived and breathed her work lay to one side of the normative dominance of Pakeha culture operating within the school. Her description of her isolation resonates with research that investigated the experiences of teaches in bilingual classrooms in the United States. While teachers of bilingual classes in mainstream schools may receive personal support and affirmation,

> None felt she/he could safely share her/his political views or visions of education with her/his peers (Arce, 2004, p.288).

In not being able to speak freely and discuss issues openly, Anna's sense of isolation was sustained.

While Anna's contribution to the research introduced troubling concerns about her isolation and her professional relationships with her colleagues, she was also at pains to recognise Watea School's efforts to develop more culturally responsive practices toward its community of Maori students. In years subsequent to the research, more Maori staff were employed as teachers, teacher-aides and in school leadership. The school extended its bilingual classes and there was ongoing work to support staff development in tikanga Maori. It is important to recognise these efforts were subject to change within the school in subsequent years, and that the conditions in which Anna taught her bilingual class are no longer likely to apply to the same degree.

Diagnosed behavioural conditions, care and belonging at Watea School

Watea School attracted a number of students with diagnosed behavioural conditions, which impacted on their schooling. These conditions included ADHD, Autism and Down's Syndrome. While these children exhibited behaviours that needed management to enable them to learn within the schooling system, there were clear pathways for both school and parents, once a diagnosis had been achieved. Watea School was still required to demonstrate skill in responding to children's needs, but outside sources of expertise could be accessed to support classroom teachers. Funding streams followed diagnoses, to enable the school to put in place the necessary supports.

However, this narrative of behavioural need, diagnosis, funding and support was anything but straightforward in practice for many children and their families. Judgment calls had to be made about the source of behavioural problems, either from within the individual child as a feature of their disposition or genetic capability, or as arising from the home environment and the child's past and current experiences. Erica (Senior Teacher) asserted the need for school and family to work together to carefully identify the nature of the problem. As a prerequisite for this work, teachers had to establish trust and rapport with parents to achieve the level of collaborative effort required and this was not always easily achieved.

When both parents and the school shared concerns about a child's behaviour, there were different pathways toward diagnosis. Assessments contributing to a diagnosis traversed the fields of physical and psychological health, social welfare, child welfare agencies and Special Education services. Identifying the source of behavioural disruptions and the parameters of behavioural abnormalities, had to be conducted within predetermined funding criteria that were sometimes difficult to apply to behavioural conditions with complex aetiologies. The provision of appropriate treatments proved to be an equally complex task, requiring ongoing functional relationships across different service sectors, within the school and with the child's family. These relationships took time and energy to establish and sustain in meeting children's needs for support.

The experienced leadership team within Watea School described themselves as frustrated by processes that were unresponsive to the urgency of children's needs. This was particularly so when children's behaviours resisted easy diagnosis and categorisation and involved complex judgements about the causation of children's behaviours. In understanding that aggressive and difficult behaviours were communicative of a child's distress, even as they contributed to the stress and distress of others, the Principal and teachers felt that bureaucratic processes sometimes impeded timely interventions from outside agencies. At other times, suitably experienced and qualified professionals, such as child psychologists were unavailable. In the eventuality that children's needs were not addressed in a timely manner, Watea School, teachers and parents could not devolve their caring responsibilities; children still had to be cared for and taught, within their families and the school.

Processes for developing timely and efficient services to meet children's needs were further impeded by the limits of knowledge in the field of child development, cognition and behaviour. The impacts of social changes on children and childrearing practices precede what is known. For example, the Principal had some knowledge of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and suggested that some children exhibited symptoms that could have been attributed to alcohol consumption in pregnancy, but this could not be easily ascertained. While there has been an understanding that alcohol consumption has the capacity to cause a range of neurological deficits with implications for children's patterns of behaviour, the full nature of these deficits and their extent has been less certain until more recently, and treatment for affected children has certainly lagged behind that knowledge (Ministry of Health, 2015).

Increased capacity to attend to underlying sources of stress in children's lives, also requires increased capacity in allied services to better assist the school and parents in their work. More responsive policy is required to mitigate the adverse parenting environment for poorer families and their children, accompanied by realistic evaluations of the work schools are required to perform in this mitigation (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). Such moves will, however, remain as reactive strategies unless recognition is given to the social and economic factors contributing to adverse parenting conditions. While the Watea School community remains marked by the

effects of poverty and the stressors it occasions, the school will continue to be challenged by high levels of need for behavioural issues in its student body, and more importantly, children will continue to be marked by the impacts of life stresses on their future life-courses.

Parents' views of the management of children's behaviour in Watea School

This section of the thesis recognises the reciprocal nature of the relationship between Watea School and its parent community. Just as the school had views about how family relationships and parent behaviours impacted on children's behaviour, so too did parents hold views about other's parenting behaviours and the quality of the school's interventions to support the development of prosocial behaviours in children. While there was substantive agreement between parents and educators about the source of most children's troubling behaviour, parents' accounts differed in some respects. They placed much more emphasis on the impact of bullying on their children's experience of school and offered some suggestions to improve communications between the school and parents on this issue.

This emphasis on the quality of parent-school communications formed a common thread through all their perceptions of Watea School's attempts to support children to develop prosocial behaviours. Where communications between parents and teachers worked well, parents expressed their satisfaction with the school. However, parental concerns about the performance of the school included aspects of miscommunication between teachers and students or parents and teachers. Thus, improvements in communication between school and parents offered opportunities for the school to be more effective in its reading of issues as they presented, and its responses to those issues.

Several parents acknowledged that children came to Watea School with past histories that explained their troubling behaviours:

> *I don't really blame the kids actually, because there might be something going on in the home, or there is a new baby or Mum and Dad are splitting up or, you know, Mum has just got no sleep and you*

know there is always something behind it…. I know how it is because
my partner and I split up a few months ago - we are back together now.
My son went right off the rails. (Shona, mother of three and a child in
his first year of school).

Thus, parents, as well as teachers, assigned responsibility for some children's behaviour to the home environment and expressly to disruptions and difficulties in relationships within the home. In this attribution, communication between the school and home were vitally important in ensuring that teachers understood what was driving children's behaviour and how best to support them.

In the instances when parents communicated effectively with the school and explained to teachers why their children were experiencing difficulties, parents felt that the school generally responded well to their concerns. This created a sense of partnership between home and school, which was greatly valued when children were dealing with difficult home circumstances. This partnership is exemplified in Yolande's account. She argued that the relationship between herself and her daughter's teacher had proven especially helpful in working out how best to support her daughter through a time of family instability. It enabled her to work with the teacher to develop consistent responses to her daughter's symptoms of distress across home and school. This could only be achieved by establishing trusting relationships between teacher and parent.

The quality of relationships between home and school was also important for Natasha, the mother of a daughter diagnosed with ADHD:

Communication is the number one thing if you have got a child with
these problems. You need good communication with the teacher and
between the teachers (Natasha, mother of three).

In Natasha's view, her daughter had experienced a degree of exclusion in her previous school, which was not present at Watea School:

> *They don't single her out for having ADHD. In xxx School, they did.*
> *So, it was like, if your child has - because they class it as a mental*
> *disorder and so she was sort of shoved aside, in my opinion. But, at*
> *Watea School, she has made friends. She talks to her teacher and feels*
> *comfortable with her teacher. She just loves school.*

Her daughter's teacher at Watea School demonstrated a willingness to work with other teachers to gain the best outcomes for her daughter:

> *...the teacher discussed with me different things she could try with*
> *Valery, like Maths Speak tests because Valery has dyslexia. She*
> *muddles things up. And her teacher said she would have a talk to her*
> *boss and the other teachers about what to do.*

This teacher worked with Natasha to both gain and share strategies for supporting her daughter in her learning and behaviour management. The quality of their relationship enabled them to sort out difficulties that arose for her daughter quickly and effectively. The contrast between the Watea School's responsiveness to her daughter's needs and willingness to initiate and maintain an ongoing dialogue with Natasha as a parent, informed her perceptions of Watea School as an excellent school.

Teachers, the Principal and parents were all aware that sometimes difficulties in communication could intrude upon the effective function of Watea School in supporting children with behavioural issues. The sources of these misconnections could arise from unintended organisational oversights and mistakes, or from a lack of understanding about the conditions within the wider community and the effects of these conditions on the lives of parents and children. Equally, misconnections could arise from parental oversights, failures and/or a lack of understanding about how the field of education functions and how parents can best support their children. Watea School did apply itself to the task of communicating effectively with parents when opportunities were created, but as in any relationship, this was a site of ongoing development.

Routine school practices, such as newsletters, classroom notes and parent-teacher interviews, offered opportunities for communicating the school's behavioural expectations. The school website outlined these expectations and their rationale. Additionally, the school provided opportunities for parents to meet with school staff to discuss these expectations prior to enrolment. These practices tended to reflect the school's need to ensure that parents understood school procedures and processes. At the same time, it enabled the school to express the values that underpinned the school's behavioural expectations of children and their processes for supporting prosocial behaviours. For example, weekly school newsletters to parents always recognised good behaviour by naming students as 'caught being good'. In this manner, Watea School's approach to giving attention to good behaviour could be demonstrated to parents, while allowing them to share in the full range of their children's successes.

In addition to these routine and regular opportunities to communicate the school's behavioural expectations of children, events fostered by the school offered other and more informal communication opportunities. Thus, parent's attendance at concerts, sports days, school trips and other events within the school allowed parents to observe teacher/child relationships in action and gave them access to teachers in less formal settings.

While all these forms of communication were valued by parents, the informal interactions that occurred between teachers and parents when dropping off, or picking up children from the school, attracted the greatest number positive comments from parents. These interactions mostly involved parents of younger children, but they were valued by all parents interviewed for the research. At these times, parents could discuss not only their children's learning progress, but also gain information about how well the child was adjusting to, and dealing with school life, including any problems that were emerging. It was also an opportunity to discuss events or conditions within the home that were impacting on children's behaviour, or had the potential to do so. Parents asserted that in being able to speak informally with teachers, they could be assured that teachers knew their children and understood their needs.

Despite these efforts, the Principal and teachers noted in interviews that many parents had minimal interactions with the school. The explanations given by teachers and the Principal for the relative lack of some parents' input into children's schooling, ranged from a lack of care on the part of some parents about their children's education, a lack of personal confidence in their ability to negotiate with the school due to their own previous difficulties in education, class differences between working-class and unemployed families and middle-class teachers, and the stressed and busy nature of parents lives, which precluded them from engaging with activities to support the school and their children's learning.

The Principal noted that teachers enjoyed high levels of trust in their parent community. There is some support for this position in the literature based on classed distinctions in parental behaviour (Lareau 2000; Thrupp, 2007a). Lareau argues that middle-class parents hold a view of childhood that necessitates parental involvement in children's development, including lobbying the school to ensure their children receive every available educational support or advantage on offer. Educational failures are more likely to be viewed by middle-class parents, as arising from inadequacies in school function and teaching performance. They feel unconstrained in making critical appraisals of the school and in demanding better teachers and access to educational supports.

By contrast, Lareau (2000) argues that the parents of working-class backgrounds tend to view childhood development as a natural process. Childhood learning failures, are therefore attributed to a lack of natural ability, or to intrinsic dispositional qualities, rather than being attributed to parental, school or teacher deficiencies. However, Lareau argues that parents in this group, do not care less about their children's learning and desire the advantages that educational success brings just as much as middle-class parents. They do not, however, have access to either the resources or the social capital that middle-class parents take for granted in advancing their children's interests.

Certainly, the parents in this research all took delight their children's learning. It was however, noticeable that parents, such as Marion, who had experienced educational

success in tertiary education, felt confident about approaching the school when problems emerged, and in advocating for her child:

> *… because my boy is quiet, and yeah, I think he can get overlooked. So I did have a chat with his teacher at the end of that year and he was going to be in her class next year as well. But it was really good. I was concerned. We came up with some strategies, things I could do with him at home, but also I felt that in doing that as a parent, it made her more aware of him, of my boy (Marion, mother of three).*

Other parents were not confident at all about seeking support for children for issues which concerned them. Some used the interviews to explore their concerns and uncertainties about their children's behaviour as it related to learning. Fiona discussed her son's distractibility, which had been raised with her in her first parent/teacher interview at Watea School in his first year of school. This had come as a surprise to her, because he had not experienced any problems at his previous school:

> *And she kind of bypassed the settling in thing and she talked about, like, he does get distracted very easily. And, I know. (Laughs.) He does get distracted. I had to ask that as well. I said, "I know he does get distracted. Do you have any suggestions about how we can work on that at home as well?" She couldn't really give me an answer on that, but, I mean it is a tough one, distraction, but I am sure with the stuff that is out there. I mean, I googled it! (Fiona, mother of two).*

The unresolved nature of this exchange clearly continued to upset her some months after the initial parent/teacher interview, when I interviewed Fiona. While she had gained some information from the Internet and had invested time and effort in working with her child at home, she did not feel able to raise the issue again with the teacher. She preferred to see the year out and start again with a new teacher in the coming year.

The differences in Marion's account of addressing her concerns with her child's teacher and Fiona's reluctance to do so, are marked. However, these differences did not denote any difference in their desire to see their children do well at school. The effect of the different strategies they employed in communicating, or not, with the school could lead to quite misleading assumptions about their respective attitudes to education. While Marion's concern and involvement with her son's education could not be misinterpreted, Fiona's could, especially as her work commitments precluded her participation in less formal opportunities for interaction with school staff. Her hopes that her actions to support her son at home would prove helpful and that she could establish a new relationship with another teacher in the future, remained shaded with uncertainty, but also bear witness to the effects of an instance of miscommunication; on the one hand, the teacher failed to pick up on the anxieties occasioned by her comments about 'distractibility' and on the other, Fiona could not overcome her uncertainties and anxieties to take the matter further with the school. Doing so, could have clarified precisely what the teacher meant by her statement and therefore what, if anything, needed to be done.

All parents asserted that they would contact the school in the instance their child was bullied. Parents, who had not felt confident about speaking with teachers or the Principal about other issues, did so when they had concerns about bullying. All parents who reported bullying, expressed confidence that Watea School had dealt with the bullying children and their parents effectively. They were also accepting of the inevitability of bullying and supportive of the school's efforts to deal with it:

> *I think a lot of what Watea School has done is that they take on children, who other schools aren't willing to help. So if that happens, of course there are going to be some behavioural problems (Marion, mother of three children).*

The parents I spoke with viewed bullies as victims of their own life experiences and their behaviours as arising from their home environments:

And some of those kids who are bullies, they don't actually realise that they are really doing it, because that is how they are treated in their lives (Marion, mother of three).

However, these perceptions of causation may be incomplete. Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, and Evans (2010) argue that school and classroom environments contribute to the incidence and nature of bullying. Furthermore, Rigby (2005) suggests that bullying is a behaviour that can serve to either develop, or maintain social status and power. It is therefore a relational behaviour that implicates the bully, the bullied, bystanders, friends and supporters, all of whom must be considered in any interventions.

Understood in this light, bullying requires a whole-of-school response. It argues for classroom environments and teachers to model the behaviours demanded of students. Paul describes his past experiences of witnessing methods of controlling children's behaviour through shame and fear as being '*horrible*' and as practices he could not countenance. Supporting a culture that values empathetic care across all relationships within the school, is important in developing practices of prosocial behaviour that are intolerant of bullying.

Parents understood and supported the school's mission to help children with behavioural issues that resulted in bullying behaviours. They did however, want to feel reassured about the ongoing safety of their children within the school environment. Two parents suggested that improved communication with the parents making complaints about bullying behaviour after its resolution, would have provided a sense of completion and greater confidence in the school's processes, although in both instances they were satisfied that school interventions had been effective in stopping the bullying behaviours.

In ascribing children's bullying behaviours to the difficulties they were experiencing at home, parents retained sympathy for bullying children, just as teachers did for children with difficult behaviours in general. Such children could not justly be held responsible for parenting deficiencies and their behaviours could be envisioned as arising from harms done to them. This position, therefore helped both parents and

teachers to sustain caring efforts to help bullying children. However, maintaining this focus on the lives of these individual children, could also act to obscure the wider contexts and conditions contributing to bullying behaviours, if they failed to result in whole-of-school approaches to remediation.

Education and the state: creating model citizens

The behaviour of students in school has concerned educators and bureaucrats from the inception of universal education. However, behavioural expectations of students have changed over time. Where once students in formal schooling attended half days and a curriculum that was designed primarily to instil basic literacy and numeracy in preparation for later participation in the workforce, requirements changed as the needs of industry and the economy demanded workers with greater levels of skill and differentiated expertise. Underlying these changes, there has been a preoccupation with how students behave in formal schooling and how their behaviours could be shaped to create better, future workers and citizens.

In light of these aims, formal schooling in New Zealand has long been concerned to implement systems of control and discipline. There are now differences in the regimes used to achieve these aims; the authoritarian rule of the teacher accompanied by methods of physical punishment have been replaced by foucauldian regimes self-governmentality embedded in self-control and self-regulation (Marshall & Marshall, 1997). The end-point of this change is to constitute the responsible and accountable, individuated subject, suited to the ends of work and consumption in the capitalist economy, a project that chimes well with the neoliberal organisation of the educational sector.

The analyses of Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2002) argue strongly that universal schooling in America has always been about shaping children to become the kinds of workers and citizens that capitalism demands. Furthermore, they argue that any other claims for education are subsumed within this purpose, not just in present forms of education, but from the very outset of universal education. Their prescription is to move from a capitalist economy to a socialist economy that serves the learning needs of all with equity.

In contrast, Labaree (1997) argues that the economic goals of education have trumped goals concerned with educating children for their future as participating citizens in democracy in America. He makes the case that applied effort can reverse this condition, by focusing on forms of socialisation that stress democratic and participatory forms of citizenship, modelling these in forms of social behaviour in formal schooling and enacting policy to reduce the dominance of the economic in structures of governance in education. While the prognoses of Labaree and Bowles and Gintis differ regarding the changes needed to restore learning to a central conception of education and their hopefulness about the socialising programmes of education, both agree that the dominance of the economic creates problems in education because of the conformity it supports.

Current visions for education clearly remain focused on the economic purposes in education in New Zealand:

> A world-leading education system is the foundation for a productive and growing economy that provides greater prosperity, security and opportunity for all New Zealanders. Our vision is to maintain and strengthen our world leading education system and to equip every New Zealander with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st-century (Sewell, 2009, p.3).

Education is therefore charged with meeting the needs of the economy and competitive markets in supplying appropriately educated and socialised workers; these workers will receive the benefits of their education in employment which is central to achievement of a good life and thereby achieve successful citizenship.

However, within this emphasis on the economic purposes of education, government policy has had to confront the undeniable reality of the difficult behaviours that some children exhibit. Children's needs, expressed in these behaviours, in conjunction with their dependence and vulnerability, prompts the state to intervene to support children. The need to intervene is further reinforced when the links between disruptive behaviours and later criminality are acknowledged. However, adherence to neoliberal ideology constrains the supports the state views as necessary.

Government policy admits only a partial recognition of the interconnections and dependencies that make up our social world, when it holds fast to an ideation of adult individuals as being fully responsible and accountable for their own circumstances, and the parenting of their children. It is willing to concede only to the necessity of responding to children's needs, because they cannot be held to the same account as adults. Thus, while it acknowledges that children suffer behavioural disturbances that must be attended to, for the distress they signal and the difficulties they cause others, it cannot easily include any remediation of wider social and economic conditions contributing to these behaviours.

Government policy has recognised that the school system provides a space for acting to reach children needing both assessment and treatment for serious behavioural issues. This group of children often has multiple needs that traverse an array of different services providers, and so the school becomes a convenient site for intervention. The state has therefore, facilitated interconnections between schools and these providers through specific policy initiatives such as Gateways, Intensive Wraparound Service and Social Workers in Schools programmes to include all decile 1-3 primary schools.

Additionally, the decile funding system recognises that schools serving communities with higher numbers of low-income families do require more funding to support the educational needs of their students and a further funding top up is distributed to schools in regions with entrenched levels of poverty. These policy actions, in addition to the regional services offered by Special Education, recognise the greater needs of schools for support by assisting children with forms of behaviour that compromise their progress in formal schooling. The following paragraphs give a brief description of the services instituted and funded by the government in response to the needs of children with behavioural issues. It then offers a discussion of why such responses have fallen short of their aims.

Gateway Assessments responds to the complex needs of children up to the age of twelve under CYF care. It mandates a programme of expert assessments to identify needs and to institute remedies. In doing so, the programme acknowledges links between difficult social circumstances and educational difficulties:

As a result of their backgrounds, kids who come into care are often disconnected from regular health and education services, and are more likely to have physical, behavioural, and emotional barriers to overcome. Often the complexity of problems means that no single agency is able to provide the full package of care and services required (Child Youth and Family, 2014).

The piloting of Gateway Assessments between 2008 and 2010 revealed the physical and mental health problems affecting children in CYF care were under-diagnosed by social workers, with consequential shortfalls in supports and interventions. Complete and expert assessment was viewed as essential for families and for children to reach their social and educational potential.

Intensive Wraparound Service (IWS) has been implemented:

…to make sure that the services and resources are there to support the small number of children and young people who have highly complex and challenging behaviour, social or education needs and their family/whanau (Ministry of Education, 2012b).

The IWS is conceived as a service for very small numbers of children with extreme behaviours that have proven difficult to manage in schools. The IWS offers an alternative pathway to exclusion from school, to minimise disruptions in education for this group of children, and to improve their educational outcomes.

Social Worker in Schools (SWiS) has been increased to include social worker support to all decile 1-3 primary schools. While the Minister of Social Development announced the extension of the project as "a vital frontline response to preventing and addressing abuse and neglect," (Bennett, 2013), the information supplied by CYF services makes the link between home circumstances and the educational performance of children:

The service provides early assistance and intervention to children and their families when social or family circumstances are causing the child to struggle with education, health or social development. The aim is to see safe, socialised children with a strong sense of identity and well-being, who are fully engaged in school (Ministry of Social Development, 2014).

These policy responses do incorporate the need to respond to the social distress of children because of its likely impacts on educational outcomes. However, services tend only to be activated once conditions of family disruption have reached critical levels for the care of children, and are minimally concerned with prevention, which would require more widespread social change and policy responses. Additionally, the services provided did not meet the demand for service in Watea School during the period of the research.

Special Education services provide support to schools for children with behavioural problems in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2015b). This may include specific conditions that disrupt their learning such as ADHD and Autism and severe forms of neurological impairment, but also includes other behavioural issues which are less well defined, but nevertheless, difficult for teachers to manage. A further initiative to address children's difficult behaviours through Special Education services is focused on rolling out positive behaviour for learning (PB4L) strategies such as The Incredible Years programme to all schools in New Zealand. In addition to providing training for teachers in the programme, Special Education services also provides the Resource Teaching, Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service, which offers expert teaching advice to teachers and schools. The Incredible Years programme and the RTLB service are designed to support teachers in managing the behavioural difficulties of children that fall short of criteria for accessing Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) funding and interventions, which are reserved with those with the most severe and ongoing needs.

As previously stated in this chapter, the local Special Education service was highly regarded by Watea School for the support and services they provided. However, the most commonly reported problem with Special Education services was the mismatch

between the resources provided and the level of need, not just in Watea School, but the wider education sector (Carson, 2013). Additionally, processes for accessing these services were complex, and accompanied by uncertainties about how criteria would be applied and the likelihood of a successful application. Compiling the required paperwork and coordinating assessments took considerable amounts of time; school and family resources were therefore consumed, in processes that offered often uncertain prospects for obtaining necessary services.

While families and the school threaded their way through these processes, children continued to express their distress in sometimes severe forms of behaviour. It is on this last point that teachers and the Principal at Watea School felt most frustrated and other principals shared this frustration (Newlove, 2015). A survey, conducted in the Te Tai Tokerau (Northland) region in New Zealand in 2015, confirmed the findings of this research in asserting that services provided by Special Education were valued, but under resourced for the level of need (Maori Television, 2015). This survey also confirmed that behavioural difficulties constituted one of the most intractable problems in managing schools because of the difficulties in getting adequately resourced services to help children (Newlove, 2015; Radio New Zealand, National, 2015). In response to these claims, the Ministry of Education acknowledged the difficulties faced by principals in meeting the needs of children, but the Ministry also emphasised the extra funding provided to schools in regions marked by poverty. Therefore, the issue had, in their view, been responded to appropriately (Radio New Zealand, National, 2015).

A policy and service designed to deal with a problem, cannot make claims to success on the basis of stated intentions, when the planned strategies cannot be implemented because of a lack of resourcing. It is disturbing when government officials indicate that a problem has been solved because there has been a policy response, while those dealing with the problems in their daily face-to-face work continue to struggle. The failure to confront the ongoing problems faced by schools, including Watea School, in meeting the needs of children with difficult behaviours, suggests that once services were instituted, continued engagement with this issue no longer took priority; it was left to individual schools, principals and parents to extract what they could from policy interventions and to make the best of what was on offer.

This was clearly the experience of Watea School. The school advocated for their students to obtain the services and care they needed, repeatedly if required. Despite the frequency with which Watea School sought supports for its students and its successes in obtaining services over the years, the Principal asserted that the processes remained opaque and uncertain. However, the needs of children demanded perseverance in the face of knockbacks and creativity in exploring all possible avenues. Combined, these characteristics offered the greatest chance of success.

While I did not interview any parents who had undertaken this advocacy work on behalf of their children, media commentary described the barriers parents faced in getting the educational supports for their children (Radio New Zealand, National, 2013b). Parents were required to have a similar skill set as the Principal: expertise in negotiating bureaucracies; and the ability to persevere in the face of adversity. Lareau (2000) argues that confidence in demanding services as an entitlement, is a marker of the middle-class. However, even with these attributes, middle-class parents were sometimes driven to pay privately to supplement state provisions, to ensure their children's needs were met (Radio New Zealand, National, 2013a). For poorer families, this last option was not available, giving witness to classed differences in obtaining necessary services and supports. In light of these differences, the time-consuming actions taken by Watea School to advocate for children and their families takes on added significance.

Conclusion: supporting one child, one family at a time

Neoliberalism, as the dominant ideology in government, continued to stress individual responsibility, or lack of it, as the driver of poor social outcomes for children. In her letter to a constituent posted on-line in 2012, the then Minister for Social Development neatly summarised government aims in reforming welfare:

> These welfare reforms aim to fundamentally shift the benefit system to one that encourages independence and personal responsibility, primarily through paid employment (Bennett, 2012).

This same letter makes it clear that achieving desired levels of independence and responsibility takes precedence over other parenting goals, in this instance the intention to home-school children. The desired outcome of these reforms was to break the intergenerational transmission of dependency on welfare and thereby, poor parenting behaviours. Work was conceived as the most effective route out of poverty and poor parenting; the receipt of welfare income was correlated with a lack of personal responsibility and dependency, creating conditions in which poor parenting occurs. The 'choices' individuals made became the focus of policy initiatives, which sought to support, educate and legislate, to change and improve, or punish the behaviours of parents.

While successful interventions do create possibilities for change in individual lives, conditions of poverty lying beneath instances of family stress and distress remain unaddressed. Targeting interventions to the child casualties of family dysfunction, while also maintaining that families are solely responsible for their social and economic circumstances, offers a child by child, family by family response and *ex post facto* support for children damaged by their life circumstances. Such programmes, however effective and necessary, are unlikely to stem the tide of children needing them, while families continue to experience the difficult economic and social conditions implicated in family distress and dysfunction.

Holding steadfast to an ideology that held parents personally responsible for children's behavioural issues, left schools (and other child welfare organisations such CYF) 'holding the baby' when families and parents were too distressed, disordered and dysfunctional to adequately parent. In their face-to-face work, these organisations were, and are, unable to easily turn away from children's needs and had no option but to try and work to redress them. They could only do so in a limited fashion, because they were unable to address the wider issues that had impacted on the lives of parents and their parenting, which contributed to children's difficult behaviours.

Watea School, in supporting children with behavioural difficulties, demonstrated both expertise and a willingness to continue to engage with children's problems and the distress their behaviours communicated. Their efforts should have been

recognised, validated, and politically supported, just as parents needed also to receive validation for the difficult work of parenting in conditions of poverty. However, politicians continued to view the links drawn between socioeconomic factors and behavioural issues by the education sector as evidence of deficit thinking and as therefore, contributing to negative and stereotypical responses to families in poverty. Creating public fora for airing the real conditions in which low-decile schools and families do their work, would go some way to ensuring an informed public and polity; continuing to view families and schools as the only agents of the intergenerational transmission of educational inequalities, obscured the impacts of poverty on family and school function, and closed off possibilities for change.

More importantly, this stance also obscured how we were all implicated in social systems of advantage and disadvantage in New Zealand in 2013. It allowed those who benefited most from social and educational systems to attribute causations for educational inequalities to the failings of individual schools, teachers, parents and students to exercise good choices and competently perform their roles. These explanations then obscured the difficulties faced by these low-decile school communities in managing children's difficult behaviours and in accessing sufficient resources to address them. High-decile schools, where such behaviours remained comparatively rare, could attribute the relative lack of behavioural concerns to the superior management of schools and families, without taking into consideration the advantages conferred by their socioeconomic status. In taking this position, a disproportionate load was placed on low-decile schools to redress behavioural issues embedded in educational inequalities and opportunities to exercise the collective responsibility necessary to initiate transformative and systemic change were lost.

CHAPTER NINE

LEARNING AND REGIMES OF ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

Introduction

This chapter examines issues of learning, assessment and measurement from the perspectives of the state policy, practices of Watea School and its parent community. The meanings ascribed to assessment in learning were thrown into sharp relief during the period of the research when the National Standards policy was introduced in primary schools as a means of reducing educational inequalities. The debates surrounding the policy revealed that all involved in this goal cared deeply about the consequences of educational underachievement for the lives of individual children and for the loss of capability and skills to the economy. However, how that care was expressed in National Standards as a policy initiative proved to be especially fertile ground for examining the ideological underpinnings of policy development and implementation. A major section of this chapter is therefore taken up with examining National Standards policy and its implementation as a significant response by the state to the high level of educational disparities in New Zealand.

I provide an overview of the processes of development and implementation of National Standards policy, because these, as much as the actual content of the policy, contributed to its vexed introduction. These processes were played out in very public debates in the media, giving witness to troubled relationships within the education sector. For this reason, data collection for the research draws not only on interviews with teachers and parents involved in incorporating National Standards into their

work, but also statements made by politicians and media commentators. These statements were both reflective of and contributed to, the difficult relationships between politicians, bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education and those actively involved in delivering education services in schools.

National Standards was introduced within particular political contexts, including the agendas of coalition partners in government and the impacts of the GFC on the New Zealand economy. National Standards was therefore, enacted within a programme of educational policies, in which some past policy initiatives were terminated and others were promoted. Public perceptions of National Standards and those of educators and academics were coloured by the range of policies included in its programme. Thus, while National Standards may have represented the most important educational reform in the government's agenda, other policies contributed to an overall understanding of the government's policy directions in education. For this reason, I have included an examination of these policy contexts.

I then present the views of the Principal and teachers in Watea School on processes of assessment in their efforts to improve the learning outcomes of students. Their discontent with National Standards, the process of its implementation and future possible uses for data generated are canvassed. Included in these accounts is the affirmation they gave of the need for assessment practices in effective teaching.

Parents interviewed for the research provided a contrasting account of their perceptions of teaching and learning in Watea School. They expressed minimal interest in National Standards, both in a general sense or as a vehicle for enabling them to better understand their children's progress. This clearly did not signify a lack of interest in their children's learning; their pleasure in their children's learning and sometimes anxiety and concern about their children's educational progress were foremost in all their responses.

The summation of these responses to issues of learning and achievement in Watea School suggests that, in reality, there was little distance between the positions of the Principal, teachers and parents. All wanted assurance that children were receiving the assistance they needed to help them learn. Parents felt most assured of this, when

teachers communicated their knowledge of their child as an individual in learning and as possessing a variety of talents and capabilities to be developed in schooling.

Finally, I argue that much of the data generated in the research is heavily saturated in neoliberal ideology. Both the state and research participants locate solutions to the problem of educational inequalities within a nexus of individual rights and responsibilities, and accountabilities for actions performed. I present a critique of both the neoliberal position informing National Standards, and the use of regimes of assessment and measurement in teaching and learning. This research suggests that the current focus on standardised assessment has little to recommend it in light of the real difficulties faced in education in redressing educational inequalities.

Political background to the implementation of National Standards

Responses to National Standards in 2013, when interviews for this research were performed, have roots in the manner in which the policy was introduced. The development of National Standards policy represented an iteration of a longstanding trend toward regimes of measurement and accountability in education, specific to New Zealand and located within historical contexts, but drawing also on globalised policy trends. Ball argues that these specificities should always be considered in policy analyses:

> One of the tensions which runs through all varieties of policy analysis
> is that between the need to attend to the local particularities of policy-
> making and policy enactment and the need to be aware of general
> patterns and apparent commonalities or convergence across localities
> (1998, p. 119).

National Standards in New Zealand can therefore be viewed in global terms as a tendency in Western education systems toward regimes of standardised testing, for the commonly held purpose of making educators responsible for the outcomes of their teaching.

However, the development and the implementation of National Standards as a policy has also been highly contingent upon the local: the specificity of circumstances and

histories in the educational sector in New Zealand; reigning discourses in educational practice in New Zealand; political exigencies; and ongoing relationships in the educational sector. Ball describes the policy-making process so:

> National policy-making is inevitably a process of bricolage: a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashions and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, re-creation in contexts of practice (1998, p. 126).

National Standards reflected the development of similar policy initiatives in England and the United States of America in seeking to hold schools accountable for the performance of students in standardised tests. However, in New Zealand, the inclusion of Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) in National Standards was conceived as tailoring the policy to New Zealand's context (Tolley, 2009a), while still delivering on the goal of holding schools and teachers accountable for the quality of education delivered in primary schools.

National Standards policy was also enacted as a part of a package that represented the interests of parties in a coalition government. It was therefore subject to the agendas advanced by different parties in the coalition, each contributing their own ideas about education policy development, but demonstrating a shared concern to raise the achievement of low-income and Maori students. Despite their agreement on the goal of this policy direction, there were also differences in their prescriptions, which had to be accommodated within policy formation.

Professional and community groups, with an interest in education, also sought to influence policy development and implementation. Debate and contestation ensued between supporters and detractors, delineating lines of engagement and resistance, power and enforcement. Examining the political contexts operating within the

educational sector, offers insights into the manner in which a 'global pattern' in education, in instituting a programme of student assessment and teacher accountability, influenced its implementation in New Zealand.

The introduction of National Standards policy in 2010 was contiguous with previous policy initiatives, in tying improved educational outcomes to school improvement policies. However, the thrust of the previous Labour government's education policy for primary and intermediate schools prior to 2008, focused on curriculum development as a broad means of improving student outcomes, with concomitant changes in teacher education and professional development to support its implementation (May, et al., 2013; Nusche, Levault, MacBeath, & Santiago, 2012).

The National Curriculum was developed in 2007, in a process that envisaged its full implementation for state funded English language medium schools in 2010. The implementation of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, the corresponding curricular development for Maori language medium schools, was planned for implementation in 2011. Both were preceded by wide consultation within the educational sector and with community groups interested in educational outcomes (Sewell, 2007). The resulting curricula were designed to create a framework, within which autonomous schools could operate in their shared goal of supporting the student learning required for future, successful citizenship.

Considerations of assessment in terms of practice and process were viewed as integral to the implementation of the curriculum (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009). A variety of progression tools had been designed to assist teachers and schools to develop assessment capability, and while Absolum et al., (2009) made arguments for system-wide alignments in assessment practices, they also stressed that this should be accomplished through deep engagement with the sector, in conversation with the National Curriculum, the Educational Review Office (ERO) and the National Educational Monitoring Project (NEMP).[16] In seeking to

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[16] ERO and the NEMP had both played key roles in systematically evaluating education services over many years; ERO through its ongoing evaluations of individual state schools and NEMP through annual research cycles that examined national subject based performance trends. The NEMP research operation was discontinued in 2010.

improve communication between the players most intimately concerned with the quality of educational performance, all could contribute to determinations of ongoing needs for systemic development. In this manner, assessment activities were envisaged as being embedded within educational processes, offering both a system-wide purview as well as analytic evaluation at the level of each individual school. Localised strategies to aid development of assessment capability of individual teachers and principals would then be facilitated, based on the needs of individual schools and teachers, while also being integrated into national processes. Maintaining a level of nation-wide cohesion and consistency was envisaged as being facilitated by iterative processes of evaluation across the sector.

The development of the National Curriculum itself represented an interregnum in the politics of contestation, which had prevailed in the educational sector since the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools in 1989. It marked a more consensual instance of policy formation and implementation in the school sector, but this period did not represent a significant change from the neoliberal policies in education that Tomorrow's Schools ushered in; merely a softening of some of the harder edges (Thrupp, 2009). The basic infrastructure of education for primary and intermediate schools remained unchanged; the localised autonomy of school governance and operations continued and this in turn, required individual schools and their communities to work through the implications of the National Curriculum for their students.

In a press release, the prospective Minister of Education outlined her policy programme: the development of national standards; the implementation of these standards by all state-funded primary and intermediate schools for years one to eight; plain English reporting to parents; additional supports and funding for underachieving students and schools for learning and behavioural problems; addressing truancy issues by getting tough on parents; and providing support for schools to redress truancy (Tolley, 2008).

The year following the introduction of the National Curriculum in 2008, coincided with the onset of the Global Financial Crisis, a national election and a change of

government. The centre-right National Party, with support from the Maori Party (advocating for Maori interests) and the Act Party (representing an overtly neoliberal agenda), achieved electoral power and formed a coalition government. Pre-election policy outlined by the National Party in October 2008, asserted a focus on improving literacy and numeracy levels for the one in five students leaving secondary school without National Certification of Educational Achievement (NCEA) [17] qualifications.

The Act Party policy was concerned with advancing parental choices in education via support for private forms of education, the institution of internationally recognised testing regimes to redress levels of academic underachievement for Maori and Pasifika students and asserting the autonomy of schools and their parent communities as the appropriate site of decision-making and accountability in education (Act, the Liberal Party, 2007).

The Maori Party advocated for Maori interests in education along three pathways: consideration of the impact of poverty on educational outcomes and the institution of in-school programmes to meet the health and nutritional needs of students in poverty; measures to promote the autonomy of Maori in determining their educational development; and support for Maori knowledge, language and pedagogies as the means of advancing Maori educational achievement (Maori Party, 2005).

All three parties were represented in the allocation of the education portfolio post-election; the Minister of Education was appointed from the National Party alongside two associate ministers, one each from the Act Party and the Maori Party. On the face of it, the coalition represented an unlikely alliance of voter interests in education, but as Thrupp (2009) notes, 'choice' provided common ground between the openly neoliberal interests of the centre-right National Party and the far-right Act Party, and the interests of the Maori Party, which was concerned with redressing educational

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[17] NCEA qualifications refer to the attainment of achieved standards in subject based curricula in secondary school years eleven, twelve and thirteen. While some schools offer international tests such as the Cambridge exams, most state-based secondary schools offer NCEA standards as the means of summative assessments of student achievement in the last three years of secondary schooling.

disparities for Maori through greater self-determination in education, including the provision of alternative forms of schooling. Agreement could also be found in a suspicion of the power of the state to advance the best interests of its citizens. While 'less government' is a standard response in the rhetoric of the National Party and Act Party, it butts up against the discourse of self-determination and self- reliance located within the collective structure of whanau, which is a feature of the commentary of Maori Party leadership:

> The state has a duty to create an optimal environment in which people can do for themselves. We must be very clear that the answers lie within the people…It is an ambitious but vital task. Trusting people to find solutions for their own lives requires an absolute belief in ourselves. It is also about dismantling the reliance we have on others; to restore confidence in ourselves (Turia, co-leader of the Maori Party, 2012).

A further strand of consensus emerged between the National Party and the Maori Party in shared discourses prompted by conceptions of 'deficit thinking' as the basis for underachievement in education. Informed by the work of Bishop et al., (2007) and Shields et al. (2005), the underachievement of Maori and Pasifika in education was attributed to teachers' stereotypical attitudes toward students and their families, on the basis of their ethnicity. These perceptions were then understood by the authors, to contribute to teachers' low expectations of students because of perceptions of their family and wider social deficits. Shields et al. (2005) argue that in a circular process, impoverished forms of pedagogy result in low expectations of student success, which are then confirmed in poor student outcomes. These outcomes reinforce teacher beliefs about the incapacity of students to learn and result in these beliefs being transmitted to students, who come to accept that their failure in learning is likely. Deficit thinking is therefore conceived as a form of institutionalised racism within the educational sector, which undermines students' cultural identities as capable learners and is played out in the performance of teaching and learning of Maori and Pasifika students.

Deficit theory asserts that teachers need to be challenged to examine the basis of their negative perceptions of Maori students and their families. This will enable them to

establish effective student-teacher relationships and responsive teaching practices (Bishop et al., 2011; Shields et al., 2005). Maori underachievement in education is therefore, explained as a largely school based deficiency, requiring changes to school leadership and teaching practices to better respond to the cultural experience and knowledge of Maori students. Improved teacher sensitivity to this knowledge and experience creates a positive platform for ongoing student learning.

The confluence of these ideations of education and political realities informed the education policy initiatives adopted by the incoming government. Their policy directions were comprised of not only new policies, but also in the termination of some initiatives and services to meet budgetary constraints. Those terminated included: Education for Sustainability; E-learning Fellowship; Innovation Pool for at Risk Students; Gifted and Talented School Support; Artists in Schools; Children and Young Persons' Lifestyles; Extending High Standards Across Schools [18] (Ministry of Education, 2009b). In addition, the government sought to cut the staffing budget across the sector, a move later rescinded in the budget of 2010. The rationale for the cuts was described as:

> In the current economic environment, the Government is seeking to focus effort and support for school on the areas of highest priority and to achieve improvement through more effective use of core resourcing."
> (Ministry of Education, 2009b).

This statement makes clear that these terminated services were not valued by the incoming government.

However, in addition to these cuts, the government did commit to increased spending and change in other areas of the educational sector: increased funding to State-

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[18] This policy provided funding to enable collaboration between schools to share expertise and knowledge, particularly in initiatives around the implementation of information and communication technologies and their application to learning. The need for collaboration between schools to support increased dissemination of expertise in pedagogy and leadership between schools has since been revived in the policy initiative 'Investing in Educational Success' in 2014.

integrated schools[19]; an extension of Te Kotahitanga pilot programme, designed to support teachers in secondary schools in establishing the relationships and practices necessary to raise Maori underachievement; the development and implementation of National Standards policy. The mix of these policy initiatives represented specific strands of party ideology with respect to education, but expressed a core belief that schools comprised the primary site of action in redressing educational inequalities. The following section explores howthese development of these three policies drew on the ideological positions held by all three parties in the coalition partnership.

The increased funding for state-integrated schools was consistent with all three parties' policy in providing support for alternative schools, and thereby greater choice for parents. That these schools were also able to draw on independent sources of funding to supplement the funding supplied by government for teachers' salaries, was also in tune with a preference in social policy for public-private partnerships as a means of mobilizing community input into social service provision, and reducing the state's involvement in the lives of its citizens (Act, the Liberal Party, 2007).

The policy of increasing funding to state-integrated schools in a time of financial contraction in general, and contraction of some educational services in particular, did occasion critical comment from teacher unions (Gainsford, 2009). However, little justification was offered for such increases, other than to observe that the level of funding for state-integrated schools had been frozen for several years, and that government policy was directed toward maintaining viable alternatives for parents in the education sector (Roy, 2009; Tolley, 2009b). The teachers' union perceived this funding increase for a form of private schooling as occurring at the expense of the public sector (Gainsford, 2009). Increasing parents' options in private education was argued by the union as reducing state schools to a provider of last resort for parents unable to afford fees demanded by private and state-integrated schools and as signalling acceptance of declining conditions in state schools. Choice would therefore, exist for parents with sufficient resources to send their children to private

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[19] State-integrated schools receive a level of government funding and in return develop a school curriculum in accordance with The National Curriculum. They retain the right to charge school fees and retain their 'special character', such as Catholic Schools. State-integrated schools are differentiated from Private Schools, which are not required to comply with the National Curriculum and receive no state funding.

or state-integrated schools, but not for those without sufficient resources, unless their children were the recipients of scholarships selectively targeted and awarded by ballot to a small number of secondary-school students from low-income families (Ministry of Education, 2014e).

The policy of increased state funding for state-integrated schools in a time of funding contraction raised questions of fairness. While claims were made for increased funding for state-integrated schools, because parents sending children to them, pay twice in taxation and fees (Roy, 2009), parents unable to afford to send their children to state-integrated schools were seen as contributing through taxes to educational services from which they were excluded (Thrupp, 2009). The justifications for state support for state-integrated schools therefore rest on the contribution they make to diversity in the educational sector, resident in their 'special character'. When this character is perceived as highly exclusionary for groups already disadvantaged in the educational sector, claims to fairness appear somewhat suspect to those with an investment in supporting a freely accessible public education service of high quality.

However, despite considerable resistance within the education sector to the trajectory of policy, the election in 2011 returned the National led coalition government to power for a second term. The Act Party, as part of its agreement to support the government on issues of supply and confidence, negotiated a further policy to promote choices in education in New Zealand (Kelly, 2012). This led to the setting up of five Partnership Schools in 2014, defined by their educational purpose of improving educational outcomes for Maori, Pasifika, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and students with special education needs (Ministry of Education, 2015b). These schools were granted regulative and legislative freedoms, not available to state-funded schools, to promote innovative responses to student needs. The expansion of the number of Partnership Schools continues unabated, despite continued resistance to the policy by unions representing most teachers and principals.

Te Kotahitanga was designed to directly address disparities in achievement for Maori in secondary schooling. It was firmly embedded in the school improvement discourse in its insistence that developing positive student/teacher relationships lie at the heart of teaching and learning. Such relationships reject the 'deficit thinking' that attributes

school failure to community, family and peer influences, which Shields et al. (2005) argue results in lowered expectations of students and therefore to pedagogical approaches that cement in school failure for Maori students. In its singular focus on teachers as both the problem and the solution, it offered an attractive option in policy for governments, predisposed to accept narrow solutions to the problem of Maori underachievement located in the practices of individual teachers and schools.

The implementation of the Te Kotahitanga programme began in 2001 under the previous Labour government (Bishop et al., 2003). Evaluative research into the processes it promoted, contributed to ongoing development of the programme. The evaluations were presented in a series of reports outlining the development of their theoretical thinking and programme development until it reached its final phase in 2011 (Bishop et al., 2011). At this point, the developers had formulated clear processes for ensuring that teachers incorporated key cultural competencies in their pedagogy.

The promise of the programme lay in its claim that it would enable white middle-class teachers to become cognisant of culturally diverse sources of knowledge and pedagogy and thereby, bridge the relational and cultural divide with their Maori students. This would enable them to offer new and creative forms of pedagogy to redress educational inequalities (Bishop et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2011). The evaluative research programme included data about the impact of the programme on the achievement of Maori students.

In the final report on Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2011) the programme was assessed by the developers as successful in providing a mechanism to broaden the culture of schooling in the secondary school years. Their evaluation argued that the culture of schooling had moved in participating secondary schools, from one that privileged Pakeha middle-class students, to one that encompassed Maori cultural knowledge and skills. As a consequence, negative stereotyping associated with ethnic and economic disadvantage was reduced. The authors argued that Te Kotahitanga represented a way forward for schools in meeting the needs of Maori students in education.

The successes claimed for Te Kotahitanga on the part of its developers, have been disputed, at least in part, in a review conducted on behalf of the Post-Primary Teachers Association (Openshaw, 2007). Openshaw's critique includes a number of points: the statistical claims are less convincing than the authors contend because of methodological design flaws, including inadequate identification of variables influencing outcomes and the lack of a rigorous control group; the rationale for the programme is based on a view of teachers as being the sole cause for Maori student under-achievement, referencing a cultural essentialism which obscures other factors such as class and/or structural and systemic factors impacting on the field of education; locating student underachievement within schools and deficiencies in teaching practices absolves governments from any blame for educational outcomes; and failure to consider that all students, regardless of cultural identity, respond to personalised teaching practices embodying care and support for the individual; the simplicity of the prescription promoted by Te Kotahitanga fails to capture the complex interplay of factors in and out of school that contribute both to student successes and underachievement. Openshaw further notes that the same facets of the programme he proffers as a critique, are those that initially made the programme attractive to a government intent on finding a singular cause for an intransigent problem, and a solution located solely within the practices of teachers.

Te Kotahitanga has subsequently been terminated as a state-funded programme, but its principles, alongside elements drawn from other programmes, have been incorporated into Ka Hikitia – Accelerating for Success, 2103-2017 (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Ka Hikitia is described as a whole-of-sector approach that extends and expands on the principles of Te Kotahitanga, to support a consistent approach in pedagogy in all forms of compulsory schooling (Ministry of Education, 2013a).While Ka Hikitia draws on Te Kotahitanga to challenge all teachers to recognise the impacts of stereotyping and low expectations on Maori student achievement, it also argues for incorporation of contributions from the wider community when it states that successful education requires:

> Quality provision, leadership, teaching and learning, supported by
> effective governance, and strong engagement and contribution from

parents, whānau, hapū, iwi, Māori organisations, communities and businesses (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6).

The recognition afforded to out-of-school influences on educational attainment is however deceptive; schools remain fundamentally responsible for harnessing these alternative sources of support for successful learning through the community and family partnerships they develop. The initiative is therefore firmly located within discourses of school improvement. Ka Hikitia, contains no suggestion that other broader social conditions currently impact on student learning, when it tasks teaching and leadership practices within schools to facilitate engagement with parents, whanau and the wider community.

Attempts to draw attention to adverse social conditions as impacting on educational achievement, are framed as deficit thinking. While both Te Kotahitanga and Ka Hikitia assert the need for teachers and schools to engage students and their communities in caring relationships as the bases for advancing student learning, the knowledge teachers accrue about the impacts of social conditions on student learning is denied. This represents a lost opportunity in ensuring that policy has relevance for educators and students.

It would be misleading however, to imply there has been no recognition by the government since 2008 that some children experience social difficulties in their lives, which demand school-based attention from services provided by the state. A variety of service providers work with, or through schools, to assist children with complex needs arising from social conditions. Government policy has facilitated these interconnections through policy initiatives previously discussed in more detail in chapter eight (Gateways, IWS and SWiS). These policies are a response to children's social, emotional and psychological needs and meeting them is viewed as necessary to enable learning. However, the discourses surrounding the provisions of these services identify the interventions of the state as measures of last resort, when parents have demonstrated their parenting failures in ways that cannot be overlooked, and students are in extreme need. The funded provision of these services is likewise directed to the most minimal provision that is politically expedient and therefore,

most often applied long after social circumstances have impacted negatively on children's well-being and learning.

National Standards: a state response to educational inequalities

National Government's actions to improve educational outcomes in New Zealand following the 2008 election, focused primarily on the introduction of National Standards (Hipkins & Hodgen, 2011). However, as discussed in the previous section, this policy was accompanied by other policy decisions, which also attributed the educational failure of under-performing groups of students to the quality of teaching they received. National Standards was therefore implemented in a policy context that appeared to be, if not antagonistic, less than impressed with the efforts of educators in the public sector.

National Standards focused on foundational skills of numeracy, reading and writing in primary school. These were deemed vital for later success in NCEA (Hipkins & Hodgen, 2011). The policy was framed as necessary to improve the life chances of low income, Maori and Pasifika children; that is, as a caring response to the unmet needs of these groups of children in education (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009b) and in meeting the future needs of the national economy for a well-educated workforce (Key, 2008). The policy therefore argued its basis in care for children, and care about the impacts of the education system on the national economy and the collective well-being of the nation.

The Minister of Education did not hold back in attributing blame for educational inequalities to schools and teachers. She argued that around 50 percent of schools were failing to use assessment appropriately (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009a; Radio New Zealand, National, 2009b). Education policy positions adopted by the National Party prior to the election in 2008, were described by the Minister of Education as "a crusade for literacy and numeracy (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009b). The Minister described her rationale for action:

> At the bottom of this is the twenty percent of kids who are failing. We
> have talked about it and nothing has changed. If you do the same things,

you will get the same outcomes, and that's not good enough for these

kids, and the parents of these kids are saying the system has to change.

The assertion that there had been no change within the primary and intermediate school sector appears somewhat spurious, given the work done over previous seven years to review and substantially renew the national curriculum and to refocus teaching in schools. Nevertheless, as a statement of care about children in education, it acted as a political call to reform primary schooling.

However, in employing such discourses, the Minister of Education used statistics and report findings selectively to create a sense of crisis in education, to which National Standards was posed as preeminent solution (Clark, 2010; O'Neill, 2013; Thrupp, 2009). The discourse of crisis was accompanied by the reminder of an electoral mandate, and direct reference to her legal power to enforce compliance with the programme of implementation, despite disagreement and resistance within the sector (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009b). This stance entrenched the distance between the government and teachers. In reminding the profession of her legal powers as the Minister of Education to enforce compliance, teachers' claims to professional knowledge and ethical codes of practice were discounted; the status of teachers as professionals was degraded to that of a group of workers to be managed in the performance of government policy.

The government remained impervious to calls to trial National Standards to ensure that it would not replicate the negative effects of standardised testing in other nations (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009a). Academics and experts in educational assessment and test development stood alongside teacher unions in contesting Minister of Education's confidence in testing as a means of improving disparities in educational outcomes (Thrupp, Hattie, Crooks, & Flockton, 2009). However, the response to this challenge was to maintain that National Standards were simply different from the standards imposed in other countries, because they included OTJs and therefore, they would not result in negative outcomes (Radio New Zealand, National, 2009b). This contention could have been addressed more evidentially if the policy had been trialled; the refusal to do so indicated that the ideation of a

standardised regime of accountability was more important than gaining knowledge about the effects of such a policy direction.

Given that the government identified National Standards as being essential in the redress of educational inequalities, how did it envisage National Standards as achieving this aim? The Minister of Education offers this analysis of the shortcomings of the education sector that they were designed to address:

> This report shows that, although schools are performing well for many of our learners, and progress is being made towards a number of goals set in previous years, there is still room for improvement. The spread of achievement of our learners is wide. Too many pupils do not achieve to their full potential because the system is not yet learner centred enough, not yet using our national curriculum to its richest potential and not yet fully embracing the use of good quality data (Parata, 2012, p. 6).

The government position, with regard to educational disparities in achievement, was, and remains, located in the practices of schools delivering educational services. Remediation therefore falls to teachers and schools, requiring them to improve their performance. National Standards was envisaged as supplying the 'good quality data' needed to focus the efforts of teachers on the learning needs of their students.

The use of this data was viewed as providing essential feedback to students, teachers and parents on student learning in relation to others, thus identifying where students were falling short:

> National Standards aims to lift achievement in literacy and numeracy (reading writing and mathematics) by being clear about what students should achieve and by when. This will help students; their teachers and parents, families and whanau to better understand what they are aiming for and what they need to do next (Ministry of Education, 2014b).

This purpose can therefore be framed as assisting students to acquire foundational skills, and providing feedback to parents, students and teachers, to assist future progress in learning.

However, it also proposed that National Standard data could meet another purpose for parents:

> The information shows your school's achievement and progress against National Standards in reading writing and maths…To help you (parents) make informed judgments about your child's school, National Standards data has been published with other public achievement data (Ministry of Education, 2014f).

National Standards was therefore, conceived as a tool for parents to evaluate the performance of an individual school in comparison with any other schools they chose to research. This could be achieved by reviewing the aggregated data about the achievements of children attending specific schools, in conjunction with other publically available data such as Education Review Office reports. Parents, in this account, were sited as consumers of the education services available to them, limited only by the distances they were prepared to travel to transport their children and the capacity of the school to take on children from areas outside school zones. Parental choice was seen as providing an incentive to schools to continually seek to improve their performance; National Standards provided parents as consumers with the information they required to make informed decisions and about the quality of education on offer.

The basis of these decontextualised comparisons of schools, has been contested in research in New Zealand (Thrupp, 2013) and resistance within the education sector has been vociferously opposed to the use of National Standards data for this purpose (NZEI, Te Riu Roa, 2010). To date, school league tables have not been compiled by the Ministry of Education to enable mass comparisons to be made between schools, but the public nature of the data has allowed the compilation of league tables by the media on at least one occasion (Hartveldt & Francis, 2012).

In defining National Standards as a policy designed to increase the effectiveness of primary schools in meeting their educational purposes, specific teacher actions are defined as the primary means by which schools will improve their function:

> Teachers will:
> • assess individual students' progress and achievement in relation to the standards
> • support students to use assessment information to inform their own learning goals and their next learning steps
> • use a range of assessment measures
> • provide regular reports to parents in plain language about their children's progress in relation to National Standards, including twice a year in plain writing
> • provide clear information to parents, family and whanau so they can support their children's learning at home (Ministry of Education, 2014b).

However, the Minister of Education has also been reported in the press as suggesting that National Standards could provide the basis for identifying and highlighting teacher performance issues (Hartveldt, 2012). It was argued that by reviewing National Standards data, schools would be able to identify the performance and learning needs of teachers, and schools would then be able to use the data to recruit teachers commensurate with school staffing needs. This use of National Standards data does not appear to have been systematically implemented to date, but clearly, the capacity exists for uses other than assessing student progress, communicating that progress to parents and students and assisting teachers to plan future teaching and learning needs.

In one sense, there is a sense of inevitability about the introduction of a standardised regime of assessment. In the privileging of markets, competition and choice as the mechanisms for the efficient delivery of services in the public sector, the use of measures to determine the efficacy of the performance of education services is rational. However, neoliberalism also claims that creative responses to problems arise within the competitive arena of markets, and the neoliberal state looks to reduce

forms of legislation and compliance that constrain private business endeavours. In this sense, public markets and private markets stand in contrast with one another and cannot be easily reconciled (Glennerster, 1991). However, in viewing schools as autonomous and employing the rhetoric of choice and responsibility, state power in education and the regimes of control it institutes are incorporated into a conception of freely operating educational markets. Standards, imposed in the name of efficiency and accountability to taxpayers as funders, provides a mechanism for insisting on the need for this control, but further to this, the rationale is bolstered by discourses of crisis, in this case, inequality in educational outcomes (Robertson & Dale, 2002; O'Neill, 2013). The relentless focus on the actions of individual schools and teachers' practices as sites of educational inequalities, allows the state to maintain its stance in decentralising responsibility for outcomes to schools and educators, while simultaneously absolving itself from responsibility for the outcomes of policy decisions in education and wider social service provision (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Peters, 2009; Gordon & Whitty, 1997).

The events that accompanied the implementation of National Standards and the fissure that developed between educators and the Minister of Education, seem far less remarkable when viewed in light of the ideological agreement between the coalition partners involved in determining education policy. While teachers relied heavily on discourses of professionalism as a means of collectively organising their resistance to National Standards and policies promoting educational choice, the government coalition partners were content to utilise the secondary elaboration of professional self-interest to explain teachers' resistance (McKinnon, 2010). Maintaining this stance enabled coalition politicians to adhere to this belief that 'fixing' teachers, through the implementation of National Standards as a means of holding them accountable, would provide the solution to educational inequalities. It would also allow greater control of the state over the performances of teachers and principals in state schools. Thus, the concerns of teachers and principals were negated and their critiques discounted.

The fact that standardised assessment practices have been well established in the secondary sector, created an impetus for their inclusion at lower ages in the primary sector (Radio New Zealand, National, 2013b). The justification made for this

downward trajectory of assessment and measurement to primary school age children, was premised on parents' right to know how well their children were performing in education and how they stacked up against other children their age. Aligning parental interests in receiving better information about their children's education, appeared to provide an additional irrefutable argument for imposing changes on the educational sector, trumping arguments that challenged the policy's likely success in raising student learning.

The demand for parents to have better information about the progress of their children in education, so that they can better assist their children to achieve is, however, accompanied by a degree of contradiction. On the one hand parents are cited as necessary partners in working with schools to further educational aims and to do this, they require better information to assist their children in their home environments; on the other, when teachers argue that home environments and parental behaviours have differential effects on children's learning, this is framed as deficit thinking and an excuse for poor teaching performance. Not only is it a contradictory position to hold, but it also sets up a false dichotomy; both parties matter in the lives and learning of children and loading one or other party with sole responsibility for educational outcomes, is likely to fail children's real needs in learning.

This contradictory position taken by the government makes better sense when parents are narrowly viewed as consumers of education services in education markets. In this scenario, parents exercise choice based on their evaluations of likely education outcomes, and it is this function of parenting that is deemed important in supporting their children to learn. Choosing the best school and identifying the best teachers becomes the key task of parenting in education; measures such as National Standards appear to provide clarity in making these choices. But, viewing parents as consumers of education services, serves to obscure their role in supporting children in learning and along with it, advantages and disadvantages that accrue to children in schooling from their family backgrounds. Thus, an irrefutable need for parents to be informed and included in the education of their children, becomes co-opted to support a diminished understanding of the complex interconnections between

children's learning, their life experiences and the impacts of families as comprising both their first and lifelong sources of learning.

The implementation of National Standards in New Zealand appeared to take a mechanistic view of the process of assessment. Assessment was uncritically assigned functions within the education sector: as a proxy for student learning and effective teaching; as a measure of school efficacy; and as a measure of the national quality of schools and schooling. However, processes of assessment are attended by far greater complexity than such assigned functions allow; how learning is assessed is subject to the prevailing understandings of knowledge, including what counts as worth teaching and learning and what methods are considered legitimate in assessing student learning. Assessment is therefore subject to historical, social and cultural influences, which come into play in the political contexts that permeate educational practices (Shephard, 2000). Correspondingly, assessment activities are embedded within the contextual environment that comprises the education sector in New Zealand.

Students and teachers in teaching-learning relationships are implicated in the range of possibilities for assessing learning outcomes. Assessments can act to recognise learning already performed, thereby assisting teachers and students to maintain ongoing intrinsic motivation to learn (Gardner, 2006; Harlen, 2006). Alternatively, assessments may serve to label students as failing, contributing to negative perceptions of their capacities and ultimately demotivating future efforts (Kohn, 1999; Reay & Wiliam, 1999). Even when successful, if student and teacher efforts are narrowly focused on meeting specific achievement targets, students can become unwilling to expend effort on learning to the extent of their potential, preferring instead focus on meeting the outcome demands of assessments and tests (Harlen, 2006). Assessment processes therefore have the capacity to enhance or inhibit the productive work of teachers and students in learning processes.

Assessments have the greatest positive impact on learning when they provide students with feedback that opens up possibilities for future learning to students (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Harlen, 2006; Hattie 2009). In this mode, teachers monitor the impact and effectiveness of the teaching strategies and practices they employ in

meeting student learning needs. Effective assessment for learning provides information that assists both students and teachers to learn more productively in their respective roles.

Despite its importance in pedagogy, the act of assessment is not value neutral. Decisions about what comprises an assessment, necessarily privilege some forms of knowledge and some skills over others (Apple, 2013). Consequences then follow for students, depending on how the assessment information is used. When assessment is contained within the teacher-student relationship and directed toward teaching and learning practices, it can fulfil purposes relevant to the learning of both. However, wider applications of assessment activities, such as extrapolating results to rank students, schools and education systems, can have far reaching negative consequences, when such comparisons fail to take school contexts into account (Thrupp, 1998).

National Standards as policy reflects some of this unease about the negative impacts of assessment practices. It incorporates OTJs, which allow the use of a variety of assessment tools to enable a broader view of student progress within an assessment of achievement in literacy and numeracy. However, this has also contributed to the lack of reliability when National Standards data is used to compare results between different students, teachers and schools.

Correspondingly, there have been calls to redress inconsistencies in National Standards data through moderation processes. This, in turn, requires greater standardisation in assessment practices, which has prompted a proposal to mandate the use of the Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) to improve inter-rater reliability in forming OTJs (Parata, 2013; Te Kete Ipurangi, 2014). The position for NZEI, Te Riu Roa (2014) is that this would constitute a form of national testing, with all its attendant negative consequences. It would accelerate the already present tendencies of National Standards to compare and rate students, teachers and schools, one with another on a normative basis, and fail to advance teaching based on assessment practices embedded in student-centred learning.

However, in a political environment that demands measures for accountability purposes, the problem of obtaining nationwide standardised data about student achievement in primary schools without national testing appears insoluble. Given the present direction of government policy, which holds schools as accountable for learning outcomes and responsible for disparities in educational outcomes, it is rationally consistent that improvements will result from regimes of measurement that demonstrate school-based differences in learning outcomes. The direction of policy towards greater standardisation and measurement therefore appears to be inexorable, in this decontextualised view of teaching and learning.

At the time I conducted the interviews, which constituted the core of this research, teachers were still in the process of incorporating National Standards into their work. They were grappling with difficulties in accommodating the policy into their teaching practices and in identifying how to extract value from the policy or to negate its negative influences. The events surrounding its implementation were still recent and raw, contributing to a significant context in which the work of the school to facilitate student learning was performed.

Watea School, National Standards and issues of student achievement

Watea School is a low-decile primary school that serves a population of students characterised by educational inequalities in New Zealand. It can therefore be viewed as precisely the type of school that was the focus of National Standards in addressing the "long tail of underachievement" (Longstone, 2012, p.5). Watea School initially, actively resisted National Standards on the basis that it was already performing robust assessment practices to aid student-centred learning outcomes. However, under the threat of illegality, Watea School, as did many other schools, complied with the legislation and implemented National Standards in 2010.The data collected from interviews details responses to issues of achievement and the implementation of National Standards, as they were perceived in 2013.

Three groups of participants within the school community, the Principal, teachers, and parents contributed to the data. Each of these commented about issues that were specific to their roles in the teaching/learning of students, but with an overlap in their

expressions of concern for student achievement. National Standards was implicated in the accounts educators gave of their work, their views of assessment and its place in their teaching. In contrast parents expressed very little interest in National Standards. However, they did have concerns about their children's learning, assessment and achievement, which included commentary on their communications with the school.

The additional thread that bound the responses of all three groups of participants together was the desire to ensure that Watea School was a happy and secure place for the work and play of children's learning. While student learning was perceived by the all groups of participants as the key work of the school, they all described the necessity for children to be known, to belong and to feel valued and cared for within the community of staff and students at Watea School. Caring and care work therefore lay at the heart of the responses of all the participants' accounts and underpinned their concerns for their children's learning.

Leadership, learning and achievement in Watea School

The leadership of Watea School took a whole-of-school response in seeking to create a place in which children could prosper in learning, realised in caring relationships. The Principal of Watea School argued that *"a caring, safe and happy school"* was critical in ensuring that students knew they were valued and belonged. The Principal's greatest challenge in Watea School was described as:

> *… creating conditions in which children are able to learn, to feel confident that they can achieve and to offer the stability to enable it to happen. I have confidence in my teachers to do the job when these pastoral conditions are met.*

This statement delineated how care was embedded in learning in Watea School. Care did not displace a focus on student learning and achievement, but was recognised as a necessary strut underpinning it. Unwell, anxious and emotionally or physically distressed children were perceived as being unable to give their best efforts to learning and unlikely to achieve to their fullest potential.

Within the day-to-day interactions in Watea School, it was therefore necessary to create space in which children could be known and their individual needs attended to. This created the conditions necessary for positive relationships between teachers and children, and children and their peers, both of which are deemed necessary by Furrer and Skinner (2003) in creating a safe learning environment. To ignore aspects of a children's lives that impact on their well-being may not only impede learning, but also devalues children as a fully, sentient persons, deserving of respect and support in having their needs met. Within this framework of care in Watea School, teachers were required to be responsive to children's distress and needs and to act with care, but in turn, teachers required structured support from the school leadership team to achieve their best work in teaching.

Effective leadership in schools is defined by how well it responds to the needs of children in the school (Hallinger & Heck, 2006; Pont et al., 2008). However, because most of its actions are conducted through others, it must also be effective and responsive to the needs of teachers and support workers, who work in direct relationships with students. Thus, robust forms of communication between the Principal, the senior leadership team and the rest of the staff were vital in ensuring that the school remained responsive to the complex needs of its both its student body and teachers, and to foster relations of care between staff members and students in supporting all to perform their best work.

At times, this required difficult conversations with staff when problems arose, or when it was necessary to provide negative feedback on performances. In this instance, the Principal asserted should be carried out with care:

> *I need to be mindful of the full range of the contributions of a staff member and show respect for their achievements.*

Placing critique within this nexus of care enables any requirement for future learning to be accompanied by acknowledgements of past accomplishments, which sustains agency in learning new skills and behaviours. Critique does not resile from addressing issues and making judgements about the level of expectation required of

staff, but allows these analyses to be placed in contexts of skills already gained and valued.

The Principal's competence in a leadership role was honed over years of experience in teaching and leadership positions. Additionally, the Principal had been active within a variety of professional groups over many years, which provided a further source of knowledge to draw on in negotiating the challenging issues that impacted on student learning. Being active within groups representing educators, also offered opportunities for collaboration: in identifying and sharing problems; in developing strategies and solutions; in disseminating expertise; and in prompting ongoing reflection. Most importantly, these forums offered opportunities for developing long term views about current issues in schooling, to support strategic and future-oriented actions. This capacity to examine and explore possibilities, no matter how constrained within the present, created an ongoing condition of hopefulness, which the Principal argued as a necessary antidote to cynicism about imposed policy directions that were perceived as detrimental in education.

Hopefulness sustained a capacity for imagining how things could be otherwise and therefore, possibilities for agentic action (McInerney, 2007). Thus, while some avenues of action were closed down when the Minister of Education enforced compliance with National Standards, the Principal was able to continue to work with others within the sector and draw strength from their shared commitment, to identify strategies for maintaining a broadly-based education service within the confines of the policy. The trenchant critique the Principal proffered to National Standards, informed by the belief that the policy would narrow the education offered to children in schools, was not an end-point, but a means of continuing to explore possibilities for future actions. Furthermore, in continuing to sustain a sense of agency under such difficult conditions, the Principal's leadership supported others within Watea School to maintain a sense of hope and positive engagement with the learning needs of its students.

As a non-teaching principal, the Principal understood leadership to be concerned with motivating, supporting and developing the capabilities of all the staff, to better ensure that children's learning needs were met. During 2013, this work had to be

achieved in circumstances in which teachers' efforts to address educational inequalities met with disparagement. Leadership was required to maintain morale and negate the politics of blame, which characterised relationships between politicians and teachers. Creating a 'community of care' within the school was especially important in enabling teachers and support workers to continue to respond to the needs of their students with creative agency; these internal relationships offered sustenance for most, when relationships had become dysfunctional and disrupted between schools, bureaucrats and politicians.

Competence in school management was especially important in maintaining a sense of stability in uncertain times. Robust and effective forms of management of the day-to-day work of the school and its governance created an environment in which teachers could focus their attention on their work with students. New central computerised system changes and the problems of their implementation had to be managed. These included the new computer system for a national payroll for staff, national school attendance registers and National Standards reporting systems. Extra staff were employed to bed in these systems and to minimise the impact of any disruptions on school function. Additionally, attention to the built environment was perceived by the Principal as having ongoing importance in conveying a sense of worth and care to students, parents, teachers and support staff. Thus, while these activities appeared to be essentially managerial, the Principal placed them firmly within the nexus of relational of care and connection, not just in sustaining teachers' ongoing efforts with their students, but also as a means of valuing students and parents within the wider school community.

The Principal maintained a firm sense of personal responsibility for the management of the school, in line with the role envisaged for principals in the initial conception of autonomous schools. However, leadership activities were distributed within a senior teaching team, giving recognition to teaching staff with high levels of expertise and experience. This distributive form of leadership enabled the Principal to draw on their knowledge in decision making, creating opportunities for different analyses of problems and possible solutions. It is in this capacity to draw on a range of experience, knowledge and skills that distributive leadership is understood as fostering better learning outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2009).

The Principal actively sought to attract and retain experienced teachers because of the high level of need within the student body. However, the Principal also sought to develop the expertise of teachers: to support and motivate teachers' professional aspirations; to support the retention of staff; and to foster ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching. The Principal took a long view in supporting staff members with specific gifts in connecting with troubled children by encouraging them to consider further education. At the time of the research, a teacher aide was encouraged to reactivate her teacher certification and another to pursue further education. Additionally, professional development opportunities were offered to a teacher to develop a better understanding of mental health issues in children, given that this staff member had a natural empathy and connection with troubled children. These opportunities were perceived by the Principal necessary in the quest to continue to improve services, as a means of assisting individuals to realise their aspirations and as raising the levels of expertise available to teachers within the school.

Maintaining a sense of stability within the school was perceived as essential in a school characterised by high levels of student mobility and need. Staffing stability supported the development of deep relationships between teachers, enabling collaborative responses to the complex needs of some students. Collaboration between teachers ensured the distribution of specialised skills and teaching strengths across the whole school. All but one of the teachers interviewed for the research stated that collegial and collaborative relationships were important in supporting them in their work. Being able to count on colleagues for advice and assistance in challenging circumstances, enabled teachers to develop and extend their skills in a supportive environment. It also allowed teachers with expertise, to receive recognition for their skills within the school.

The respect that the Principal expressed for his teaching team in acknowledging their competence and skills, modelled the attitudes and values that were demanded of teachers in caring relations with their students. This was a circular process where relationships of care between the school leadership team and the wider teaching body contributed to stability within the teaching body and created a concomitant stability of school climate for parents and children attending the school.

However, Watea School faced changes in its teaching workforce, prompted by the planned retirement of several long-standing staff members in 2014. In addition, an increasing school roll over 2013 necessitated the appointment of additional staff in 2014. The Principal planned to respond to these changes by increasing the number of formal whole-of-staff meetings, and instituting frequent and regular meetings of the school leadership group, to ensure that problems could be addressed quickly and effectively. These measures were envisaged as being necessary to help future staff establish new relationships within the school and gain fluency with "*how things get done*" at Watea School. At the same time, the Principal was aware that the introduction of new staff created opportunities to revisit Watea School's values and practices, enabling the school to benefit from the skills and expertise that new staff brought with them and offering the chance to reassess the school's responses to student needs.

While the Principal viewed teachers as autonomous practitioners within the school, and supported them to develop the skills and expertise they needed to function as such, school leadership was still conceived as having direct impacts on learning in Watea School. It was necessary to ensure that the school curricula continued to include learning in the visual arts, music, drama, and physical movement. Schooling bereft of creative opportunities was viewed by the Principal as "*joyless*" and offering a sterile conception of a future world of work and social participation for children. Creative activities in schooling allowed different groups of children to shine, to be valued and to develop. These activities particularly important for children from low-income families, unable to pay for enriching out-of-school activities.

Maintaining these areas of learning within the school curriculum in the primary school years was not perceived by the Principal as detracting from the attainment of skills in literacy and numeracy. Rather the opposite was claimed by the Principal and is supported in the literature (Graham, Parker, Wilkins, Fraser, Westfall, & Tembo, 2002; Hetland & Winner, 2001). The Principal was therefore determined to ensure that Watea School offered a broadly-based curriculum. This was envisaged as supporting teachers to create lesson plans that harnessed innovative and creative forms of pedagogy, but also in retaining activities for children to express themselves in learning across a range of activities.

While the Principal was critical of National Standards, this position should not be understood as resistant to the need for good assessment in teaching. National Standards, however, raised concerns that demands for assessment could upstage teaching and learning activities as the central concern of education. While affirming the need for teaching to utilise better processes **for** determining student progress, the Principal argued that assessment was increasingly becoming the focus **of** teaching. In setting standardised learning targets, it was inevitable that teachers would feel pressured to define children's success in the terms demanded by assessment and reporting requirements; the challenge for the school leadership team in Watea School was to ensure that teachers retained their confidence in supporting children to learn across the curriculum and in providing recognition for all achievements.

This stance in no way diminished the importance of literacy and numeracy, but the Principal argued for a more expansive understanding of learning that could contain a range of future possibilities in the imagined futures of children. Students' gifts and talents across a range of activities, including the arts and sport, required support in education to open up a range of future occupational options. The fact that effective forms of learning assessment and moderation in the school were well established in the school prior to National Standards, suggested that the school had demonstrated a sustained focus on supporting children in learning. Better assessment was not seen as the most pressing concern in ensuring that children reached their potential in education in Watea School in 2013.

The Principal's estimation of the highest area of need was in obtaining the level of support children and families needed to ensure their regular school attendance and to address their disruptive and distressed behaviours. Both impacted on the ability of students to learn to their fullest capacity from the teaching provided. As described in chapters seven and eight, Watea School expended considerable energy in addressing these issues. The Principal advocated for services to support children experiencing mental and physical health issues with great persistence, in the belief that to fail to obtain the care required in a timely manner, impacted on children's capacities to reach their potential in learning.

Effective leadership in Watea School therefore, approached children's learning needs from two directions: on the one hand, teachers were supported by an experienced and resourceful leadership team to maintain effective assessment practices within an enriched pedagogy; on the other, leadership practices within the school worked assiduously to meet the pastoral needs of students and to support parents where possible, to ensure that children could be in the best position possible to learn. In committing Watea School to meet the complex needs of children to enhance their capacity to learn, the government's emphasis on assessment practices was met with some dismay by the Prinicpal for its lack of vision and resistance to consideration of the full range of factors impacting on student achievement.

Teachers, learning and assessment in Watea School

The interviews conducted with teachers about the challenges of their work in advancing learning, focused mainly on issues of attendance and behaviour presented in chapters seven and eight. However, the shortcomings of assessment in determining learning and the false sense of clarity they offer, were outlined by William, an experienced teacher of years five and six students:

> *There are real problems, even in administering tests. If the test is too hard, then the child feels a failure, while if the test is too easy, it does not tell either the teacher or the parents what level the child is really at. So, the results seem to be clear but they are not nearly as conclusive as they appear. This does not even get to grips with whether the tests are doing what they say they are doing. And, all the while the teachers are doing testing, they are not teaching.*

Generally, the mood was one of frustration with the government's emphasis on assessment and measurement as being the activities most likely to redress educational inequalities.

In the view of all the teachers interviewed, the school already implemented the assessment practices that informed and helped their teaching. Ongoing development of processes of moderation within the school assisted them to be confident in the

quality of their assessments. Attendance issues, meeting pastoral care needs and managing behavioural issues comprised the major challenge in meeting the learning needs of children within their low-decile school. Their efforts to manage these issues constantly impacted on time and energy available for classroom teaching. The reporting requirements of National Standards were therefore seen as one more call on their time to be shoehorned into an already busy day, and one that offered no additional benefits to their work.

All the teachers interviewed worked long hours, especially in term time, but also for significant portions of term breaks. The multiplicity of the tasks they needed to address in the hours outside their classroom teaching, such as lesson planning, creation of classroom teaching resources, subject research, maintaining student progress records and ongoing professional development, were perceived as necessary for effective classroom teaching. Additional calls on teacher time to contribute to the overall function of the school, such as attending regular meetings with colleagues to discuss issues and problems arising in the workplace and contributing to school planning and direction setting processes, also cut into their time, even as they understood and appreciated their necessity.

Additionally, many different service providers came into the school to assist children with specific learning, social and emotional needs. The outcome for an individual teacher was a complex process of integrating the numerous demands on teacher time into the teaching day, while maintaining a core focus on student learning. National Standards simply added another layer of bureaucratic administration that, in the words of one teacher *...adds nothing more to my teaching and gives nothing back (William, experienced teacher, years 5&6).*

However, a number of teachers remained suspicious that National Standards would not simply remain an activity to be managed, with few consequences for them beyond the time wasted in compliance. They believed that eventually, the information provided by schools would be used to compare student outcomes from teacher to teacher and from school to school, without consideration of contexts operating within schools. These potential uses were viewed as unfair and without merit.

Some schools in New Zealand have welcomed the data that National Standards has provided. The setting of standards has assisted them to identify the low expectations that had become prevalent within their school, and in realising that other schools expected more from their students, improvements had eventuated (Radio New Zealand, National, 2013c). This would appear to provide some strength to the argument that standards enable some schools to benchmark their progress in supporting student learning and support students to develop fundamental skills for later learning. However, as Thrupp and Easter (2012) note in their initial evaluation of the impact of National Standards, schools differed in their prior performance of assessment activities, which affected the degree of disruption occasioned in implementing National Standards policy. Those with well-established assessment practices, such as Watea School, derived little benefit from National Standard while also implementing the bureaucratic requirements of National Standards with relative ease. Schools with poorly developed assessment practices and issues of transience struggled more, but may have derived some benefit in developing teacher capabilities in assessment (Thrupp & White, 2013). However, schools that committed to the process of National Standards without critical thought, also demonstrated narrowed curricula in efforts to improve measured outcomes (Thrupp & White, 2013). This, in some degree at least, represents teaching to test. Teachers at Watea School, in seeking to retain an enriched pedagogy, were therefore required to carve out spaces within the regimes of assessment imposed by National Standards, to sustain creative teaching responses to their students' learning needs.

All the teachers interviewed at Watea School felt devalued by the process of implementation of National Standards. They resented the message that the pastoral issues they faced in teaching were extraneous to teaching and learning:

> *It makes me laugh when I think of John Key and the Ministry. You don't know about the pastoral care. It is actually knowing the whole child and building on that that is needed (Patsy, New Entrant Teacher).*

Some noted that they were increasingly required to attend to children's needs that in most schools would have understood as parenting functions, such as wearing seasonally appropriate clothing and ensuring health needs were noticed and attended

to. However, these concerns were relatively minor in comparison with the challenges they faced in their classrooms in integrating children with difficult behaviour into classroom routines.

Still others interviewed resented the distraction from work that had begun in implementing the National Curriculum. National Standards had been rolled out in 2010, the year in which mainstream schools were expected to evaluate their curriculum content alongside the new National Curriculum. Implementing National Standards diverted attention from the National Curriculum. While schools, including Watea School, sought to maintain a focus on the curricular issues they perceived as centrally important to their teaching, such as what they should be teaching and how it should be taught, they were being required to implement National Standards, which asserted that assessment was the preeminent concern in improving student outcomes. The bureaucratic requirements of the National Standards policy were therefore, resented as being a distraction from their assessments of their own learning needs as teachers, and those of their students.

The use of state power to enforce compliance with National Standards created a rupture between the Ministry of Education and the workforce it administered. It exposed the ministry to charges by teachers at Watea School that it had failed to respond to teacher concerns over National Standards or to advocate for the profession. This situation was contrasted unfavourably with previous collaborative processes that had been used to develop the National Curriculum. The result was a relational gap between those charged with the national administration of the education sector and teachers engaged in the performance of teaching in Watea School, at a time when the performance of both demanded more collaboration to navigate a period of change.

Despite difficulties that swirled around teaching in 2013 and the impacts on morale, the teachers interviewed for the research expressed affection for the children in their classrooms. They were described as warm, funny, friendly and responsive to attention and mostly, keen to learn. There was a sense, sometimes not put into words, but very visible during the interviews, that these children mattered to their teachers and were known to them. Paul describes the impact of establishing effective

relationships with children on their motivation to learn in the work of the reading recovery teacher in the school:

Oh yeah! She is just amazing and they want to please her. When she says that they are wonderful you can just see them grow. She makes it look so easy to have that relationship but she gives them all her energy and attention, even if it is for them for a limited period of time (laughs).

Paul later goes on to explain that Watea School has chosen to place resources in teachers and support staff, because the school believes that these relationships are the key to supporting the children in the school community to learn.

However, developing effective relationships requires teachers to also be authentic in their interactions:

I can only teach with what I have, which is me. And I think I have worked out a style which uses me to my best advantage in my teaching. I like to have a laugh and use humour. And it works. It creates a sense of fun in the classroom. It develops a relationship and the kids seem to respond to it well. That is not to say that every kid will love me or think I am wonderful. My style will suit some better than others, but it is the way that I can do it best and I think after all the years I have been in teaching, I have worked that out (William, experienced teacher, years five & six).

Getting to know children, in developing caring, attentive and responsive relationships, as Paul notes, serves to create a reciprocal desire to please in children and a motivation to learn. However, this reciprocity also implies a willingness to be known to children, in the manner that William describes. The qualities that teachers bring to their work cannot be replicated in formulaic performances in the classroom, but are worked out relationally with children in a mutual performance of classroom teaching and learning over time (Cranton, 2006).

In summary, the teachers at Watea School felt that the National Standards policy imposed an additional burden on them in terms of complying with its reporting requirements. It detracted attention from those facets of their teaching that they felt were important: the ongoing development of a responsive curriculum in the school; and the development of responsive teaching practices in alignment with appropriate assessment activities. Furthermore, they were deeply offended by the manner of its implementation and the implication that any resistance to the policy was grounded in professional self-interest. However, they continued to maintain and develop teaching practices, which engaged with the needs of their students. This sense of professional obligation, supported by the whole leadership team and the experience of many of the teaching staff within the school, sustained them in their work. Thus, while the years prior to and during the research were fraught and demoralising, they drew strength from their collective commitment to teaching in Watea School.

Parents' perceptions of teaching and learning in Watea School

Parents provided a range of different opinions of their children's teaching and learning at Watea School. Most were happy with the teaching provided, some unequivocally so, others with some qualifications. However, common to all parents interviewed, was the pride and pleasure they took in witnessing their children's progress in learning, and the aspirations they held for their children in education. I begin this section by exploring parents' accounts of their children's progress in learning. I then explore the learning issues that troubled them in their children's experiences of schooling.

Parents commented positively about the commitment of teachers. They believed that teachers knew their children and appreciated their individual abilities and personalities. Parents with older children, who had moved onto Intermediate School, expressed some nostalgia for the personalised style of teaching provided at Watea School. They expressed regret for the fact that after primary school, children become defined by what they fail to achieve, rather than the progress they have made in their learning. This set of parents felt confident, based on their past experiences, that the education Watea School provided, would set their children up for future success in schooling.

While all parents were excited about the learning progress their children had made, for some, this excitement was coloured by a degree of anxiety about how well their child was achieving. However, these anxieties appeared to ease when they related specific incidents of learning progress to me:

> *Well he loves to talk about his bugs. And they did something in the first term which he was really into, which was dinosaurs and his teacher did with him. ...Yes he just loves to talk about science and stars and things like that - and bugs! (Delia, mother of two.)*

> *He's full of a million questions about everything. He has a thirst for knowledge. It's crazy! (Fiona, mother of two.)*

Even when there were learning difficulties, parents acknowledged progress made with pleasure:

> *Progress wise, her report that I got was really ... I was really amazed at it and I was so excited at the teacher interviews it was... I am happy with her progress. She is not quite at her level, but she has improved from the start of the year, so that is the main thing (Natasha, mother of three).*

For most of the parents interviewed, the changes they witnessed in their children's learning, accompanied by teacher's assessments, provided sufficient reassurance that their children's learning needs were being attended to and well supported. However, parental concerns about the lack of homework provided by Watea School disrupted these perceptions for some parents. The issue of homework is explored later in this section.

None of the participants interviewed demonstrated a lack of care about their children's learning, although it must be said that this was a self-selecting group and it is unlikely that disinterested parents would have taken part in the research. For the most part, parents anticipated that educational success was necessary for

employment in rewarding jobs, providing future economic security. This was particularly the case for Shona, who had experienced extreme levels of family trauma and instability, which had disrupted her own education:

> *But to me, I see that studying at university and all that stuff is… not a lifeline, but is a way forward towards your goals, and what I say is, if you work hard, you get to places where you want to be and all that stuff. I lost all that stuff when I was 16 and even though I have studied a lot since then, but I can't fully study like how I used to, now that I have children and all that, and it is hard, and having a partner that doesn't believe in academics, you just have to get on. It's just … so all my kids' schooling, I have done. If he wants to bitch and moan about it, I don't care because my kids are going to get somewhere (Shona, mother of three).*

Thus, while Shona had suffered both socially and educationally from the effects of family instability, poverty and transience, she framed her narrative in terms of choices made, when she "lost all that stuff", as a result of her actions at age sixteen. She was not the only female parent with childhood experiences of poverty and childhood trauma to do so. It appeared to me that the issue was not that these women refused to take responsibility for their actions, but that they had internalised an account of poverty and childhood trauma as resulting from choices they made. While taking responsibility for the conditions of their lives fed into a sense of agency for them as mothers and informed their determination to make better choices for their own children, it also served to obscure the systemic dimensions of their past histories. They were not responsible for the initiating traumas that contributed to the breakup of their families as children, for the multiple placements in foster homes, or for the disrupted forms of schooling they received as a consequence. Yet, they perceived the quality of their current lives as being due to the choices they made.

Active participation in Kohanga Reo provided Shona with opportunities to reclaim lost ground in education. It also gave her an understanding of children's learning processes. She was able apply this knowledge to support her son and younger children in education. Thus, while Kohanga Reo is primarily concerned with

supporting the developmental capabilities of pre-school children to learn within cultural contexts, it also served as a means of assisting Shona's own learning, offering opportunities to acquire educational knowledge and social capital that could be used to assist her children.

Shona and Margaret, as Maori women actively involved in local Kohanga Reo, described feeling somewhat cut off from the learning of their children, once they attended Watea School. Neither felt confident about approaching the school about this discomfort, as Lareau (2000) suggests middle-class mothers would. This lack of confidence in no way indicated a lack of interest in education on their part. Although I suggested that their concerns were important, and that the school could benefit from knowing that they wanted to be more involved in their children's schooling, neither felt able to take the first step, in case it was seen as being critical of the school. However, both women gave permission for me to speak about this issue with the Principal and agreed to the suggestion that the Principal contact them and local Kohanga Reo to discuss how parents could contribute to, and participate in their children's schooling. This has subsequently provided valuable feedback to the school about their delivery of education to Maori, and insights have been incorporated into Watea School planning.

Concerns about Watea School's policy of not issuing homework as a regular practice were expressed to some degree, by five of eighteen parents participating in the research. While parents occasionally described children bringing home special projects to work on, and books to read with them, Watea School did not regularly send worksheets, or spelling lists home with students. Watea School encouraged parents to talk to their children about what they were doing at school, and to read to, and with, children regularly. They suggested that parents involve children in the tasks and activities they performed in the home, such as cooking, shopping, gardening and watching the news on television. The school argued that talking with children about these activities could provide transferrable learning opportunities. This advice was provided intermittently via school newsletters to parents and in interactions between teachers and parents at parent/teacher interviews. In the Principal's view, encouraging these kinds of interactions, would also establish forms of

communication with children, enhancing parent/child relationships in the longer term.

However, parents who expressed a high level of concern about the lack of homework, were not reassured by these explanations. One, highly anxious couple thought homework would offer opportunities for them to know that their daughter was applying herself to her school work and that she could perform the tasks expected of her. However, they also viewed homework as enabling good learning routines to be established:

> *But how do you encourage them? You sort of become the bad guy in your own home. If you want to force them to sit down with the book and then they start asking when 15 minutes is up and they don't want to do it anymore. But if they come home with homework, like we had as a child, you were forced to do it. Your mind set was, "Now it has to be done for tomorrow." No one is forcing you to do it but you know you have to do it (Michael, father of a year six student).*

Other parents with concerns about the lack of homework, mirrored these themes, but with less vehemence.

I did not ask parents for their opinion about homework as a routine question. I did ask them how they felt their children were doing at Watea School and if they had any concerns about their children's learning, or communications between school and home about their children's learning progress. Issues around homework were raised directly by parents in response to these questions. I had not considered that homework would be an issue for parents in primary schooling and was surprised to find it so. I therefore later looked to the literature to gain some understanding of the purposes and functions of homework in primary schooling.

There is a paucity of research about homework and primary schooling. However, Cooper, Jackson, Nye, & Lindsay (2002) in their review of the literature suggest that the correlation between homework and academic achievement is weak in the primary school years. Furthermore, it has negative effects on learning when accompanied by

supervisory parental behaviours. For the couple, most desirous of regular homework, it is likely that the supervisory opportunities they envisaged, would have contributed little to their daughter's progress in education. In contrast, homework activities facilitated by parents, but conducted cooperatively with children, are more likely to have a positive impact on learning. The messages given to parents by the Principal, to create learning opportunities, based in positive relations between parents and children about topics of interest to both parties, would appear to have support in the literature.

Two parents commented both positively and negatively on the use of relief teachers. They noted that when the relief teacher had a good working knowledge of the school and children through regular relief duties, their children coped well with the absence of their regular teacher. However, the use of one reliever, unfamiliar with classroom routines and unable to establish effective relationships with the children, was perceived to have interrupted progress in children's learning and their enjoyment of school. Damle (2009) suggests that regular teacher absences from the classroom, accompanied by the use of relief teachers, can negatively affect learning. Given the emphasis on teacher/student relationships in facilitating learning in the classroom, this correlation appears logically consistent.

Indeed, the personalised style of teacher/student interaction established by teachers with children in Watea School, was greatly valued by parents. Delia described her choice to send her son to Watea School as being based on reports that the teachers treated children as individuals; other schools within the area were perceived as not doing so to the same degree. This research makes no comment about the veracity of this, although two other parents made similar comments. It is probably fair to say that the reputation and practices of Watea School, as accepting and welcoming to students, contributed to this perception.

All the parents interviewed valued teacher communications with them about their children's progress in learning. They especially appreciated the time some teachers made before and after school to discuss their children's learning and any problems they had in the classroom. When questioned about whether National Standards had helped them to understand their children's progress, those with older children stated

that it had made no difference to the level of information they received from the teacher. Explanations about what they could do as parents to support their children's learning were the most valued form of communication between teacher and parent and this had not changed with the introduction of National Standards.

Nigel, as the father of a new entrant in the school and a secondary school teacher, described the difficulty of communicating National Standards assessments to parents:

> *It is a little bit - because at that age you can only do so much with regard to assessment and understanding where they are, but it is a little bit frustrating because (pause)…. The teacher said to us, "This is the report that I have done and she is right on the bottom end of the scale."*
> *And I thought, "Oh well, who cares. She is making progress and she is reading."*
> *"But," she goes, "But the following day - the day before, she read about four words instead of six on the day in the assessment for the school, but the following day after the assessment, she read about 20 words and I had already done the assessment."*
> *(Laughing.) And really, if they are only pooling those figures, really does it do anything other than (pause)? But that is National Standards, and this is the thing about National Standards.*

In this instance, Nigel was capable of rationalising his response to the negative data collated in his daughter's National Standards assessment, but his relief in recounting the teacher's explanation that the assessment could not be relied on as a true estimation of his daughter's progress, was nevertheless apparent. While Nigel had both the skills and confidence to be able to assess his daughter's progress in learning, other parents might not. In this instance, the explanation provided by the teacher would have assumed even greater importance in ameliorating parental anxiety and sustaining parents' beliefs in their children's capabilities in learning.

One parent, as discussed in chapter eight, described not receiving sufficient feedback during a parent/teacher interview. Although the teacher's comments were related to

her child's classroom behaviour, rather than learning progress, Fiona remained troubled by the lack of information about what she could do to support her son and anxious about his learning progress. However, she did not feel able to take up these concerns with the teacher, preferring to wait out the year until he moved to another classroom.

This reluctance to impose on teachers by asking for explanations concerned the Principal. It impacted on teachers' communications with parents about their of children's capabilities in learning. One response to this perception of distance between teachers and parents, was to increase opportunities for school staff and parents to meet and mingle informally through school functions and events. Facilitating bidirectional teacher/parent communications remained a work in progress during 2013, as the school looked to create opportunities for parents and teachers to get to know each other better and to support effective working relationships between them.

Finally, two parents interviewed for the research were concerned about the number of enrichment activities provided at the Watea School. They noted that some families struggled to provide opportunities for their children to access private provision of leisure activities such as swimming lessons and holiday experiences. However, these parents also noted the difficulties of organising school camps and trips, which had to be substantially funded by Watea School. In offering this critique, they then qualified it by describing a range of opportunities for children to develop and express their talents:

> *I love that they also look at the all-round development of the child. Not just National Standards are here. We had better just push Math, English, and that kind of thing, but they do look at those experiences that kids need all round (Marion, mother of three children).*

> *You know, if a kid is good at something, they are encouraged to do it. And like that leadership stuff has been good. Some of the kids get shoulder tapped to do like the bell ringing or the patrols (pause). A bit of responsibility, yeah, yes. And I think that's good. They get more*

involved in school. I think for those sorts of reasons kids are better off and the opportunities they have at school are incredible (Maureen, mother of three children).

These two parents also commented specifically on how much they appreciated the work teachers put into children's performances in musical and dramatic events. They were described as highlights in the school year and as contributing to children's confidence.

In the main, most parents were satisfied that teachers had provided them with feedback about their children's achievement and advice about how best to support their children. National Standards was simply a non-event for parents. When they did have concerns about their children's achievements, National Standards reporting was not seen as offering anything substantive to the conversation. This may have been because processes for communicating children's progress were already effective for most parents and teachers were skilled at providing information about learning in ways that did not provoke anxiety. Parents were reassured by the knowledge that teachers appreciated their children's individual talents and understood their needs. This information could not always be easily transferred in formal teacher/parent interviews, but was more likely to occur in conversations that occurred within informal settings. Teachers, who made time to communicate in this way were acknowledged and appreciated by parents.

Conclusion

National Standards represented the pivotal government policy response to educational inequalities. It sought to reduce disparities in educational outcomes by instituting nationally standardised assessment practices in primary school years. These standards also included teachers' professional judgements in an attempt to avoid the worst effects of standardised testing, which have become evident in other countries in which they have been instituted. However, politicians signalled their interest in using the data generated by National Standards for purposes other than informing directions for further teaching and learning for individual students. They suggested that the data could be used to assess the performance of teachers and

schools and to make comparisons between different groups of students. These usages suggest that, at least in the minds of politicians, the data generated by National Standards comprised a valid form of nationally standardised testing. It therefore also seems likely that the consequences described in the literature on standardised testing, such as a narrowed curriculum and impoverished forms of teaching for those groups of children deemed most at risk of underachievement, will ensue if teachers become increasingly focused on ensuring children meet the required standards.

Politicians continued to pursue the implementation of National Standards over considerable opposition within the educational sector and claims that regimes of standardised national testing had failed elsewhere to reduce educational inequalities. The rationale for National Standards also focused on providing parents with information to enable them to make informed choices on behalf of their children and to better support their children in education. This research suggests that at Watea School, these benefits were not apparent to parents.

The parents interviewed for this research, continued to value informal conversations with teachers as the most useful form of communication. These communications offered opportunities for exploring the contexts of their children's learning, including their adjustments to formal schooling and what parents could do to help their children, while reassuring parents that teachers knew their children as individuals. Thus, parents viewed their children's learning as occurring within the social contexts of school life including the development of relationships with their teachers and peers.

While Watea School was apparently successful in communicating student progress without creating anxieties in relation to National Standards, it was not without cost. Teachers bore the burden of making an imposed policy work, which they believed would not assist them to meet the needs of children at risk of underachievement. They were distressed that their expertise in working with these children was discounted in policy development and implementation. They perceived government responses to children's needs as being under resourced and inadequate to the levels of need in their school community. Finally, they believed that as teachers and a

school, they were being held unfairly accountable for educational outcomes of children disadvantaged by their social circumstances.

Nevertheless, the Principal and the staff of Watea School continued to demonstrate considerable agency in their day-to-day work with children, despite the demoralising impacts of government discourses and policy. Their work was informed by compassion for children's life circumstances and a sense of social justice based on the rights of children to receive an education and to realise their potential in learning. The within-school community of care supported their collective endeavour to constantly review and revise processes for meeting children's learning needs.

Developing relationships with the parent community in a collective sense to support the work of the school remained an ongoing project at the time of the research. Developments in communication between parents and the school have continued apace in the years since 2013.Watea School has therefore retained a sense of hopefulness grounded in their day-to-day practices of teaching, which has sustained their ongoing efforts to meet the needs of children attending Watea School and to harness the capabilities of parents to support their children's learning.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The work of this conclusion is three-fold. Firstly, it seeks to draw together the themes identified in the thesis. In creating a coherent account of the research and the work of Watea School, it was analytically necessary to pull apart the transcripts, notes, policy statements and media commentaries to thematically identify the issues that contributed to educational inequalities and to create a coherent account However, this coherence was an artificial construct in the actual work of Watea School, as it set about meeting its educational goals. The three themes presented, and the underlying issues they represented, were often bound together and interconnected in a dynamic environment of shifting human and material resources, events and interactions across all levels of engagement in the field of education. This conclusion therefore, seeks to convey a sense of the complexity that accompanied actions undertaken to resolve issues embedded within these themes.

Secondly, I proffer a summary of the critique of the ideological focus of government policy in redressing educational inequalities. The principle strut of the government's policy programme during the research rested on the implementation of National Standards as a means of addressing educational inequalities. The government resolutely insisted that improved assessment would reveal underperforming teachers and schools and empower parents to demand improvements. National Standards was viewed as the key to ensuring education markets functioned effectively in main-

stream schools and would result in improved teacher, school and student performances.

However, this reliance on education markets was tempered by some recognition that higher levels of social need in low-decile school communities contributed to poorer educational outcomes. Policy initiatives therefore, increased resources in low-decile schools in response to the most visible needs of children that impeded their likely progress in education. A variety of supports were provided to address the mental and physical health needs of children, to provide food to children and to offer social work support. However, the government remained resistant to examining the effects of socioeconomic inequalities that underpinned these needs, or to place weight on the links between socioeconomic inequalities and educational inequalities. Thus, more widespread social policy to address conditions of poverty in New Zealand society remained substantively unaddressed.

The dominance of neoliberal ideology in New Zealand society and governance explains this reluctance to consider the impacts of social and economic inequalities on educational outcomes. Continuing to view the issues of educational inequality within the confines of neoliberal ideology, even when accompanied by the application of some pragmatic responses to needs, offered limited possibilities for policy responses. It channelled government toward managerial policy responses in mainstream schools, in efforts to hold individual schools, teachers and sometimes parents (with respect to parentally sanctioned and unjustified school absences) accountable for educational outcomes. This inevitably involved a drift toward increasing regimes of measurement to identify who should be held responsible when children failed to achieve predetermined measures of learning. However, this focus served to obscure the actual complexities that lay behind measured outcomes. In the case of Watea School, the impacts of issues of attendance, and behaviour on learning, and the socioeconomic factors that lay behind them, were subsumed into a government narrative of teachers and schools demonstrating deficit thinking and low expectations of children from low-income and Maori families.

The third strand of this conclusion picks up the need to offer an alternative ideological stance to balance our conceptions of individual rights and responsibilities

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with our necessary sociality in being both recipients and givers of care. I argue that had care ethics informed policy interventions to address of educational inequalities, education policy development and implementation would have occurred more democratically and with more care for all parties during the period of the research.

Drawing together attendance, behaviour and learning issues

Attendance, behaviour and learning issues impacted on the work of Watea School in ways that were complex and interconnected. While I have presented them as separate in the findings chapters and has having thematically distinctive effects on the school's core purpose of facilitating children's learning, in practice, they were much more difficult to disentangle. For example, the behaviour of some children impacted on both their learning and attendance, but equally, difficulties in learning and disrupted patterns of attendance could contribute to incidences of challenging behaviour. The interconnected nature of the problems children brought with them to their schooling, contributed to the difficulties Watea School faced in enabling children to reach their potential in learning.

Fig 10.1: The Relatedness of Issues of Attendance, Behaviour and Learning.
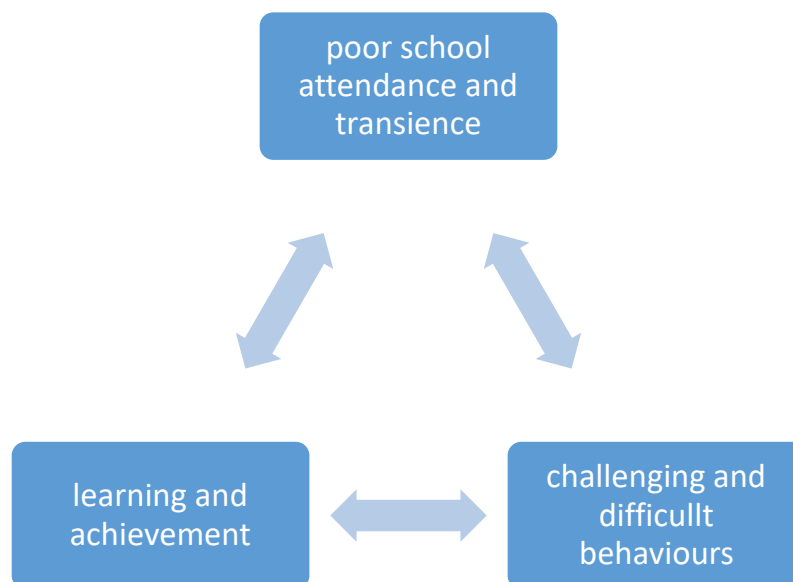
Conditions of poverty contributed to the higher incidence of issues of attendance, behaviour and student achievement in Watea School. The frustration for Watea

School was that they had little or no control over the social and economic conditions in which many of their students and their families lived. They were, therefore, condemned to be always reacting to children's challenging behaviours and disrupted patterns of attendance, and the impacts of both on learning. Consequently, the Principal argued for greater recognition of the influence of socioeconomic factors on children's disparate educational outcomes and for social policy interventions to directly address them. The Principal envisaged that these interventions would accompany support in the field of education for the ongoing development of teaching expertise, including improved implementation of the National Curriculum and expertise in teachers' assessment capabilities. However, the Principal argued that these should be supported in ways that recognised the interconnections between conditions of poverty and children's learning outcomes. In this manner, education would be part of the solution to educational inequalities and not expected to bear the full weight of children's disparate outcomes.

Watea School, in response to the multiple needs of its students, continued to place an emphasis on pastoral care as an essential strut upon which to build effective teaching and learning. Watea School staff fed children, accessed clothing and raincoats when required and provided health services in situ to assist children and families with health problems. The leadership team and support workers advocated and supported children to access additional services. However, many of these activities, the health clinic excepted, did not operate during school holidays. School-based actions could only ever provide a stop gap, and an intermittent one at that, to the totality of the impacts of poverty and family distress on children's lives.

The emphasis on pastoral care for children in Watea School also played a vital part in creating an inclusive learning environment for children. This was essential in supporting children into prosocial behaviour, enabling them to develop caring relationships with peers, support workers and teachers, which in turn, nurtured self-perceptions and beliefs in children that they belonged and could achieve in formal schooling. Retaining a broadly based curriculum was essential to this work and teachers committed to ensuring that as well as supporting children to acquire the primary skills of literacy and numeracy, children learnt other things about themselves that were necessary for ongoing educational success: that children knew that they

mattered and were important to others; that they believed that **all** their gifts and talents were valuable and would be needed to live a good life; and that all their learning and achievements deserved recognition. Thus, just as behavioural deficits were addressed by positive reinforcement to enable children to identify those behaviours that would help them to remain connected with their peers and teachers in schooling, so too teachers sought to build on positive gains in all forms of learning, to positively reinforce ongoing effort and motivation.

The government's choice to locate solutions to educational inequalities primarily in the assessment practices of teachers, was therefore at odds with the understandings of the Principal and teachers at Watea School. It also ran counter to the understandings of groups representing teachers in New Zealand, contributing to dysfunctional working relationships between the political, bureaucratic and practitioner arms of the education sector. The discord between these different groups affected the capacity of the sector to harness its collective capabilities in redressing educational inequalities. In discounting the voices of many working in low-decile schools with experiential knowledge and expertise grounded in practice, it excluded them from contributing positively to policy development.

I argue for the need to develop an alternative to neoliberalism as basis for education policy. This argument is based on a critique of the effects of neoliberal ideology in education as a necessary precursor to ideological change and the next section outlines this critique. Remaining locked into the discourses of individual accountabilities and the siloed forms of thinking they promote, does little to redress the complexities of educational inequalities, fails to promote an understanding of the connections between the different issues contributing to them, and does not sustain the connections between different groups that need to work together.

Neoliberal ideology and the case for ideological change

I have proffered a critique of neoliberalism in education in this thesis, but I also argue that is entirely unremarkable that a dominant ideology drives policy and governance. All decisions about what ought to be done and the range of possibilities that present themselves in perceptions of what could be done, are based in ideology. This section

summarises the key facets of the government's neoliberal prescriptions for primary school education during the research and outlines its shortcomings in meeting the needs of the students of Watea School. But, it also discusses the manner in which neoliberal discourses permeated the thinking of teachers and parents in the Watea School community. While the teachers at Watea School recognised areas of complexity in seeking to mitigate the impacts socioeconomic disadvantage on learning and argued for the need for improved pastoral supports to redress educational inequalities, they also tended to negate the impact of social conditions on parenting behaviours. In this sense, teachers often held parents responsible for children's disruptive behaviours, poor school attendance and consequent learning difficulties, without considering the complex and difficult circumstances in which some parents were required to parent. This allowed them to sustain a position of care and respect for children's rights in education, but the embeddedness of these rights in children's family relationships and socioeconomic conditions were sometimes overlooked or underestimated.

The government's ideological programme for education focused on the need to make schools and teachers accountable for educational outcomes as its primary policy response to educational inequalities. This was supported by the view that education markets, companied by increased capacity for the exercise of parental choice, would result in improvements for Maori and low-income students that largely comprised the student body at Watea School. However, framing education services within discourses of accountability and choice, also dictated the need for data to inform government and parental evaluations of school effectiveness. National Standards offered a means of measuring children's learning achievements, reporting them to parents and compiling them nationally. It therefore appeared to meet this need.

Watea School teachers and its leadership team viewed this analysis as mistaken on a number of fronts: equating student success in assessments as unqualified evidence of learning was a false perception, based on a partial subset of possibilities of taught and learnt material; processes of ranking children, to determine their progress in learning within the reported data required by National Standards, failed to account for the differences in individual children's learning trajectories and was likely to impact negatively on some children's confidence in their capability to learn; use of

data to evaluate the quality of teaching and school function failed to capture the different contexts in which different schools and teachers performed their work; the emphasis placed on assessment activities, diverted attention from deeper engagement with the new National Curriculum; privileging assessment activities as the most important factor in changing outcomes and diverted attention from broader social issues that contributed to difficulties in teaching and learning in a low-decile school. Further to these objections, the Principal believed that the policy would contribute to a narrowed curriculum as principals, teachers and parents responded to pressures to view learning within the confines of National Standards measures.

Teachers in Watea School tended to favour parenting failures as explanations for the difficult behaviours, disrupted attendance and the generalised learning difficulties that some children exhibited. This stance, accompanied by an appreciation of children's rights to education, motivated their ongoing commitment to act to redress children's needs. However, at the same time, this emphasis also ensured that their analyses of children's issues tended to remain locked within neoliberal conceptions of individual, parental responsibility and accountability. Parents were sometimes framed as a source of frustration for teachers, in much the same way that government sited teachers as frustrating their efforts to reduce educational disparities. In both instances, such assignations reduced opportunities for connections across differences, and possibilities for collaboration.

Parents interviewed for this research, acknowledged the difficulties teachers faced in working with some distressed children. They also concurred with teachers in locating these difficulties within the dysfunction of some children's families. In the instance when parents described their own traumatic and difficult childhoods, which had contributed to their own educational difficulties, they continued to describe their educational difficulties as resulting from choices they made. This choice rhetoric fed into a commitment on their part to choose more wisely on behalf of their children and to work toward teaching their children to make better choices. However, within this discursive framework, there was little room for considering the systemic nature of the factors and events that had historically narrowed their own educational options, and which could potentially impact on those of their children.

This choice rhetoric not only constrained the ability of parents to perceive systemic disadvantages, but also obscured from view the advantages that other families could take for granted in their children's schooling. The internalisation of neoliberal understandings of choice and responsibility, across both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, gives witness to the dominant power of neoliberal ideology. It allows those groups characterised by high levels of social and economic status, to attribute their successes to their personal virtues, innate capabilities and motivated efforts. These attributions sustain perceptions of ongoing entitlement to advantages, nurturing a belief that others, in lacking the social and economic status they enjoy, are also lacking the personal attributes required to attain these advantages. In contrast, those of lower status internalise a sense of stigma and shame, which embeds a deeply rooted sense of accountability and precludes any sustained structural critique.

This thesis does not dispute that there are individual factors that are influential in achieving educational, social and economic goals. But, the growing body of research on both parenting and child development suggests that the dispositions, cognitions and behaviours of individuals are shaped by, not only by their genetic inheritance, but also by environmental factors. Thus, the exercise of choice, even within a consideration of individual differences, reflects a somewhat more arbitrary distribution of good fortune than neoliberal ideology allows.

Working within neoliberal ideology to break cycles of disadvantage is difficult. Its adherence to ideations of individual responsibility, enacted in competition with others for economic resources as a marker of success, will always result in some falling behind. Those who achieve competitive success, will enjoy the accompanying social status effects, while those who do not, are stigmatised by their conspicuous lack of resources. Inevitably, this will result in forms of exclusion for those who fail within an economic framework, and these effects are compounded when individuals internalise their attributions of failure as evidence of their poor choices and personal deficits. I argue that an alternative ideology is required to break cycles of disadvantage that neoliberalism has served to embed, in education and in wider society.

Rethinking ideology: care ethics in education

I draw on an ethic of care to argue in this conclusion for an alternative to neoliberal ideology, which opens up possibilities for understanding educational inequalities in different ways. Espousing an ethic of care as the basis for action, enables us to balance our conceptions of individual rights, responsibilities and agentive capabilities with our necessary sociality in being both recipients and givers of care. This stance allows us to view the problem of educational inequalities as relational, in which we have a collective responsibility for both its genesis and its resolution.

An ethic of care, as outlined by Tronto (1993) goes further and offers a vision of how care could be enacted in education. It agues that caring actions are characterised by particular qualities: attentiveness to the widest consideration of factors and and the full range of analyses of all those involved in redressing educational inequalities; a willingness to respond to all these factors and anlayses in determining how best to act; competence in planning and the implementation of programmes of remediation; and responsiveness to the evaluations of not only children affected by educational inequalities, but those required to implement planned interventions. Using such a framework allows an evaluation of the care, ethicality and justness of actions performed by all parties in attempts to achieve transformative change.

Acting with care, allows us to recognise the incomplete and uncertain nature of our knowledge at any time. It directs us towards a process of ongoing dialogue and communication between those responsible for planning care, those delivering care and those who receive it. The processural qualities of care allow for the unpredictability of future events and recognise our current and future knowledge deficits in meeting care needs. This makes space for uncertainty to generate new forms of knowledge and understanding, from which new policy responses and practices can emerge. Building in contingency and flexibility into planning and policy processes, whether at the level of the local school or the educational sector, is necessary to accommodate this uncertainty, enabling ongoing reflexivity and responsiveness to needs (Gerston, 2011; Walker, Rahmen & Cave, 2001).

An ethic of care therefore, makes fewer claims to rightness and offers instead, some guiding principles for acting ethically. These principles offer us, individually and collectively, sufficient confidence to act on our perceptions of need, because the responses that are initiated are always viewed as an ongoing project. If actions fail today to provide the solutions required to address problems, then the feedback from providers of care and care-recipients can contribute to more robust forms of understanding for future planning to meet needs.

This attentive engagement with those who will be acted upon by those planning interventions, is the pivotal response required of those with systemic and political power to drive change. In 2008, this would have led the incoming government to seek the input of teachers, students and parents in gaining the fullest understanding of the problem of educational inequalities, **before** enacting policy initiatives that teachers and principals were required to implement. This would not have meant seeking out supporting opinions for favoured strategies; rather it would have been concerned to open up the widest range of possibilities for consideration. Regions with concentrations of entrenched poverty and high numbers of low-decile schools could have expected to be mined for their working knowledge of the scope of the problems they faced and the expertise they had developed in meeting children's needs.

At the local level of the school, it is also important to create opportunities for parents of children at risk of educational underachievement to contribute to interventions designed for its redress. Developing relationships of care between students, teachers and parents allows a shared understanding of the complexities involved for all parties in supporting children in education; it increases the likelihood that actions will be based on the fullest evaluations possible. Fostering the forms of communication that offer attentive listening skills to elicit information as well as effectively transmitting information creates a dialogic space between parents and teachers. It is in this space that Freire (1993) argues that possibilities for transformative learning are promoted across classed differences and in challenge to current orthodoxies.

The actions taken by the Principal, in speaking directly with some families, provided a space in which parents' concerns could be heard. This fostered better understanding

the issues faced by some parents and the ramifications of these issues for children's learning. Other spaces were similarly created by teachers and support workers as they attempted to understand the behaviours of distressed children when they assisted parents to seek specialised services. However, informal communications between teachers and parents were most appreciated by parents, because they contributed to trusting relationships between teachers and parents. These contacts allowed parents to appreciate the expertise and care teachers brought to their work their children and to feel confident that teachers knew and valued their children as individuals.

Teachers were more likely to infer that parents were emotionally invested in their children's learning, when parents sought out opportunities for dialogue with teachers. This research revealed that this inference was not always correct; classed differences acted as barriers to some parents in initiating contacts with teachers. In this instance, those teachers who made extra efforts to engage with parents and to initiate conversations with them, were appreciated by parents. However, fostering relationships capable of supporting dialogue with parents, was a difficult task when so many students moved frequently in and out of the school. Nevertheless, it was evident from the accounts of both teachers and parents that when it was achieved, it contributed positively in creating an effective learning partnership between home and school.

In summary, in arguing for an ethic of care as an ideological basis for action, I acknowledge that there is no last word to be had about the complex problem of educational inequalities. However, opportunities for harnessing the collective capacity of the whole sector for creativity and innovation in its redress, were lost when the critical analyses proffered by educators and academics of government policy were discounted and dismissed. In pressing ahead with its predetermined agenda, the government created an environment of coercion and control over teachers and principals, which signalled a distinct lack of care about the teaching profession, or for its practitioners in the years 2008-2013. While the government insisted that its actions were based on the needs of children and caring about the problem of educational inequalities, it also proved unwilling or unable to consider the full range of conditions that impacted on children's knowledge.

Had the incoming government adopted a processural approach in expressing its care for children underachieving in education, it would have recognised the need to include all those with parts to play in achieving successful outcomes. Its efforts to provide leadership on the issue of educational inequalities, would have opened up the analytic, planning and evaluative processes of its policy prescriptions to input from practitioners, academics, parents and students. An ethic of care asserts that means matter in achieving ends, because the relationships that are created in the process of enacting change, will be necessary for later evaluating, refining and redesigning services in the ongoing work of meeting both the goals of the present and those yet to emerge.

Limitations of the research

This research offered opportunities to understand how Watea School responded to the needs of its low-decile community of students and parents during a period of upheaval within the primary school sector in New Zealand. Locating the work of the school within an examination of an ideological and social justice framework enabled an exploration of its political and policy contexts. Thus, the work of Watea School could be examined for areas of resistance to and concurrence with prevailing ideology and policy, as well as the impacts of policy interventions on its work.

These political contexts created an environment of distrust and anxiety that constrained my research activities. Some planned activities were not able to be carried out as initially envisaged. While some informants were able to provide me with valuable background knowledge about relationships and practices within the sector, much of this commentary was unable to be explicitly used. I was also required to offer only generalised contextual information, drawn from local and regional sources of data, which placed Watea School within its geographical, historic, social and economic contexts. These omissions, necessary to protect the confidentiality of the school and individuals, were especially important during a time when relationships within the sector were difficult.

In not including children in the research, a valuable source of information was lost. While parents could speak to some concerns on behalf of their children, these could

only be partial representations of how children perceived their schooling at Watea School. The usefulness of the research to Watea School, was less as a consequence, and this research contributes to children's under-representation in research projects on issues concerning them.

There were also constraints that arose in the research, because I was not a teacher. I relied on teachers' accounts of their work, supplemented by parents' perceptions. I had no real means of evaluating their actual performance of teaching and learning. I am sure that a teacher performing this research would have elicited a very different and more nuanced account of their work, informed by knowledge drawn from their own experiences of teaching and as an insider to the profession.

However, this limitation was, I believe, a strength in interviewing parents. I was gratified by the willingness of parents to explore their sometimes, complicated views of education and the work of Watea School. Positioning myself as outside the teaching profession, but with an interest in education, appeared to enable them to express their own concerns more freely. I feel sure that had I come to this research as a member of staff of a school, I would have struggled to elicit the same depth of data.

Finally, in choosing to focus on the work of a single school, I was limited to the experiences of one school and its responses to the needs of its community. Without doubt, there are other forms of creative agency being enacted in low-decile schools within the same region. In focusing on a single school, opportunities have been lost for celebrating instances of creativity and innovation that could have informed the wider sector. However, in retaining a focus on a single school, it allowed me, as a sole researcher, to elucidate in more detail how Watea School acted with commitment, care and expertise, in educating some of the most challenging students, drawn not only from its own neighbourhoods, but from other areas in the city.

Some concluding thoughts

I want to make an acknowledgement of the difficult environment in which teachers performed their work in the year prior to the research and during 2013. The white

heat of the disputes between the Minister of Education and her ministry officials on the one hand, and teacher and principal representative groups on the other, has faded over time, but the effects on the morale of teachers interviewed were obvious in 2013. However, once educators began to speak of their work with children, their commitment and care about the children they taught, shone through. Their thoughtful accounts of their work demonstrated their deep engagement with their professional responsibilities. I therefore felt, both saddened and angered when teachers were professionally disparaged in media discourses at this time. If the teachers and support workers I interviewed, were representative of others working in low-decile communities, and I have no reason to think not, then New Zealand parents should feel extremely fortunate to have this quality of workforce teaching their least advantaged children.

It should also prompt the wider New Zealand public and those with power over the teaching profession to consider very carefully the inequalities that are embedded across many social dimensions of life in New Zealand. Charging schools and teachers with responsibility for redressing the educational inequalities arising from wider social conditions is irrational; education can play its part in solving the problem, but it requires a concerted, whole-of-society effort to address the conditions in which educational inequalities are embedded. It places an ethical requirement on those who are currently privileged, both socially and educationally, to consider the bases of both the advantages they enjoy and the disadvantages others suffer, when they make their evaluations of education services in New Zealand.

Finally, I would like to finish this thesis with a story related to me by Marion about her son, and his participation in an inter-school running event. It offers clarity about how care operates and its benefit in supporting those who are falling behind:

> *Marion: Kelvin (Marion's son) got to the park this year for cross country. But, he was **so not** keen to go. He was just really worried. And that's part of his personality. Things are a bit worrying for him. But I said, "You are going to school and we'll go to the park and see how you go."*

I got a call from his teacher that morning, saying that Kelvin was really upset.

And I said, "Well, I will go up to the park, if you can bring him up there."

And Mr. Jones said, "Yeah. Kelvin, do you feel ok with that?"

And Kelvin said, "Yes."

And Mr. Jones. says, "I won't make him run. We will just see if he wants to, when he gets there."

So right up until the start, I didn't know if he was going to line up. He was hiding behind the other kids. But, he ran! I was so happy. But, he came dead last. But also, he had two friends who stuck with him, the whole way round. And that to me, says that those kids were taught that it's more important to look after each other than to win.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's like the marines. Nobody gets left behind.

Marion: Yes, exactly. It's more important to look after each other. And there was another girl the same day, who Mr. Jones. said, did exactly the same thing. Her mate fell over, and she stayed with her. So it's just these kinds of things - and they are not rare either. These are the things that are really important to me, as my kids grow up. I told Kelvin too, I said, "Man, your mates are awesome, just to stick with you. I think they are awesome!"

He said to me, "Mum, we look after each other."

There would have been children who won their races that day, prompting pride and admiration for their running abilities. This would have resulted in prestige and status for them as individuals, their families and schools. However, the care expressed by teachers, parents and children in supporting an anxious boy to face his fears and a friend to stay with another who fell, enabled all children representing Watea School to know that they were supported and valued in giving their best efforts.

It is a different kind of winning to give this care to others. It is all too rarely valued in a society focused on celebrating those who come in first, as the repositories of our best hopes and representatives of our collective identity. And yet, when we see or

hear of others acting with care in this way, we are moved and bound to recognise the moral worth of their actions. However, in the neoliberal encoding of individuals as unique constellations of gifts and talents to be honed in competition with others, we lose sight of what it is to be **with** others in our participation and in our efforts to help those falling behind. It would be comforting to imagine that the children in Watea School in this story could retain their faith in a society comprised of people who "look after each other", rather than finding themselves defined by success in winning in competition with others, or worse, their failure to do so.

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Appendix 1

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

ADULT INFORMATION SHEET.

Kia ora and thank you for the opportunity to present my research project to you. I hope that you will be able to take part in this research as a parent, or person who works/volunteers at Watea School.

Introduction

My name is Christine Read. I am a PH.D. student at Massey University, Albany Campus and I am conducting research into the way in which Watea School works with its community to provide care and support for the children who are being educated at the school. I am being supervised in this research by Associate Professor Ann Dupuis and Professor Cluny Macpherson.

I grew up and was educated in the ***** area, and my daughter attended Watea School in the 1990s. I live locally in Woodhill and worked with families in ***** for many years as a midwife. This work and my own experiences as a parent gave me a deep interest in the way schools work with children, families and other organisations to help children reach their potential, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

Watea School plays a big part in the lives of its students, but its work can only be done with the help of families and the wider community. I plan to do his research with Watea School for the length of a school year to see the way that the school works with all those concerned in the life of the school. The research will capture the relationships between the school and the surrounding community. This is a story that needs to be told at a time when the media focus in education is all about measuring standards, deciles, and teacher performance. These measures do not easily describe the way that teachers work with children, families and communities in day-to-day relationships of trust and mutual concern to ensure that children achieve their best in many different ways.

Who can take part in this research?

I would value the input of each and **every one who works at Watea School,** paid or unpaid. I would like speak with you about what you like and value about the school; the things that have worked well; things that have been difficult; what could be done differently to achieve good things in this school and how well you think the school works with the community. I want to speak with you if you are **the parent of a child** about your experiences with Watea School. Finally, I would like to provide opportunities for **children in year six** to create work (stories, art work, photographs), to show what it is like to be a child at Watea School. If you are a parent/guardian of a child in year six, I will give your child a sketch pad, pens and the opportunity to take photographs of things at the school that reflect his/her experiences of Watea School. I would like to speak with your child about the work produced to gather his/her views about the school. Your child is an expert in being a student at Watea School with an important story to tell.

What does your participation involve if you are an employee, volunteer, parent/guardian, and you wish to take part in the research?

Interviews will only be done after you have received full information about the research, any questions have been answered and you have signed a written consent form. Each interview will take about an hour, will be audio taped with permission and will take place at a location and time of your choice. If you are a parent of a year six child, you will also be

asked to give your consent for your child to take part in the research and be interviewed. However, I will also require a written consent from your child to allow me to use any of the work your child has produced or to conduct an interview with him/her. If your child reveals that he/she is experiencing harm, or risks of harm, school resources and processes will be used to help your child.

Your rights as a participant and/or as a parent/guardian of a child taking part in the research.

You are free to choose whether you take part in this research, but if you do, I can assure you that the research will be conducted carefully and ethically in line with university academic research principles. If you decide to take part in the research, and you also give consent for your child to take part, you and your child have the right to: ☐ refuse to answer any question during the interview;

• ask any questions you wish at any time during the interview;

• stop the audiotape at any point in the interview;

• withdraw any information you have provided up to one month after the interview has taken place;

• examine the transcription of your personal interview and change any material you don't want used in reports of the research up to two weeks after receiving the interview transcription;

• request your audiotape to be returned to you on completion of the research.

I can assure you that all research materials will be treated with great care. The information you provide is confidential and any identifying details will be removed in reports or publications. Information will be carefully stored and available only to me and my supervisors. After the research is completed, a summary of findings will be sent to you should you wish it, and recordings destroyed.

Please contact me if you have any further questions, or if you would like to take part in the research:

Christine Read.

Phone: 09 4389066/Mob: 021 1438 256

E-mail: chrisread424@gmail.com

My supervisors are also available to answer any questions you may have:

Associate Professor Ann Dupuis (Massey University)   Professor Cluny Mapherson (Massey University)

Phone 09 4140800, extn. 9054   Phone 094140800, extn. 9057

E-mail: A.Dupuis@massey.ac.nz   E-mail: C.Macpherson@massey.ac.nz

 I very much look forward to meeting with you to answer any questions, or to interviewing you should you agree to take part in the research.

Approved by the Massey University Human Participants Ethics Committee: Northern; Application MUHECN 12/085 on 18/12/2012. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Ralph Bathurst on telephone no 09140800, extn. 43279

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM: ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Researcher: Christine Read

Supervisors: Associate Professor Ann Dupuis; Professor Cluny Macpherson.

This form will be stored securely for a period of six years.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to:

- Take part in this research;
- Allow the interview to be audiotaped;
- The information I provide being used for publications and other academic purposes;
- Provide information for this research on the understanding that my name or any other identifying details will not be used in any publication of the research data.

I give/do not give my consent for the interview to be audio recorded.

I understand that I have the right to:

- Ask questions at any time;
- Withdraw from the interview at any time;
- Decline to answer any particular questions;
- Have the audio recorder turned off at any time;
- Have a transcript of the interview returned to me so that changes can be made if I wish to within two weeks of the interview;
- Withdraw my information from the study at any time up to one month after the interview has taken place.

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………..

Name: …………………………………………………………………………...

Date: …………………………………………………………………………..

(Continued overleaf).

I would like/do not want a transcript of the interview sent to me so that I can check the interview for information that I do not want the researcher to use in publications and for other academic purposes.

I would like/do not want to receive a summary of the findings of the research.

Address to send the transcript and/or summary of the research findings or e-mail address:

…….

………..

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Appendix 3

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM FOR THEIR CHILD TO TAKE PART IN
RESEARCH.

Researcher: Christine Read

Supervisors: Associate Professor Ann Dupuis; Professor Cluny Macpherson.

This form will be stored securely for a period of six years.

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to:

- Allow my child to take part in this research;
- Allow the interview with my child to be audio recorded;
- The information my child provides being used for publications and other academic purposes;
- Allow the information my child provides for this research to be used only on the understanding that my child's real name or any other identifying details will not be used in any publication of the research data.

I understand:

- That I have the right to change my mind about allowing my child to take part in the research at any time;
- That I have the right to ask further questions at any time before and after the data has been gathered;
- That even when I have given consent for my child to take part in the research, my child still has the right to refuse to take part.
- That if my child reveals information indicating the experience of harm or the risk of harm, school processes will be activated to support my child.

Signed (parent/guardian): …………………………………………………………………………………..

Name: ……..

My Child's Name is: …………………………………………………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………………………………………………………………..

(Continued overleaf).

I would like/do not want to receive a summary of the findings of the research.

Address to send the summary of the research findings or e-mail address:

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Appendix 4

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS: ADULT PARTICIPANTS.

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the reports.

Signature ……………………………………………………………………….

Date…………………………….

Full name printed…………………………………………………………….

Approved by the Massey University Human Participants Ethics Committee: Northern, Application, MUHECN 12/085, on 18th Dec 2012. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathhurst on telephone no 09140800, extn. 43279

Appendix 5

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: ADULT PARTICIPANTS, WORKER/VOLUNTEER

Questions will be used to prompt the interview rather than as a survey or questionnaire, except for questions in bold. The interviewer will respond to answers to elicit full descriptions of the nature of the interactions between the worker/volunteer and others at the school including children, and children's parents.

Name……

Position held or nature of the work you do at Watea School:…………………………………………

………..

How many years you have been working at Watea School?………………………………………….

Tell me the story of how you came to do this work at Watea School?

What kinds of experience did you bring to Watea School when you started work here?

How has it the experience of working at Watea School been for you?

What areas of your work do you find difficult, challenging, frustrating?

Are there specific problems that you think need to be addressed?

What do you think would make things better? Can you see any possible solutions?

Who gives you support to do your work? What sorts of things support you in your work?

What do you enjoy most about your work?

What things do you feel that Watea School does well?

What do you think the future holds for you at Watea School?

Overall, how would you rate Watea School, one being excellent and five being very poor?

 Excellent………Good…….. Neither good nor bad……..Poor……………..Very poor

1……………………2………………………3…………………………….4………………………5

Can you tell me why you rate the school this way?

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A SCHOOL

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Researcher: Christine Read

Kia ora and thank you for the chance to tell you about my research project.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Christine Read. I am a student at Massey University, Albany Campus. I am working with Watea School to do research about how the school cares for children and works together with families and others to help children get an education. Associate Professor Ann Dupuis and Professor Cluny Macpherson from Massey University are supervising me to make sure I do the research properly.

I will be working with Watea School for a whole year to talk to as many people as possible. I will try to interview everyone who works at the school, anyone who comes to visit the school and I want to talk with every student in year six. I think by talking to you and all these other people I will get information about the good things that happen at Watea School, but also ideas and suggestions about what you and other people think could make the school even better.

I want to talk to you to find out how Watea Schools helps you to learn and to be happy. I also want to know if you think that there are things that you could do, or other people could do to make the school a better place. You have important things to tell me about what it is like to be a student at Watea School that will help to make the school better for everyone. I would love to hear your ideas and stories.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS RESEARCH?

I will give you your own sketchpad. In this sketch pad you can write anything, draw anything, stick in anything, cut out and paste anything that you want to about Watea School. It will be yours to keep and you can decide whether you want to show it to anyone else such as your teacher, your class, your friends, your family or me. Here is a list of some things that you can think about, but you will probably think of many other things you could do as well:

- What happened on you best ever day at Watea School?

- What is the story of your worst day at Watea School?

- What is the funniest thing that has happened to you at school?

- What is the hardest thing about school for you?

- What do you like best about Watea School?

- If you had a magic wand and could make a wish to change something at school, what would it be? Why do you want to change this thing?

- Draw a picture/take a photograph of the thing you like best, or worst at school and why you think it is the best or worst thing.

- What is the most important thing Watea School has done for you?

- What advice can you give to next year six pupils at Watea School?

 I will also give you a camera to take 10 pictures of things about your school that are important, exciting, fun, difficult, sad or wonderful. These can be used in your sketchbook and kept private or shared with others for a group project. Towards the end of the year, I would like to be able to talk to you about your work in an interview using an audio recorder. You will also be able to tell me then which parts of your work you are happy for me to use in my writing about the research.

YOU ARE A PERSON WITH RIGHTS. HOW WILL I RESPECT YOUR RIGHTS?

• You have the right to have full information about the research and to have all your questions about the research answered.

• I will only do an interview with you if you give me written consent and I will also need to get written consent from your parent/guardian.

• You do not have to do the interview with me if you don't want to. You can stop the interview any time you want and you can change your mind about taking part in the research at any time.

• If I ask a question and you don't want to answer it, you do not have to.

• I will also ask you for consent to use an audio recorder to tape the interview. This means that I will only use the audio recorder with your permission and we can stop it any time you want.

• If you give me permission to make a recording, I will listen to it later and type up what you have said on the computer.

• I can give you a copy of this writing so you can change things if you want to.

If you agree to be interviewed and let me use your work in your sketch pad for my research, I will make sure that everything you tell me or show me is kept confidential. This means that if I use the information you have given me, I will make sure nobody will know it is you that gave the information to me. To make sure of this, I will ask you to choose a special name. It can be anything you like as long as it is not your real name. This means that if you have made a picture, or told a story, and I use it in the research, it will have your special name on it and you and I will be the only people know who know who gave me the information.

The only reason to break this promise to keep everything confidential is if you tell me something that makes me think you could be in danger of harm. If this happens, I will talk with you about it and we will work out together who we should talk to and what we should do to help keep you safe.

You can talk to me and ask me questions any time about the research when you see me at the school, but here are my contact details as well:

My name: Christine Read.

Phone: 09 4389066 / Mob: 021 1438 256

E-mail: chrisread424@gmail.com

These are the contact numbers for my supervisors. You can ask them questions about the research if you need to:

Associate Professor Ann Dupuis (Massey University, Albany)

Phone: 09 4140800, extn. 9054

E-mail: A.Dupuis@massey.ac.nz

Professor Cluny Mapherson (Massey University, Albany)

Phone: 094140800, extn. 9057

E-mail: C.Macpherson@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 7

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD PARTICIPANTS

Researcher: Christine Read

Supervisors: Associate Professor Ann Dupuis; Professor Cluny MacPherson. These people will help Christine to make sure she does a good job with this research project. This form will be locked up safely at the university for six years. After that it will be destroyed.

Christine Read and I have talked about the research. Christine has explained to me the way we will do the research together and she has answered all my questions. She has also given me some written information to read about the research and I can keep this. I have read this information.

I agree to do this research with Christine. I know that she will use the things I make and the things I tell her to do her own writing for the research. She will make sure that nobody will be able to work out what I have said when she does her writing. She will not talk to anybody about anything I have said to her without my permission, but if I tell her something that shows that I am in danger, then she will talk with me about getting help for me from a safe person.

I **do** agree that Christine can use the audio recorder when I talk to her in an interview: ☐

OR

I **do not** agree that Christine can use the audio recorder when I talk to her in an interview: ☐

I have rights. I can change my mind any time about doing this research. I can stop doing the research if I do not want to carry on. I don't have to answer any questions if I don't want to. I can have the audio recorder turned off at any time I want. I can always ask Christine questions if I am not sure about anything and she will answer my questions. Christine will make a typed copy of our interview and she will show it to me so we can check to see if it is right. I can change things then if I want to.

This is my special name I have chosen ……………………………………………………………………
This is the name Christine will use if she has to write down what I have said, or uses anything I have made when she writes her research reports. She will not tell anyone that I have chosen this name.

This is my real name: …………………………………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………………

I can see the typed copy of the interview with Christine:

Tick this box if I **do** want Christine read through the typed copy of the interview with me. ☐

Tick this box if I **do not** want Christine to read through the typed copy of the interview with me. ☐

I can have a final report about the research to keep if I want:

Tick this box if I **do** want Christine to send me a report about the research. ☐

Tick this box if I **do not** want Christine to send me a report about the research. ☐

Christine can send me the final report about the research to this address:

……
……
……
……

Appendix 8

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS: CHILD PARTICIPANTS.

I have had the chance to read the transcript of the interview I did with Christine and to change things if I want to, or to take out some of the things I said in the interview.

Now I agree that Christine can use anything in the transcript when she writes about the research, but she will make sure that when she uses something I have said, she will not use my real name. She will only use the special name that I have chosen.

Signature: ……………………………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………

Full name: …………………………………………………………………………………………….

The special name I have chosen: …………………………………………………………

………

Approved by the Massey University Human Participants Ethics Committee on: Northern, Application MUHECN 12/085 On the 18/12/2012. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Ralph Bathurst on telephone no: 094140800 ext: 43279

Appendix 9

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILD PARTICIPANTS

Questions will be used to prompt the interview rather than as a survey or questionnaire, except for questions in bold. Children will be reminded that they can bring their sketchbooks with them to show me the work they have done about their school, but only if they want to take part in the research. The interviews will explore their work and the things they like best about school, the things they find difficult, and what they think could make school better for them and for others in the school.

The suggested list of topics below has been presented to them earlier, but the interviewer will aim to be responsive to what is raised by the children themselves, rather than imposing a structure on the child. It will also be important to ensure that the researcher clearly understands the meaning of the things chosen by the child to be included in their sketch book about the school.

Name:………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Pseudonym:………………………………………………………………………………………………..

How many years have you been coming to Watea School?…………………………………

How will we do this interview?

If you have your sketch pad you, I would love you to show me what you have done, but you certainly don't have to show me anything you don't want to. I would like to ask you if you can tell me or show me anything about:

• What happened on you best ever day at Watea School?

• What is the story of your worst day at Watea School?

• What is the funniest thing that has happened to you at school?

• What is the hardest thing about school for you?

• What do you like best about Watea School?

•   If you had a magic wand and could make a wish to change something at school, what would it be? Why do you want to change this thing?

•   Show me a picture or a photograph of the thing you like best, or worst, at school and why you think it is the best or worst thing.

•   What is the most important thing Watea School has done for you?

•   What advice can you give to pupils coming into year six at Watea School next year?

Overall, how would you rate Watea School, one being excellent and five being very poor?

Excellent………Good……..Neither good nor bad……..Poor…………….Very poor

1………………………2………………………3…………………………4………………………5.

Can you tell me why?

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

Proposed Research at Watea School 2013.

Kia ora and thank you for the opportunity to present my ideas for undertaking research at Watea School. The following is a proposed outline of the research and as such, is open for discussion and change. I envisage this as a collaborative venture and welcome suggestions and ideas for enhancing the research.

About the researcher:

My name is Christine Read and I live locally in Woodhill. My daughter attended Watea School as a pupil in the 1990s. I grew up and was educated in the ***** area, following on to become a registered General Nurse and Midwife at ***** Hospital. I have worked for most of my working life as a Midwife in *****, and for much of that time in community-based roles. My working life as a Midwife has been based around caring for women and families to support them to achieve the best for their newborn infants.

The desire for a deeper understanding of the circumstances and conditions of parenting and care for children prompted my return to education at a tertiary level. I have completed a BA in psychology and sociology (double major) and a BA Hons in sociology. I am currently enrolled in a PH.D. Programme at Massey University, Albany Campus as a part of my ongoing education. My focus continues to be on the needs of children in society, the support they and their families receive from social institutions, and the relationships of care for children and families with these institutions especially under conditions of social deprivation.

With these motivations, and being mindful of the way in which schools are increasingly being used as a site for liaison between government services concerned with the well-being of children and families, I have become interested in the manner in which schools negotiate their brief to both educate children and provide pastoral care. It is evident that children cannot be isolated from the circumstances of their lives, and schools in seeking to educate, care and support children will develop relationships with not only children, but also families and their local communities. In turn, these communities are embedded in wider society. In a time of media reports about standardization of curricula, the measurement of the individual academic achievement of students and individual teacher's performance, the story of care in helping children to achieve their full potential through these nested relationships has become lost. I want to play my part in doing this research to describe and explore the connections and relationships that are central to ensuring the effective function of schools within the context of their communities.

The research rationale.

Schools, with a significant number of children experiencing disadvantage, are faced with additional educational challenges to realise the capabilities of the students in their care. Poverty impacts negatively on the academic achievement of children in ways that have been well researched and documented: in diminished opportunities to take part in enriching experiences outside school hours; social exclusion within schools and peer groups predicated on differences in clothing and nutrition; environments outside the school that make it difficult for students to study (cold and overcrowded homes); low parental expectations of children based upon their own scholastic experiences and a concomitant reduction in the ability of parents to assist learning in their children; stereotyping and lowered expectations of children on the part of teachers; the transience of some families and the resultant inability of these children to establish a sense of connection and belonging within a learning environment. These factors are by no means unalterable, and many schools defy the odds in supporting their students to achieve. However, given this literature, it is important that successful innovations and creativity in meeting the challenges posed by poverty occasion celebration and where possible, replication.

But this must be done in ways that do not oversimplify or trivialise the work that is necessary for success.

This research aims to illuminate the efforts and successes achieved within the Watea School community in addressing the identifiable challenges and constraints it faces, day in and day out, as a low-decile school. In order to achieve this goal, I plan to work with Watea School over the full school year in 2013 to explore the ways in which the school community works together, the resources the school is able to access and mobilise to achieve its goals, and the problems and shortfalls which constrain the school's capability to reach its goals. This will involve a loosely structured plan of interviews and observations to canvass opinions and experiences of school life with all groups of people involved in the school community. In addition to this data, information will be collected from school communications, media and government sources to provide the socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical contexts within which the school operates.

In order to do justice to the aims of the research, and in line with the desire to relate the complexities and realities of the story of providing care in education, I have chosen to focus on the experiences of a single school community in as much depth as possible. In discussions with others in the ***** community, Watea School was recommended to me as a school that would be likely to prove interested in this project because it has clearly identified the need to work with its community to provide the best for its children in both educational and pastoral care.

Other schools may find when reading the reports written about the research, that they do not identify with everything in the data. Nevertheless, I believe that those who share the work of educating children under similar circumstances will recognize and be informed by the power of the stories revealed in the research. This is not about comparing one school with another, but about communicating the reality of a shared concern with achieving the best for children under difficult circumstances. The aspirations, goals, plans and actions of one school community will provide a way of looking at issues within the wider educational sector. The

possibilities exist for promoting dialogue within the Watea School community and in wider society and about successes and challenges faced in the daily lives of all involved with life in the school.

In writing about the research, care will be taken to ensure that Watea School's interests will be respected as a participant in the research in addition to respecting the rights of each individual research participant. This will require ongoing discussion of ethical issues between me, my supervisors and with the school community through all stages of the research

Proposed schedule of data collection

Following ethics consent in 2012, (hopefully by November), data collection will commence about the geographical site of Watea School, geographical mapping of the surrounding area, the characteristics of the social environment in which it is situated and the implications this has for the school population. It is anticipated that this information will be able to be collected from public government websites, and publically listed information about the school. Data collection will commence from written materials at the school, and written communications/policies on the school website. The ongoing collection of data from school communications, media representations and government policy and discussion documents will continue on throughout the following school year in 2013.

Presentations about the research will be made to different groups within the school community before applying for ethics consent: The Board of Trustees; the teaching faculty; possibly a group of senior students. It is envisaged that these groups will have a contribution to make in shaping the research to better meet the research aims.

At the commencement of the school year in 2013, and after having ensured that Massey University Ethics consent has been gained, information will be disseminated about the research project. A timeline for data collection will be drawn up for the year as a take-home notice and as a posting on the school website.

At the commencement of the school year, a programme of open-ended interviews will commence with all those who work in the school community and who are willing to take part: The Board of Trustees, The Principal, Teachers, Support teachers, Administration staff, Maintenance staff, Health Clinic staff, Social worker, and any visiting support workers providing occasional or periodic services. While it would be best to do as many individual interviews as possible, it may be expedient to conduct group interviews on occasion. Some demographic data will be collected about the participants: role and function within the school; length of tenure at the school; previous experiences that impact on the performance of school duties. Questions will be asked that encourage participants to explore their understandings of what they hope to achieve in their roles within the school, what plans they have for realising these hopes, what would be helpful for them as individuals and the school in general to implement their hopes and plans, and what circumstances pose challenges and constrain them. The quality of their relationships will be explored: with students; families; the teaching faculty; support workers; professional bodies; other community organisations; media and government agencies.

The participants will be asked to discuss changes within the school: changes they have designed and implemented; changes that have impacted positively on their work in the education and support of pupils and changes that have impacted negatively on their work in the education and support of pupils. They will also be asked about the impacts of environmental change (social, economic, cultural, political and personal), positive or negative, that they perceive as affecting them in their work within the school community.

Concomitantly with this round of interviews, the researcher will attend as many events within the school, including those that are open to families, to observe and make notes about the way the school engages with parents/guardians and the wider community. The researcher will also attend staff meetings to observe the internal dynamics within the school. The researcher will be available to spend some time in the classrooms of individual teachers to observe teacher/children interactions, and the way that children interact with each other. This will be

supplemented by informal observations and conversations with children in the playground in recess times.

It is anticipated that the researcher will becomes increasingly better informed about the primary school education sector during the course of this process of interviewing and observation. It may therefore be necessary to interview some participants more than once to explore issues as they arise more fully. Alternatively, a participant may also wish to communicate additional or different information at a later date. The extended period of time in which data collection is possible will enable these changes to be captured, especially if there are events over the course of the year that prompt a period of rapid change within the school and the educational sector.

The latter part of the year (final two terms) will be more concerned with capturing data from parents and students. Children in year six and their parents will be canvassed to participate for several reasons: they are more likely, although not necessarily, to have had a longer experience of the school; the children are older and more likely to be able to articulate their feelings and thoughts about Watea School; the process can be approached for both parents and children as an opportunity to reflect on their experiences at Watea School- an 'exit interview'- before they move into a new school; as senior students in Watea School, children have status as 'experts' within the student body and can therefore speak with some authority about their knowledge of the school.

I envisage beginning the research process for parents/guardians and children at the end of term two by providing information through school notice to year six pupils. This will be followed in term two by sending out an information sheet outlining my wish to interview the parents of year six children, the reasons for the research, consent procedures, etc. (Appended Information Sheet). These interviews can be conducted with parents in groups or individually at a time and location of their convenience. As well as collecting important data from parents/guardians as participants, I will raise the ethical issues involved in conducting research with their

children as participants. This will enable me to facilitate a discussion of the issues and provide the opportunity for ensuring informed consent for their children to take part in the research.

The following trigger questions will be used to prompt responses from parents/guardians about their relationship with Watea School:

- How long has your child/children been at Watea School?
- How has the school been for you and your child? Does Watea School meet the needs of your child?
- Have you been involved in helping at the school? Tell me about it.
- Have you had any problems with the school? Tell me about these problems. ⍰ How have these been dealt with?
- Do you feel comfortable talking to the teachers, the Principal, the office staff, other staff, other parents, the Board of Trustees?
- Has your child been happy at the school? Why do you think that is?
- Is there anything you think Watea School should be doing that it is not doing?
- Is there anything (or things) that the school does that you think should not be done?
- Tell me what your overall impressions of the school are.
- What do you hope for the future of your child at school?
- How do you think your child will do in the next school he/she goes to?
- Is he/she prepared and are you confident about the next step in schooling for your child?
- How do you think Watea School compares to your own experiences at school? What was school like for you?

Parents will be required to give consent on their own behalf to take part in the research and on behalf of their child as parent/guardian. Parents will be free to take part without the inclusion of their children and vice versa. (See attached consent forms). However, a child taking part will not only require the signature of a parent/guardian, they will need to freely give consent on their own behalf.

The researcher will speak with the children in a classroom setting to explain the process of doing the research with them. This will not only be an opportunity for the researcher to recruit children as participants, but will also enable children to understand the way in which social research is done and allow the ethics and implications of social research to be explored. Issues and mechanics of consent will be discussed, including the need to use a 'nom de plume' so that they will not be identifiable in the final reports.

The aims of the research will be explored in the research by soliciting experiences of Watea School from the child participants. Listed below are some questions/suggestions to act as prompts, but I would also be seeking to solicit ideas from the children themselves about what they would like to include:

- Tell me the story of your best ever day at Watea School?
- What is the story of your worst day at Watea School?
- What is the funniest thing that has happened to you at school?
- What is the hardest thing about school for you?
- What do you like best about Watea School?
- If you had a magic wand and could make a wish to change something at school, what would it be? Tell me why you would like to make this change.
- Draw a picture/take a photograph of the thing you like best at school. Tell me why this is the best thing.
- What is the most important thing Watea School has done for you?
- What advice can you give to next year six pupils at Watea School?
- What advice would you give for children starting school next year?

The techniques and mechanisms for collecting data will be explored and discussed. I would prefer to offer a variety of ways for data collection to be implemented and for the individual children to decide how they would like to record their data, what form it should take and how widely they wish their work to be distributed. As a collective group of participants, I will suggest that they could create a piece of work themselves about Watea School to report to the rest of the school, their parents and future pupils.

The options that I envisage and will budget for include:

- A generously sized sketch pad in which each participant can write, draw, scrapbook in as their own. Written texts can be in any form, original or otherwise - stories, poetry, songs, etc.
- The opportunity for each participant to take 10 photographs which can be included in their own sketchbook.

The researcher will conduct a 10-15 minute interview, audio recorded, with each fully consented child towards the end of term four. The discussion will be about what they have worked on and done for the research and the significance of the things they have chosen to present. The children will be asked which parts of their work they would like to reproduce in a school research report where others such as their classmates, teachers and parents will see what they have done, which parts of their work I will be able to use with their nom de plume for academic research reports and which parts of their work they do not want used at all.

I would prefer to offer all children in year six the opportunity to take part in discussions about the research, giving a sketchbook and the opportunity to take photographs so that no child is singled out by not taking part in the research. I view this level of participation as an opportunity to learn how to 'do' social research. However, I would not interview children without consent, or include any materials produced by unconsented children in my reports.

Additional ethical considerations in research with children.
The power differential between adult researcher and child needs to be carefully considered. It is for this reason, care is taken to ensure that consent is given by the child, not just in a general sense, but also in terms of which material is consented for what purposes. The age of the children involved requires parental/guardian consent, but of equal importance is the right of children to determine on their own behalf whether they will take part in the first instance, and just which parts of their material they are happy to allow the researcher to use.

Qualitative research opens up the possibility for participants of any age to reveal information that is unexpected and troubling. I plan to compile a list of service providers that may be required to support any participant (adult or child) who reveals information which suggests the need for ongoing social or personal assistance. This issue is of even greater significance if a child reveals information about abuse, neglect or bullying. Confidentiality and trust-keeping must be negotiated in balance with the needs with and rights of a child to be kept safe. It is for this reason that it is important to discuss issues of confidentiality with children prior to them taking part in the research, and it is included as a part of the consenting process. It is equally important to work with an individual child in identifying an appropriate and trusted person to act on their behalf in dealing these problems. The school Social Worker is likely to provide some assistance in the first instance, and my supervisors will provide expert advice for dealing with ethical issues as they arise.

OUTLINE OF WORK

2012

 OCTOBER:

- Research Outline to Principal (1st of October)
- Gather e-mails/letters of support.
- Presentation to the Board of Trustees
- Presentation to the teaching body
- ? presentation of research outline to a focus group of students in year five, that is the future year six students in 2013.
- Completed literature search
- Draft done of methodology section
- Outline of work done for confirmation including a completed ethics consent with all supporting documentation

NOVEMBER

- Resubmit for ethics consent if required

- Begin collecting social, economic, ethnicity, geographical data
- Canvass the dominant themes in media and policy documents
- Completed writing about the methodology for research.

DECEMBER

- Ethics consent completed hopefully.
- Purchase equipment required
- Printing of materials including information sheets and prospective timeline for research.
- Collation of school documents: mission statements, manuals etc. to be worked on over the summer break
- Collating material from school website- information and links for the community

2013

JANUARY

- Complete preparations
- Begin attending school events once school year begins.
- Introduce the upcoming research to the staff, pupils and parents in school notice, and make presentations to teachers/support workers about the final form of the research.

FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL

- Data collection from the Principal, teachers, support workers and administration staff, teacher-aides, maintenance staff, health clinic staff etc.
- Transcription/writing up, maintaining information flows.
- Collate information from media sources (ongoing throughout the school year)
- Collect and collate information from Ministry/policy/principals and teacher professional forums/ interest groups (ongoing throughout the school year).

MAY, JUNE, JULY

- As above
- Information about the research to the parents of year six children

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER,

• Interviewing parents

• Classroom session(s) with year six children

• Distribute information sheets and sketchbooks to children for the final two terms

• Continue to interview educators/support workers as required

• Maintain data collection from media and policy sites

• Send out consent forms for parental/guardian consent for children

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER

• Complete interviews with children

• Complete interviews with parents

• Copy materials as required from children's sketchbooks and return to children

• Write a report for feedback for children

• Complete an interim report for parents and school

• Publish a children's report for Watea School and certification for all child participants in year six.

2014

• Write up findings in dissertation form

• Write up findings for publication

• Complete a full and final participant's summary for the school and adult participants.

• Complete a full participant summary for children.

• Report back to school in person in any format desired by the school

•

Appendix 11

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE IN EDUCATION

PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Confirmation and Ethics Consent procedures November-December 2012.

Following ethics consent, data collection will commence about the geographical site of Watea School, geographical mapping of the surrounding area, the characteristics of the social environment in which it is situated and the implications this has for the school population. It is anticipated that this information will be able to be collected from public government websites, and publically listed information about the school. Data collection will commence from written materials at the school, and written communications/policies on the school website. The ongoing collection of data from school communications, media representations and government policy and discussion documents will continue on throughout the following school year in 2013.

Term One, **beginning of February to April 19.**

At the commencement of the school year, a programme of open-ended interviews will commence with all those who work in the school community and who are willing to take part: The Board of Trustees, The Principal, Teachers, Support teachers, Administration staff, Maintenance staff, Health Clinic staff, Social worker, and any visiting support workers providing occasional or periodic services.

Questions will be asked that encourage participants to explore their understandings of what they hope to achieve in their roles within the school, what plans they have for realising these hopes, what would be helpful for them as individuals and the school in general to implement their hopes and plans, and what circumstances pose challenges and constrain them. The quality of their relationships will be explored: with students; families; the teaching faculty; support

workers; professional bodies; other community organisations; media and government agencies.

The participants will be asked to discuss changes within the school: changes they have designed and implemented; changes that have impacted positively on their work in the education and support of pupils and changes that have impacted negatively on their work in the education and support of pupils. They will also be asked about the impacts of environmental change (social, economic, cultural, political and personal), positive or negative, that they perceive as affecting them in their work within the school community.

Concomitantly with this round of interviews, the researcher will attend as many events within the school, including those that are open to families, to observe and make notes about the way the school engages with parents/guardians and the wider community. The researcher will also attend staff meetings to observe the internal dynamics within the school. The researcher will be available to spend some time in the classrooms of individual teachers to observe teacher/children interactions, and the way that children interact with one another. This will be supplemented by informal observations and conversations with children in the playground in recess times.

Term two: 19th April-12th July.

Information about the research will be distributed via school information systems to parents and a presentation of the research organised for interested parents. Class presentations will be organised for year six children to provide information about the research aims and processes. Particular care will be taken to ensure that there is understanding about ethical issues including their control over decisions to contribute to the research.

All year six children will receive a sketch book and pens and will be encouraged to book a time to take photographs of significant sites within the school.
Interviews with school staff and support workers will continue.

Parent interviews will commence.

Observations will be ongoing.

Term three, 29th July- 27th September

Interviews will be ongoing with parents, and photograph sessions will continue with children.

Interviews with children will commence from the beginning of September extending into the final term of the school year.

Term four, 14th October- 20th December

Interviews and observations completed. An initial summary of findings will be prepared for the children taking part in the research in order to distribute it to them before they finish their school year.

2014 onwards

Reports will be written to meet the academic requirements of my course

Communication will continue with the school with regard to research findings and how they can be used.

A summary of findings will be prepared in age appropriate language for children, and summary prepared for all other research participants.