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School Decline:

Predictors, Process and Intervention

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Education at Massey University, Auckland, New
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Abstract

The ramifications of school decline are profoundly serious for the students, staff and community of a school. School decline is the steady downwards spiral that some schools experience when a complex set of influences interact with negative and unresolved outcomes. This study explored the largely unresearched area of school decline and developed a set of potential predictors of decline that could assist in understanding, preventing or dealing effectively with school decline in the future. Grounded theory, selected as a methodology appropriate for exploratory research, was used to guide the process of data collection and theory development. Three schools, labeled by agencies and the media as being in serious decline or “failing”, were selected for the study. Adults who were in significant roles in the schools during the decline periods were interviewed about their experiences. As part of the data analysis and interpretation a set of propositions was drafted and was sent to these interviewees and to fourteen educational advisors who work with schools at risk and in decline. The advisors’ feedback on the propositions, analysis of school related documents, Education Review Office reports and Ministry of Education file documents provided rich additional data. The factors associated with the lead up to school decline, and the process of decline, are multilayered, contextual and complex. Each study school’s experience of decline involved a unique combination and order of occurrence of common factors and influences. Many of the issues that predispose schools towards decline are associated with, and are exacerbated by, unethical or unprofessional attitudes or behaviour by individuals, and unprofessional practices within the schools and between neighbouring schools. Once decline begins it escalates and is difficult to stop. This thesis contributes towards the development of a theory of school decline by identifying potential predictors of school decline and by describing how decline begins and escalates. It also identifies factors that are associated with interventions being insufficient or ineffective. The theory of school decline provides insights for school leaders and educational agencies that may assist in the prediction and prevention of school decline in the future.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Research Rationale	3
The Aim of the Thesis	4
The New Zealand Context	5
Dealing with School Decline in New Zealand	7
Understanding the Concept of Decline in Relation to this Study	10
An Overview of the Research Process	11
Organisation of the Thesis	13
CHAPTER 2 RELATED LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS	15
The Role of Literature in this Project	15
Defining Decline	17
Defining Failure	18
School Effectiveness	21
Schooling Improvement	24
Educational and School Change	25
Schools “at risk”	26
Educational Failure	28
Education Review and Measurement	28
Organisational Decline and Failure	29
School Ineffectiveness, Decline and Failure	32
The “Failure” of Innovative Schools	33
Interventions	34
New Zealand Research on Decline and Interventions	36
A Related Study	38
Linkage of the Literature with the Thesis	39
CHAPTER 3 GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY	45
Rationale for the Selection of Grounded Theory	47
The Genesis and Evolution of Grounded Theory	47
Tenets of the Grounded Theory Process	49

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Research partnership	49
Data analysis	52
The Initial Research Design	53
Sample selection	54
School selection and access	54
Interviewee selection	56
Gaining informed consent	57
School consent	57
Interviewee consent	59
Planned data collection strategies	60
Interviews	60
Key informants	62
Documents	63
Ethical Considerations	64
The “greater good”	64
“Do no harm”	65
Personnel perceived to be “the cause” of the problems	66
Anonymity and confidentiality	66
The schools	66
Individuals	67
Processes for handling research data	68
Using verbatim and referencing documents	68
Insider/outsider role	69
Moving from Initial Plans to Implementation	70
CHAPTER 4 DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND THEORY BUILDING	71
Predispositions	71
Mapping the Decline	72
Evolving Data Collection Process	72
Sampling changes	73
Document collection	73
Researcher reflection through memo writing	74
Literature	75
Data Analysis	76
Coding transcripts and generating categories	76

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Administrative and “open coding”	76
Constructing categories	77
Sorting categories	77
Refining and naming categories	78
Emergence of the core category	79
Document analysis	80
Developing the propositions with participants	81
Testing the propositions with educational advisors	85
Returning to the propositions	86
Building the Theory	87
Reader guidelines regarding references and quotes	90
CHAPTER 5 POTENTIAL PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL DECLINE	92
PART ONE: MACRO (SOCIETAL) INFLUENCES	94
Inadequate Responses to International and Educational Trends	95
Socio-economic Status and Demographic and Economic Factors	97
Schisms over Societal Values, Norms and Social Movements	99
Inability to Respond to Policy Changes	102
Impact of Community Conflict	105
PART TWO: MESO (INSTITUTIONAL) INFLUENCES	107
Decline in Student Enrolments	107
Ineffective Internal Management of Systems	109
Poor financial and asset management	109
Ineffective management of poor staff performance	111
Inadequate principal appraisal	114
Poor appointments resulting in performance problems	116
Ineffective school systems	118
Unresolved Issues and Problems	119
Governance difficulties	119
Loss of staff cohesion and morale	123
Problems associated with staff longevity	125
Familial and professional role conflict	127
The consequences of a deputy principal not being appointed principal	128
External Influence, Power and Authority	129
Ministry of Education support was difficult to achieve	130

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Lateness of response/ reluctance to act	130
Financial support was difficult to obtain	131
Reporting and bureaucratic requirements	134
Education Review Office methodology and reports	136
Perceived problems with the review process	137
Report accuracy and wording	138
Publicity following the publication of reports	139
The frequency of follow-up reviews	140
Post Primary Teachers Association	142
School Trustees Association	144
Competition between schools	145
The media	147
Consultants and facilitators	149
PART THREE: MICRO (PERSONAL) INFLUENCES	151
Inadequate and Ineffective Senior Leadership	152
Lack of experience and ability	152
Poor change management skills	154
Principal health and stress problems	155
Unprofessional and unethical behaviour	156
The Potential for Personal Responses to Help or Hinder	157
Lack of awareness of problems and control of information	157
Dissonance, divided loyalties and passive responses	159
Ineffective active responses	161
Highly regarded staff left the school	163
Rationalisation and coping strategies	164
Destructive personal agendas	165
Loss of student and parental confidence	166
Summary of the Findings Related to Decline Predictors	167
CHAPTER 6 THE DECLINE PROCESS	170
Catalysts, Crises and Critical Mass	173
Crises	173
Reaching critical mass	176
Competing Forces	176
Negative forces	177

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Education policy	177
Leadership	179
Governance	180
Community conflict/contests	181
Teacher Unions	182
Destructive personal responses	184
Unethical/unprofessional behaviour	185
Ineffective performance	187
Agency support and/or intervention	188
Positive forces	190
Training for boards of governors/trustees	191
Schools cooperating	191
Interventions	191
Effective performance	192
Constructive personal responses	193
Escalation of the Decline	195
Leadership behaviour	196
Resignations and appointments	197
School competition	198
Student achievement	198
ERO reviews and adverse media publicity	199
MOE interventions	201
CAPNA Process	203
Self-perpetuating Phase	204
Summary of the Findings Related to the Decline Process	210
CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	213
Indicators and Predictors of Decline	214
Decline Prevention	223
Fostering ethics and professionalism	224
Encouraging appropriate personal responses	227
Ensuring effective leadership	228
Promoting effective governance	234
Managing government policy implementation	236
Coping with Decline and Intervention	241

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Why external intervention is required	242
Seeking help	245
MOE intervention	247
ERO reviews and resultant publicity	251
Agency interactions	254
Independent review and support	255
School Closure	257
Discussion Summary	258
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION	259
Introduction	259
The Aims, Objectives and Contributions of the Thesis	259
Implications for Schools, Agencies and Policy Makers	261
Research Limitations	263
Areas for Future Research	264
Final Thoughts	266
BIBLIOGRAPHY	293

List of Figures:

Figure 1	Data strategies, collection and use.	46
Figure 2	The process of refining categories	79
Figure 3	Extract from the draft research propositions	82
Figure 4	Draft “at risk” indicators	83
Figure 5	Process of Building Theory from Case Study Research	88
Figure 6	Unresolved issues/problems	92
Figure 7	Potential predictors: Macro (Societal)	94
Figure 8	Potential predictors: Meso (Institutional)	107
Figure 9	Potential predictors: Micro (Personal)	151
Figure 10	Potential predictors	168
Figure 11	The decline process: Beginnings and escalation	171
Figure 12	Generalised decline timeline	172
Figure 13	The decline process: Competing forces	178
Figure 14	The decline process	211
Figure 15	Macro (Societal) influences/predictors	215

Figure 16:	Meso (Institutional) influences/predictors	216
Figure 17	Micro (Personal) influences/predictors	217

List of Appendices:

Appendix A	Glossary	267
Appendix B	Information Sheets	271
Appendix C:	Consent forms	279
Appendix D	Guiding questions for interviews	281
Appendix E	Ethics Committee meeting discussion document	282
Appendix F	MOE file documents	284
Appendix G	Memo writing	285
Appendix H	Data analysis process: Sorting categories	286
Appendix I	Monitoring sheet	288
Appendix J	Data analysis process: Transcript page	289
Appendix K	Examples of responses to the propositions	290

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates issues associated with school decline in three selected schools that went through an extended period of decline. The thesis explores the impact of school decline on school organisation and effectiveness, on the professional and personal lives of some school leaders and staff, and on the school community. The research topic was pursued in the hope that the knowledge gained will be used to help prevent such problems in the future or, at least, provide guidelines for when and how to intervene in order to resolve problems as early as possible. The research involved listening to the experiences of people who were either trustees or were in leadership positions¹ in one of the three study schools during their periods of decline. The study triangulates these data with the experiences of educationalists who work with schools at risk or in trouble, with documents and with related literature.

The three study schools are urban, co-educational, secondary schools catering for students from year 9 to year 13². They each serve a multicultural community but the three communities differ in the mix of ethnicities comprising the school rolls. While decile³ ratings differ, all three schools were in the lowest half of the decile groupings and each was the lowest decile school compared to neighbouring schools. All three schools were, for some years after they opened, successful schools with growing rolls and well respected reputations in their local communities and in the educational community. Early stages of decline became evident in all three schools shortly before the beginning of Tomorrow's Schools⁴ in 1989. Early decline indicators included concerns about leadership effectiveness, poor leadership appointments, low student achievement, factions amongst the staff and in

¹ The professional leaders interviewed included people holding the positions of associate principal, deputy principal, assistant principal and head of department or faculty.

² These are the typical secondary schooling years for a New Zealand student aged approximately 13 to 18 years.

³ New Zealand schools are given a decile status based on a set of criteria and calculated using Census information. They are ranked from 1 to 10 and the categories broadly correlate to socio-economic status. Decile 1 schools are the 10 per cent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 10 schools have the lowest proportion of these students. Some school funding (about 4%) is allocated on the basis of decile ranking in an attempt to provide equity.

⁴ Tomorrow's Schools was the name given to a major educational policy change that took place in New Zealand in 1989. It changed schools to self-managing organisations governed by boards comprising mostly parents of enrolled students.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

the communities, inefficient systems, poor financial management, poor teacher performance remaining unchallenged and unresolved controversial issues. Decline continued and escalated in each school over approximately a decade, through the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools and after. During the periods of decline, each of the schools had three principals and a number of changes to their senior leadership teams. In all three schools student numbers dropped, over a decade, to approximately a third of what they were during the preceding successful period. Following particular events there were roll drops of between 5 and 10 percent in less than a year. Each school had at least one Ministry of Education (MOE) statutory intervention as a result of concerns expressed in Education Review Office⁵ (ERO) reports. The timing of decline related events and activities varied, resulting in a pattern unique to each school. While the timing and the specific nature of each activity varied, however, the types of issues, problems and events were similar for all three schools.

My research looks back on this period of decline in the three study schools. By the time this research commenced, increasing effectiveness was evident in all the schools. Trustees governing the schools had received training, roll numbers had increased or stabilised, staff morale had improved, systems had been upgraded, poor behaviour and performance had been challenged or dealt with, constructive relationships were being fostered with neighbouring schools, quality appointments had been made and the outcomes of effective staff professional development were becoming evident. This progress was evidenced by the end of MOE interventions and ERO reviews being scheduled in what it calls the “normal cycle” for schools.

This chapter provides the reader with a brief overview of the thesis. It introduces the research topic, the study schools, the researcher's background and motivation for selecting this topic and the overall aim and objectives of the thesis. The chapter provides an exploration of the policy and regulatory environment during the time of the decline of the three study schools, as well as the wider educational context in New Zealand over the period in which the decline took place. The concept of school decline is defined for the purpose of this study and an overview of the research process is outlined. Finally, this

⁵ The Education Review Office is the agency that has responsibility to regularly review the compulsory education sector in New Zealand, including all early childhood centers and schools. ERO is funded by the government, is otherwise independent, and reports directly to the Minister of Education.

chapter provides an introduction to the structure of the thesis with a summary of the contents of each chapter.

Research Rationale

There are a number of New Zealand schools that are entering into, or are already in, a spiral of decline⁶. For some schools, in the past, this downward trend continued until the failure was extreme, public and damaging for the reputation of the school and the people in it. Some schools in New Zealand have been closed because of their performance. In the study schools, intervention took place at a very late stage of their decline. Nolan and Wilson (1998), in their evaluation of MOE interventions, found that other New Zealand schools had similar decline experiences. The international research on support and accountability interventions makes it very clear that there are no easy solutions to school decline and that reforming or repairing damaged schools is a long-term and complex process (Barber, 1998; Kovacs, 1998b; Reynolds, 1998; Stark, 1998; Stoll & Myers, 1998; Whatford, 1998). The more extensive the damage to a school's reputation and the longer the period of decline, the more difficult, more expensive and more time-consuming it is to reform and rebuild the school (National Audit Office, 2006, p. 7). Most importantly, the children in such schools are at risk of having a stressful and less than ideal education during their compulsory years⁷. In New Zealand, Schools Support Project (SSP)⁸ reports and ERO reports provide evidence that some students have spent half their compulsory schooling time in a failing school and, consequently, have missed out on the types of learning experiences they deserve (Sinclair, 1999).

As an educational consultant, part of my research and development role has involved working in many schools that are having difficulties. These schools have ranged in location, size and decile. Some had declined over many years. Others schools, at the early stages of problems, needed help either to avert a crisis or to prevent decline beginning. Some of the schools had received unfavourable ERO reports and were exposed in the media. Others

⁶ The Ministry of Education (MOE) has a division which employs Schools Performance Teams to work with schools at risk. School Support Services teams are also working with schools having difficulty throughout the country, on contract to the MOE. Since October 2001, 324 interventions have been initiated and as of September, 2007, 97 were current.

⁷ In New Zealand, education is compulsory until children turn 16 years old.

⁸ The Schools Support Project, later named School Support Services (SSS), is the division of the Ministry of Education that has responsibility to support schools that are having difficulties.

had not experienced either unfavourable reports or media censure because they acted with urgency to address their problems and in order to protect their public reputation. During these work experiences, I watched and listened to students who were aware of the negative reputation of their school and who identified themselves with that reputation of failure. They were powerless to improve their situation and experienced “shame”, “anger”, “frustration” and “sadness”⁹ at being trapped in it. Adults in declining schools have had their personal lives and careers adversely affected. Effective intervention and support, at the earliest possible stage, would clearly be an advantage to all parties. Even in the schools where the problems have not become public knowledge, there have been serious and sad situations that have required significant time and appropriate support to repair and heal. As school decline escalated, I observed that many staff suffer loss of confidence, fulfillment and esteem as well as possible damage to career paths. Having personally witnessed distress and damage to children’s education, and to adults’ efficacy and careers, in declining/failing schools, I made a commitment to become well-informed in order to do all I could to prevent school decline from happening or to provide effective support once decline begins. Appropriate parts of the thesis are written in the first person in order that my “researcher-as-instrument” stance is clear and overt (Ball, 1993, p. 46).

It is intended that this thesis will contribute to an understanding of the experiences of some of the school leaders and trustees who were involved in the study schools during a period of decline. Insights are sought into the institutional systems and structures that, at best, allowed the decline to continue or, at worst, contributed to the decline. The thesis will suggest a theory for illustrating school decline by describing early indicators associated with the study schools’ decline, developing these indicators into potential predictors of decline and by describing the process of decline.

The Aim of the Thesis

The main aim of this thesis is to contribute towards a theory of school decline. There are four objectives within this broad aim.

⁹ When I worked as a researcher in their schools, these are words that students used to describe their personal situations.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

- The first objective is to explain why the schools I selected to study became predisposed to experiencing problems.
- The second objective is to gain an understanding of how decline begins.
- The third objective is to analyse the early phase of decline and to identify factors that have the potential to slow or halt decline.
- The final objective is to understand why decline escalates to the stage of becoming very difficult to stop.

Initially, the study objectives included exploring school failure. Participants were provided with information about the proposed study that discussed school “decline and failure”. As literature was sought and data were analysed and interpreted, it became clear that the focus was not on school failure and closure. Nor was it primarily on school reform or improvement, although there is an extensive body of academic literature on school reform, schooling improvement and how to “fix” failed schools. The foci needed to be the precursors and the process of decline. This study stops at the point when school decline has escalated to the stage of the school being described as a “failed school”¹⁰.

The New Zealand Context

New Zealand has experienced major changes to its education system over the last two decades that have had implications for all schools. These changes are discussed at the outset because reference is made to aspects of the wider educational policies, and the changes, throughout the thesis.

In 1984, the Fourth Labour Government was elected and began introducing neo-liberal changes to aspects of New Zealand’s economy and ways of operating. The education sector was identified as one, of many, areas in need of change. The resulting changes required of schools were significant and “almost continuous” between 1984 and 1994 (Sullivan, 1994, p.3). A taskforce, chaired by Brian Picot, was set up to consider possible reforms to the management of schools (Snook et al., 1999). It reported back in May 1988

¹⁰ The literature on educational failure and decline is discussed in Chapter 2.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

and the resultant policy document, “Tomorrow’s Schools”, (Lange, 1988) was implemented through the Education Act 1989. David Lange, the New Zealand Prime Minister and the Minister of Education at the time, outlined the philosophy behind the new system as explained by Fiske and Ladd (2000):

Standards in education would not be uniformly imposed from the centre but would allow for local differences and allow schools to shape themselves in ways which met the distinctive needs of the local community. In this local responsibility lies the greatest potential for good of Tomorrow’s Schools, and perhaps its greatest risk.
(p.57)

There were two very different systems in place prior to and after 1989 when Tomorrow’s Schools legislation was enacted. Prior to 1989, the education system was managed by a government department, The Department of Education (DoE). Staffed primarily by ex-teachers and principals, it was characterised by centralist policies and practices (Fiske & Ladd, 2000) and employed a staff of inspectors to evaluate and monitor the performance of individual teachers. According to an OECD report, it had a high level of control over individual schools and the management of their staffing and resources (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1995, p.100). Principals were appointed by DoE staff whose inspectors offered advice and support but they also had considerable authority to make decisions with, or for, schools and for individual leaders and teachers (Spreng, 2005, p. 67).

Under the new regime, three changes were highly relevant to this research. First, the large DoE was replaced by a new and smaller Ministry of Education. The MOE was responsible directly to the Minister of Education and saw its role as carrying out government policy, rather than supporting schools which were now expected to self-manage. Second, a new government review agency, called the Review and Audit Agency¹¹, was established to audit and monitor school performance. Finally, each school would now be self-managing and governed by an elected Board of Trustees (BOT) which would write a charter for its school¹² and the school’s performance would be monitored against its charter. A further

¹¹ The Review and Audit Agency became the Education Review Office (ERO) shortly after it was set up and before review teams completed their first reviews (Mallard, 2000).

¹² Initially the majority of each charter was provided for the school by the Ministry of Education and was mandatory. There were a small number of sections that each school could develop as a unique reflection of its own community’s values and goals.

change was the decision of the newly elected National Government, in 1990, to abolish enrolment zones giving parents the right to select a school for their children, resulting in immediate decreases in the student numbers (Carpenter, 2000; Hawk & Hill, 1997). Fiske and Ladd recognised the extent of the impact of de-zoning on secondary schools, in particular, saying “the effect of this ruling was to change the culture of public education in New Zealand” (2000, p.58).

The changes to education were consistent with a more general neo-liberal thrust that focused on devolution of power, individual choice and individual responsibility. The impact of the changes on the study schools must be considered within the wider context of three schools that began to decline under the previous system and continued to decline under Tomorrow’s Schools.

Dealing with School Decline in New Zealand

During the decades prior to Tomorrow’s Schools, when the DoE was the controlling body, as a result of the post-war “baby boom” most schools had full rolls, new schools were being built and there seemed to be little public discussion or awareness of school decline or failure. The responsibility for school performance lay with principals and with the DoE. Principals held the most important role in controlling what happened within schools. If principals were perceived as not performing effectively then DoE inspectors intervened. The most frequently used strategies for dealing with the poor performance included finding the principals another career path, convincing them to retire or moving them to another school. Fiske and Ladd (2000) criticised the regime, claiming there was a perceived conflict of interest for Department inspectors who were available to schools in a supportive role but who were also asked to report on the performance of principals and had the responsibility to communicate official criticism.

Since the implementation of Tomorrow’s Schools in 1989, government policies and the roles of the MOE and ERO have evolved and changed (Mallard, 2000). There has been a shift from an initial phase of deliberate and total non-intervention by the MOE to the current range of interventions, some of which are statutory and take back areas of governance, control and/or management from schools. The major role of the new ERO

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

was, and still is, to audit every school in the country, independently of the MOE and of any assistance which schools might receive from the MOE (Spreng, 2005). ERO, however, has not had an explicit definition of school failure. Although ERO review reports described and attributed responsibility for problems, they did not make any attempt to measure failure (p.69). At the beginning of this new era, there was a clear policy of school self-management under which the MOE made it clear to schools that it did not have a role in intervention. Spreng (2005) discusses the approach of the MOE to failing schools and concludes:

Two explicit expectations of Tomorrow's Schools, as they relate to school failure, can be construed. The first goal was that inefficiencies in schools, and especially outright failure, would be identified earlier and more clearly, and that such failures would be corrected. The correction would be spurred by the market forces of unrestricted parental choice. Either failing schools would respond to the competitive pressures and improve themselves or the situation would be remedied through the exit of the failing schools from the system. In either case, the correction was supposed to happen primarily without government involvement. (p.69)

The major philosophical positionings around the extent of government control versus school autonomy were contested by school trustees and leaders, politicians and MOE personnel (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; McCauley & Roddick, 2001; Spreng, 2005). The contestation occurred throughout the change period, and has continued. The positionings form part of a wider political and economic debate on the role of schools in the community, the responsibility of governments for the provision of education and governmental responses to school decline and failure. Since schools play important social roles, in addition to the role of educator, in their local and wider communities (Hirschman, 1970), it has been argued that any government has a responsibility to provide quality education to all its children and that tolerating declining and failing schools is at odds with such an obligation (Spreng, 2005, p.1). The New Zealand education policy of non-intervention was driven by analysts and economists in the Treasury who thought it was counterproductive to help ineffective schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; McCauley & Roddick, 2001). As has been demonstrated through this research, in the early 1990s, this policy of non-intervention was followed to the extent of not providing support for schools, even when it was requested.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Following school de-zoning, there were growing public and political concerns about the ability of schools in low socio-economic communities to survive and deliver effective education. In 1993, the MOE carried out a review of school resourcing that identified problems associated with the way schools were funded, particularly schools in low socio-economic areas (Norris, Bathgate & Parkin, 1994). As a result of these review findings, a socio-economic indicator was developed and, in 1995-96, schools were allocated a decile ranking upon which they were partially funded.

By the mid 1990s, it became clear that some schools were in need of support and there was reluctance, on the part of the MOE, to consider closure as an option. This dilemma left the MOE in the position of having to write new policies and set up systems and procedures to identify schools in need of improvement and support. A report commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), entitled “Overcoming failure at school”, describes the New Zealand education system, by 1998, as having:

...a three pronged approach to combating school failure. It has a number of measures intended to raise school performance generally, a central monitoring system to identify problems and the Schools Support Project¹³ with a programme for overcoming difficulties in individual schools. (Kovacs, 1998a, p.92)

This three pronged approach began in 1994 with the setting up of the Schools Support Project (SSP) that would provide a range of strategies to support identified schools (McCauley & Roddick, 2001). It was followed, in 1995, by the SSP’s first component to be implemented, The Safety Net Strategy (SNS). The three possible interventions through SNS were informal action, formal action and Statutory Action¹⁴. The latter form of intervention was extended, in 1996, to include Business Case interventions. In 1998, the Schools Support Project identified the following “At Risk Situations” for schools:

- The quality of care appears to jeopardise the safety and well being of the students involved.

¹³ The Schools Support Project was a division of the Ministry of Education that was set up to provide “safety net assistance strategies” for schools that had been identified as being “at risk” in some way.

¹⁴ The Minister of Education was able to replace a board of trustees with a commissioner

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

- The quality of education provided appears to be below the minimum expected and may be detrimental to the interests of students involved.
- The performance (including financial management) of the board/management gives serious cause for concern.
- Disharmony appears to exist in the relationship between any of the board of trustees, the principal, the staff or the community.
- The viability of the school appears to be at risk due to factors outside the control of the board. (MOE, 1998)

In addition to the Schools Support Project, the Schooling Improvement Strategy (SIS) began, in 1995, to identify “at risk” clusters of schools and to implement a series of school cluster initiatives to bring about improvements to student achievement through planned interventions (McCauley & Roddick, 2001).

The Education Standards Act 2001 provides a wider, than previously available, range of statutory interventions that can be recommended by ERO and by the MOE, with the decision to intervene being made by the Minister of Education. Intervention options include requiring a school to provide information, developing and implementing an action plan, directing a school to appoint a specialist advisor, the appointment of a Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) who can take over specific areas of responsibility or the appointment of a Commissioner who replaces the BOT as governor of the school (MOE, 2001). The Minister of Education has, in recent years, closed a number of schools, including secondary schools, which declined to the extent of being judged unviable.

Understanding the Concept of Decline in Relation to this Study

An early challenge of this research project was how to define the term “decline” in order to select study schools. I was unable, as other writers have noted, to locate clear or agreed definitions of decline (Gorard, Taylor & Fitz, 2002, p. 381; NAO, 2006, p.19; Woodfield & Gunby, 2003, p.877). Initially, I decided to select schools that had declined severely enough

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

to be described as “failing” or “failed” by ERO, MOE and the media. It seemed reasonable to assume that a school that has failed will have also declined. Eventually, my analysis and writing shifted away from using the construct of failure as it became clear that there was a process of decline with phases that can be described and potentially predicted.

This construct “decline” does not easily lend itself to quantitative measurement because many of the associated factors are more observable than measurable. For example, all three of the study schools were subjected to negative media stories that caused distress but it does not seem helpful to set a minimum number of media exposures before the school would qualify as having failed. Trying to measure the seriousness of the decline by the number of years it took, or the extent of the roll drop might add a degree of reliability or confirmation to the discussion but may have dubious validity. A decline can escalate and appear in quite a short time if a crisis becomes public. On the other hand, decline could have remained hidden for a period of years.

Severe decline was evident in all three schools in this study through a decrease over time in student numbers, staff numbers, variety of educational programmes offered, staff and student morale, confidence of parents in the school, financial viability, physical appearance, systems failure, school reputation, the level of criticism in review reports, and MOE confidence. As the research progressed and data were analysed, the significance of the indicators of decline and of their inter-connectedness became clear, resulting in the potential predictors of decline (Chapters 5 and 7) and in the theory of decline articulated in Chapter 8.

An Overview of the Research Process

Three secondary schools that declined to the extent of being described as “failing”,¹⁵ but which are now operating successfully, were selected as the study schools. Data were collected from a sample of 36 school leaders and trustees, who were active in these three schools during a period in which they were in decline. Previous principals, however, were

¹⁵ Each of the study schools qualified as a school that had been through a serious enough decline to have been identified in the recent past as “failing” by the MOE, ERO and the media.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

not interviewed¹⁶. The data collected from this sample focused on the periods of decline, and was collected retrospectively.

The following research questions guided the interviews with study school participants.

- How aware were the adults of the extent of the school's decline?
- What intervention options did people have (legal, political, personal)?
- What actions, if any, did they take to intervene?
- Were these actions judged successful, and why or why not?
- Why did such actions not prevent or significantly interrupt the decline?
- Why did individuals and/or groups not take further action?
- How did they feel about being involved during the period of decline?
- Did they feel in any way responsible for the decline?
- Were outside agencies aware of the school's problems?
- If so, what actions did they take and why were they not effective enough?
- Retrospectively, what can be learned from the experiences of the adults who were involved, particularly those in leadership positions?

During the analysis of the data, a set of propositions was developed that was sent to study school participants for comment. Data were also triangulated with documents, sourced from my collection¹⁷, ERO and MOE. Together this information provides a record of events, as well as reflections of people's responses to those events. I also sent the propositions to a second sample of fourteen education advisors who currently work in schools that are at risk or in difficulties. These educational advisors commented on the propositions in relation to their past and current experiences in a wide range of schools.

¹⁶ Because previous principals were viewed as one of the main factors contributing to the decline of the schools, they were the most vulnerable or likely to be harmed by the research and informing them could have jeopardised the participation of other participants. This is further discussed in relation to ethical considerations (Page 63).

¹⁷ Documents collected when I was working in the schools in evaluation and research roles include minutes of meetings, action plans, evaluation reports, MOE and ERO correspondence, statistical data and media reports.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter 2 discusses the related literature and concepts. It opens with a discussion of the role of the literature in this project, introduces the notions of “decline” and “failure” and explores the literature in these areas, identifying a gap in knowledge. Areas of literature, relevant to decline and failure, include school effectiveness; schooling improvement; educational and school change; schools at risk; educational failure; education review and measurement; organisational decline and failure; school ineffectiveness, decline and failure; the failure of innovative schools; interventions and New Zealand research on decline and interventions.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach of grounded theory. The chapter explains my choice of grounded theory as an appropriate exploratory methodology for this study and describes the origins of grounded theory and its evolution into a methodology that is used in divergent and varied ways. The particular approach I have taken in using the grounded theory method is outlined and the key tenets are described: my partnership with research participants; the collection and analysis of the data; data interpretation; saturation and the process of the theory emerging. The methodological discussion explains the decisions made, and criteria used, for selecting a sample of schools and interviewees, the setting up process and management of the ethical issues.

Chapter 4 describes what actually took place in the doing of the research; instead of, and in addition to, what was initially planned. I explain the process of sampling, interviewing, data analysis and the development of a set of propositions in response to issues and needs identified as data were analysed. The chapter continues with an outline of how a second sample of respondents (educational advisors) was selected and their feedback on the draft propositions. Secondary data were sourced from my school files, ERO reports and official MOE files. New literature, associated with significant categories that emerged from the data, were sourced and used to triangulate emerging findings. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the theory was developed.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the findings of the research. Problems that predisposed the schools towards being at risk are described in Chapter 5 as a series of potential predictors of decline. Problems occurred at a societal level (macro), at the institutional level (meso) of the school and other organisations and at the level of the individual people involved

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

(micro). Throughout the chapter, predisposing factors are presented as potential predictors of decline and are summarised and highlighted at the end of each section. The process, through which these predisposing problems collectively moved each school into decline, is described in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 7, the indicators and predictors of decline are listed and discussed. The rest of the chapter addresses the implications for school personnel, for agency personnel and for governments in relation to the prevention of decline and what can be learned from ineffective interventions that might assist in designing effective interventions.

The final chapter describes the contributions of the thesis through revisiting and reflecting on the original aim and objectives, the theory of school decline is summarised and its implications for schools, agencies and policy makers are discussed. Subsequent sections include acknowledging the limitations of the research and discussing possibilities for future research into school decline. Lastly, school personnel are reminded of the strong rationale for addressing issues and problems early and effectively.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS

At the early stage of conceptualising and exploring the topic of school decline and failure, it was important to investigate the related areas of research and literature. Because of my work in schools at risk, I was well informed on school effectiveness and schooling improvement literature but I was unsure what research was available on the reasons for school decline. My initial search revealed a gap in knowledge that justified conducting this research. Consequently, a methodological approach appropriate for exploratory research was required. I selected grounded theory which is a methodological approach developed by the theorists Glaser and Strauss in their seminal text *The discovery of grounded theory* (1967). This chapter begins by explaining the controversial role of literature in grounded theory¹⁸ and how it was used in this project. The concepts of “decline” and “failure” are explored, noting that the two terms are often not well defined and sometimes used interchangeably. This chapter then explores eleven areas of knowledge related to school and organisational decline and failure, integrating literature from the initial search with literature sought as analysed data indicated areas of interest. The addition of the latter brought rich information to bear on associated issues.

The Role of Literature in this Project

There is a major debate amongst users of grounded theory about the role literature can and should play in the methodological process. Glaser (1998) appears to have given conflicting advice. He said “do not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is done” (p. 67). He later (p. 120) recommended publishing a paper based on the literature review before beginning the data collection in order that, if the theory that emerges differs from the literature, the researcher will be able to reflect on the differences. Researchers have long debated the role of literature in grounded theory with some advocating doing most of the fieldwork before searching out any literature so that preconceptions do not influence the theory development (Allan, 2003; Dey, 1999;

¹⁸ The grounded theory approach is discussed more fully in Chapters 3 and 4.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Emerson, 1983). Other researchers suggest leaving the literature search until categories begin to emerge during the analysis phase, at which time the researcher can seek literature that they know will be relevant and “the extant literature is incorporated into the study as data” (Fernandez, 2004, p. 86; Rose, 2006). Trauth (2001) provides what could be considered as a synthesis of the two positions by arguing that most writers agree the researcher should not ignore the literature but not allow it to interfere with using an inductive rather than a deductive process. Glaser and Strauss urged researchers to be open and broad-minded about what constitutes data and to use “any material bearing in the area” (1967, p. 169). At the advanced stage of the data collection the role of literature becomes very important and “is read as a source of *more data* to be compared with existing grounded data” (Trauth, 2001, p.109). Incorporating new literature, therefore, becomes another stage in the investigation during which “findings in the literature can be used as data” (Rose, 2006, p. 11).

I have elected to use literature both before and throughout the data collection and analysis. A literature search was conducted as a requirement of the doctoral programme, in which I was enrolled, and was part of designing the research proposal, prior to the decision to use grounded theory as the methodology. The purpose of the initial literature search was to clarify what information was available on my topic. The initial key concepts, used as search words, were “decline” and “failure” in relation to schools. Early literature searches resulted in the conclusion that there appeared to be little literature on the reasons for school decline or how it began. There was some literature on school closure but it was always related to roll decline as a result of population changes (Keough, 1978). The search was broadened to include concepts such as “at risk”. This led to promising titles which turned out to have little relevant content. The focus was usually on individual students, or groups of students, who were considered “at risk” or “failing”. It sometimes broadened to include schools that had a large number of “at risk” students but it did not focus on the school itself being “at risk” of decline or failure. Wider searching led to references to school decline or failure but only in relation to research or reflections that focused on intervention, reform, improvement or the effectiveness of the schools. These topics, which are part of the extensive literature on school effectiveness and schooling improvement, are included in the discussion because their relevance later became clear. The knowledge gained about various interventions is relevant to the study of decline because a number of interventions, in New Zealand and overseas, have not been entirely successful and the school decline has continued either irrespective of the intervention or after a short period of remission (Brady,

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

2003; Cuban, 1990; Datnow, 2002, 2005; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Nolan & Wilson, 1998; McCauley & Roddick, 2001; Rau, Baker & Ashby, 1999).

Later, during the process of analysing data, some specific areas of interest were identified and I sought literature to compare with emerging categories. This additional literature assisted my understanding of some aspects of the decline process at an advanced stage of analysis and contributed to the theory building. The investigation of the literature begins with a clarification of the concepts of decline and failure. It continues with a discussion of key areas of related literature, namely school effectiveness; schooling improvement; educational and school change; schools “at risk”; educational failure; education review and measurement; organisational decline and failure; school ineffectiveness, decline and failure; the failure of innovative schools; interventions and New Zealand research on decline and interventions. The relevance to my study of each of these areas of literature is outlined.

Defining Decline

Literature about school decline, and definitions of it, were difficult to locate. The British National Audit Office report (NAO) says “There is no single definition of a poorly performing school” (2006, p. 19). Gorard, Taylor and Fitz, (2002, p. 381) searched for English schools that were in a “spiral of decline” and concluded that there was a “lack of official data over time and lack of agreed definitions” of decline. Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 42) begin their discussion on decline with the caveat that there has been little research on the antecedents of decline and note that warning signals, symptoms, causes and consequences of decline are interrelated. Burke and Cooper (2000), however, point out that the literature focuses not on the course or process of decline but on the consequences of decline. Boyne and colleagues (2004), similarly, claim that discussions on school decline occur only with reference to reform. It may seem self-evident that a period of decline occurs before failure. This appears to be the approach taken by most writers who have tended to identify phases of effectiveness or a continuum from “effective” at one end to “not effective”, or “failing”, at the other. At the most simplistic level, Woods (1979) describes the “divided” school. Ramsay, Sneddon, Grenville and Ford (1983) label the schools they studied as either “successful” or “unsuccessful”. This dichotomous way of sorting schools is also used by Rosenholtz who discusses “moving” and “stuck” schools

and pinpoints characteristics of less effective schools (1989, p. 32). Other writers have used a continuum or typology to indicate that a process is involved with decline. Stoll and Fink (1996; 1998), for instance, discuss a typology of five school cultures, which categorises schools on two continua; one of effectiveness to ineffectiveness and the other of improving to declining (1996, p. 85). The “cruising” and the “sinking” school are identified as declining and the “struggling” and “sinking” school as being ineffective. Lodge (1998, p. 151) says there is a continuum from “effective” to “ineffective” to “failing” and sees the failing end characterised by an “overwhelming sea of pressures”. Lauber (1984, p.32) argues that schools and communities follow predictable cycles and that “like it or not, your schools sooner or later will have to deal with decline”. Fink (1999; 2000, p. xiii) discusses the “attrition of change” and the concept of “cycles”, in relation to an innovative school that lost its edge. Miles and Snow (1994, p. 83) tell us that decline occurs “incrementally” while Sarason (1998, p. 119) says it is an “issue of degree”. Mintrop claims that schools can get, “stuck in decline without failing” (2004, p. 89). It could be argued that the three study schools were “stuck in decline” but that makes the process sound somewhat static, in contrast to the dynamic and escalating nature of the decline. Stoll and Fink argue that “schools are either getting better or they are getting worse because the rapidly accelerated pace of change makes standing still impossible” (1996, p. 85). This study demonstrates that the decline in the study schools escalated and intensified over time.

Defining Failure

Some writers appeared to consider the word “failing” as being synonymous with being ineffective or declining. Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 253) concur and list what they call “interchangeable terms” including dysfunctional, unstable, needing improvement, low performing and educationally bankrupt. Failure, on the other hand, was usually connected with external intervention and/or closure. Defining “failure” for profit-making organisations is relatively easy as they are judged as effective or ineffective in terms of profitability, efficiency or market potential (Scott, 1976, p. 56). There is a point at which an organisation becomes financially unviable, is put in receivership or liquidation and suffers “organizational death” (Singh, House & Tucker, 1989, p. 594). Similarly, the process of organisational decline can be monitored through an increasing loss of profit and/or growth in debt. There have been attempts to use criteria to assess the health or effectiveness of

not-for-profit organisations but Scott admits that “no one is exactly sure how to measure it” (1976, p. 57).

When examining schools, failure is very complex (Hargreaves, 2003; Slavin, 1998; Slavin, Karweit & Wasik, 1994; Thrupp, 1998). Precise definitions of school failure “remain elusive” (Lashway, 2003; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Children’s learning, or school success, cannot be quantified or measured as objectively as financial profit or loss. According to Woodfield and Gunby (2003, p.877), although politicians and educational review agencies identify schools as failing, they have not defined failure or developed measures for it. Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 252) claim that the term “failing school” is a relatively new one that surfaced in the 1990s. While the concept of school effectiveness has been studied for decades, the study of ineffectiveness is relatively new, its meanings are still being clarified and the characteristics of ineffectiveness have been based mostly on the experience gained from interventions (Lodge, 1998; Reynolds, 1998). MacBeath (1999, p.14) stresses that “the search for effective schools is not a value-free activity” and school stakeholders and agencies will hold differing views on what constitutes an effective school. Weiner (2001, p. 6) likewise explains that, “inevitably people will hold different perspectives on “failure” based on their positioning within it”. Such differing views may partly account for the lack of a clear definition of school failure.

In a discussion on school failure, Hargreaves notes that there are, “a variety of ways for a school to be ineffective” (2003, p. 13). Some schools are judged in terms of failing to meet the needs of society and, in particular, what Goodman calls the “third wave” of school change which is needed for the coming of the information age (Fink, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Goodman, 1995; Hargreaves, 2003). Schools can be made vulnerable because of external influences, such as demographic patterns, that result in a fall in student numbers. An example is a drop in birth rates from “plummeting” fertility which impacts on student numbers (Keough, 1978, p.7). The extent to which some schools fail their students is one of the most controversial areas of failure because student underachievement is directly linked to schools that serve low socio-economic communities (Harker, 2000; Harker & Nash, 1996; Hawk & Hill, 1996; Hughes et al, 1996; Lauder et al, 1999; Spreng, 2005; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1985; Thrupp, 1996; Thrupp, 1999). If schools are to be judged as succeeding or failing because of their place on league tables of student achievement, as measured by external high stakes assessment, then there are some schools that will always be close to the bottom, regardless of how much value they add to student

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

learning (Stoll & Myers, 1998). At the other end of the spectrum there are schools in high socio-economic areas that do not necessarily add value although their students arrive with high levels of achievement (McPherson, 1993; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Stoll and Fink (1998) described unidentified ineffective schools as “cruising” and ERO used this descriptor to criticise some New Zealand schools.

These forms of defining school failure through statistical neighbourhood, in relation to past performance or through value-added achievement are politically controversial and are typically resisted by elites who do not want their schools to be branded with the stigma of failure. (Hargreaves, 2003, p.153)

Recently, in some countries, low school performance has been defined “by failure to achieve state-mandated accountability targets, particularly test scores” (Lashway, 2003, p. 2).

Some writers and researchers focus more on the culture of the organisation and on aspects of organisational problems such as inefficient systems, unhappy or unhealthy relationships, low morale, resistance to change and poor leadership or governance (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Fink, 1999; Hargreaves, 2004; Middleton, 2004; Ranson, Farrell, Peim & Smith, 2005; Stoll & Fink, 1996, Wylie, 2002). These, and other examples of organisational problems, feature strongly in my research study. One of the most challenging aspects of organisational failure is to differentiate between the factors that might be most strongly associated with the decline’s genesis and those that are most likely a consequence of it. A key challenge for this research is to provide some insights into this topic.

Characteristics of ineffective schools have been identified through the process of attempted interventions and reforms (Myers & Goldstein, 1998; Reynolds, 1998). Some writers attribute descriptors to schools that probably cannot be measured. Rosenholtz (1985), for instance, describes failing schools as being characterised by “deepening detachment”, “resigned pessimism”, a “paralysis of spirit” and a “stagnation of vision”. Myers (1995, p. 8) summarises this well in the statement that, “what causes ineffectiveness is different for each school and it is the degree, combination and culmination of these characteristics that results in the judgement that a school is failing”.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

It is clear, therefore, that there is variation in what educational researchers and writers consider to be failure. Most writers agree, however, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the nature and extent of school failure (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Gorard, Taylor & Fitz, (2002; Woodfield & Gunby, 2003). Unlike organisations in the business world, even the concept of survival is not necessarily an indicator of failure in the education world (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Meyer & Zucker, 1989). A perspective promoted by Myers and Goldstein (1998) suggests that it is reasonable to suppose that “most schools might be failing some of their students, some of the time, in some respects” (p. 177). Even if this is the case, it is very different from a whole school being in decline and having a detrimental effect on most, if not all of its students. An important conclusion for this research topic is that when a school is described as “failing”, it is a judgement, by some person or organisation. This judgement is most likely to be based on their views of what an effective school should be like, rather than an informed understanding of what constitutes failure (Gray & Wilcox, 1995).

The schools I selected to study for this thesis declined until they finally received the level of intervention support required to enable them to regain their original effectiveness. The study schools were judged to be “failing” to the extent that ERO wrote several critical reports for each school and placed the schools under extra reviews, that the MOE instituted a range of special measures and interventions, that the media used the descriptor “failing” and that some parents removed their children and sent them to other schools. They were judged to have failed, to some extent, to meet the needs of their communities, compared with some other local schools and others on the league tables.

School Effectiveness

The first area of literature I have chosen to discuss, related to decline and failure, is the broad topic of school effectiveness which has been an important and popular area of study for several decades (Boyd & Shouse, 1997; Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Hargreaves, 2003; MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; Reynolds et al, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1985; Sammons, Mortimer & Thomas, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Weiner, 2001). As MacBeath and Mortimore (2001) explain, it is generally accepted that “good” schools do have a positive effect on student learning:

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The unambiguous finding from three decades of studies across the world... is that schools do indeed make a difference... in other words there is a “school effect” with all the other factors held constant, there is a 5 to 15 per cent variance between more and less effective schools. (p.6)

Key words in school effectiveness literature include “successful”, “empowered” and “self-managing” schools that “make a difference”. The research and writings in this field usually generate a list of factors that positively correlate with, and may explain, the effectiveness of schools. These lists vary in length from, “Borger’s sparse study of three to Scheerens and Bosker’s generous review of over seven hundred” (as cited in MacBeath, 1999). The lists tend to cover similar factors that usually include a shared vision, an effective learning environment, a focus on student achievement, high teacher expectations of students, a home/school partnership, professional development, staff collegiality and effective self-review (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Sammons, Mortimore & Thomas, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Regardless of this broad consensus on what makes a school effective, MacBeath (1999) argues that the search to identify and describe effective schools is “like the hunt for the unicorn” and that the lists of descriptors are of little use for teachers wanting to improve their practice:

Nevertheless it has been widely seen as important to try to pin schools down and for three decades we have tried to get to grips with the questions, “What are the essential ingredients of effective schools?” and “What makes one school more effective than another?” The two groups most absorbed with this question have been researchers and policy makers; researchers because it’s their job to find answers to their own questions; policy makers because they want answers which will justify their decisions. (p. 9)

Effective leadership is always one of the key success indicators of an effective school and there is an overlap between school effectiveness literature and literature on effective school leadership (Barth, 1990; Bush & West-Burnham, 1994; Edwards, 1986; MacBeath, 1999; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1991; Stewart & O’Donnell, 2007). There are also strong links between literature on school effectiveness, effective leadership and effective change management (Alvy & Robbins, 2005; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Rosenblatt & Schaeffer, 2000; Scott, 1999). The distinction between transactional and transformational leadership provides clues to the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

links between leadership and change management; the former being unlikely to guarantee successful implementation of change (Bush & West-Burnham, 1994; Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1991). While there is consensus on the view, and the evidence, that a school principal plays a significant role in the effectiveness of a school, there is a lack of clarity on the impact an ineffective leader has on an effective school or on how much impact an effective leader has on a dysfunctional school. It would appear that effective leadership is necessary, possibly essential in the long term, for school effectiveness but that it is not sufficient as a sole factor.

While effective schools clearly share important practices, Stoll and Fink (1996, p. 32) argue that it is insufficient to describe these characteristics, “and assume that ineffective schools possess the mirror opposite of these factors”. In fact, there is no evidence that ineffective schools could become more effective by trying to adopt these features (Boyd & Shouse, 1997; Luyten, Visscher & Witziers, 2005). Stark (1998) provides a helpful medical analogy:

The treatment that a sick person needs to recover is different from the regime that will make an ordinary person fit. Indeed a fitness regime imposed on invalids may make them worse. The same seems to apply to schools; competence must precede excellence. (p.36)

Though there may be a connection between the factors that correlate with school effectiveness and those that correlate with school ineffectiveness, some writers concur that there is no research evidence to support this assumption (Reynolds, 1991, 1998; Reynolds, Hopkins, Potter & Chapman, 2001; Weiner, 2001). Even if it were true that the reverse applies, and that ineffective schools are polar opposites of effective schools on all the correlating factors, this tells us nothing about how the decline process begins or how to stop it. Reynolds (1991) claims the track record of attempting to improve ineffective schools, using factors shown to be present within effective schools, is not good. Reynolds’ concern indicates the need for research which identifies factors associated with ineffectiveness and decline and strategies to halt or to reverse decline.

Building on Stark’s (1998, p. 36) medical analogy of the needs of a sick person, my study has been designed to investigate how the study schools came to be so unwell without comparing them to healthy and effective schools. It is a study of ineffectiveness that does not rely on using characteristics of effectiveness as a comparative tool.

Schooling Improvement

The second area of literature that informs issues of school decline is the area of schooling improvement which grew from the school effectiveness movement. There are many writings on the connections and differences between the two (Harris & Hopkins, 2000). Schooling improvement has been the “dominant paradigm” influencing educational policy and practice for a generation (West-Burnham, 2006). Knowledge about schooling improvement also “resulted from reflection on failed change efforts in the 1960s and 1970s” (Fink & Stoll, 1998, p.304). The general consensus is that “school effectiveness can inform school improvement” (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p.26). School improvement includes specific projects in one or more schools, usually connected with schools in low socio-economic areas (Ilea, 1984). Some international and New Zealand nation-wide school improvement initiatives have attempted to move education in particular directions such as a focus on technology or being more self-managing. Some schooling improvement has had a more generic focus on the important need for all schools to self-review and constantly improve their delivery. The discourse of schooling improvement includes “school renewal”, “innovation” and “initiatives” and has sometimes been driven by the demands of an external review agency such as the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in Britain and ERO in New Zealand.

McCauley and Roddick (2001) outlined four main generalisable findings from their review of the international literature on schooling improvement. First, neither “top down” nor “bottom up” change is adequate to sustain improvement. “To really succeed, a schooling improvement strategy has to be developed at a number of levels, and be reinforced through other policy settings” (p.14) such as policies on health, finances and social welfare. The second and third conclusions were that not enough is known about approaches to effect positive change for schools and that change is slow. McCauley and Roddick specify that five to eight years of support are needed to ensure that improvement in secondary schools is sustained. Fullan (2000, p.1) says it takes “about six years” to achieve successful change in student performance. A further variable is offered by Stoll and Harris (2004) who suggest that interventions need to “embrace context specificity to meet the needs of different schools” (p. 6). Finally, McCauley and Roddick (2001) say there is no “silver bullet” and both internal and external agency (energy and ownership) have to be fostered. While knowledge gained about how to improve schools is of value, it cannot be easily

applied and does not sufficiently inform policy makers or practitioners about how to prevent, identify or halt a decline.

Educational and School Change

Educational and school change is the third area of related literature. There is a strong focus on re-structuring, reform and innovation in the literature and research on educational change (Evans, 1996; Lieberman, 1995; Moon, 1983; Scott, 1999). Even so, change management is challenging and complex. An American study on change strategies during a reform process in twelve high schools concluded that “complex systemic reform is a messy process, so that it is difficult to tie any single change strategy to success or failure” (Foster, 1996). The change which is happening when a school is in decline, however, rarely forms part of the discussion so it is more difficult to extrapolate useful ideas from this body of literature that may contribute to preventing or halting decline. Some writers recognise the importance of change managers needing “to possess a wide range of performance skills specifically relevant to their particular role and context” (Scott, 1999, p. 163). It is possible, therefore, that the range of change management skills required to slow and halt decline may differ from those required to restructure, reform or innovate.

In addition to the role of the principal as a leader of change, two key themes emerge in the change literature. The first is how difficult it is to achieve educational change. Evans (1996) provides some insights into why this is the case:

One of the central lessons we think we have learned about previous rounds of innovation is that they failed because they didn't get at fundamental, underlying, systemic features of school life: they didn't change the behaviours, norms, and beliefs of practitioners. Consequently, these reforms ended up being grafted on to existing practices, and they were greatly modified, if not fully overcome, by those practices. (p. 5)

The second relevant theme is that, because change is rarely politically neutral and, because “interests are enhanced or damaged by change,” many people need to be involved for an improvement to occur (Ball, 1993, p. 78). Having an effective principal is a necessary but

not sufficient condition to ensure an effective school (Stoll & Harris, 2004). Sergiovanni provides a reason:

Though principals are important and their visions key in focusing attention on change and in successfully implementing the process of change, what counts in the end is bringing together the ideas and commitments of a variety of people who have a stake in the success of the school. (1991, p.269)

The literature clearly shows that principals alone cannot always bring about the changes needed for schools to become effective. While change does need to be led, Scott (1999) concurs that the principal will need support from others as leaders of change. Scott corrects what he considers is a recurring misconception by clarifying that “leadership does not just fall to people in management positions” (p.170). While the literature reveals that educational reform is difficult, and it takes many people working with an effective principal, it is unclear if a similar conclusion might be drawn about managing the period of the decline. As a study focusing on the period of decline, rather than reform or innovation, my research seeks to understand why study school leaders were unable to effect the changes necessary to halt the decline.

Schools “at risk”

Schools defined as being “at risk” constitute the fourth related area of the literature. The term “schools at risk” is nearly always synonymous with schools that cater for students who are identified as being “at risk”. The literature identifies two broad types of at risk students; those who have special educational or behavioural needs and those who come from low socio-economic communities. The former do not appear to be associated in any way with the school being at risk as an organisation. The latter present a more complex relationship with their school because schools in poor areas are more vulnerable to failure for a range of complex reasons (Harris, 2003; Woods & Levacic, 2002).

I have been involved in researching low decile schools in New Zealand for ten years (Hawk & Hill, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; Hill & Hawk, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2003). The research foci included school effectiveness, effective classroom teaching practice, the needs of Maori and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Pasifika students, curriculum design, assessment practice, the student teacher relationship, using student voice and parent/school partnerships. These low decile schools were ones in which student achievement, as measured by external national exams¹⁹, was low; placing the schools in the situation described in the literature of being “at risk”. Some of these schools were failing as organisations²⁰ but others, at the same time, were very strong, viable and well managed organisations. The Auditor General describes the same situation applying in English schools where some schools in deprived areas are good schools despite low prior student attainment (NAO, 2006, p. 3). Assumptions were made at the time by policy makers and MOE personnel that, if the leadership and governance of the schools could be improved, the student achievement would improve as a direct result. The research in which I was involved demonstrated that the situation was more complex than that (Hawk & Hill, 1996; Hill & Hawk, 1998a, 2000). Some schools that were failing organisationally are now well managed and the organisational improvements have resulted in significant increases in measurable student achievement.

Several studies, by Harker and Nash, demonstrate that increases in student achievement are linked to the attainment levels of students at entry to the schools (Harker, 1999, 2000; Harker & Nash, 1996; Nash, 1993; Nash & Harker 1997). Much of the improvement in achievement relied on effective teaching and teacher/student relationships and on the schools being able to provide the “wrap around” services of health diagnosis and provision, truancy monitoring, counselling, family liaison and special support for students at risk for a range of complex reasons. Most of the literature in this area focuses on the generic and direct relationship between low student achievement and poverty, rather than on the small number of schools that are organisational failures (Harker, 2000; Harker & Nash, 1996; Hughes et al, 1996; Lauder et al, 1999; Spreng, 2005; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1985; Thrupp, 1996; Thrupp, 1999). An important reason for doing this research is that the public, and policy makers, often struggle to differentiate between school difficulties associated with serving a low socio-economic community and difficulties because of internal organisational ineffectiveness, a situation that might require very different types of support.

¹⁹ Until 2002, the New Zealand external exam system included School Certificate at year eleven and Bursary at year thirteen. A new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) was fully implemented in 2004 and is now the main academic qualification within a new National Qualifications Framework.

²⁰ This “failure” was identified by ERO, the Ministry, media and/or by independent research: AIMHI (Hawk & Hill, 1996).

Educational Failure

The fifth area of literature that informs the study is that of educational failure. Educational failure is a term that tends to be applied to broad systemic failure across schools, rather than the failure of individual schools. Such failure occurs when whole countries, districts, states, or schools with traits in common, experience major problems with effective educational delivery by their schools. Toronto (1992), in a study of decline in the quality of Egypt's educational system, concluded that a combination of macro forces played a role in educational decline including, "historical trends, national leaders, international donors, the bureaucracy and the socio-religious issue of Islamization". Widespread educational failure has often been related to the socio-economic status of the schools involved. Wider educational failure is discussed and analysed at a national level by educationalists and researchers in several western countries and is directly linked to structural changes to the education system, demographics (Crespo & Hache, 1982) and/or changes to government policies (Gorard & Fitz, 1998; Hawk & Hill, 1997; Kolderie, 1990; Selden, 1994; Thrupp, 1999). Lauder et al. (1999) argue that the change to 'Tomorrow's Schools' in New Zealand is a prominent example in which new right policies of parental choice, de-zoning and school competition led to a decline in a number of the lowest decile schools. Other writers concur (Ainsworth, 1994; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; McKenzie, 1999; Spreng, 2005). This change in policy prompted the decline in some low decile schools, even schools with no prior organisational failure, and directly contributed to sending schools into a "spiral of decline" (Hawk & Hill, 1996, p. 349). A key contribution made by this body of literature is to emphasise the vulnerability of schools that serve low socio-economic communities. However, the literature on educational systems failure, while related to school decline, does not sufficiently answer the questions posed in relation to how individual schools experience decline or what school personnel can do to prevent their own school declining.

Education Review and Measurement

The sixth area of literature, educational review and measurement, is relevant because of the reasonable expectation that organisations set up by governments to check on the quality of their schools may generate literature that provides insights into school decline and failure. The OECD (1995) has studied and compared national review systems in some depth and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

New Zealand is one of the countries that have such a system: The Education Review Office (ERO). ERO's reports on individual schools have always been available to the public. The public nature of the reports means that the reviews are an important event for schools because they "do much to shape the perception of the school" by parents (Spreng, 2005, p. 68). ERO reports do not, however, describe the decline process in individual schools. It is important to note that, while ERO currently has a framework for its audits that outlines what it expects an effective school to be doing, it did not have, at the time of its reviews of the study schools, and it still does not have a definition of decline or failure (Woodfield & Gunby, 2003). As Brooke-Smith (2003) points out, care needs to be taken by reviewers in the selection of outcomes as measures of school effectiveness because:

There is a tendency to select what is easily measurable, such as test and examination results, leaving out a range of important qualitative outcomes such as social awareness, citizenship, ethical values, self-esteem, vocational preparation, leadership development and lifelong learning. (p. 38)

A report on the external review process in English schools by OFSTED identifies ten indicators of a poorly performing school (NAO, 2006, p.4). They have been identified through examining schools that have declined to the extent of requiring "special measures" or being given "a notice to improve". The report notes that OFSTED has attended more to very poorly performing schools than to under-performing schools and indicates that "by spotting signs of trouble earlier, the schools may be able to recover more quickly" (p. 6). It appears that the framework for school reviews, in England and New Zealand, has neither provided knowledge on the reasons for school decline nor has it been specific about the criteria for school failure.

Organisational Decline and Failure

Searching more widely than literature on schools and education located the next related area of literature; organisational decline and failure. The same gap in information about decline is reiterated in this literature on organisations, even those organisations that are similar to schools (Boyne, Martin & Reid, 2004; Kim, 1988; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Public organisations, like city councils or hospitals, have characteristics in common with

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

schools in that they are government funded and focused on service to the community (Sarason & Lorentz, 1998). Levine (1978, p.316) said, with reference to the United States of America, “We know very little about the decline of public organizations and the management of cutbacks”. We have only “questions”, “hunches” and “shards of evidence”. He suggested that the reason for this might be because, “even though some federal agencies ... and many state and local agencies have expanded and then contracted, or even died, the public sector as a whole has expanded enormously over the last four decades”. Kim (1988, p. 3), on the other hand, concluded that the area is “under-researched” because western culture “values size and growth” and because “decline and stagnation are regarded as a disgrace”.

The discourse about decline in the business world is largely unhelpful to schools because schools are inherently different in nature from businesses. Discussion on business decline and failure is focused around profits, liquidations, industrial performance, retrenchment, delayering, mergers, acquisition related performance, downsizing, transaction cost economics, employee acquisition and privatisation (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999; Meyer & Zucker, 1989; Miles & Snow, 1994; Sarason, 1998). Causes of organisational failure include product obsolescence, recession, aggressive foreign competition, over trading, bad financial ratios, high cost structure and acquisitions (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p.64). It is difficult to see how any of these issues apply to schools.

Some of the topics covered by the literature are similar to those discussed in the education sector in that they either focus on the reform process or on the process of deliberate restructuring or downsizing of an organisation. This process, however, is very different from the school situation where the decline takes place over years and identification and intervention is less formal, more prolonged and usually less public. A complicating factor for schools is that teaching jobs tend to have been protected, even when school outcomes are poor, because it is difficult to directly and causally link teacher performance with learning outcomes for students. The literature on organisational crises also highlights the link between public perceptions and financial decline (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Most organisational crises are either caused by financial problems, or result in them (Starbuck, Greve & Hedberg, 1978).

Nevertheless, some insights can be gained from the business literature, such as the feelings people experience when their jobs become threatened and the actions of whistle-blowers

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

(Benson & Ross, 1998; Glazer & Glazer, 1999; Miethe & Rothschild, 1994; Perry, 1998; Yamey, 2000). Insights from Kim's (1988) study into "business mortality" discussed some themes that emerged in my study. The first theme linked the impact of competing organisations on resources. "The more competitive and resourceless their environmental conditions were, the more likely the institutions were to experience decline in key resources" (p. 205). In my study, competition from other local schools resulted in a drop in roll and, therefore, resources. The second related finding was that "The declining institutions tended to be risk avoiders, have conservative leaders and devalue expansion" (p. 207). There was no evidence in my study of risk avoidance but there was ample evidence of a siege/survival mentality that developed. The third similar finding was that "Under conditions of decline institutions were less effective in maintaining smooth functioning" (p. 211). My findings indicated that most areas of school organisation became less effective as decline escalated. The fourth related theme reflected an important finding of this thesis. "There is no one-way dysfunctional effect of decline" so it is unhelpful to apply "a short-term fix to declining performance" (p. 213). Although there were many issues, problems, and experiences, the three study schools had in common, each school followed a unique path as the decline began and escalated. There was evidence that inadequately designed or short-term interventions were not sustained. Other similar findings identified by Lorange and Nelson (1987) included tolerance of incompetence, fear of embarrassment and conflict and the loss of effective communication in declining organisations. Silver (1992, p. 3) identified two issues relevant to study school experiences; "a lack of talent with middle managers" and managers who "tiptoe around stressors".

The gap in knowledge about organisational decline in business appears to be similar to that for schools (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The main focus of many authors was on reform and "turnaround management" (Goldstein, 1988; Slatter, 1984). I could find little on the process of decline, the reasons for the decline or of the efforts, other than whistle-blowing, made by the employees or governors to halt the decline. What became clear is that organisational differences are sufficient that care needs to be taken in generalising from, or even comparing, the business situation to that in schools.

School Ineffectiveness, Decline and Failure

The small number of educationalists who have written on school decline and failure tend to have been experts in school effectiveness and schooling improvement (Barber, 1998; Fink, 2000; Fullan, 2000; Hargreaves, 2004; Kovacs, 1998b; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Reynolds, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989; Stoll & Fink, 1996, 1998; Stoll & Myers, 1998; Woods, 1979). Some experts on school effectiveness and schooling improvement have identified the gap in knowledge about school decline because of a lack of research evidence (Barber, 1998; Gray & Wilcox, 1995; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Reynolds et al, 2001; Robson, 2002; Stark, 1998). This lack has resulted in school decline being discussed theoretically or in relationship to school effectiveness. Stoll and Fink (1996), for instance, discuss a typology of five school cultures based on the assumption that schools are getting either better or worse. Two types of ineffective schools are identified; “struggling” and “sinking” schools (Stoll & Fink, 1998, p. 192). Myers (1995) describes “swaying” and “sliding” schools. Rosenholtz (1989) discusses “stuck” schools. Woods (1979) describes the “divided” school. They are all descriptors of schools that are having difficulties. The authors provide sets of descriptors or criteria for each identified stage which are helpful in understanding what needs to be addressed for improvement to happen.

The major focus of the writing on school decline, however, is on the process of reform, rather than the process of decline, as the following chapter titles in the book edited by Stoll and Myers (1998) indicate: “**Combating**²¹ Failure at School: An International Perspective”, (Kovacs, 1998b); “No Slow Fixes Either: How Failing Schools in England are Being **Restored** to Health”, (Stark, 1998); “**Rising** From the Ashes”, (Whatford, 1998); “Highbury Grove- From Deconstruction to **Reconstruction**”, (Cutler, 1998); “The Study and **Remediation** of Ineffective Schools: Some Further Reflections”, (Reynolds, 1998); and “**Turning Around** a Struggling School: A Case Study”, (Turner, 1998).

Some researchers cite the difficulty in gaining access to schools in decline as the reason for the lack of knowledge in this area. Nicolaidou and Ainscow claim that, “there is little research available that looks closely at failing schools, not least because gaining access to such sensitive social contexts is usually difficult, if not impossible” (2005, p. 230). Bending’s (1993) doctoral research in Ohio, USA, attempted to develop a theory that

²¹ These words have been highlighted to emphasise the focus on reform, rather than decline.

would predict school closure by using publically available data that were able to be accessed without the consent of schools. Using voting data, census data and school enrolment data, she identified factors that had direct effects on school closure. With the exception of “voter support” and “age of buildings”, factors that her study has in common with the macro influences in my study include enrolment numbers, competition from other schools, population decline and socio-economic status.

Reynolds (1998), and Reynolds with his fellow reviewers (2001), offer a different reason for the lack of research on school decline or failure. They suggest that, historically, the research community has been more interested in how to “fix” problems in schools that are in difficulty and that there has been little research interest in the reasons for the decline (Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds et al, 2001). Whatever the reasons for the lack of research, there is general agreement about a gap in knowledge. Gray and Wilcox (1995) identified the gap and articulated the need for research back in 1995 and, while there is an increasing awareness of the need for such research, Robson (2002) said it has still not happened. In 2007, I was unable to locate any studies that focused specifically on the beginnings, or the process, of school decline.

The “Failure” of Innovative Schools

The ninth area of related literature is relatively small and specific. There is a small body of literature about schools that have been set up as new and innovative schools and how, over varying periods of time, they experienced decline and became “ordinary” schools. These research studies are detailed case studies and the described failure is a failing to remain “innovative” or as “beacon” and “light house” schools (Cuban, 1992; Doremus, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1982; Fink, 1997,1999, 2000; Fletcher, Caron & Williams, 1985; Mirel, 1994; Moon, 1983). There are also some examples of schools that were closed because a specific “crisis”²² they experienced was so great as to make them unviable (Fletcher et al, 1985; Seville, Brunsdon, Dantas, Masurier, Wilkinson & Vargo, 2006). Although some of these studies discuss the reasons for failure, they do not discuss a decline period. Rather, they focus on the failure of the school to live up to the expectations of the various stakeholders.

²² In several cases the “crisis” took the form of a legal trial.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Most of these “failed” schools had relatively short periods of success before they were perceived to be “ordinary”, as Fink illustrates:

I have been associated with a number of new and innovative schools Within a relatively short time these schools seem to have become rather conventional schools. (1997, p. 1)

Some issues that Fink (1997, 1999) identifies in his study of a Canadian high school are relevant to my research and have been integrated into the discussion in Chapter 7 of this thesis. There are also major issues that apply in that school’s situation that do not apply in my study schools because they were not set up initially as “beacon” or “lighthouse” schools of innovation with the associated expectations. The study schools were normal healthy mainstream schools before they declined.

Interventions

The next area of related literature describes agency intervention in schools that have been identified as needing outside help. Agencies responsible for school effectiveness, in a number of western countries, have undertaken a range of interventions in schools identified as declining or failing. There is substantial evidence that attempts at school reform have often not been successful and/or have not been sustained (Brady, 2003; Cuban, 1990; Datnow, 2002, 2005; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Rau, Baker & Ashby, 1999). While the literature in this area does not explain why or how schools declined, it provides some valuable insights into the extent and effects of the decline and why it is so difficult to halt or reverse once it becomes established. It also provides insights into why the interventions were designed the way they were and how this contributed to their effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

Regarding the reasons for school decline, some writers have challenged the validity of the judgements made by policymakers and politicians which have guided the nature and management of interventions (Goldstein & Myers, 1997; Hargreaves, 2003; Luyten et al, 2005). Some have also criticised any process that includes labeling schools as “failing” and

“blaming” individual schools (Harris, 2001; Mintrop, 2004; Weiner, 2001). Goldstein and Myers (1997) concur with such a view:

The school effectiveness research base is used to justify blaming schools for “failing” on the assumption that because some schools succeed in difficult circumstances the reasons others do not must be their own fault. In this scenario complexity and context are ignored. Furthermore some politicians and policymakers have found it possible to deny their role in “failure” by shifting all the blame onto individual schools. (p.214)

Early identification of schools experiencing difficulties, while generally assumed to be desirable, often does not happen even when external agencies are involved in a review capacity (Boyne et al, 2004; Brady, 2003). Accurate identification of the reasons for the problems, or at least careful analysis of them, is acknowledged as being vital if appropriate strategies are to be designed to remedy situations (Boyne et al, 2004; Cuban, 1990; Datnow, 2002; Fullan & Miles, 1992). There is general consensus that each problem situation needs to be accepted as unique and that solutions, that may have worked in one school, cannot be assumed to work in another school (Boyne et al, 2004; Brady, 2003; Joyce, 1991; McLaughlin, 1990; Nicolaidou, 2005). Several studies highlighted the need for school ownership of the intervention strategies if they were to be made to work (Brady, 2003; Chapman, 2005; Lashway, 2003). Associated with the concept of ownership is local capacity and willingness to make changes (McLaughlin, 1990) and the importance of starting “where the school is” (Moletsane, 2002, p. 117).

Opinions vary as to the value of external scrutiny and, in particular, the value of external pressure on schools to reform (Brady, 2003; Clarke, 2005; Willms, 1992). The most successful interventions are characterised by greater use of external consultants, changes to senior management teams, staff involvement and managing change at a rate with which a school could cope (Bennett, 2001; Boyne et al, 2004; Learmonth & Lowers, 1998; Sarason, 1991). Lashway (2003) insists that, while external assistance can facilitate reform, effective leadership at the school site is essential. A frequent reason given for interventions not working was that they were not continued for long enough (Ainscow, West & Nicolaidou, 2005; Chapman, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Judd, 2000). Finally, governments or ministries are reluctant to close schools and closure is relatively rare (Boyne et al, 2004; Lashway, 2003).

This body of literature on interventions has highlighted the difficulty and importance of designing appropriate interventions that are effective and sustained. This thesis, it is hoped, will be able to contribute further insights into why interventions sometimes fail to halt school decline.

New Zealand Research on Decline and Interventions

The final area of related literature includes a small number of New Zealand evaluations of interventions. I was unable to find any New Zealand research on the specific topic of school decline or on the reasons for school failure. However, there have been four evaluations that have researched MOE interventions in schools in difficulty, after they have been identified as being in need of support. The earliest was an evaluation of one of the Schooling Improvement initiatives called Achievement in Multicultural High Schools (AIMHI). This formative evaluation, which produced 20 evaluation reports²³, involved the evaluators, Hawk and Hill, working in nine multicultural, low decile secondary schools (Hawk & Hill, 1996; Hill & Hawk, 1998). The first report, in 1996, used quantitative and qualitative baseline data to identify the reasons for student underachievement and outlined both external and internal reasons for low achievement. The schools involved in AIMHI developed a collective action plan, based on the 1996 report, and implemented development initiatives. The 1998 report noted significant improvements in all AIMHI schools but reiterated the findings of the baseline report regarding the powerful impact on underachievement of external influences over which the schools had little or no control.

The Schools Support Project (SSP) evaluation, by Nolan and Wilson, (1998) was the second evaluation of a MOE intervention. This identified a number of difficulties that were experienced by the schools involved in the MOE interventions which included the interventions being too late, the delivery of support to the schools too complex and time consuming and the disharmony and stress experienced by people in the schools during the process.

²³ Eighteen of these reports, which were confidential to the schools, included a baseline report and a mid-evaluation report for each school.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The third evaluation was of another Schooling Improvement initiative: Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara²⁴ (SEMO). Robinson, Timperley and Bullard (2000) found that the success of an intervention partnership, between the MOE and schools, was heavily influenced by the skills of the parties in managing the tension between the tasks and the relationships. The energy went more into managing the relationships than the tasks and the MOE staff had difficulty balancing their role between exerting pressure and providing support for schools and their communities (McCauley & Roddick, 2001, p. 17).

Finally, another evaluation of the SSP was conducted, in 2001, by McCauley and Roddick. While the evaluation does discuss implications of the issues facing schools, its primary focus was to evaluate the effectiveness of the MOE interventions that were designed to strengthen the SSP schools and increase student achievement. McCauley and Roddick identified successful aspects and barriers to success of the SSP as well as listing suggested improvements. There are similarities between intervention experiences described in these evaluations and those experienced by the study schools in my research. The AIMHI evaluation identifies external and internal factors that contributed to school fragility. None of the evaluations, however, describe the process of the decline prior to MOE intervention.

There were only two New Zealand research studies I could identify that focused specifically on school decline. The first was my own research, with colleague Jan Hill, on schools at risk (Hawk & Hill, 1999). This drew on records²⁵ of our professional involvement in 24 schools, exploring their experiences in order to draw some conclusions about what happens to schools in a decline or crisis situation. It also outlined some of the risk factors that should be avoided if schools are to remain effective. The second study, by Spreng (2005), using a case study approach to describe the education systems in New Zealand, the United States of America and Qatar, examines the different responses to school failure and the effects of interventions in each country. Focusing on the need for effective intervention in failing schools, Spreng concluded that a competitive market model did not remove the problem of failing schools, that closing schools is expensive and difficult, that interventions need to be specifically designed for a school and that private sector expertise can be effective in turning around declining schools. Once again, these studies approach the issues of decline and failure but they do not attempt to analyse the

²⁴ These are two of the lowest socio-economic areas in New Zealand.

²⁵ Data were collected from meeting minutes, review materials, action plans, letters, faxes, field notes and interviews.

reasons for, or the process of, the decline. They make a valuable contribution in providing some insights into why decline continues if interventions have been based on inadequate diagnosis of the issues, were too late starting, were not sustained for long enough or were inflexible in their approach.

A Related Study

Valuable insights into school decline are offered in a doctoral dissertation by Tippet (2004) called, "Leadership under conditions of decline in a small private black college". While the purpose of the study was "to fill a void in the literature on leadership" (p. 6), the context of the research is a declining school in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. Data were collected from nine one-hour interviews with members of the Board of Governors, college presidents and senior academic and administration officials. Their opinions were sought on their own roles and experiences as well as what factors, events or people "impacted conditions in the College" during its decline (p. 45).

There are many differences between this small private black college and the three larger multicultural study schools. There were differences also between the New Zealand context and the macro influences on schools in Memphis prior to Tippet's research. She describes an educational environment "characterised by inter-institutional competition" for college students in which twenty-one other similar colleges were closed over a thirty-four year period, resulting in one of the five reasons for the decline: increased competition from external environmental influences (p. 34). Tippet identifies two causes of decline that were similar to the predisposing influences in my study: "inexperienced leadership and ineffective management techniques" and "internal conflict" (p. 107). She identifies two other causes of decline that were similar to factors my study found which were associated with the phase of decline escalation: "decreased resource availability and external support" and "ineffective programmes that hindered the marketability of the college" (p. 107). A significant difference, however, between the findings of the two studies is that, while Tippet describes both causes and effects of decline, she does not differentiate between different stages prior to, or during, the decline. Another key difference is methodological. Nine one-hour interviews about one small school did not allow Tippet wide-ranging opportunities to triangulate data.

Differences aside, there are many similarities in the experiences, feelings and opinions of the participants in the two studies. Both studies identify themes which include declining resources, a lack of external support, competition from other schools, inexperienced and untrained governors/trustees, poor appointments, inexperienced and unskilled educational leaders, falling roll numbers with associated resourcing problems, internal staff conflict, negative/unprofessional behaviours, crisis/siege mentality, innovative staff leaving and mediocre staff remaining, resistance to change, decreased morale, scapegoating and blaming others for problems.

Linkage of the Literature with the Thesis

I have explored the concepts of decline and failure, as described in the literature, without being able to discern any clear consensus on criteria for either concept. It appears that the word “failing” is often used as a synonym for “declining”. Some writers, on the other hand, have used the words “failed” and “failure” to describe a range of school situations that have not resulted in school closure. The literature on educational failure did not contribute greatly to an understanding of why some schools decline while other neighbouring schools do not. Similarly, literature on organisational failure primarily focused on external economic and societal reasons, rather than internal organisational causes or on the decline process.

I have concluded that the literature on school effectiveness (SE) and schooling improvement (SI) skirts around the issues of defining and measuring failure and of describing decline. Some writers note that the literature also appears to have avoided tackling the reasons for decline (Barber, 1998; Gray & Wilcox, 1995; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds et al, 2001; Robson, 2002). While a continuum of effectiveness is implied by writers, who identify a number of stages of effectiveness and ineffectiveness, there is not a particular cohesive theory that has been put forward to explain the decline process. Explaining these limitations in the literature, including addressing the question of why school effectiveness researchers (SERs)²⁶ and writers have avoided tackling the reasons for decline, requires wider critique of the

²⁶ Abbreviations for School Effectiveness (SE), School Improvement (SI) and school effectiveness research (SER) are commonly used in the literature.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

methodological, social, political and theoretical limitations of these school effectiveness, improvement and change literatures. Thrupp (2002, p. 4) explains:

The key tensions seem to be around the complexity of the debate over SER, the value of pragmatism, the impact of social class, the significance of methodological problems, the value of current attempts to theorise SER, the relationship of SER to educational politics and policymaking, the politics of doing SER and the claimed achievements of SER.

The methodological limitations are perhaps the easiest to understand. There appear to be three methodological reasons why school decline has not been specifically researched. The first reason is the difficulty in gaining access to schools that are in decline (Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). As well as a tendency for schools not to seek help, there has been reluctance in the past, and/or an inability, for agencies to intervene until the situation has become extreme and known in the public arena. It may still be difficult, or impossible, to conduct such research during the decline period prior to the decline being identified by an external agency because of an unwillingness of the people involved to participate, or a lack of awareness on their part of the extent of the problems. Access can continue to be difficult, even after schools have begun the reform process, because personnel are wary of negative publicity of any type, including the publishing of research findings. In my study this barrier was overcome because past and current study school personnel knew my research background and skills and because they trusted me. The second reason relates to the longitudinal nature of the decline process. It is not possible for a researcher to predict how long a school would be in decline but s/he would need to be prepared to spend years collecting data, unless they selected a retrospective way of collecting data as I have done in this study. This barrier has practical and financial implications. The third methodological issue is controversial and “remains central to debate within and beyond SER” (Thrupp, 2002, p. 6). Many researchers hold polarised views about the merits of qualitative and quantitative research and the extent to which each can validly inform debates on school effectiveness, improvement, decline and failure (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000; Slee & Weiner, 1998; Thrupp, 2000, 2002; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Thrupp (2001, p. 450) argues that although there is more to the debate than the pros and cons of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, their significance should not be underestimated. Statistical methodologies and mathematical models have been criticised as being “methodologically flawed” (Wrigley, 2003, p. 8) and “*acausal*” (Willmott, 1999). Writers express concern also about the use of

multilevel modelling because of its complexity and lack of comprehensibility (Thrupp, 2002; Willmott, 1999). Such positivist approaches are criticised as inadequate because of their oversimplified view of the social context of schools and because they lack understanding of the complexity of school effectiveness and failure (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000; Thrupp, 2001, 2002; Wrigley, 2003).

Social limitations of the school effectiveness, improvement and change literatures centre on their tendency to give insufficient weight to the impact of context on school processes (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003) and because they largely neglect social justice (Wrigley, 2003). Writers criticising proponents of school effectiveness and schooling improvement argue that discussion of issues such as school decline and failure need to be linked with broader social problems such as poverty and need to be contextualised within particular societies and specific conditions that exist (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000; Thrupp, 2000). Furthermore, school effectiveness discourses are based on “assumptions about norms that privilege the middle classes” (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p.116) and are criticised for failing to address issues “for disadvantaged students” (Slee & Weiner, 1998). Goldstein and Woodhouse (2000, p. 356) contend that SER has looked at “within-school complexities” but “has made almost no attempt to contextualise schools within the wider environment”. Some of the external influences on decline, called macro influences in my study, are identified in the literature on educational failure, schools at risk and organisational failure (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). The vulnerability of schools that serve low socio-economic communities and the pressure placed on fragile schools by governmental policy changes are key examples. The literature on school change and on educational review highlights the challenges faced by school leaders in managing staff morale and resistance. This literature also draws attention to the politics and the complexity of working with a range of stakeholders, requiring high level leadership skills. As well as demonstrating the importance of the wider environment (macro factors), the thesis describes the impact of the within-school environment (meso and micro factors). Many of the macro, meso and micro factors impacting on the study schools, and contributing to their decline, were contextual and some were associated with their being at the bottom of the socio-economic pecking order compared to neighbouring schools. My study shows that claims by some school effectiveness researchers that declining schools can be reformed if their leaders actively replicate the attributes of effective schools are unrealistic and misleading. There were other schools in the wider urban area that were lower decile than two of the study schools and which did not decline, as did the study schools. The AIMHI research (Hawk & Hill, 1996)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

also showed that when low decile schools are exposed to the same macro influences, they do not all decline. School decline, therefore, cannot all be attributed solely to the socio-economic context. On the other hand, the socio-economic context is of particular importance once decline begins in a school because, as the educational advisors indicated, higher decile schools have the ability and a stronger incentive to call on people and financial resources that are not available to lower decile schools such as the study schools. Access to such resources can have the effect of halting decline at an earlier stage, before it becomes self-perpetuating. Policy implications include ensuring low decile schools have fast access to expertise at an early stage, help to identify issues and needs and the finances to implement reforms. Policies to reduce socio-economic segregation between schools and indeed to reduce social inequalities within society as a whole are also relevant.

Theoretical limitations of the school effectiveness, improvement and change literatures revolve around general lack of a theoretical base (Thrupp, 2001) and specifically about the avoidance or denial of social inequity and the need for social justice (Wrigley, 2003). There are major gaps and silences in school effectiveness theory relating to identity, culture, poverty and difference (Morley & Rassool, 1999). Morley and Rassool (1999, p. 117) further argue that “power is undertheorised”. Some writers link the denial of social inequity (Wrigley, 2003) to the researcher(s) holding an ontological position, underpinned by epistemological concerns (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000; Willmott, 1999). Further, Willmott (p.262) claims that positivism “quite simply cannot sustain any notion of the irreducible causal efficacy of socio-cultural properties. Thus it cannot *theorise* the conditions that maintain for socio-cultural change or stability” (p. 260). Critics of SE and SI research debate the extent to which researchers are prone to ideological capture (Thrupp, 2002). Willmott (1999, p.257) explains that “It is not the theoretical presuppositions *per se* that are ideological, but the social uses to which they are knowingly or unknowingly put”. The various arguments for and against SE and SI and critiques of the research on which the movements are based, seem to have mostly emerged “because of the political use of the research for which might be considered to be ideological rather than educational purposes” (Townsend, 2007a, p. 940). Political limitations of the school effectiveness, improvement and change literatures result from a combination of methodological and social limitations as well as ideological capture, as Morley and Rassool (1999, p. 129) explain: “School effectiveness has become a vast industry, legitimised through public policy, finance and educational research”. They continue their criticism, claiming:

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The school effectiveness movement, and now its operational arm – school improvement – are utilitarian solutions to a largely manufactured crisis over standards. The gaps and silences are also politically significant. School effectiveness raises questions about what works, rather than about whose interests are being served. Opportunities to debate the issue of competing interests and perceptions are limited. School effectiveness and school improvement are powerful condensates, demanding consensus and orthodoxy. (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p. 135)

Thrupp (2001, p. 446) points out the difficulty some researchers have in “seeing SER as a radical activity when it is so closely tied to government policy and the ‘problem-solving’ assumption that if a policy is not clearly achievable in the current political climate it is not worth wasting time on”. Other SE researchers stand accused of not just providing data on which the reform agenda of the Right can be based (Slee & Weiner, 1998) but of making a political choice to support such an agenda (Wrigley, 2003) and even of “actually implementing the agenda of neo-liberal/managerial governments in various roles around the world” (Thrupp, 2001, p. 32). Research funding sources often result in researchers having a “vested interest” to promote and defend their work (Willmott, 1999, p. 255). Furthermore, according to Thrupp and Willmott (2003, p. 228), some texts are “overtly apologist” in selling SI policy. Goldstein and Woodhouse (2000) suggest the solution is a clear separation of SE research from government interest but they acknowledge the difficulty when governments regard the research community as consisting of “either committed friends or subversive enemies” (p. 361). Thrupp (2002, p. 7) advises researchers to be reflexive about the political and ideological climate and to consider the worst possible uses to which their work could be put. Other writers, giving researchers the benefit of the doubt regarding their own ethical positions, point out that it is easy for politicians to misuse findings in ways that are beyond the control of researchers (Thrupp, 2001). Although I have no financial or political conflicts of interest, the latter assertion has direct implications for my research. Although, in the thesis, I stress the importance of NOT using the potential predictors as a de-contextualised checklist for either diagnostic or remedial purposes, I will have little control over how others choose to report or use the study.

While there is no literature that comprehensively describes the decline process or reasons for decline, there are related areas discussed in this chapter which have provided valuable insights, especially regarding external intervention. Many writers acknowledge that failure and decline exist and offer suggestions as to why and what can be done to reform and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

repair damaged schools (Cutler, 1998; Kovacs, 1998b; Reynolds, 1998; Stark, 1998; Stoll and Myers, 1998; Turner, 1998; Whatford, 1998). Researchers describe attempts at interventions and reform and conclude that these interventions have usually not been successful in the long term. Primarily, from these attempts at intervention, writers and researchers draw conclusions about the factors associated with school decline. This gap in research knowledge is an important one, given the failure of interventions based, at best, on effectiveness literature rather than on any identified understanding of the factors most strongly associated with the decline they are trying to reverse (Boyd & Shouse, 1997; Luyten, Visscher & Witziers, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Reynolds, 1991; Stark, 1998; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Weiner, 2001).

The three studies by Fink (1997, 1999), Spreng (2005) and Tippett (2004), which each explored some aspects of school decline, influenced my research. They identified factors which are shared in common with my study and they informed my theory building in different ways. The Fink study (1997) identified issues associated with a process of decline such as the micro-politics, the negative influence of the teachers union, roll decline, a loss of staff leaders, balkanisation of departments and the importance of early intervention. The Spreng study (2005) contributed to my understanding of the power of external influences, such as market forces, competition and government policy, on all schools but especially on fragile schools. Finally, the main contribution of the Tippett study (2004) was its focus on inadequate leadership, both governance and professional. In this thesis, a key factor associated with the onset of decline in the study schools was the large number of unresolved issues and problems. Decline arose because leaders at all levels were unable to effectively manage these issues and problems.

CHAPTER 3

GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

Exploring the literature on school decline led me to conclude, as also noted by Robson (2002) and Nicolaidou and Ainscow (2005), that there still appears to be a lack of research which focuses specifically on the causes or process of school decline prior to the stage at which external intervention occurs. Furthermore, Boyd and Shouse (1997), Luyten, Visscher and Witziers (2005), Reynolds (1991), Reynolds, Hopkins, Potter and Chapman (2001), Stark (1998), Stoll and Fink (1996), and Weiner (2001) emphasise that it is important not to assume that knowing what constitutes an effective school can provide appropriate guidelines for fixing or reforming a school in difficulty. This gap in knowledge called for a methodology, such as grounded theory, that could be used in the present study and that would be flexible and exploratory in nature.

Grounded theory is not a theory; it is a methodological approach that can be used to generate theory. The first section of this chapter provides my rationale for using grounded theory. The following section outlines the genesis, evolution and use of grounded theory, as well as the reasons it is well suited for a topic which does not have a well-established body of knowledge. Next, the tenets of the grounded theory process which were used in setting up this research are outlined. The focus begins with the initially planned methodology and ethical approval and follows through to the selection of schools to be studied and the selection and recruitment of participants to be interviewed. Figure 1 illustrates these methodological decisions under the headings “Initially planned” and “Data used”. Finally, the chapter explores relevant ethical issues and explains how they were managed. Consideration is given to the rationale behind methodological decisions, as well as evidence of rigour in the research process so that the validity of the approach, and the data collected, can be judged. Grounded theory methodology encourages researchers to use their own knowledge, experiences, intuition and judgement throughout the process from the initial planning through to the final theorising. This places a responsibility on the researcher to be transparent²⁷ about thoughts and influences on the process and the outcomes.

²⁷ The transparency begins in chapter 1, where I outline my rationale for selecting the topic, and continues through the following three chapters with my decisions about the relevance of literature, my predispositions, my explanation of how data were analysed and categories named, use of memos and the process of theory building.

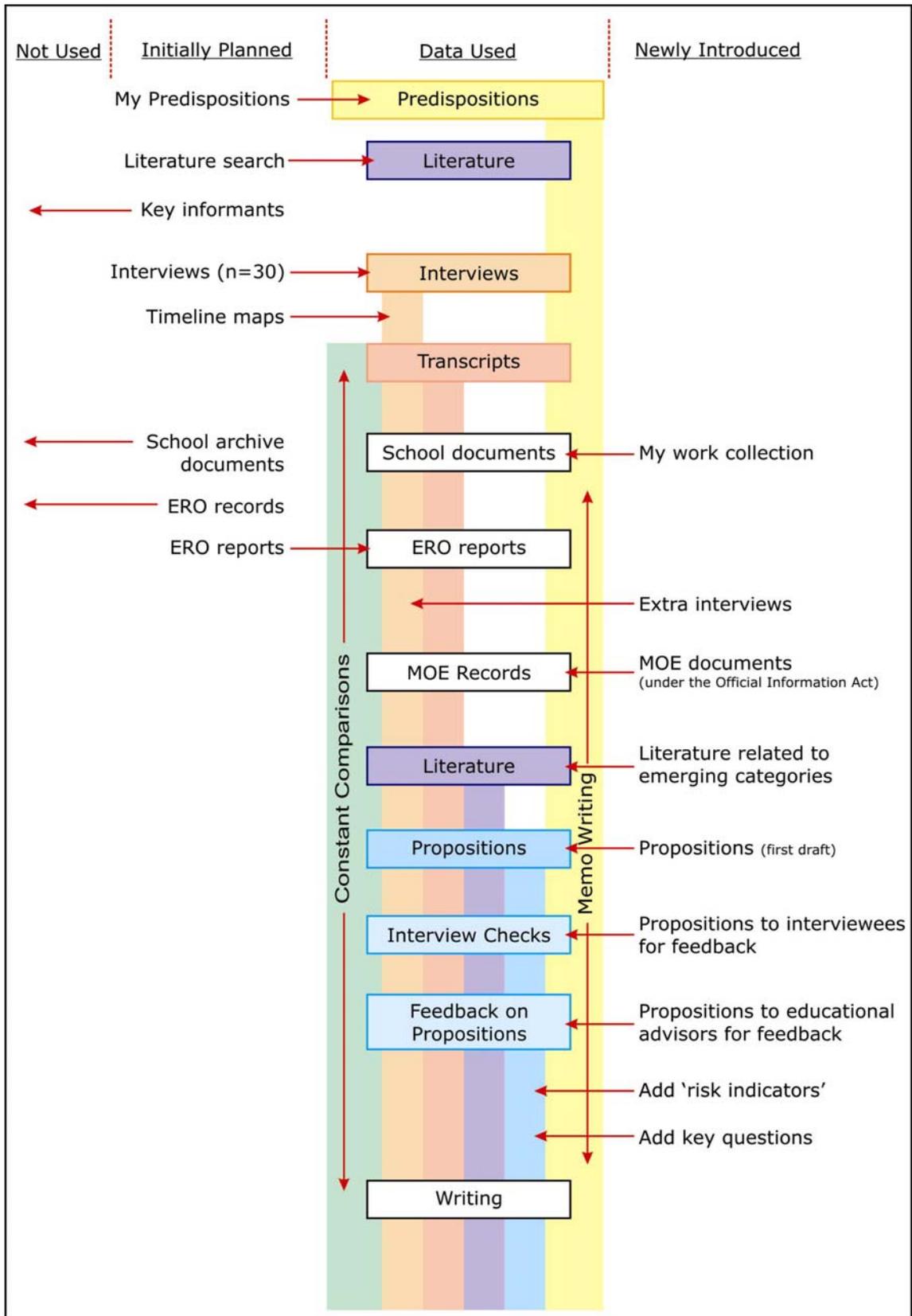


Figure 1 Data strategies, collection and use.

Rationale for the Selection of Grounded Theory

My work experiences in schools in crisis indicated that this research was likely to enable investigation into areas such as communication, power, leadership, community conflict, dysfunctional relationships, government policy and school culture (Hawk & Hill, 1996 and 1999). Because observations are theory laden, and researchers do not come to a situation with a blank slate, my work experience will have shaped my perception of what is important. My topic, school decline, is situated in a relatively unexplored field. Deciding on a theoretical orientation, before collecting any data, could have unduly influenced the emphasis placed on any one or more areas. Guba and Lincoln argue that, “it is better to find a theory to explain the facts than to look for facts that accord with a theory” (1982, p. 244). Even more serious could have been the scenario that areas, or issues that I had not identified as being influential, turned out to be pivotal. I considered this topic one which required an exploratory approach that would allow the theory to emerge from the data. Lather describes such theory building as “testing the truth through dialogue, rather than theoretical imposition” (1986, p.263). Anderson (1990, p.150) describes the theory emerging “from the grass-roots” and Bishop calls it “the “bottom-up” approach to identifying themes and patterns from experiences” (1996, p.55). Grounded theory is such an approach and, as Eisenhardt (1989, p. 548) explains, “...it is particularly well-suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate”. According to Stern (1995, p. 30) “the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted water”. I selected grounded theory as an appropriate epistemology because the topic of school decline is relatively uncharted.

The Genesis and Evolution of Grounded Theory

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss first wrote about grounded theory in their book *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (1967). At that time, according to Charmaz (1983), the methodological climate considered quantitative research more valid than qualitative research which was viewed as little more than a helpful preliminary. Glaser and Strauss were challenging deductive forms of theorising which forced research into the role of testing or verifying existing theories rather than playing a pivotal role in theory development and production (Dey, 1999, p12). Grounded theory is concerned with “the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1). Data are collected and then coded through a process of categorising, synthesising, summarising and sorting (Charmaz, 1983, p.111). Research continues until the researcher is confident about the meaning and importance of the categories and until the value gained from the effort involved becomes marginal; a process called “saturation” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.533).

Glaser and Strauss went their separate ways over time. There were further publications by Glaser, and by Strauss working with colleagues, that more fully explained and elaborated on the method as they each understood it (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1978; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While Glaser said that he and Strauss agreed on the need for a “systematic applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory” (Glaser, 1992, p. 16), by 1990 it was becoming clear that they held differing views on how to implement the processing of the data and the task of coding in particular. In 1992, Glaser maintained that the original tenets described in their book (1967) still held. He claimed that it was now apparent to him that he and Strauss have “profoundly different views” and that Strauss “has used a different methodology all along ... one of full conceptual description” (p.122). Strauss, on the other hand, continued to use and write about grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997; 1998). The writing that followed over the next decade expounded on the issues over which the originating authors disagreed strongly (Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 1995; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Melia describes how many researchers have discussed at length the issues and the differences between the approaches argued by these two authors which include the nature of the research questions, the nature of the coding operations, “forcing” versus “emergence”, and a perceived shift from “discovery” to “description” of the theory (Melia, 1996). Strauss and Corbin do not refer to the original key concept of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Melia (1996) suggests that the differing approaches seem to have become self fulfilling as the students of each of the originators have continued to teach the different versions, depending on who taught them; but she also suggests that, “this dispute over grounded theory versus full conceptual description will join the ranks of academic differences of opinion and ultimately will not damage the larger enterprise that was launched with *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*” (1967, p. 375).

The relevance of this controversy to my research is that I needed to understand each of the arguments in order to make my own decisions about how to process the data I collected. I

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

have used grounded theory largely as Glaser and Strauss originally promoted it, and as Glaser continued to explain it. I found these procedures to be truer to the original objectives of researcher openness with “ideas” being grounded in, and by, the data collected. In contrast, and in agreement with Melia, I found the Strauss and Corbin explication of grounded theory method to be “rather programmatic and over formulaic” (1996, p.370). The process promoted by Strauss and Corbin involves complex data coding and processing procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). I was concerned that these over-complicated processes would result in my losing touch with the original words and ideas provided by the participants. Open coding, advocated by Glaser, involves assigning names to issues or themes that appear to be emerging. The simplicity of using open coding and constant comparisons appealed to me, rather than labeling and then grouping, sub grouping and regrouping, as Strauss’ method recommended. Glaser provided a convincing rationale for simplicity when he reiterated that “Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it” (1992, p 43). Previous experience using grounded theory provided guidelines for a process that would enable me to work directly with the original data. It would be pragmatic enough to produce information that has the “relevance” and “grab” that Glaser said grounded theory should have (Glaser, 1978; Lowe & Glaser, 1995); thus, providing valuable information for educationalists working with schools at risk.

Tenets of the Grounded Theory Process

This section provides a brief overview of the methodological stages, language and concepts necessary for understanding the grounded theory process that I used. It explains the importance of the research partnership, the process of data collection and the process of analysis leading to theory building.

Research partnership

Grounded theory involves the researcher and the participants working as partners throughout the process of gathering, processing and interpreting the data. I share Bishop’s enthusiasm about the way a grounded approach enables research participants to “explain their own lived experiences” and for the researcher to work with them to interpret and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

articulate the findings “not explained in terms of “grand theories” or sociological “laws” (but rather) a “bottom up” approach to identifying themes and patterns from experiences” (1996, p.55). In my role as the researcher, I am reminded of the importance of staying close to, and grounded by, the words of the participants; as well as maintaining analytic distance (Glaser, 1992; 1998).

Data collection

The philosophy behind grounded theory encourages a flexible, open-minded approach to collecting data. Glaser (1978, p. 6) noted that the “grounded theory method ...transcends specific data collection methods. The generative nature of grounded theory constantly opens up the mind of the analyst to a myriad of new possibilities (including) variations in method”. Grounded theory allows, and encourages, the researcher to move in directions indicated by the data as the open coding takes place.

The process of setting up the initial data collection for this study was relatively straight forward and was a “close fit” with the types of strategies recommended and used by both Glaser and Strauss. Additional data were collected using newly planned strategies as the need became evident. The notion of theoretical sampling, based on emerging concepts, is the researcher’s license to move in new directions and use unplanned strategies to collect further relevant data, and was a process I followed in this research.

As well as taking an open-minded approach to collecting data, the researcher is required to ensure that there are sufficient valid data. An important method to ensure that sufficient data are being collected, to validate ideas and provide a platform for theory development, is to use the process of data triangulation. Glaser and Strauss describe triangulation as being embedded in the methodology and being an ongoing part of the systematic approach to analysing the data through constant comparisons (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Mathison (1988) describes triangulation as a process of using multiple methods, data sources, and sometimes researchers, to enhance the validity of research findings (p. 13). There is extensive literature on ways of triangulating data with one of the clearest sets of guidelines provided by Denzin (1978) who outlines four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation including time, space and person, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. During my research study concepts and processes were triangulated through comparing experiences between the interviewees

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

within each school. Comparisons were made among the three schools and later at the stage of testing propositions with the educational advisors²⁸. Comparisons were also made between data and the literature and between information from interviewees and the documents obtained from ERO and MOE. These processes include data and methodological triangulation, the latter being by far the more common type (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Fink, 1997).

Another way of considering triangulation is to consider three outcomes that Mathison (1988) says might result from a triangulation strategy: convergence, inconsistency or contradiction. In my study, there were examples of all three. There were many examples of convergence as different participants from the same school recalled the same events and had similar feelings about them. There were also many examples of convergence when the same contributing factors were identified in all three schools. There were examples of inconsistency where, as Mathison explains, “it is possible to construct a plausible explanation” of the inconsistency (1988, p. 16). One such example was when deputy principals, who missed out on being appointed principal, espoused having the interests of their school at heart but were perceived by other staff as working against the interests of the school by undermining the new principal. A careful look at the data indicated that the deputies were not deliberately setting out to undermine their principals. They believed they were resisting unnecessary or unwise changes that their new principals were trying to implement, thereby protecting the interests of the school. Other staff, however, perceived their actions as undermining and the outcome was destructive for the school. An example of contradiction was the opposing views held by some school personnel and ERO reviewers about how serious the problems at the schools were and what intervention would be desirable. Fortunately, Mathison reassures researchers that:

...we end up with data that occasionally converge, but frequently are inconsistent and even contradictory. And we do not throw up our hands in despair because we cannot say anything about the phenomenon we have been studying. Rather, we attempt to make sense of what we find and that often requires embedding the empirical data at hand with a holistic understanding of the specific situation and general background knowledge about this class of social phenomena. (1988, p. 17)

²⁸ A sample of fourteen educational advisors who work with schools at risk and in decline responded to the research propositions. Their responses triangulated data and provided current perspectives on the issues (see Chapter 7).

My experience in using triangulation strategies in this study, during the constant comparisons of the data, was that data were mostly convergent or inconsistent, rather than contradictory. This convergence of the data is evident in the findings and discussion chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Data analysis

Grounded theorists are encouraged to pursue an iterative and rigorous approach to data analysis and interpretation. In this section of the chapter, I discuss how some theorists have responded to ideas related to data use. In Chapter 4, I discuss in detail the process of analysis I used. When deciding how to process the data, I initially followed a path which is similar to that outlined in the first publication by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later by Glaser (1992), and other theorists (Allan, 2003; Charmaz, 1983; Fernandez, 2004; Melia, 1996; Trauth, 2001; Urquhart, 2001). Data analysis should begin as soon as possible and be systematic (Dey, 2003). The analysis involves coding and constant comparisons. Trauth explains:

The idea of constant comparison is at the heart of grounded theory as a method Put simply, constant comparison is the process of constantly comparing instances of data that you have labeled as a particular category with other instances of data, to see if these categories fit and are workable. (2001, p. 109)

Drawing on critiques by Melia (1996, p.373), who criticised “the plethora of categories, subcategories, as well as properties and dimensions, and the appearance of so many rules”, outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990); I decided to use a less complicated Glasarian process. Glaser (2001) recommended that, if researchers were uncertain about the coding process, they should just write what they see in the data in front of them.

Through being involved, over a number of years, in some large scale research projects, involving the analysis and interpretation of data from thousands of interviews, observations and group discussions (Hawk & Hill, 1996; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Ramsay, Harold, Hawk, Kaai, Marriot, & Poskitt, 1990), I refined a coding process which I used again this time. As I wrote this chapter, however, I became confused about the numerous ways of describing the systems of coding and by the names given to the various processes and stages: “open”, “focused”, “line-by-line”, “axial”, and “selective” coding. I also noted the contradictions

within the original writings of Glaser and Strauss, as well as the writings of various followers of one or the other of the originators. For some time, I tried to fit the coding which I had done with the written descriptions of the strategies in order to describe what I had already enacted. It finally became clear that there are as many ways to “do” grounded theory as there are researchers using it (Charmaz, 1983). Being guided, rather than controlled, by grounded theory has enabled as full and accurate description as I can provide of how I worked with the data without feeling obliged to justify each step by giving it a name from the literature (Chapter 4). Grounded theory researchers, Dey (1993) and Trauth, (2001) concur that what is important is that the coding is done at an analytical level, not a descriptive one. They stress that the names of the categories need to reflect concepts, constructs, ideas or process, rather than simple descriptions of behaviour. An example from my data analysis is the behaviours of stealing, lying and inappropriate sexual liaisons which became part of the conceptual category of “unethical and unprofessional behaviours”. A second example is the series of actions taken by groups of school or agency staff that became part of the process categories of “competing forces” and “decline escalation”.

The early writings of Glaser, in particular, name the process of theoretical saturation as the means by which researchers know when to stop. At its simplest level, researchers stop collecting data when no new properties, categories or relationships emerge and they are not learning anything new from new data, or further sampling fails to add any significant value to the study (Fernandez, 2004, p. 87). Saturation refers to concepts rather than data and it is the point at which no further conceptualisation of the data is needed (Dey, 1999, p. 8). Some new insights were still emerging at the time I had completed the planned 30 interviews so I extended the sample to 36 interviews before I was confident of saturation.

The Initial Research Design

I was involved in an exploratory research study in 1988/89 that used grounded theory as the main approach (Ramsay et al, 1990). After making the decision to use a grounded theory approach for this research, I set about refreshing my memory and knowledge and updating myself on the methodological discussions that occurred as Glaser and Strauss diverged in their interpretations of how the process should occur. The following section,

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

depicted in the left hand column of Figure 1, outlines the data collection process that was planned. This process was modified and expanded as the research progressed (Chapter 4).

Sample selection

Initially, I planned to collect data from a sample drawn from individuals who were in senior positions in schools which had declined to a serious extent. This section outlines the selection of the initial sample of schools and of the individual participants who were involved during the decline period. As the research progressed, I expanded this sample to ensure saturation of the interview data. Later, a sample of educational advisors was selected to respond to a set of research propositions, developed during the data analysis. The process of selecting educational advisors is outlined in Chapter 4 as part of the way the grounded theory methodology moved towards a conclusion.

School selection and access

The first decision in designing the research process was whether to select primary schools, secondary schools or both. I selected secondary schools, rather than primary, because they are larger and more complex organisations. It has been said that secondary schools are resistant, if not impervious, to change (Fink, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994; Sarason, 1971). This may be an overstatement but, in a larger organisation, decline is probably less likely to result from random events, local anomalies or the actions of one individual. Secondary school decline is, therefore, likely to be a more reliable reflection of generic decline issues. My second decision was whether to select single sex or co-educational schools. I selected co-educational schools. While they are only one part of the compulsory schooling sector in New Zealand, they represent 80 percent of all state secondary schools²⁹ and are the largest sector. I decided to include only state schools because they form the bulk of New Zealand's education system. Integrated and independent schools are in the minority and are governed and funded differently. Three state co-educational secondary schools were approached to participate and they all agreed.

²⁹ This percentage was calculated from data that were downloaded from the Government "Education Counts" website on 20th February, 2007. (<http://www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/themes/homepages/SchoolRoll/index.html>).

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Deciding on criteria for “decline” and “failure”, and selecting schools on that basis, was a more complex issue than deciding on the types of schools to include in the sample. The schools were selected according to the following criteria: each qualified for the research as a school that had been through a serious enough decline to have been identified in the recent past as “failing” by the MOE, ERO and the media. This was evidenced by negative ERO reports, newspaper and magazine articles exposing school problems, inclusion in the Schools Support Programme³⁰ and/or replacement of the Board of Trustees (BOT)³¹ with a commissioner³². At the commencement of my study, I was aware of at least nine secondary schools, in the North Island³³ alone, that met the above criteria. Three were selected for pragmatic and methodological reasons. The first pragmatic reason was that it is more likely that I would be given access to schools in which I had worked and established rapport and trust. The second pragmatic reason was that the selected schools are now in a process of positive development, having become successful enough not to feel threatened by involvement in a research programme. All three schools now have principals who were not involved during the period of decline. The majority of the current senior leaders are also new to their schools. Each school has had at least one positive ERO report and all three have stable or increasing rolls. Methodological reasons for selecting three schools included the research design allowing for as few as three, being able to select schools with differing decile ratings, having enough schools to triangulate data in a range of ways and having confidence that I would have enough interviews to achieve saturation of the data.

I have worked in each of the schools in a range of roles and have personal knowledge about each school and its history. Serving in multiple roles, especially in New Zealand and in my work, is common in education and has the potential to cause confusion or to compromise informed consent (Oliver, 2003). At the same time, it can have the advantage of providing a researcher with access because of already established credibility. My credibility with current and past personnel, and rapport and trust with current personnel, is based on their knowledge and assessment of my work. On several occasions I was told that the trust in me was the major reason each of the boards permitted my research, and the reason that some of the participants agreed to an interview. Privacy and confidentiality for

³⁰ This programme is one of the intervention programmes set up by the MOE to ensure schools at risk, or in decline, are monitored and supported.

³¹ The school’s governing body. It is a body corporate and is elected by the school’s community.

³² The Minister of Education can replace an elected board of trustees with a commissioner if s/he thinks the school is seriously at risk and the BOT is not governing effectively.

³³ Most of New Zealand’s population is in two large islands and the majority of that population is in the North Island.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

participants and for the schools was not difficult to protect during the data collection period because I was still having contact with each of the schools for a variety of reasons as a normal part of my work in schools. My occasional contact with the schools and school personnel would not seem unusual, even to my colleagues. It would have been difficult for school personnel to find out about the research interviews because 32 of the 36 interviews took place off site.

Interviewee selection

The grounded theory process of theoretical sampling, while involving an initial plan, requires the researcher to move in new directions, indicated by the data, when selecting participants. In designing the plan I was cognisant of Fink, using a similar methodology, saying there are few guidelines for researchers working in retrospective research situations (1997, p. 4). Initially, I sought people who were in the school before the decline began and who continued their employment during the decline. My intention was to select interviewees who were involved in the study schools over as long a period as possible, who held positions of influence, had wide-ranging knowledge of what was happening in the school and/or contact with a wide range of school personnel. As the interviewing progressed, interviewees were chosen because of key roles they played in the school during the decline period. The sample, therefore, includes senior and middle management (deputy, associate and assistant principals and heads of departments), trustees, and other key personnel such as counsellors, principals' personal assistants (PAs), and caretakers. It was a purposive sample selected by using a snowballing strategy. Individual participants were identified through my knowledge, reference to documents (such as staff lists or minutes) and mention by other interviewees. Current principals were asked to identify long serving staff and trustees. Also, at the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee if they knew of others who might be contacted for an interview. The snowball sample grew as one contact led to another. There were five recommended contacts I was unable to locate because they had left the country, died or moved away.

My previous qualitative research experience indicated that it would probably take about eight to ten interviews before the data were likely to be saturated. My initial proposal estimated a sample of ten participants from each school; 30 in total. Using grounded theory, however, resulted in this plan being modified. More interviews were arranged if data were not saturated or when categories emerged during analysis, indicating a need to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

investigate a particular group of behaviours. An example of the latter reason for selecting interviewees was the school leaders who were so disillusioned they left their school at a relatively early stage in its decline (see Chapter 4). The interviews were not conducted in strict order with one school being completed before another was started. I began with just one school (School A), completing six interviews before I started interviewing people from the second school (School B). Interviews overlapped across schools A and B, and then across schools B and C. Most of the last interviews to be completed were from School C. I extended the number of interviewees for school B because earlier interviews had signaled the importance of interviewing staff who had made the decision to leave the school. The reason there were only nine interviewees from School C was because the data were saturated by that time. In all, 36 interviews were conducted with participants: 12 from School A, 15 from School B and 9 from School C.

Gaining informed consent

I used both informal and formal approaches to gaining informed consent from schools and potential interviewees. The process for gaining informed consent, described in this chapter, was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) prior to my beginning the research³⁴. Copies of the documents used are in Appendices B and C.

School consent

Deciding on the appropriate individuals, groups and/or schools from whom informed consent was required was necessary before research could commence. The question of the school as “agent of permission” is complex in this study. Casey (2001, p. 137) says that, “where the data source within the organisation requires managerial permission to be accessed; the organisation is an agent of approval”. I could have sought permission from participants without either the current principals’ or boards’ knowledge and I did not need to visit the schools to gain access to interviewees. It still seemed appropriate, however, given the sensitive histories of the schools, to gain the consent of the current principals and boards of trustees, as their schools could be regarded as “passive participants” (Oliver, 2003).

³⁴ Protocol no. 02/021.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Because I had worked previously in all three schools selected for the study and, therefore, had various forms of relationships with some school personnel, I needed to ensure that potential participants felt free to say “No”. For each school, the initial contact was with the current principal, at first informally and later formally. My informal verbal request was made along the following lines:

I have a request to discuss with you and I need to feel confident that you will be comfortable to say “no” if you are at all unsure about ---- school being involved. I am beginning research for a doctorate on the topic of school decline. I want to understand why it happens and what we could learn to prevent it in the future. I need to select three schools that have experienced a period of serious decline and then contact staff and trustees who were involved during that time, to be interviewed about their experiences. The people interviewed and the schools will not be identified at any stage, including in the final thesis itself. Nobody apart from me will know who the participants are. There is a formal process of informing and getting informed consent from the board that I will need to go through, but I wanted to know how you might feel about the idea of this school being one of the research schools before I considered approaching the board chair.

My requests were greeted with a level of enthusiasm that gave me the confidence to continue. After the principal agreed to support my request, I approached the current board of trustees’ chairperson informally to assess his/her willingness for the school to be selected. Once they had each indicated support, the full written information sheet (Appendix B) was sent to each BOT chairperson for distribution to trustees prior to a board meeting. I attended the board meeting, spoke about the research, gave trustees the opportunity to ask questions and left while the board made its decision. Each school gave full written consent before I approached interviewees.

Later, it became apparent that I needed to request MOE documents in order to triangulate data provided in the interviews. At the MOE’s suggestion, I re-contacted the principal and board of each school to inform them that I intended to request access to files held on their school. I received a letter from each board giving me permission to proceed. On MOE advice, my request was made for the MOE files through The Official Information Act 1982³⁵.

³⁵ An Act of Parliament that enables the public access to information held by public institutions.

Interviewee consent

All potential interviewees were approached³⁶ to assess their possible willingness to participate. If they indicated an interest, I provided them with an information form, a consent form and a contact information form (Appendices B and C). I attached a note indicating my willingness to be contacted for any explanations. Of those I approached, only one person refused to be interviewed. Once the interviewee returned the signed consent form, I phoned and scheduled the interview. Before beginning an interview, I went over the key aspects outlined in the consent process giving another opportunity to ask questions, asking if they were willing to have the interview taped and reminding them they could ask for the tape to be turned off at any time or ask to finish the interview at any time. Glaser (1998, p. 107) advises strongly against taping interviews. My experience with lengthy interviews on sensitive topics has convinced me that it is less obtrusive to have a tape on than it is for the researcher to be writing notes as the interviewee speaks. Also, the demands of trying to manually record everything would detract from my role as an interviewer to support and encourage the interviewee. Only one person asked for the interview not to be taped. During that interview, I made handwritten notes that were later typed up and sent as a transcript for comments and verification. Two interviews, done by phone because interviewees lived far away, were also taped.

As well as consent to participate, interviewees were asked for consent to use the information they provided. Each taped interview was transcribed by a professional secretary and returned to the interviewee for verification and/or further comments. Some advisors on ethics are adamant that interviewees have the right to “examine and amend” the transcript of their interview (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). My experience during this research causes me to challenge the worth of this exercise of interviewee rights, as well as the ethics of asking for more of their time. Two interviewees specifically requested not to be sent their transcripts, saying that they were content with what they had said during the interview and wanted me to use that with their permission. I posted a copy of the interview transcript to all other interviewees and they each eventually returned their transcript and gave me permission to use it. Some minor corrections were made to grammar, or additions in order to complete sentences, but nothing significant was added, deleted or changed in any of the returned transcripts.

³⁶ Initial approaches were made in a variety of ways; face to face, by phone and by email.

Planned data collection strategies

I initially planned to collect data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were to be interviews with study school personnel and follow-up phone interviews and email discussions with selected key informants. Secondary data were to be collected from a range of school related documents, as well as the memos I wrote throughout the research process.

Interviews

The interviews with study school personnel took place, largely as initially planned. Once a person agreed to be interviewed, an in-depth, face-to-face interview was conducted with each interviewee at a time and place of their choice. Two interviews were conducted by phone, four interviews were conducted at the school of the interviewees, and two were conducted in my home. The other 28 interviewees selected their own homes. Interviews took between two and three hours each and were a combination of “the unstructured interview” and the “non-directive interview” (Cohen & Manion, 1989). My approach to each interview differed slightly, depending on my relationship with the interviewee but, in every instance, I was aiming to “enter into a kind of interactive relationship in which communication becomes a two way street” (Anderson, 1990, p. 227). I allowed each interviewee to have a high degree of control over the direction of the dialogue while ensuring all the key areas were covered. When I knew the interviewees well, and we had shared experiences, the interviews were conducted less formally. When I did not know the interviewee, the interview process was more formal, though still semi-structured. Each interview began with the suggestion that the interviewee tell the story of their time at the school, starting with the time they first arrived. It is argued that story telling enables the person to relax and to recall the things that have meaning and seem the most important to them (Bishop, 1996, p. 25). Fink (1997, p. 79), a Canadian researcher who used a similar interview process, said that the “collective” or “rehearsed” memories of interviewees tend to be recalled first. My prompts and questions ensured that I covered all aspects, including tapping into their “dissident memory”, which might include a version that differs from the version of events that has become accepted and recounted. The following example demonstrates this point:

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Kay: You talked earlier about how the school seemed to carry on as usual in spite of the concerns that many staff had. As things got worse, do you think the students knew about what was happening?

Interviewee: Some of them definitely did. I had some of the senior students come to talk with me about what they had heard

Kay: What had they heard? And how were they feeling about it?

Sometimes interviewees knew that I knew what they were talking about and skipped, or missed, detail that I needed to hear. I often countered this by an explanation such as:

Kay: It is very important that I hear your recollections and do not assume I know what you experienced or thought. Even though you know I was there, please describe it all for me in detail so I hear it through your words.

I used the research questions (Appendix D) as a memory prompt for my role as interviewer. Interviewees had seen the questions in the information posted to them as part of the process of gaining informed consent but I did not give them a copy again. I was open, however, about referring to my list of questions in the latter stages of the interview.

Kay: We have covered a great deal of ground and you have given me fantastic information to work with. Let me just quickly check my guiding questions to make sure I have not forgotten to ask you anything.

There were times when I asked interviewees for advice on the process I was using. In the instance of the example given below, it resulted in an addition to the sampling strategies.

Interviewee: In the early days [school name] lost about a third of the staff. And that continued at a senior level because people couldn't work with him. Some were certainly good people, but they just didn't fit his mould so they left. So the people who stayed, I guess, adjusted themselves into the system and thought "well if I want to survive I will have to compromise".

Kay: So it's going to be very important for me to tap into some of those people who left? How important do you think their views would be to this research?

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Interviewee: *Extremely important because they made a different set of decisions and it affected the school greatly.*

As the interviews progressed, and I was involved in the data analysis, questions and themes began to emerge that required further investigation. I began to add extra questions towards the end of the interview with an explanation that I was beginning to test various themes as well as “to tap the unique knowledge or perspective of interview subjects” (Fink, 1997, p. 92). I explained this explicitly to the interviewees:

Kay: *Let me run a couple of questions past you for your opinion. I am pretty well advanced now with my interviews and some ideas have begun to emerge that I am exploring further. One of the things I have learned is that there is a difference, almost like two samples of people. There are people who stay and people who go, when a school is declining, and they have quite different perspectives. Do you have any comments on that issue?*

Interviewee: *That was certainly my experience. A lot of staff left ...*

Interviewees were encouraged to phone or email me if they had further information or ideas to contribute. I received emails from six study school participants, following their interviews, and the comments were used as additional data. The following email is one example:

I couldn't stop thinking after you left the other night and decided to put some more thoughts in writing for you. One thing I remember vividly is ... (Middle manager)

Key informants

Initially, I had planned to identify two key informants for each school and to keep regular contact with them during the data collection and analysis phases, both of which were interconnected and ongoing. This strategy was intended to provide further information for me, if required, as I learned about each school, and also to act as a means of triangulation as I collected and analysed data. This plan, however, did not turn out to be effective and I abandoned it. Figure 1 shows the “Key Informants” listed under the heading “Initially Planned”, with an arrow moving them left into the “Not used” category. Of the six identified people, one died soon after the first interview, one left the country and another

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

was very busy and difficult to contact. At the same time, other interviewees, who had not been identified as key informants, were making extra contacts and showing an extended interest. I abandoned my initial idea in favour of encouraging anyone to have further input, if they chose to offer it.

Documents

As Figure 1 shows, I initially planned to collect archived documents from each school for validating and triangulating data from interviews. School BOTs had agreed to allow me to use school documents, within the confines of the agreed confidentiality. I also planned to use ERO reports, which are public documents, as well as documents from ERO files. Documents provide an unobtrusive and stable source of data that, on occasion, is the only source of evidence on some issues (Fink, 1997, p. 80). As is appropriate, using grounded theory, the planned process was changed and extended as the collected data indicated the need to take new directions. While some documents were unavailable, documents played a greater role in my research than was originally anticipated. I used school documents from my work files³⁷ and sought access to study school files from ERO and MOE. Figure 1 shows under the headings, “Initially planned” and “Not used”, that, while I was able to access all the ERO reports, the ERO files during the study schools’ decline periods had been destroyed in line with ERO policy. Under the heading, “Newly introduced”, in Figure 1, are documents from my work collection and MOE file documents obtained under The Official Information Act 1982. Chapter 4 describes how the planned document collection took place as well as the adapted and extended process that evolved.

A key attribute, and strength of the grounded theory method, is its broad approach to what constitutes data and the ongoing analysis of data throughout its collection. The planned collection strategies (Figure 1; “Data used”) have provided rich data but so have the unplanned strategies (Figure 1; “Newly introduced”) that evolved as the research progressed. These are discussed more fully in Chapter 4. They include my own analytical and interpretive notes made as “memos”, updates for supervisors, MOE documents, new literature and feedback on propositions from the school interviewees as well as from a sample of educational advisors.

³⁷ Documents included meeting minutes, reviews, action plans, correspondence, media articles, reports, school data, financial statements and school newsletters.

Ethical Considerations

Being an ethical researcher involves more than just following legal prescriptions and proscriptions. As O'Brien (2001, p. 29) states:

Ethically informed and ethically sound research will often require researchers to put in place procedures and protocols which extend beyond the requirements enshrined in the law – the law provides a minimal framework. Ethics requires research practitioners to act in ways which are ethically sound, rather than limiting themselves, as researchers, to meeting legal requirements.

There were ethical issues to be approved and managed before this research began. These were addressed in the proposal to the MUHEC³⁸ and approval was gained before commencing the study. The process of gaining informed consent from school boards and individual participants has been discussed earlier in this chapter. An ethical approach was particularly important because of my professional relationship with the study schools and the potential for role confusion. In addition, there were complex ethical problems associated with confidentiality. These problems emerged when I began writing the findings chapters where I tried to provide sufficient written evidence to convince a reader without disclosing details or examples that would identify the schools or study participants.

The “greater good”

Ethical issues are neither black or white nor good or bad. There is usually a trade off and a balance that needs to be found between the costs and the benefits, often called the cost/benefit ratio. The costs from this research, at worst, could involve some individuals feeling discomfort while taking part or others being offended at not being invited to take part in the research. Publicity resulting from individuals or the media guessing which schools were involved could adversely impact on schools that have been identified as declining and named as failures. Fortunately, none of the problems which were explored as possible ethical dilemmas eventuated. The benefits could involve interviewees feeling positive and empowered through their participation. Of more importance, closing the gap in knowledge has the potential to prevent lost and damaged educational opportunities for

³⁸ Massey University has Ethics Committees based on three sites. My support came from the Albany Campus Committee.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

students and to empower people and agencies to intervene early and effectively to prevent serious school decline. It would be unethical not to take up the opportunity, arising from the nature of my professional work in declining schools and schools at risk, to do such potentially useful research.

“Do no harm”

Ensuring that research does no harm is of fundamental importance. The question of the potential harm to individual schools was difficult to judge. In each instance, their decline and reform, along with those of other schools, has been very public knowledge within the education community. Even if the study schools were identified at any stage, it is unlikely that any harm would result because their “bad reputations” are in the past. People in the education world and in their communities are aware of the reforms and improvements that these schools have made.

Aside from the issues of anonymity and confidentiality, the other possible harm to individuals could have come from their revisiting a past time that was very unpleasant or difficult for them. For study school participants, the interview did bring back some bad memories. I was aware of some interviewees feeling emotional, because of the memories evoked, but I was not aware of any feeling upset. The interview, for most interviewees, was a combination of renewed reflection and catharsis. Most volunteered their thanks and gratitude for the opportunity to be able to discuss the experience. Their appreciation is reflected in the following comments recorded in my research journal; comments made after the tape recorder was turned off or as we walked to the door at the end of the interview.

It is such a relief to have been able to talk about these things. I have felt as though I shouldn't discuss it with anyone because it felt disloyal.

It feels like a weight off my shoulders to have been able to think and talk about those days. It was a nightmare for us all and when it was over it was easier not to think about it.

I'm very grateful for the chance to help to make sure other people don't have to go through what we had to.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Most study school participants, having been through the trauma of a school in crisis, expressed the desire to ensure that other children and adults do not have the same experiences. They were motivated to take action to improve the situation for others and regarded being part of such a research exercise as a way of doing so. In this sense, their involvement was an empowering experience, as the following email illustrates:

I believe your work will be invaluable in preventing the endless repetition of this pattern, and in clarifying central government, community and social responsibility in avoiding the appalling human cost of school failure and I am very keen to keep in touch. (Email from senior leader)

Personnel perceived to be “the cause” of the problems

In each of the three schools selected for the research, previous principals were viewed, in the educational community, as one of the main factors contributing to the decline of that school. These people are no longer involved in the schools. Of the potential interviewees, they were the most vulnerable or likely to being harmed by the research. I felt that even those who are still alive³⁹ would probably not agree to participate in the research. Furthermore, being informed about the research and/or being asked to participate could be very distressing for them. Even the topic, “school decline”, denotes strongly negative connotations, and possible implications, for the principals ultimately in control of the schools at that time. Informing them could also have jeopardised the participation of other participants, if any of the principals tried to prevent the research taking place. For these reasons they were not informed about the research or asked to participate.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The schools

From the beginning, care was taken to ensure the schools selected for this research could not be identified. The education community in New Zealand is small in that people tend to know each other and information about individuals and schools is quickly disseminated. Tolich and Davidson (1999, p.79) warn that, “with a population of only 3.6 million, it makes sense to conceptualise New Zealand as a “small town””. Allowing the study schools “to choose their own pseudonyms” (Tolich, 2001, p. 10) would not be a solution that

³⁹ Seven of the nine principals are still alive though, at the time of the interviews, two could not be contacted for reasons of health or personal circumstances.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

would protect individuals or their schools. While it is not possible to stop people guessing which schools were involved, my work in a number of schools in difficulty made such guessing more difficult.

In writing the thesis, the data provided by participants are handled collectively for the three schools. It is not a case study analysis of the decline of individual schools nor does it seek to attribute blame or damage reputations. Apart from me, a small number of MOE and ERO staff⁴⁰ are the only people who know the identities of the three schools in the study. Each interviewee knows the identity of only one of the schools in the study. I developed an eight digit code for each transcript so I was able to identify the school and the position of the interviewee, even from isolated pages or quotes. I originally intended to use the code number in the thesis to reference quotes. However, it became obvious very early in the analysis process that an outsider could connect different parts of a transcript and separate the references for each of the three schools. That, in turn, could have led to identification of some individuals because of the positions they held or the information to which they had access. Quotes from interviewees are attributed to their position in the school only.

Individuals

Individual interviewees were not anonymous in the sense that I knew participants' identities since they allowed me to participate with them in the data collection. They were guaranteed confidentiality during the process and in the thesis script. The current principal and board were not told the identity of the participants from their schools who were involved in the research. The same coding system, as described above for the schools, was used to protect the identities of the participants.

In this thesis, interviewees are identified as "senior leader", "middle manager", "trustee" or "support staff"; names which describe the positions they held through most of the decline period. These categories are sufficiently general so that no individual can be identified, even if the reader attempts to guess the identity of a school. This means that the individuals, and the schools, will have the confidentiality that was promised. There is no guarantee that interviewees will not talk with each other about the research but I have no evidence that this has happened.

⁴⁰ Both organisations agreed that the small number of staff involved with my request for documents would keep the identity of the schools confidential.

Processes for handling research data

Procedures were put in place to protect the confidentiality of the schools and the participants. All field notes and interview notes have remained confidential to me, while the tapes were all transcribed by the same person who signed a confidentiality agreement before beginning this task. She did not know the names of the interviewees. Tapes were identified with a code number only. Transcripts have been stored electronically on my computer which is protected by an access code and a password.

Using verbatim and referencing documents

The greatest confidentiality problem, and one I had not fully anticipated, became clear as I worked with the data. It is the issue of how to provide information for the reader about the findings, the type of interviewee who provided the information and the sources of documents, without identifying the schools. Some issues were important to discuss but were so specific, and sometimes unique, they would identify the school. Examples include the types of unethical behaviours of some principals and senior leaders; the types of illegal acts by some principals and senior leaders; the nature of MOE interventions; the types of reports/reviews conducted in the school; the dates and content of ERO reviews; and the distinctive position held by some staff such as counselors, principals' personal assistants or chairpersons of the boards of trustees.

Including quotes from the interviewees, and from documents, adds richness to the explanation. The problem of referencing them, while protecting personal and school identities, has been challenging. Some of the documents used, such as ERO reports and BOT minutes, are in the public domain and they easily identify the schools. The same problem applies to the documents released under The Official Information Act 1982. Before releasing the documents to me, material was deleted to protect the privacy of natural individuals, to maintain the constitutional convention protecting the neutrality of officials, to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs and where material related to schools outside of the study. The names of the schools, and the names of some people associated with the schools, however, were not removed and, even if I removed them, some of the events and situations described would be recognised. In addition, it is impossible to provide a specific reference for these documents without providing the information needed for people to access them. I sought ethics committee advice on how to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

handle this issue (See Appendix E). Committee members agreed that I should use only broad categories to describe people's roles. They suggested that the schools should not be identified, even with pseudonyms or letters, because it would be easy to assemble the examples from one school in order to identify it. They also advised of the need to keep the public documents "private" in order to keep the confidentiality commitment. Privacy has been protected through disguising them in the body of the text and not including them in the bibliography. I have hidden gender by the use of s/he and his/her when necessary and, on a small number of occasions, I have changed some words in a quote to allow it to be used but to ensure the person's identity is protected without changing the sense of the quote.

Insider/outsider role

As a researcher, who had been involved in the research site during the period being researched, it is impossible to remain distanced from my memories of the school at that time and not to react, in terms of my own experiences, to what interviewees were saying. This can be an advantage but it is also a potential disadvantage. Fink was in a role similar to mine when he did his research in a Canadian school, some years after having been employed there. Fink (1997, p. 80) explains how he used his own recollections as a source of data:

I was personally involved, either as a teacher or administrator, in most events described in this study. My own recollections, therefore, provide another source of data, as well as acting as a control on the veracity of other data sources. The discussion which follows, elaborates the three main methodological strategies mentioned as well as my own reminiscences.

I have chosen not to use my own recollections as data but I have certainly used them as a credibility check on other data provided. My recollections enabled me to prompt interviewees regarding events. As an insider, for some of the time, I am able to remember and make judgements about the relationships the interviewee had to others involved; about the extent of their knowledge in some areas; about the intensity of people's feelings during the decline period; about their changed perspectives over time; and what others in the school thought about them at the time. I am fully aware of the potential for my own views and perceptions, as well as the degree of adequacy of my memory, to influence my

interpretation of events. My challenge, like Fink's, was: "to combine the advantages of my unique "inside-outside" perspectives while minimizing their potential disadvantages" (p. 86). Overall, I feel the advantages have outweighed the disadvantages and I have been careful to disclose fully to the reader the times I have made judgements in these ways.

Moving from Initial Plans to Implementation

The process for setting up this research was one frequently followed by social scientists working within a university: deciding on a topic, doing a literature search, writing a proposal, having supervisors appointed, having the proposal approved and seeking and obtaining approval from an ethics committee. During these activities I was required to provide very full and specific information about the methodology to be followed. This initial plan was modified, as is appropriate when using grounded theory. The researcher is encouraged to adapt or add strategies for data collection when the ongoing data analysis indicates the need to do so. This chapter has outlined the initially proposed steps and strategies and the following chapter explains how these were changed and adapted during the grounding of the data and the development of the theory.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND THEORY BUILDING

A grounded theory approach to conducting research allows for, and encourages, an “extreme openness at the beginning of the study” (Brytting, 1995, p. 529). It is an iterative approach in which the openness continues throughout the sampling, data collection, data analysis and writing. Glaser tells the researcher to “remember and trust that the research problem is as much discovered as the process that contributes to resolve it” (1992, p. 21). I describe the evolving research process and how it responded to identified needs for further data, as well as contributing data.

This chapter further discusses the initial sampling and data collection plans. It explains my decisions about continuing to use some of the planned strategies, abandoning some and adding others, as the analysed data indicated a need to collect extra and different data. Figure 1 depicts the research activities in the main section of the diagram under the headings “Data used” and “Newly introduced”. I begin by describing how I recorded and reflected on my predispositions about school decline; the decline maps I developed for each school; selection of the samples of schools and interviewees; the collection and use of documents; and an explanation of how the data collection process was adapted as the research progressed. In particular, I explain how a set of propositions was developed and used to seek feedback on the emerging theory from existing participants, as well as from a “newly introduced” sample of educational advisors. Continuing the description of the evolving methodology, I discuss the process of analysing the data and refining categories as I worked towards theory development.

Predispositions

Because the methodological approach is one of letting the theory emerge from the data, the sensitivity and open-mindedness of the researcher is of particular importance. My work in

declining schools has exposed me to experiences that have influenced my thinking on this topic. One of the first tasks in undertaking this research was to put in writing my personal views and predispositions on the topic of school decline. I have used these statements throughout the phases of data comparisons, analysis, interpretation and writing to self-reflect and self-challenge my interpretation of the data, ensuring that the evidence warrants the conclusions drawn.

Mapping the Decline

A chronological summary of events associated with the decline was drafted for each of the study schools with the help of documents and data from key interviewees who had been at the schools over an extended time. Each timeline includes school events and activities, reports, media publications, key appointments and resignations. The timelines were not shared with interviewees but I used them at appropriate times during the interviews to prompt the memories of the research participants and to elicit responses to events. I had initially planned to include one of the timelines in this chapter of the thesis but it became clear that the content and the order of events would easily identify the schools. I developed, instead, a diagram⁴¹ as a generic representation of the timelines which eventually became the diagram of the decline process. Developing this diagram assisted with the clarification of the core category, the decline process, and in the emergence of a theory of decline.

Evolving Data Collection Process

A number of changes were made to the initial data collection plans that were outlined in Chapter 3, for either pragmatic or methodological reasons. The evolving process included adaptations to the sample size and type of interviewees, the collection of documents, the use of my own reflections and the collection and use of the literature.

⁴¹ The diagram is found in chapter 6.

Sampling changes

The purposive sampling strategy known as “snowballing”, described in the previous chapter, was used but in a modified way. My initial proposal estimated a sample of 10 participants from each school, 30 in total. Participants were to be selected because of their leadership roles over an extended time during the decline. The main change occurred when I realised part way through an interview that I had been focusing only on people who had stayed in one of the schools over most of the decline process. Evidence had been building to indicate that staff who decided to leave the school, because they were unhappy with what was happening, were often the most highly respected colleagues and were regarded as a great loss to the school at a time when they were most needed. An interviewee’s comment heightened my awareness and clarified the need to interview some of these staff. The interviewee gave me the names of some individuals who had left that particular school. I made contact with them, as well as doing the same for the other two schools. Glaser (1978) encourages the selection of participants for a purpose indicated as a need by the data. “In the beginning he (the researcher) starts ... to sample in all directions which seem relevant and work. Later on ... his sampling becomes more selective along the lines of his focus on the central issues of his emerging theory” (p. 46). Concurrently, I continued the planned interviews.

Document collection

Initially, I had planned to seek historical documents from each of the schools. The school BOTs gave permission to access and use any documents. In all three cases, however, there were hardly any historical documents remaining in the schools because they had been lost or destroyed as administrative areas were upgraded or changed over the years. With permission, I have, instead, used documents which I collected when undertaking research, review and/or evaluation roles in the schools.

As the interviews progressed and a number of respondents referred to actions and interactions with the MOE and ERO, I felt it was important to seek evidence to triangulate these data. ERO reports are public information and all recent reports are available on-line. Again, with the permission of the school BOTs and with support from ERO, I obtained 22 reports on the three schools. These reports covered the period of decline in each of the study schools. ERO destroys its evidence files on schools after six years so this became one

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

of the initially planned sets of data that Figure 1 shows as “Not used”. The MOE, however, does archive records to which I sought access. The three schools, again, gave written permission to access and use the documents. The documents were received under The Official Information Act 1982. I read over 1500 MOE file documents from the three schools (Appendix F). They ranged in length from one page internal memos, faxes and emails to 30 or 40 page reports on the schools. Documents collected included staff lists, board minutes and correspondence, independent reports on aspects of school functioning, school and intervention action plans, MOE and ERO internal communications and correspondence, ERO reports, needs analyses, communications with parents, staff meeting minutes, media articles, compliance reports, budgets and financial reports, and principal reports to the BOT.

Researcher reflection through memo writing

The role of the researcher’s reflections in grounded theory is very important. The reflective activity Glaser and Strauss recommend using is called “memo writing”. Glaser said that memos “lead naturally to abstraction or ideation” and considered this to be a critical part of the theory building process (1978, p. 93). Because Glaser and Strauss ended up holding differing views on this point, researchers need to study the various opinions and make their own decisions on how to handle reflections. Peshkin notes that memo writing is still an area that is not well understood. “What is even less well understood is the way that a developing interpretation and the identity or orientation of the researcher evolves over the course of a research project” (2000, p.5). My self-reflection began prior to the preparation of the research proposal and continued throughout the entire research process. Beginning with the articulation of my predispositions, I continued to record reflections, sometimes taking the form of notes or what Glaser refers to as “jots” of just a few words (1998, p. 178). They included my thoughts, concerns, questions, impressions, experiences and understandings as they emerged (Appendix G: Memo writing). They played a useful role during the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data when most of my analysis of memos took place. They were used less than the other data sources during the writing phase. The process of analysing memos was straightforward and comprised, “putting those that elucidate the same category together in order to clarify its dimensions and to distinguish it from other categories” (Emerson, 1983, p. 123). Reflections also took the form of research updates and reports to my thesis supervisors. Glaser warns strongly

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

against showing memos to “advisors” and insists they are not to be judged or evaluated (p.178). However, I found it very helpful to discuss the ideas at supervision meetings and those discussions assisted the evolution of my thinking.

Literature

A grounded theory approach requires the researcher to develop the theory from the data without being unduly influenced, prior to data collection, by any existing ideas, including the literature. Glaser explains:

In our approach we collect the data in the field first. Then we start analysing it and generating theory. When the theory seems sufficiently grounded and developed, then we review the literature in the field and relate the theory to it through the integration of ideas ... thus scholarship in the same area starts after the emerging theory is sufficiently developed so the theory will not be preconceived by pre-empting concepts. (1978, p. 32)

As key categories emerged during the data analysis I began searching for these specific topics. At that point, the research and new literature became a source of data against which Emerson (1983) suggests comparisons could be made. Two examples will demonstrate this process. The first was the issue of school staff wanting to expose problems and to seek advice, help and/or intervention. I became aware of the difficulties involved for the person who wanted to “blow the whistle” and began searching literature on whistle-blowing. Most of it was not directly applicable because it focused on the legal process and rights of whistle-blowers in the business world. There was, however, some useful information on the feelings and motivations of the whistle-blower, on the risks they take and on some of the consequences for them. This was useful in providing more evidence of the difficulties involved and, therefore, the reasons it seldom happens. The second example is that of the nature and success of interventions in schools. Examples of interventions, discussed by most interviewees, resulted in an important category and a key phase in the decline process being identified. In the example of the study schools, the interventions were ineffective in halting the decline. I began to explore the literature on interventions. Most related to schooling improvement projects so the context is not the same but there were valuable insights into why interventions often tend to fail. This extant literature is a source of more

data, to be compared to the existing grounded data (Fernandez, 2004, p. 86). It can be used to help build the theory.

Data Analysis

Coding transcripts and generating categories

Prior to the start of this research, I decided to code manually and not use the computer software programmes that are available. The size of the data set made it manageable to process manually and the use of software would not add benefit. This form of coding allowed me to stay directly in touch with each interviewee's contribution, and the context in which they made each comment. The attentive handling of the data enhanced my ability to analyse and interpret their comments. In particular, I wanted to see the whole data set at the same time in order to sort and re-sort, with all the categories in view. I used a large table and the floor to sort and re-sort categories and subcategories (Appendix H: Sorting categories). Photocopies were kept of all documents at each stage of the processing, using a monitoring sheet (Appendix I).

Administrative and "open coding"

As is appropriate when using grounded theory, I began processing the interview transcripts at an early stage and continued in an ongoing way, in order for the data analysis to be accessible as the subsequent interviews were conducted. The transcripts were processed using two coding activities. An administrative code identified each respondent. The other code dealt with the content of the interview.

The first was a pragmatic and managerial process for the purpose of being able to identify small sections of data, such as individual quotes, while they were being sorted and analysed. Each transcript was identified with an eight digit code that enabled me to know who the respondent was, to which school they had belonged, the position they held at the school, and the page of the transcript from which the comments came. The transcripts were formatted with a blank column on the left side of each page. This column was used to identify each respondent's comments using part of the transcript code. I used a stamp to transfer the code down the page. This procedure enabled me to literally cut up the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

transcripts and manually collate and sort the codes to generate categories, without losing track of their source (Appendix J: Transcript page).

The second coding process, for the purpose of analysing and interpreting the data, was a form of content analysis that Glaser called “open coding”. A blank column on the right side of each page was used to record the initial coding of key ideas, issues and themes next to the relevant verbatim remarks (Appendix J: Transcript page). Initially, I used single words or phrases to name the process, the actions or my analysis of what was happening.

Constructing categories

As the open coding progressed, with codes being compared and contrasted, themes became more evident. I became aware of the connections between issues and ideas that I had given related but different code names. As a result of the constant comparisons, categories began to emerge from the related codes and I named each category (Glaser, 1992, p. 43). At the stage of having transcribed about two-thirds of the interviews, I began cutting up the coded pages and sorting the sections into the categories. I was aware that my experiences working in schools aided my understanding of how to group ideas and themes. As Dey (1993), an expert on research methodology and grounded theory, explains:

The construction of a category or the appropriateness of assigning it to some part of the data will undoubtedly reflect our wider comprehensions – both of the data and what we are trying to do with it. The researcher (who brings to categorization an evolving set of assumptions, biases and sensitivities) cannot be eliminated from this process. (p. 104)

The analytical judgements made in constructing categories were, in part, based on my research and work experiences.

Sorting categories

About one-third of the way through the interviews, my written reflections highlighted a growing awareness of different levels of influences on the schools and on the decline process. At the broadest level, there were national and international societal influences which I called the macro level of influence. There were also institutional influences both

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

within the school itself, within the school's community, from external agencies and between these groups, called the meso level. Finally, there were influences at a personal (micro) level. The latter included responses, feelings, behaviours and actions of the individuals involved from the principals and senior leaders to key staff and the trustees. I went back through the coded transcripts and added this dimension to the coding simply by numbering them "1" for micro, "2" for meso or "3" for macro. Initially, I found some categorising decisions difficult to make. One example was whether to place data about a specific principal at the micro level or the meso level. Working with many bits of data helped me understand that, if the issue was something specific about the person such as their level of experience or personal skills, then it belonged at the micro level. On the other hand, if the issue was how the principal behaved in relation to her/his senior team, then it belonged at the institutional (meso) level. Having to work with the data until I reached these understandings, helped the development of my thinking about the connections between the categories and was invaluable later for analysis and interpretation.

Refining and naming categories

As the sorting and comparing of codes and categories took place, it became clear that I had used different words for codes that clustered or belonged together. The following example (Figure 2) illustrates how some of the original code names were combined into groups with each group becoming a category with a new collective name.

Figure 2 provides several examples of codes and categories that were re-named. During the open coding I had used, for instance, the words "lack of (principal) knowledge" or "lack of (principal) skills" to describe issues outlined by participants. Comparing and sorting coded quotes into categories, and comparing the categories, brought together examples of principals lacking "ability" or "experience" as well as "knowledge" or "skills". Following further analysis of the original quotes, I made the decision that a lack of leadership "ability" best described a category of issues.

It was not always easy to decide which name to give a category because each of the individual named codes that contributed to the category emphasised a slightly different aspect of the issue. An example is the category I eventually named "staff longevity". Codes derived from interviewee comments that contributed to this theme included "staff stay too long", "teacher stagnation", "entrenched staff attitudes", "staff longevity" and "insularity".

<u>The Principal</u> (Micro level)	
<u>Original code names</u>	<u>Category created</u>
Leadership Management Organisation	} Leadership
Experience Knowledge Skills Ability	} Ability
Performance Competence Effectiveness Making people accountable	} Effectiveness
Judgement Fairness Ethics	} Professionalism/Ethics
Power Control Manipulation Gate keeping Bullying	} Power abuse

Figure 2 The process of refining categories

All four codes describe aspects of the same issue which can be called “staff longevity”. There were examples in all three study schools of attitudinal problems developing that were attributed to the length of time some staff had been in the same school. Each code provides valuable information about those attitudes and their effect on the school. I named the category “staff longevity” because it was accurate, succinct, descriptive yet broad enough to include the sub-sets of ideas. The specific nuances associated with “insularity” and “stagnation” were not lost, however. They were used in the interpretation of the data, the design of the theoretical constructs and in articulating the findings.

Emergence of the core category

As the process of sorting and constant comparing continued, it became clear, from the physical laying out of the data, that nearly all the categories were connected through a time

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

sequence. Some categories related to a phase prior to decline beginning. Other categories were connected to various stages of the decline. While I had been aware of connections between categories, I had not previously connected them in a sequential way. As I sequenced categories, the core category for this research emerged: “the process of decline”. Almost all the other categories linked closely to this category and most helped explain it. The process of decline was “central” and “recurred frequently” (Glaser, 1978, p. 95). This category “conceptualises the “basic social process” or basic problem addressed by the theory, providing an integrative framework around which the analysis develops” (Dey, 1999, p. 110).

Document analysis

The 22 ERO reports, over 1500 MOE documents and six file boxes of school documents became important sources of data as well as providing triangulating evidence for issues and themes identified during the interviews. Dey (1993 p.99) advises researchers to have:

...criteria for selecting documents, or for focusing on particular extracts, (that) reflect the issues on which the researcher is seeking evidence. There must be some criteria for inclusion or exclusion of documentary data, even if these are broadly defined and refer mainly to the boundaries rather than the substance of the subject being researched.

I looked for the following information from the documents:

- Written evidence of what was happening to the school (relevant to its decline),
- Words that were used to describe its situation,
- Names/roles of people actively involved in issues,
- Evidence of specific decisions or of a decision making processes,
- School self-review recommendations and action plans,
- Consultation and communication processes,
- Complaints or expressions of concerns,
- Evidence of any interventions, and by whom.

Some of the letters, faxes and emails provided clear evidence of strong feelings, emotions and opinions as well as factual information. Other documents were prepared for a specific purpose and took standard or required formats. Fink (1997, p. 82) points out that what such documents do not say can often be more important than what they do say and that “the inert words do not convey the politics, passions, and intrigues which surrounded many of the documents”. I tried to interpret documents in conjunction with the interview data, in order to fully understand the agenda, motives and deeper meanings of the writer, as well as the effects they had on people and situations. The ERO reports are a good example of the need to interpret the written words in the context of the time because ERO has gone through stages of review types and strategies as well as styles of reporting.

Developing the propositions with participants

Previous research experiences have shown me the value of working in a partnership with research participants (Hawk, 1997; Hawk & Hill, 1996). Instead of simply reflecting back to participants their contributions by sending them their transcript to amend or verify I was hopeful that the participants would assist in the interpretation of the data. Part of a reflexive methodology, an important component of grounded theory, is to check in an ongoing way the emerging ideas with the participants. This is what Cresswell (2003) calls “member checking”. At the same time, I wanted to avoid the mistake about which Oliver (2003, p. 63) warns of “encouraging or allowing participants to read or edit large amounts of primary data”. Instead, about two-thirds of the way through the interviews, I began developing a draft set of propositions. These came from constant comparisons between data and my reflections.

The draft propositions comprised written sets of statements or questions that summed up some of the theoretical constructs and explanations that were emerging. The propositions were listed under a main heading, such as the “Level One” heading in Figure 3, and under a sub-heading, such as “Principals”. They covered the three levels of analysis; macro, meso and micro issues⁴², and were similar to the following example:

⁴² These levels of analysis are explained and described in Chapter 5.

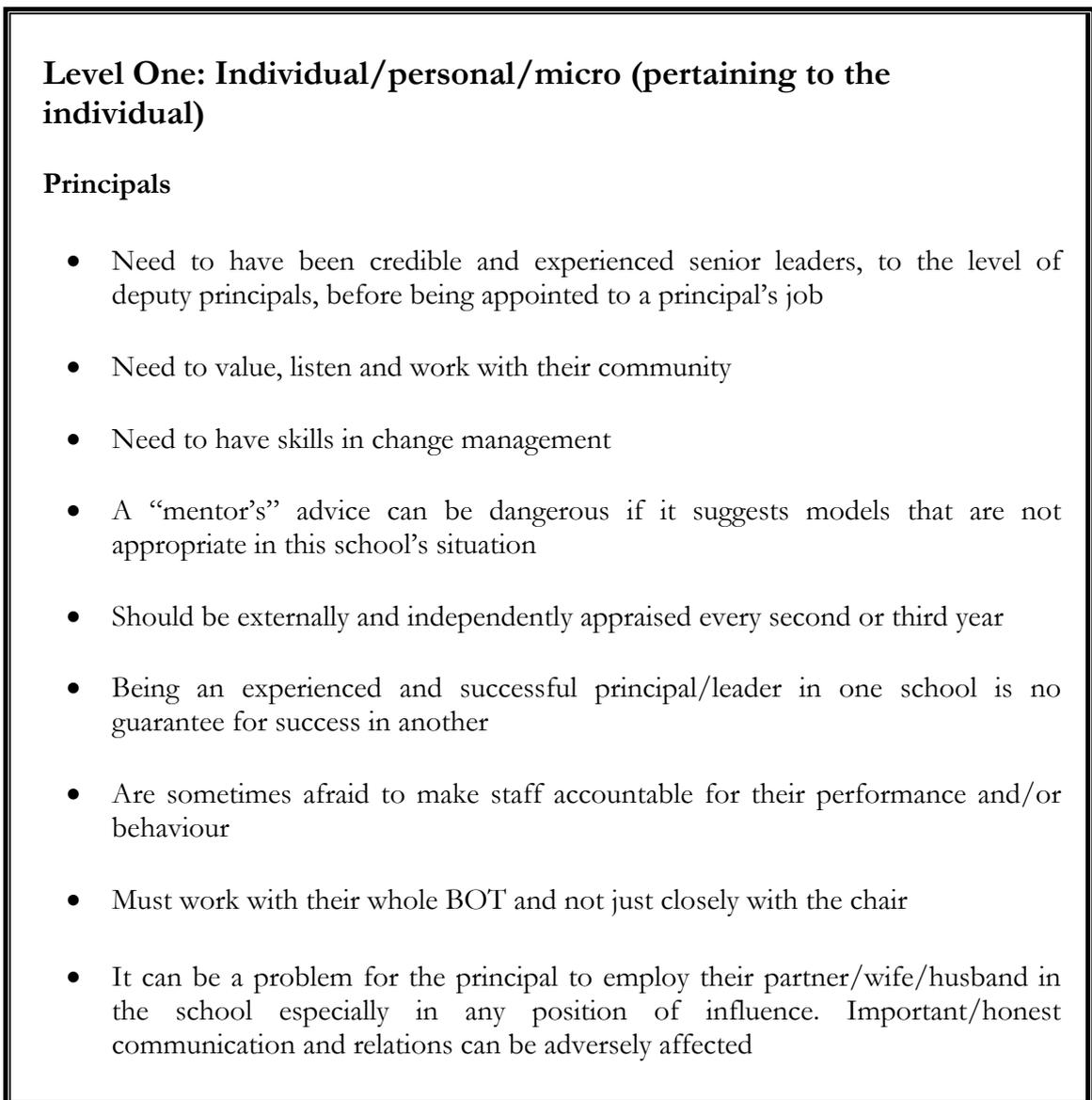


Figure 3 Extract from the draft research propositions

Some propositions took the form of possible indicators of a school's being "at risk". Others were guidelines for effective interventions (Figure 4).

- Many staff leaving in a short time can be a danger sign, or a very positive sign (depending on the quality and seniority of the people leaving).
- A roll that drops over several years is a danger sign. A roll that is low and does not change is a danger sign.
- Any small dishonesty is possibly the tip of the ethical iceberg.
- A school that does not interact professionally (e.g. take part in MOE contracts or remain active in its local cluster) is in danger of having a narrow/insular outlook.
- An empty/near empty or unhappy staff room at lunch and intervals.
- Any staff who are unchallenged about unprofessional/unethical behaviour.
- The principal's partner (husband/wife) working in the school in a significant position.
- Factions amongst students, staff or parents.
- Community issues being brought into the school.
- Groups within the school getting favoured treatment.
- Appointment procedures being informal/unprofessional/illegal.
- Groups, or significant numbers of staff who have been at the school for a long time.
- Very low staff turnover.
- Principals not appraised formally.
- Principals appraised only by the BOT and/or close principal colleagues.
- ERO reviews ignored/rejected without being challenged.
- Teachers' needs put before students.
- Principal and/or senior leaders lacking effective professional development.
- Staff resistance to change.
- An entrenched and negative leader and/or members of the school branch of the union.

Interventions

- Need to happen as early as possible.
- Need to be based on a very sound analysis of the issues/problems and their underlying causes.
- Need to deliver on promises and be accurate about funds available.
- Need a public relations strategy/advice.
- Are only as effective as the credibility/reputation of the person(s) intervening.
- Key people to interview are caretakers, principal's secretaries and counsellors.

Figure 4 Draft "at risk" indicators

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The set of draft propositions was sent to each study school participant for their comments. I made no effort to prove that the propositions were correct. My request to participants was phrased as follows:

I have come up with a set of draft themes/issues/propositions and I am very interested in any feedback you might have that will either add to my knowledge, or affirm or challenge these initial findings. I am NOT saying that all of these things happened in all of the schools, but I am saying they seem to have played a role in more than one school. There is NO obligation for you to respond but any comments, examples, (or) agreement/disagreement, would be much appreciated.

The propositions were either emailed or posted to study school participants. I provided spaces between each proposition so that participants could write comments. Twenty-five participants replied in writing, although often without detailed comments. Seven sent an email or a note indicating general agreement with the propositions rather than responding to each individual proposition as demonstrated by the following response:

Your initial analysis seems fine to me – it “resonates with my experiences” so to speak (Middle manager)

As for the propositions, they all seem eminently reasonable and I can’t identify many gaps. (Senior leader)

Definitely on the right track and most comprehensive. The only one I would rephrase is the final one. (Senior leader)

Nineteen participants responded in detail to each individual proposition with responses ranging from general affirmation to strong agreement. Suggestions were made about changes to the wording of some propositions. An example was the following proposition:

A “mentor’s” advice can be dangerous if it suggests models that are not appropriate in this school’s situation.

One participant responded saying; *“Dangerous is a very strong word. Maybe use ‘inappropriate’, ‘destructive’ or ‘counter-productive’”*.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

On occasions, participants provided an example or personal experience to support the proposition. In response to the proposition that:

Principals should be externally and independently appraised every second or third year,

a participant said *“Definitely agree. In my experience they benefit from different perspectives and strengths of their appraisers”*.

There were a few examples of a respondent saying *Not at my school but I know of other schools at which this has happened (Senior leader)*. Some respondents added a completely new proposition. An example was the following addition to the propositions on interventions:

Needs a highly skilled person who is able to rise above the cacophony – needs to be able to think strategically and deal with people in a professional, ethical manner.

Testing the propositions with educational advisors

After refining the propositions, I discussed them with a colleague who works in schools at risk and who expressed a strong interest in seeing them. The feedback was so helpful that I decided to identify a sample of people, referred to as educational advisors, who have wide and current experience in schools at risk or in decline. I wanted these advisors to comment on the propositions in relation to their past and current experiences with schools at risk or in decline. I began by selecting and directly contacting people who I know through professional connections. Nine of the 14 people were selected in this manner. Another five were recommended by the advisors who had already been interviewed. These educational advisers work in a range of schools, including primary and rural schools, and in a range of roles. Four are national advisors for their organisations, working with schools all over New Zealand. Five work for regional educational agencies. Five are currently private consultants, most being experienced as Advisors, Limited Statutory Managers or Commissioners to schools under the statutory provisions of the Education Amendment Act. Some are experts in particular fields of educational advice. Most have school leadership backgrounds, many having been principals, prior to taking up their current positions. All have been in their current roles for at least several years.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The set of propositions was sent to each of the educational advisors, with the same request for feedback that was sent to the study school participants. The following questions were added to the propositions document. The questions canvassed issues identified during the data analysis, on which I knew they had current knowledge.

- Is there a difference in the way low and high decile schools manage being “at risk” or in decline?
- Are there particular attributes that make the person(s) facilitating an intervention effective, or ineffective?
- How effective is STA in helping schools in decline?
- Apart from poor leadership by the principal, what are other major reasons for decline?

Three of the educational advisors asked for face-to-face interviews during which I took notes. The other eleven responded by email or in writing. Examples of their responses are included in Appendix K.

Returning to the propositions

Responses to the propositions, from both school respondents and from educational advisors, indicated affirmation and support for most of the propositions. In addition, I received some very detailed comments and examples of issues currently occurring in schools. Some propositions were removed either because they were challenged, or because there was not a great deal of support for them. An example was the proposition that “an empty/near empty or unhappy staff room at lunch and intervals” is an indication of a school at risk.

The propositions were used as a focusing and reflective technique to validate the findings, extend and enrich the data, and as an important part of the analytical process through which I worked. I sorted them by section and then by question so the data on each issue could be added to the categories generated from the interview transcripts. Using the core category to connect the other categories, a final framework was devised. This has been

used as the framework for developing and articulating a theory of decline which is outlined in the following chapters.

Building the Theory

During the theory building process I was guided, in particular, by what Bouma (1993) and Eisenhardt (1989) said about what constitutes a theory and how to build it. Bouma provides a description of what constitutes a theory:

Put most simply a theory is a guess about the way things are. A theory is an idea about how something works. A theory is an idea about what difference will be made by doing or not doing something. Theories are ideas about how things relate to each other. (1993, p. 16)

I have used the word “iterative” several times in my description of the process of collecting and using the data. From the earliest memos and interview data, my processing of the ideas began and evolved throughout the process and the writing. The same descriptor and approach applies to my theory development. At an early stage of exploring developments in grounded theory, I read Eisenhardt’s (1989) description of his theory building using a case study methodology. I had decided against using a case study methodology in order to protect the identity of the study schools and research participants; selecting a grounded theory approach instead. However because I selected three study schools and used similar data collection strategies to Eisenhardt, I found the table he used to outline the theory building process was easy to understand. I adapted it for my grounded theory approach by including strategies which I was planning to use, to describe and guide my theory building process (Figure 5).

As well as written memos, and the use of Eisenhardt’s table to help clarify my theory building ideas, I sketched several diagrams. Whetten (1989, p. 491), writing on what constitutes a theoretical contribution, explains that “a visual representation often clarifies the author’s thinking and increases the reader’s comprehension. In particular, formal models aid theory developers and users to assess the balance between parsimony and completeness”. The process of developing the diagrams, that eventually became Figures 10,

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

13 and 14, required me to articulate the relationship between categories and issues, to be clear about the order of events and timeframes, and to think through which factors, influences and categories were the more important.

Step	Activity	Reason
Getting started	Design of research aims and questions	Focused efforts
Selecting study schools and participants	Specified population (Participants)	Retained theoretical flexibility
	Theoretical, not random, sampling	Focused efforts on theoretically useful schools and participants – i.e., those that replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories
Crafting instruments and protocols	Multiple data collection methods (Interviews, documents, propositions, memos, literature)	Strengthened grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence
		Fostered divergent perspective and strengthened grounding
In the field	Overlap data collection and analysis including memos	Sped analyses and revealed helpful adjustments to data collection
	Flexible and opportunistic data collection methods (Educational advisors)	Allowed investigations to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features
Analysing data	Within-school analysis	Gained familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation
	Cross-school search using divergent techniques	Forced researcher to look beyond initial impressions and see evidence through multiple lenses
Shaping categories and propositions	Iterative tabulation of evidence for each construct	Sharpened construct definition, validity, and measurability
	Search out evidence for “why” behind relationships	Confirmed, extended, and sharpened theory
Extant literature	Comparison with conflicting literature	Built internal validity
	Comparison with similar literature	Built internal validity, raised theoretical level, and sharpened construct definitions
		Improved construct definition, and raised theoretical level
Reaching closure	Theoretical saturation when possible	Ended process when marginal improvement became small

Figure 5 Process of Building Theory from Research (Adapted from Eisenhardt, 1989, p.533)

A possible concern of researchers using grounded theory is whether the data will be comprehensive enough and whether the researcher will be sufficiently skilful to enable a theory to emerge without being forced. Glaser assures the reader that the process, if done well, will “generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser, 1992, p. 16). This can be classified as a ‘middle range’ theory that is between “working hypotheses” and a “grand theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There seems little doubt that school decline would classify as a “substantive area” within which to work. The theorising begins with memo writing to help the researcher develop the ideas that will eventually provide a deep understanding of the issues (Glaser, 1978; Trauth, 2001). A key aspect of the theory generation is to identify a core category that will be pivotal in that most other categories will relate to it and it accounts for most of the variation in pattern and behaviour (Fernandez, 2004, p. 89). The category, “decline process”, is the core category in this study. It is associated closely with the majority of patterns of behaviour and is central to all the findings. Dey (2003) informs us that the theory will focus on behaviour, rather than on individuals; will assert relationships between concepts; will be derived from the data and can be reported in narrative or as a set of propositions. I have fulfilled these guidelines with the data generating both a set of propositions and a narrative report.

Glaser (1995, p. 680) provides a list of questions for the researcher, or reader, to ask in order to evaluate how “good” the theory is.

1. What is the ultimate power for the emerging theory to explain across a range of different contexts?
2. What are the basic social processes which have been revealed?
3. How has the process of constant comparison evolved?
4. Has the saturation process of the data been demonstrated?
5. How has the theoretical sampling process emerged?

This chapter, with the previous chapter, addresses questions 3, 4 and 5 by outlining the research journey from its beginnings, with the planned methodology, through the adaptations made to the process and on to the reality of grounded theory in action. The chapters provide detailed methodological information as well as insights into my decision-making throughout the research. The following two chapters outline the research findings, including the basic social processes required to address question 2. They describe factors

that predisposed the study schools to decline and describe the process of their decline. Chapter 5 sets the scene by outlining problems and influences present in the schools which predisposed them towards either being tipped over the edge or into an event triggering a period of decline. The influences are important because they have the potential to be developed into tools that could help predict decline in other schools. The first of Glaser's questions "What is the ultimate power for the emerging theory to explain across a range of different contexts?" is addressed through responses to the propositions that were developed and tested by participants in relation to their past and current experience in declining schools.

Reader guidelines regarding references and quotes

Different fonts have been used to assist the reader in recognising the difference between quotes from literature and those from research participants and study documents. APA style has been used for all references to the literature: direct quotes over 40 words are indented in normal font. In addition to the literature, quotes are from two other sources; the words of the interviewees (school personnel and educational advisors) and from the documents (MOE records and school records). I have used quotes from research participants and quotes from documents. To enable these to be easily identified as distinct from the literature, these quotes are indented and in italics. Quotes were selected because they are examples of frequently mentioned ideas. In some instances, words of the research participants have been integrated into the body of the text, italicising them to indicate that they are quotes, rather than my words. The source is identified at the end of the indented quotes as being school personnel (e.g. *Senior leader, Support staff*); educational advisors (e.g. *Educational advisor*); MOE or ERO documents (e.g. *MOE fax to school, Internal MOE memo, ERO report*); or from school documents (e.g. *Board minutes, Letter from board chair to MOE*). These quotes are not dated or referenced in any more detail for reasons of confidentiality which are fully explained in Chapter 4. In a quote, if the name of a person or school has been omitted for reasons of confidentiality, I have used ---- in its place. In reproducing quotes from thesis participants, some superfluous speech has been deleted from the text. For example, the ums, ahs and other habits of speech that sound normal to the ear, have been eliminated because they do not do justice to the participant's quality of speech and they distract the reader from the intended meaning. The gender of the person being quoted

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

has been disguised by using “s/he” or alternating between “his/her” and “her/his”. While some quotes may sound a little stilted, providing the gender would, in some instances, give a clue to a participant’s identity. There are a small number of exceptions when the gender of a person being discussed in a quote is identified because it assists in understanding the point being made by the research participant.

CHAPTER 5

POTENTIAL PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL DECLINE

The findings of the research are presented in this chapter and the following one. In this chapter, I explore problems that predisposed the three study schools towards being at risk and that were indicative of decline. Chapter 6 describes the decline process itself from the time it began to the stage when it became self-perpetuating. Figure 6 illustrates the way issues, problems, behaviours and needs appeared in the study schools, requiring action. The inwards flowing arrows illustrate the way pressure built when problems were ignored or not handled effectively. The outward flowing arrows represent release of the pressure and a return to equilibrium that could have occurred if appropriate responses, developments and actions had been taken to resolve problems. The many complex and interrelated problems that occurred in the study schools are discussed in this chapter. Because most problems remained unresolved, they contributed to the decline. As such they can be separated out as potential predictors of decline.

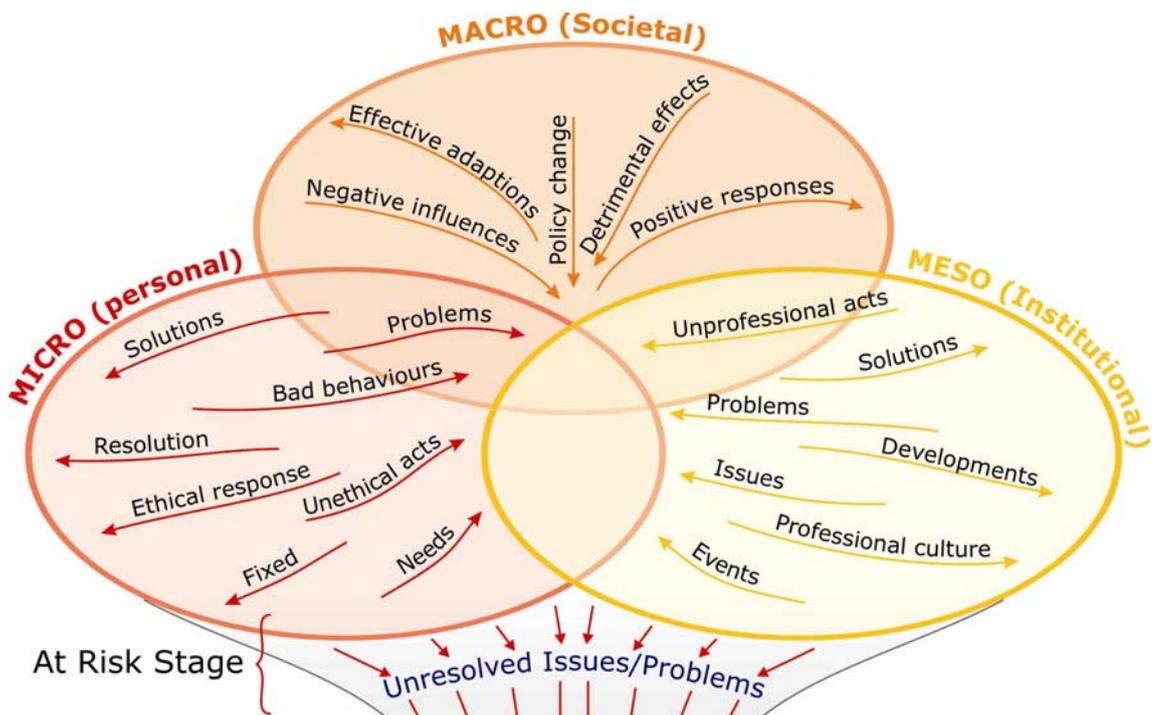


Figure 6 Unresolved issues/problems

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

This chapter is divided into three sections, each outlining a level at which problems occurred. How problems occurring at a societal level (macro) impacted on the study schools is described (Figure 7). Problems also occurred at the institutional level of the school, and in associated organisations, through their cultures and systems (meso) (Figure 8). These internal school issues developed in ways that made the study schools vulnerable as organisations. Outside educational organisations had a strong influence on the schools in both positive and negative ways. Finally, at the level of the individual people involved (micro), the personal influences which contributed to the fragility of the schools and to their decline are discussed (Figure 9).

PART ONE: MACRO (SOCIETAL) INFLUENCES

A complex range of external forces and demands have an ongoing impact on all schools, in both positive and negative ways. Schools are unable to change or avoid them. Each school responds to the external forces in ways that reflect the culture, efficacy, effectiveness and strength of the school as an organisation. While the macro influences were not the focus of the study, they emerged as important because they provided the broader context within which the meso and micro influences operated. In the study schools, for various reasons, responses to macro influences were not productive. Many of the external demands were ignored, rejected or mismanaged; thus becoming contributing decline factors and potential predictors of decline. While many of the resulting problems are unable to be described in detail because they would identify the schools, thus transgressing the promised confidentiality, they are outlined in broad terms. The external influences that made the most significant contribution towards decline in the study schools include inadequate responses to international and educational trends; socio-economic status, demographic and economic factors; schisms over societal values, norms and social movements; inability to respond to policy changes and community conflict.

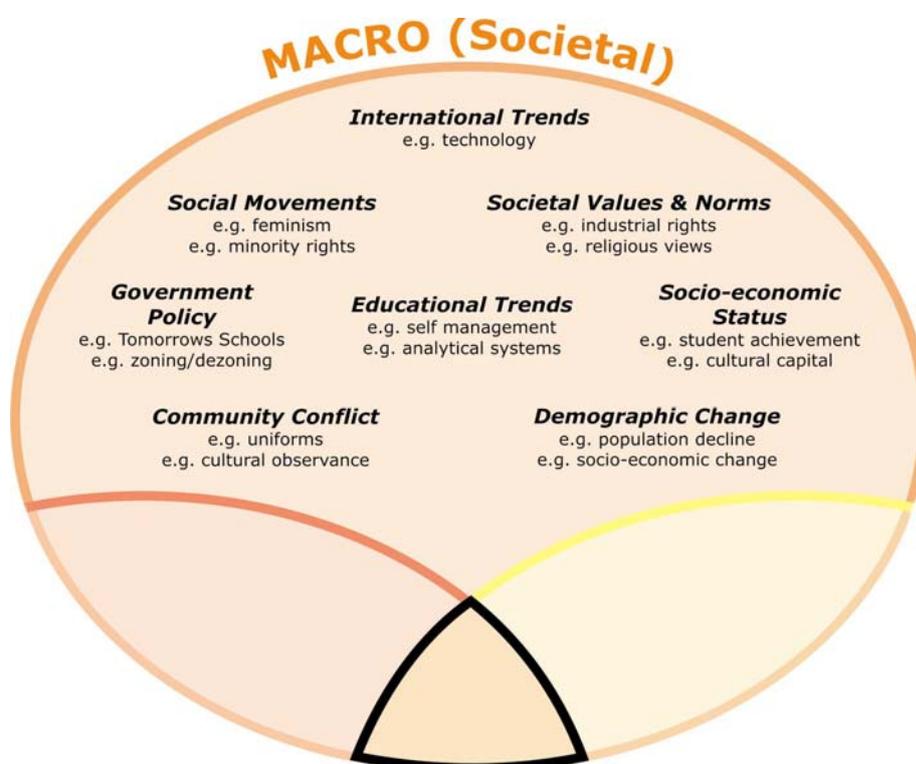


Figure 7 Potential predictors: Macro (Societal)

Inadequate Responses to International and Educational Trends

School professional development programmes for staff are one of the main strategies schools employ to ensure teachers have the opportunity to keep up-to-date with international and educational trends. New Zealand schools, both before and after Tomorrow's Schools, have been provided with professional learning and development opportunities by the DoE or the MOE. The study schools missed opportunities that were available because their leaders were so preoccupied dealing with problems that they were not proactively seeking school development. Since the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, the MOE has played an important role in keeping school personnel informed about international educational trends and in providing relevant professional development, often through whole-school professional development contracts. Some of these contracts simply required that an application be submitted. Other development contracts, however, were contestable and were awarded on the basis of a school tendering a proposal and competing with other schools to "win" the opportunity. If a school did not have people with the time and skills to present the documents in the format and at the level of quality required to compete, they lost opportunities that other schools accessed. An example was the Technology Beacon Schools contract that required a proposal that none of the study schools felt able to develop at the time it was offered. Other examples included contracts for professional development in assessment, curriculum leadership and whole-school professional development. In the study schools as school leaders worked to address issues, their energy was increasingly directed towards coping with the growing number of problems and was diverted away from professional development and the core business of teaching and learning.

The PD (professional development) committee should write an annual plan for PD that reflects the school's goals which, in turn should include major curriculum initiatives and developments available to schools through MOE contracts. (Independent review of student learning)

We just always seemed to get more and more behind everyone else (with professional development) because we were constantly putting out fires. I couldn't see a way for us to catch up with what other schools were doing. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Another reason for the inadequate response of study school personnel to international trends was a lack of adequate funds. The study schools, as they moved into decline, became increasingly financially pressured and unable to keep up-to-date with even basic resources, let alone rapidly changing and expensive technologies.

The library has a limited selection of books. Department resource rooms are lined with empty shelves. At the moment the netball courts are closed because the surface is coated with moss, making them a safety hazard, and we haven't got the \$5000 needed to clean it off. (Principal letter in MOE files)

Thinking back we wasted money and, since we didn't have much to start with, it did not leave us enough to even upgrade the phone system, let alone buy the computers we needed. We did not have the ability to process or use data or to keep our planning and schemes updated electronically. (Senior leader)

Global ideological trends, such as an increasing awareness of individual rights, interacted with local influences such as market forces, school competition, and selection by socio-economic area, to create severe pressure on the study schools to retain their rolls and their reputations. The decisions of local parents, exercising their individual right to choose a school for their children, had a detrimental impact on the study schools when parents selected another school. In particular, parents removing their children and sending them to other schools in response to government zoning policy changes, changes in the status of neighbouring schools and adverse publicity, put the study schools under extreme pressure from coping with roll decline.

Potential Predictors:

- **The school does not participate professionally in MOE contracts or in other professional networks and has an insular outlook.**
- **The school does not keep up to date with international and educational trends through effective professional development programmes.**
- **Financial pressures prevent the school from keeping up-to-date with technologies.**

Socio-economic Status and Demographic and Economic Factors

MOE data show that low decile schools have, for some time, been more vulnerable than higher decile schools and more likely to need special support and external intervention (Mallard, 2000). MOE records of statutory interventions⁴³ show that sixty one percent of interventions, since 2001, have been in low decile schools. Approximately 25 percent of low decile schools have been subject to intervention, compared to six percent of high decile schools. Each of the study schools was the lowest decile school compared to other secondary schools in the area. They also ranked lower than their neighbouring schools on the achievement league tables published in the newspapers. They all struggled to provide modern facilities and technology and to fundraise to support the changes they wanted to make.

The disadvantages which students at (study school) have are overwhelming. The odds are firmly stacked against them. Learning resources are limited in comparison with schools in more affluent areas. For example, the main computer room is equipped with second hand machines bought from another school which upgraded to more modern equipment. (Principal letter to Minister of Education)

The study schools found themselves struggling to battle the competing forces of improvement versus decline (described in Chapter 6). Their low decile status, relative to neighbouring schools, made it difficult, for example, for them to attract students which, in turn, made growth and improvement difficult.

The general chat around the local schools was that if you (a parent) were in a position of choice, you would rank ---- (school) at the bottom and endeavour to promote your child so they might be accepted by ---- (school). (Trustee)

⁴³ Analysis of MOE data, as of September 2007, on interventions since correct legislation was introduced in 2001.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The study schools all experienced roll drops⁴⁴ as a result of competition from changes in neighbouring schools. This was concurrent with an increase in the number of students with complex behavioural and learning needs, placing new management demands on staff⁴⁵.

Our roll was critical for our survival. We were badly affected by ... the threat of a new school. The intermediate considering recapitating⁴⁶ was a huge concern. (Senior leader)

The demands on our teachers increased as the neediness of the (newly enrolling) kids increased. Changes in our catchment area made a big difference to the pressures we were put under. (Senior leader)

One study school experienced a drop in its new student intake when a neighbouring school recapitated. Another study school suffered a decline in student numbers when a new school was built close by.

A serious threat to the school came from its local contributing schools which had made the decision to retain their year nine and ten students and not to give the (study school) staff access to the students or parents in order to present them with informed options. (MOE evaluation report)

Potential Predictors:

- **The school serves a low socio-economic community and has the lowest decile rating, compared to neighbouring schools.**
- **The area the school serves suffers from a decline in the population of school aged students and/or changes in the status or numbers of neighbouring schools.**

⁴⁴ Further information on study school roll decline is provided on page 17.

⁴⁵ Schools are primarily funded and resourced on the basis of the number of students on the roll. As a result, local or national demographic changes, including changes to schooling in the neighbourhood, have a direct impact on a school's ability to sustain its staffing and range of academic programmes. If the population change affects neighbouring schools in the same ways, the negative impact on any one school is lessened. If the change is local and affects only one school, the impact can be very serious.

⁴⁶ Recapitation occurs when an existing school decides to extend the number of years that it retains students. A year 1 – 6 primary school, for example might decide to add the two intermediate years 7 and 8. An Intermediate school (7 and 8) might add the secondary years 9 and/or 10. Such a change requires the school to formally apply and receive permission from the MOE to change the status of the school.

Schisms over Societal Values, Norms and Social Movements

All three study schools experienced conflict within the school as a result of trustees, staff and parents contesting value-related issues.

Our students came from homes where parents held strong views on all sorts of things. We could never please everyone. The staff and the board were divided on the same issues. (Trustee)

Examples of issues that divided the parental communities in one or more of the study schools included what parents believed an effective education comprises; what socio-economic and cultural groups they wanted their children to mix with; how students should be disciplined; what school uniforms, or lack of them, symbolised; how much homework is good; the management of streaming, acceleration and enrichment; co-operation versus competition and the appropriateness of having religious activities associated with the school.

There were indications of divisions within the board which centered on a liberal/conservative debate. Trustees, staff and the parent community were divided over such issues as school uniform, corporal punishment and biculturalism. (Historical MOE report)

Other times, issues were contested which resulted in groups of parents holding different views from the majority of the staff; a board taking a position that most staff were unhappy about, or that some parents were unhappy about; or conflict in the school's local community having a negative impact within the school.

There were meetings outside the school and lots of car park talk going on. We knew it was a "no win" situation whatever we decided. Some of the parents ... were determined to get the decision they wanted and lobbied really hard. (Senior leader)

The experience of the study schools was that energy and resources were focused on trying to deflect or resolve these conflicts and schisms at the expense of the core business of teaching and learning and of general school effectiveness.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The conflict was in the community, between the principal and the board, amongst the staff and amongst students. Students were aware of it and felt the effects of it on a daily basis. Teachers and students felt powerless to change things for the better. (MOE report)

In addition to local conflicts, global ideologies and societal trends influenced individuals and groups within the study schools, having the potential to be a catalyst for conflict and, therefore, contribute to decline. There were examples of the impact in the schools of feminism, liberalism, anti-racism, and the gay-rights movements. The resurgence of rights of indigenous peoples, and their languages, gained momentum in New Zealand as Maori asserted their tangata whenua⁴⁷ status and schools were required, through their charters⁴⁸, to acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi⁴⁹. Study school personnel holding and promoting such ideologies took actions that sometimes had positive outcomes for people in the school, and at other times had negative outcomes. The feminist movement, for instance, permeated the lives of individuals and influenced decisions. In each of the three study schools there was a group of women, identifying as feminists, who worked actively to promote the wellbeing of women.

There was a women's group. They had strong views about everything. They staged a coup and then went to the board. (Senior leader)

Positive manifestations of the feminist struggle, in all three schools, included the appointment and promotion of more women to leadership positions. Negative manifestations included women who were promoted, in the opinions of the participants, primarily because of their gender and beyond their level of ability. A similar situation occurred when some men and women were appointed primarily because of their ethnicity, after which two study schools experienced performance problems with principals. All three study schools had to manage performance problems with a member of the senior leadership team who had been appointed primarily because of their gender or ethnicity.

In (the principal's) mind he was pushing women forward into positions of responsibility but she hadn't had the experience to cope with that level of authority. (Middle manager)

⁴⁷ The first people of the land of Aotearoa/New Zealand

⁴⁸ Each school was required to write its own charter, although at that time, the majority of the contents of school charters were mandated by the government.

⁴⁹ A founding document for Aotearoa/New Zealand in the form of a treaty between Maori and the British crown.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I was involved in that process of appointing the principal and I know s/he was given the job because of her/his colour. ... that soon showed and caused us problems. (Trustee)

As well as study school personnel taking a pro-active position on societal issues, some felt forced into taking a very passive or reactive position. The example of leaders being appointed more because of their culture than their skills resulted in criticism by some staff, while others were afraid to comment.

(A DP) was scared of the "race card". We all got scared of the "race card" because it could be played so easily against you. ----- was branded a racist. You were a sore loser and you were a racist if you criticised (the principal's) performance. (Senior leader)

The study schools each suffered as a result of what an ERO report described as *a poor history of staff appointments*. Many of these appointments were made by trustees and principals for ideological reasons that divided school personnel. Inappropriate appointments and the poor performance of the leaders contributed to school ineffectiveness.

The transparency of process and the active encouragement to staff to critically evaluate the past performance of the school and be actively involved in charting a more rigorous organisational direction is also in sharp contrast with the management style and effectiveness of the previous (principal). (ERO report)

There were examples of the impact of social movements, other than feminism and racial equality, on individuals and on staff in the study schools. The social movements that had some adverse influences included gay rights, personal rights and responsibilities and liberalism in relation to teaching and student discipline. Problems resulted from the way some individuals and groups used the philosophy of a social movement as justification for unwise decisions or unethical and unprofessional behaviour.

Potential Predictors:

- **Factions exist between or amongst students, staff, trustees and parents.**
- **Community issues that divide people are brought into the school.**
- **Appointments are made because of age, gender or ethnicity.**

Inability to Respond to Policy Changes

Changes in government policies, particularly educational policies, placed additional strain on the study schools at a time when they were already under pressure because they were declining. A major policy change was the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools. The most immediately obvious impacts were the election of a board of trustees to govern the school and employ staff, the development of a school charter and a new funding system through a bulk funded operations grant which allowed and required each school to be self managing. The views of the majority of the research participants indicated that, during the early stages of the reforms, the impacts of these changes were both positive and negative. The most negative influence of Tomorrow's Schools at that time was probably the extra pressure it put on schools that were already declining.

*We were struggling with what we were doing already, let alone taking on something different.
(Middle manager)*

It soon became apparent that the new system was more transparent. Study school trustees were entitled to have access to information, previously kept from parents, such as school finances, personnel issues, property decisions and correspondence. Parents and the public had access to the findings of the ERO reviews. School problems, existing during the period before the policy changes, became evident.

The great thing about the market model was that eventually things got so bad that the truth couldn't be denied and something had to be done. Failing schools were always there but it was concealed. (Middle manager)

At the same time problems were becoming overt, there seemed less clarity about how and where the schools should seek support and, in the view of some study school personnel, support was not forthcoming when requested.

The impotent bleating of Ministry officials fuels our growing anger about the situation I urge you and your Ministry colleagues to do something constructive to help ... (Principal's letter to MOE)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Another major policy change was to the system of educational accountability. External educational evaluation, which previously focused on individual teachers⁵⁰, now involved review of the whole school. ERO reviews played an important role as a catalyst for support and reform in the study schools. However, the publicity from the released⁵¹ ERO reports had a negative impact on the study schools in two ways. First, school leaders found themselves having to respond to public criticism of issues they were unprepared to defend. Second, the publicising of identified problems resulted in a loss of community confidence in the study schools.

There were a number of very public and damning ERO reports. The principal took several weeks sick leave and then resigned. The morale of staff and students was at an all time low and community indications were that they had lost confidence in the school. (MOE report)

A third significant policy change was related to school zoning and de-zoning. Zoning is a government policy designed to ensure children have the right to attend their neighbourhood school. In cities, however, the delineation of the zones influences socio-economic clustering of families and the price of real estate.

When parents say "I want to put my kid in a good school", translate that to a wealthy school. We are very upwardly mobile as a culture and parents will still put their kids in that school because it is high decile. The school name is buying them kudos on their CV. It gives the parents a sense of well-being because they get their kid into that school regardless at times of its educational outcomes. (Middle manager)

In any socio-economic community, the school at the bottom end of the parental preference ladder becomes vulnerable because *when zoning went, schools like ----- could not compete*. The study schools were all at the bottom of that ladder in their district and de-zoning led to direct competition with their neighbouring schools for students.

The moment zoning went, any parents with "get up and go", got up and went. Suddenly our role dropped. (Middle manager)

⁵⁰ DoE inspectors previously graded the performance of individual teachers.

⁵¹ For some years the media had access to school review reports at the same time as the school. This has since been changed to allow schools time to digest and respond to the report before it is made available to the public on the ERO website.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The school has always had to deal with the reality of having the lowest socio-economic intake for the wider area. Once zoning was abolished, it had the reputation of being a “tough” school and it lost more students than any of the other local schools. (MOE report)

A consequence of the Tomorrow’s Schools policies experienced by all schools, including the study schools, was an increase in inter-school competition for enrolments. Research participants expressed the opinion that low decile communities have the least ability to challenge government or to take measures to attract families to their schools. They expressed anger and frustration over what they saw as an unreasoned and unreasonable ideological policy position.

The ideology was that if you bring market forces into schools like businesses, then survival of the fittest applies and the schools that aren’t performing should pull up their socks and make a difference. Are you going to close down all the decile 1 through to 4 and 5 schools? (Senior leader)

There were non-educational policies, such as housing policy, which study school participants observed having a detrimental impact on their school.

When the government started to charge market rates for state houses, there were empty houses all around us and some of our school families moved out of the area at that time. (Senior leader)

In summary, government policies, and education policies in particular, affect all schools with positive and negative effects likely to be felt to differing degrees depending on the ability of the schools to adapt, adopt and problem solve. The most vulnerable schools tend to be the lower decile schools and schools that are in difficulty. The study schools, because they were already in decline as well as being low decile schools, were less able to cope with the macro influences than their neighbouring schools.

Potential Predictors:

- **The school receives negative media publicity.**
- **Changes in government policy require schools to adopt/adapt.**
- **School enrolment zones are removed.**

Impact of Community Conflict

A macro influence that contributed directly to study school decline was community conflict. All three schools were put under a range of pressures because issues that caused conflict in the community were played out inside the school as well.

We had people with differing opinions. We also had people who were in a particular community group with an agenda, who saw themselves as being the leader, not just outside in the community, but within the school as well. (Middle manager)

One manifestation of this type of conflict was in the selection, through election and co-option, of board members. In all three schools, community groups competed for co-opted⁵² positions, causing dissent in the parent community.

Some trustees fear that the two ethnic groups currently not represented on the board, will object to any other co-options being made. This kind of situation has caused dissent in the past. Because the school is rebuilding and is still in a very vulnerable position, it is critical that the board uses its powers to co-opt specialist expertise. (Consultant's report to MOE)

A further example of community politics that caused conflict was when contributing⁵³ schools manipulated parental access to information or gave out negative messages about a receiving school. Sometimes this was done at an informal level when teachers advised parents not to send their children on to a particular school. Other times the contributing school leaders deliberately blocked parental access to information. Letters and pleas to the MOE for help resulted in advice but no supportive action.

My response to your final question "Can they (the contributing school) deny us access to the pupils?" is that it is unlikely that an intermediate school would deny its pupils access to information about high schools. If it did it would be a matter to be resolved through discussion and

⁵² A school BOT is elected by its parent community, comprising between 3 and 7 elected members. It also has the ability to co-opt between 2 and 6 additional trustees. The co-opted trustees are selected by the existing BOT.

⁵³ The New Zealand education system comprises primary schools that contribute students to intermediates or middle schools, that contribute students to secondary schools. There are other types of schools that do not require students to transition, but this pattern of contributing and receiving schools describes the majority of state schools.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

dialogue between two boards. Your request for access is reasonable and from the students' and parents' point of view, desirable. (MOE letter to school principal)

At the same time the school was undergoing restructuring and implementing changes to meet student needs, it was put at risk of becoming unviable because of the actions of its main contributing schools It was difficult at times for (study school leaders) to have access to the parents of potential students to present the school as an option. (Independent review report for MOE)

Examples of a mismatch of values and perspectives among and between groups of school stakeholders were manifest in all three schools, resulting in conflict or dissatisfaction.

There are polarised opinions that some people are publically committed to. (Fax from principal to MOE)

The resignation of the principal opened the way to potential resolution of some of the major problems. Unfortunately this did not eventuate. There were still divisions within the board which centered on a liberal/conservative debate. Trustees, staff and the parent community were divided over issues such as ... (MOE report)

Potential Predictors:

- **Community issues that divide people are brought into the school.**

Most of the external forces described in this section of the chapter, were influences that impacted on all New Zealand schools. Because most schools did not go into decline, it can be assumed that they found constructive ways to manage the forces that may have ranged from embracing them enthusiastically to passive acceptance and adjustment. The forces themselves were not the main factors associated with study school decline. Problems were created when the study school leaders did not effectively manage the external forces and did not solve or resolve problems.

The next two sections of this chapter describe pressures at the institutional (meso) and personal (micro) levels that indicate why the study schools did not develop such a constructive mindset, and why they were unable to effectively manage the macro pressures.

PART TWO: MESO (INSTITUTIONAL) INFLUENCES

This section discusses the meso or internal organisational effectiveness of the study schools, as well as the performance of educational agencies during their interactions with the schools (Figure 8). The study schools declined in spite of the efforts made by outside agencies. The analysis focuses on the reasons associated with study school decline which are expressed as potential predictors of decline. Why the interactions of the agencies with the schools were unsuccessful in the short or long term is of particular interest.

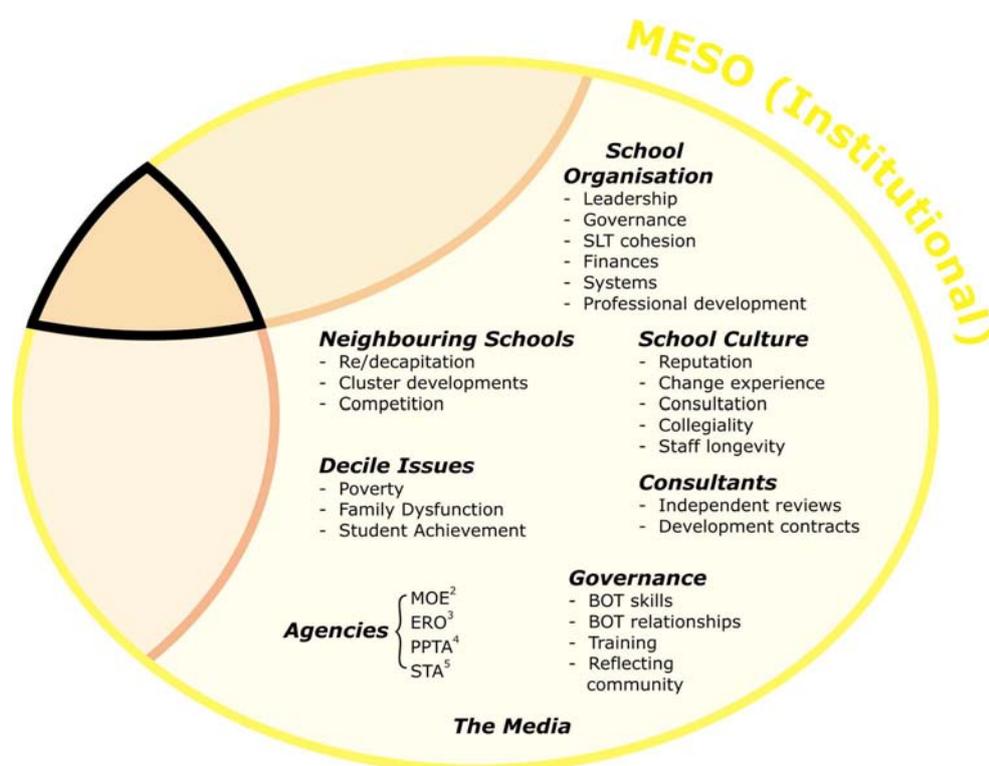


Figure 8 Potential predictors: Meso (Institutional)

Decline in Student Enrolments

In each of the three study schools, a falling roll was both a consequence of unresolved problems as well as a contributor to new problems. The schools each had growing rolls from the day they opened until they were large schools, compared with secondary schools throughout the country.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

In the early days of the school, under the first two principals, the school roll grew steadily and by (year) it was one of the largest schools in the country. (Historical MOE report)

Student numbers declined in all three schools, over approximately a decade, to a third, or less, of the students enrolled at their fullest year.

The decline in student numbers followed a similar pattern in all three schools. There were significant reductions in numbers following soon after either a critical ERO report, subsequent negative media coverage and/or after the policy change in 1991 of school de-zoning.

On these occasions, in each study school, there were decreases of between 100 and 200 students in a year. These decreases were caused by both a drop in new student enrollments at entry to school, as well as greater than usual numbers of enrolled students leaving the school to move to other schools. The size of the roll reductions decreased after approximately four or five years. From that stage onwards the schools experienced smaller annual reductions, caused by decreases in the intake at entry to school.

A roll reduction automatically entails a reduction in teaching and leadership staffing and in operational funding. The decrease in operational funding has further ramifications on staffing and property. Each decrease, therefore, was followed by a lowering of staff morale and a reduction in the range of senior subjects the school was able to offer.

The school roll has fallen dramatically over the last five years The falling roll numbers have made it difficult for the school to maintain a broad programme, particularly in the senior school and to provide specialist teachers. (MOE report)

As the roll reduced, there has been a reduction in the funding allocated for the employment of the property and grounds staff. Because there has been no reduction in the size of the grounds or the number of buildings, the current staff are unable to keep up with the work required to keep the school well-maintained. (MOE report)

The study schools' experiences illustrate that a rapidly falling roll, or a small roll that does not grow, are factors strongly associated with decline and serve as predictors of it. The impact of falling student numbers is discussed further in Chapter 6 because it was a key

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

feature associated with escalation of decline and one of the factors that contributed to the self-perpetuating nature of study school decline. Several ERO reports and MOE review reports document the detrimental effects of the declining school rolls.

Roll shrinkage and the associated loss of funding continues to be a primary pressure on the school....This sharp decline in funding and staffing levels has had a significant impact on the school's ability to preserve option choice in the senior school as well as reducing the provision of learning support programmes. (ERO report)

Potential Predictors:

- **Enrolment numbers fall over several years.**
- **Enrolment numbers are low and do not grow.**

Ineffective Internal Management of Systems

All three study schools became increasingly ineffective with a range of administrative and systems problems. The schools were not always ineffective, however. Each of the interviewees, who was involved with one of the three schools during its early stage of operating, offered the opinion that their school was effective and efficient during those early days. Areas that later contributed to decline through mismanagement included finances and assets; personnel management; principal appraisal; appointments and other school systems. Since each of the ineffective systems contributed to decline in all three of the study schools, it is likely that each has the potential to be an indicator, and possible predictor, of decline when it occurs in another school.

Poor financial and asset management

Financial and asset mismanagement became major issues in all three schools at some stages. A key concern was that financial systems were not robust enough to detect abuse when it occurred.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

(The secretary) would come in and she'd say there's \$300 missing from the strong room. On Monday (the principal) would come in and say "oh I found that \$300", so s/he was sort of taking money and putting it back if it (the loss) was noticed. (Senior leader)

There were examples in all three schools of fraud, falsification of documents and/or theft by people in responsible positions. School equipment was "borrowed" by staff and trustees for extended periods of time and resources were used inappropriately. There was only one prosecution, of which I am aware, for these activities in spite of some school personnel being aware of the problems.

(In her house) there were these books and paintings. Later I realised ... s/he had clearly taken money out of the library grant for years. (Senior leader)

During the review of the expenditure it was noted that the school paid a parking fine We recommend that the employee who received the parking fine make their own payment. (Audit NZ report to BOT)

At the serious end of the offending scale, the individuals committing the crimes of fraud and theft personally benefitted. In each case school operational accounts were depleted of badly needed funds. There were also two instances of deliberate inflation of school rolls which resulted in increased funding and staffing to which the school was not entitled.

(The principal) got into trouble because s/he'd been inflating the school roll. Everyone had a free period a day, class sizes were absolutely super, but it was against the law. (Senior leader)

In this example of fraud, the school was the beneficiary; however when this fraud was discovered, the school had an immediate drop in funding and staffing due to the reduced student/staffing ratio.

The school's calculation was adjusted by the Ministry of Education roll auditor. As a result of that roll audit the school's bulk operating grant was significantly reduced. (ERO report)

There was one example of non-existent staff being put on the pay roll.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

*S/he was drawing money for (people) who weren't actually on the staff. They were fictitious names.
(Support staff)*

The roll audit also revealed an excess of staff entitlement. (ERO report)

At the less serious end of offending, people in the school became aware of the unethical nature of some of the behaviours and either felt very uncomfortable about it, or lowered their own standards as a result. The quote immediately following is an example of the latter response:

We might have been a bit liberal in our interpretation, but I mean nothing bad. It was normal practice at the time you know. (Senior leader)

We had other rackets that were going on. Not only within the staff but also, for instance, the tuck shop. I felt unhappy but I did not have enough evidence to tell anyone. (Support staff)

Potential Predictors:

- **Financial problems occur.**
- **Assets/resources are depleted and property is not well maintained.**

Ineffective management of poor staff performance

A second area of ineffective organisation was the management of personnel; in particular, the performance of leaders in managing poorly performing staff. During the decline periods there were teachers, in all three study schools, who were not performing to appropriate standards.

We need to buy some out (hopeless staff) and replace with better. (MOE staff file note).

Examples of indicators of poor performance mentioned during interviews included teachers arriving late to class, sleeping during class, being poorly prepared and lacking in routines and classroom management.

Some staff turn up late to class, are not disciplined in themselves and do not adequately discipline the students. (Historical report for MOE)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

As well as ignoring some performance problems, there were several instances of senior leaders dealing with non-performing staff in very informal ways which were ineffective.

We decided not to do any competency procedures at that stage because if we started even one it would have sapped all our energy and time and would have undermined remaining staff even further. (Senior leader)

I talked to individual staff members and some were so keen to get out I just helped them. Two were bribed with study leave. (Senior leader)

Some leaders were clearly anxious about following the legally appropriate procedures and reluctant to face a process that they perceived to be difficult and stressful. Others found ways to justify not taking action, when it was clearly needed, by *making excuses for the teachers and for themselves (Senior leader)*.

It is critical to the credibility of both the board and the principal that, this time, the correct competency procedures are followed through to the end. (Evaluation report for MOE)

... it is hard to do, and of course the unions get in alongside them and fight for them and you are under threat of constructive dismissal. (Senior leader)

At least two study school principals had the confidence and determination to deal professionally with poor teacher performance. This led to the lodging of personal grievance claims against two schools. While the grievance claims were not successful, interviewees, who were involved, said the process took an emotional toll, used a great deal of time and cost the schools financially.

We had the experience where a DP was useless and (was) clearly identified as being incompetent. We got rid of her/him in the end but it was a huge long process and we didn't want it to cost the school any money. (Trustee)

A substantial effort is being made to assist identified teachers and departmental managers to improve their levels of performance. However the scale of the task is very large and reflects the consequences of a lengthy history of weak personnel management in the school. (ERO report)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

MOE file notes and emails, independent reviews and MOE reports provided evidence that even when there were advisors and consultants at the schools, funded through MOE interventions, some of the performance problems were not dealt with effectively.

Three of the teachers, whose work was independently reviewed ... are still teaching at the school. In some instances their performance has improved a little, but in the opinion of the students, senior staff and a curriculum consultant, they are still not meeting the needs of students. (Report for MOE)

Reasons for not managing performance problems included a school not having the money to buy the person out; support for a teacher by Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) field officers being so strong that the principal and board could not cope with seeing the process through; and a school making errors in the process.

There are two reasons it has been difficult for the school to address these concerns. One relates to the role of the teachers' union. If they declare a teacher to be competent, when the school knows the teacher is creating problems and barriers to student learning, whose opinion should be acted on? The other problem centers on the willingness of school leaders and governors to see through competency and discipline procedures. (Advisor's report to MOE)

The problems created for study school staff and students by poor teacher performance were sometimes severe. Teachers had to cover for the poor performance of other teachers, students suffered from poor teaching, student behaviour deteriorated, department's needs were neglected and parents lost confidence in the school.

Continuing exposure to poor teaching practices has a detrimental effect on the students. Their education is severely hampered. (ERO report)

Our ---- department has a new HOD and is in a parlous state, due to neglect and a previously incompetent HOD. (Principal letter to MOE)

Major concerns have been identified with the performance of five departments. Because of the impact on student learning, the issues raised in these reviews require more urgent action than an annual appraisal process allows. (Independent review report commissioned by the school)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Potential Predictors:

- **Personal grievances are lodged against the BOT**
- **Poor performance is not addressed or not satisfactorily resolved**

Inadequate principal appraisal

Ensuring rigorous principal appraisal was problematic, in the opinion of study school trustees and ERO.

While the principal has a good relationship with the board, it is not satisfactory for the board to allow the appraisal of his/her performance to lapse. The board must promptly attend to this matter. (ERO report)

An issue, when the board chair elected to do the appraisal, was that s/he did not have the skills or the educational knowledge to be able to identify performance problems, or school effectiveness problems.

I think they (trustees) didn't really feel like they were in a position to challenge teachers, let alone to challenge the school management. (Support staff member who attended BOT meetings)

Because trustees have differing views on the current directions of the school, it would be useful for the board to include an independent, external appraisal of the principal's performance as part of the appraisal process. (ERO report)

An independent external appraiser, however, was no guarantee of a rigorous process or of an honest or perceptive report.

How does the consultant decide if the job the principal is doing is good? We never gave questionnaires to students (and) or to staff? How do you know you are good enough, just because someone you pay (the appraiser) is telling you that you are, based on what you (the principal) have told them? (Middle manager)

Other concerns, mentioned during the interviews, were having another principal do the appraisal if they were a close colleague of the appraisee principal and having the same appraiser over a number of years. In the view of some staff, principal appraisers did not

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

have the courage to identify and report concerns or became so close to the principal that they lost their independent perspective.

The appraiser was the same person every year. It is almost like there was a protection of the principal. (Senior leader)

As well as selecting an appraiser who has the skills and integrity to give honest feedback to the principal, there are lessons which can be learned from these examples. There is a need for a rigorous process that involves collecting feedback from staff and students and, arguably, a need to change appraisers from time to time.

Trustee interviewees were concerned that they were not allowed to read the appraisal reports. In the instances reported in the study schools, only the board chairs read the reports. Study school participants mentioned at least one example in each of the three schools, when the relationship between the principal and board chair was close, to the extent that the board chair was perceived as protecting the principal from board scrutiny. Two of these three board chairs were interviewed and confirmed their close relationships with their principals.

We worked very closely together, especially over the appraisal. I did it with (the principal) and told the board we had completed it. ERO was critical that we did not complete the process. (Board chair)

Consequently, the board was reliant not only on the validity of the report, but also on the honesty and perceptiveness of the chair.

The appraisal of the principal should be reported in full to the board of trustees. That includes the staff rep⁵⁴. Because then people can judge the quality of the appraisal as well as the appraisee. Our board chair stopped it being given to the rest of the trustees. (Staff trustee)

Potential Predictors:

- **The principal is not appraised formally and comprehensively.**
- **The principal is appraised only by the BOT and/or close colleagues.**

⁵⁴ Each board of trustees has one staff trustee elected by the staff.

- The whole BOT is not well informed about performance issues.

Poor appointments resulting in performance problems

Independent reviews, MOE documents and research participants identified poor appointments that had been made by study school principals and/or BOTs, either through lack of judgement or from not following a rigorous process. In total, there were nine principals in leadership roles over the decline periods in the three schools. Concerns were evident, in MOE and ERO reports, that there were serious performance issues with three of the nine. Another was convicted for a performance-related criminal offence and was dismissed from the school. Trustee interviewees and ERO reports described concerns with some of the other principals as well.

The previous report found that the principal was not providing effective professional leadership. This discretionary audit confirms that this is still the case. (ERO report)

There were at least seven senior leaders, in the role of either deputy, associate or assistant principal, with whom performance problems were identified.

There are still major concerns about the performance of the deputy principal. This has been signaled in two independent reviews, in the (MOE) report and in the consultation carried out in preparation for (MOE intervention). (MOE report)

In all these cases, it was the opinion of the interviewees that those leaders did not have the attributes, or appropriate leadership experience when they were appointed.

I was told (by two trustees) that their hands were forced over the principal's appointment ... the board was told by the advisor they had to take her/him. It was a political appointment. (Senior leader)

After the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, the study school BOTs made senior leader appointments, including principal appointments. Some trustees acknowledged they did not have the required skills or experience to make educational appointments.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Even those of us who had made appointments in our own work places did not know enough about the skills needed to be a good school principal. Some of the board had never been employees at all. (Trustee)

Sometimes a lack of procedural requirements for school appointments resulted in processes evolving and becoming accepted as the conventional wisdom on how things should be done. Examples were reported of referees not being contacted or not rigorously questioned, of a total reliance on reports from nominated referees only, qualifications not being checked, appointments virtually being made over the phone and very informal interviews.

I had a ring from (the principal) saying “would you like to be Head of (a department)?” and I didn’t have a job and said “yeah, that sounds good thanks”. So I went out and had a chat to him just in his office, no formal application or anything like that. (Middle manager)

The position should have been advertised and interviews gone through. We lost a good person that way because s/he didn’t get the job in the end. (Senior leader)

We learned the hard way that we needed to talk to people other than the referees they say to contact. You just get referees who say nice things about you. You need to talk to other people but how do you do that? It feels like going behind someone’s back. (Senior leader)

The board needs to ensure that there is documentation of appointments presented to their formal meetings for approval and that summaries of procedures for selection are filed. (ERO report)

In the short term, poor appointments were tolerated, even when school personnel were aware of resulting performance problems.

(The principal) was a genial fool. I remember going into (the associate principal’s) office ...and she was just beside herself with rage over something stupid (the principal) had done. (Senior leader)

S/he was promoted beyond his/her ability ... and so that side of the school (leadership decisions) was slowly starting to sort of breakdown. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I find that the concerns identified by the ERO report are largely valid. Lessons are uninteresting, lack clear learning objectives, use resources which are outdated, language which is often difficult for students to understand and do not require students to take any responsibility for their own learning. (Independent review of teacher performance)

In the longer term, difficulties occurred with providing support and appropriate exit strategies for poor performers. Some appointments, including leadership appointments, were made in the study schools that, in retrospect, trustees regretted and school leaders criticised.

Potential Predictors:

- **Appointment procedures are informal/unprofessional/illegal.**
- **BOTs appoint principals without taking appropriate educational advice.**

Ineffective school systems

Deteriorating systems created problems for a wide range of study school staff. Systems identified as creating problems included day-to-day organisation, attendance, student discipline, meeting organisation and professional development.

Staff meetings and HOD meetings were just shambolic. ... nothing was ever organised. (Middle manager)

How we organised professional development needed a huge overhaul. Teachers just went to anything they wanted and it was a good way to take time off school. There did not seem to be an overview of what the school needed. (Middle manager)

Systems associated with managing students became less effective in all three schools as the decline escalated.

By the end of last year there were no systems in place to deal effectively with the routine issues of attendance, lateness, uniforms and discipline. (Evaluation report for MOE)

(The deputy principal) would keep the records in discipline and guidance issues and would run guidance programmes, but progressively s/he became more and more bogged down in dealing with

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

the matters of the day ... so the systems started to sort of break down in the school. (Middle manager)

Student attendance got worse. Somehow the truants and wagers seemed to know our systems weren't working. (Support staff)

Potential Predictors:

- **Ineffective systems and practices continue.**
- **There are breakdowns in systems, routines and procedures.**
- **There is inadequate record keeping.**

Unresolved Issues and Problems

Some organisational problems that emerged in each of the study schools had the potential, if not well managed, to contribute to the complex number of interwoven problems which led to decline. Unresolved problems included governance difficulties, ailing aspects of school culture, problems associated with staff longevity, nepotism and the consequences of a deputy not being appointed principal.

Governance difficulties

In 1989⁵⁵ when the first BOTs were elected to govern schools, all three study schools had more parents nominated for trustee positions than the available elected places, so each school had an election. Initially, most study school trustees were parents, some with no previous committee experience and certainly not with board governance experience.

The school had a board that was supportive, representative of the student community and keen to fulfill its governance role. Trustees were, however, lacking in knowledge about their responsibilities and were not playing an active governance role. (MOE report)

⁵⁵ Boards of trustees were elected for the first time at the end of 1989 and took on the governance responsibility for their schools. At that time five parent representatives were elected to the Board and were joined by their principal, an elected staff trustee and, in secondary schools, an elected student trustee. Each board was able to co-opt between one and four additional trustees either for their expertise and/or to ensure representation of the school's community. Most commonly, this representation would address the need for gender and/or ethnicity balance.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

All three boards were involved in training activities in the form of large off-site meetings during which governance and management roles were clarified, and charter and policy writing was guided. Training for boards focused on setting up procedures for school governance, rather than what to do if there were doubts about the principal's performance or how to spot problems with school finances or systems of accounting. All trustees interviewed criticised the training they received.

Some of us went to the training but when we got back to a meeting it was hard to know how it worked in practice, and not all of us had heard it, so it was sort of wasted. (Trustee)

We went to meetings but we never understood the financial statements or the financial reports. (Trustee)

I didn't have the time, the competence or the expertise. If I had a principal who wanted to run rings around me, that principal would run rings around me. (Trustee)

Not all trustees chose to attend training programmes. Though the study school boards included some trustees with high levels of professional skills (e.g. accountant, medical doctor, church minister, local government counsellor, businessman, and a school leader), some of these trustees realised, with hindsight, that they lacked confidence and skills in the governance role.

Because many of the governance matters were delegated to the previous principal, the board has found it difficult to focus on its role and responsibilities. (ERO report)

I think as a board we didn't take responsibility. I think we were slow to act. (Trustee)

Our chair had this attitude, no we don't need training. We can do it ourselves. We were wrong. (Trustee)

There were times when trustees felt they did not have enough information. Other times some felt swamped with information, describing it as a strategy their principal used to control the board.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

As a result of a number of incidents, board members felt that they were receiving inaccurate or filtered information from the principal. There were also instances cited where the principal refused to give information that the board believed it had a right to expect. (Research report for MOE)

(The principal) would overload the board with info on the grounds that if you gave them too much they wouldn't notice what was in it. S/he used to write these huge reports that confused and exhausted everyone. (Trustee)

A particular issue that became a problem in two study schools was the relationship between the BOT chairperson and the principal. In both cases the relationship was one of strong, mutual and unchallenging support, to the point that the whole BOT was not kept as fully informed as they should have been and the BOT chair ceased to question or challenge the principal.

(The board chair) saw no wrong in (the principal) and they (BOT) allowed him/her free reign. (Senior leader)

The chair would back the principal to the point where the principal was actually totally dominating and running (things) and the rest of the board were not having a real big say because the principal had got the chairperson in her/his pocket. (Trustee)

Documents provided triangulating evidence that some trustees had personal agendas, acted independently of their board, did not act as a good team member or, as a fellow trustee said, *turned up just to get the money.*

Prolonged board meetings are marred by frequent disputes and conflict. (ERO report)

Often decision making processes have been slowed down or sabotaged by misinformation, poor communication, pursuit of individual agendas, revisiting issues once decisions have been made, open conflict and lack of leadership. (Report to MOE)

In my judgement the end result is likely to be a principal who simply walks away in frustration at constant petty meddling. (Internal MOE memo)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Some trustees reflected later that they were reluctant to accept feedback or accept the seriousness of the school's situation. One described being in denial, even after independent reviewers or ERO reported on issues.

We had all these surveys, the public had told us and then (an independent consultant) came in and told us precisely what everybody knew but some didn't want to accept. (Trustee)

When trustees realised there was a serious situation, they were sometimes overruled by the principal and found it difficult to insist on action. Several participants noted that it is *very difficult, if not impossible*, for a board to take action if the principal is determined and controlling.

.... (the board was) a little too weak to stand up and say "look, we don't agree". (Trustee)

Other trustees, realising that they and their school needed help, did not want to go to the MOE or ERO, fearing bad publicity and loss of control. Further, they were not convinced that STA⁵⁶ was capable of helping.

People were afraid to go to the Ministry; afraid to go to ERO because of the public report, can't go to the Ministry because either they won't do anything or they will control, they will take over so the school loses control. (Staff trustee)

The study schools were put at risk of decline by a combination of inexperienced and over-reliant trustees, inadequate BOT training, poor quality information, personal agendas, lack of MOE support and sometimes controlling principals.

Potential Predictors:

- **BOT training is inadequate, or not all trustees are involved.**
- **There is a close and unchallenging relationship between the principal and board chair.**
- **Political agendas are put before students' needs.**
- **A BOT is not strong in its governance role.**

⁵⁶ School Trustees Association is the association of trustees from school boards of trustees. It has a national body (NZSTA) and, during the period of the research, local associations. STA provides support and advisory services for schools, especially on governance, legal and employment matters.

- **Trustees don't know when or how to seek advice or help.**

Loss of staff cohesion and morale

As research participants reflected on the decline period, they described aspects of their school's culture that they had observed becoming increasingly problematic. Concerns included a loss of cohesive direction, factions forming, problems with communication and decision-making, a loss of trusting relationships, increasing acceptance of unethical and unprofessional behaviour and loss of staff morale.

Many have forgotten just how negative and dispirited the school was at that time and the magnitude and complexity of the problems that had to be addressed, some of which had been evident for years and were embedded in the culture of the place. (MOE commissioned report)

In all three schools there was a loss of cohesion and sense of collective direction.

The principal's vision for meeting the mission of the school would be enhanced by whole school discussion and understanding of principles, curriculum and systems. The school as a whole will benefit from clarification of perceptions and a coordinated approach. (ERO report)

Everyone seemed to be paddling their own canoe. (Middle manager)

The lack of collective direction was reflected in divisions and factions within the staff. The factions were sometimes personality based and other times founded on differing ideologies or opinions on issues affecting the school.

There is a small group of staff who want to reinstate (a previous system). They are agitating against changes and actively undermining (the new initiative). (Evaluation report for MOE)

There was the old guard who were there a long time before (the new principal) arrived. Then a new group developed that supported the new principal and the new initiatives. (Middle manager)

Participants described a culture in which people had stopped trusting each other and communication had become secretive and sometimes subversive.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

You figured out who you could trust. You would be very careful. They (some school decisions) gave a kind of power to some people that was destructive, and remained destructive. (Middle manager)

There was a lot of muttering behind backs. (Trustee)

Decision-making was often problematic because of poor communication within the school and because of the loss of trust between key staff.

It didn't seem fair but we had no channels to use to challenge the decision making. (Middle manager)

We needed good decision making but that didn't happen. (Support staff)

Behavioural norms changed as some unethical or unprofessional behaviour became accepted by many as being customary.

I don't think there were any real expectations that were professional, or (that we) should work in a professional way. We needed a way of working and an expectation that things would be handled in a professional way. (Support staff)

... (condoning poor teaching) allowed others to think "well I'll just come here and get my pay package". There was very much a kind of arrive at 8.30 and leave at 3.00 mentality. (Middle manager)

We are talking about a culture where it's OK occasionally to help yourself to something (steal) that you need. (Middle manager)

Some staff experienced a loss of confidence in themselves, and in others, with a consequential decrease in staff morale.

Teacher efficacy for a number of staff was low and this was an additional factor here preventing real movement. (Senior leader)

The number of formal teacher competencies reviews apparently required, presents the risk of further negative publicity for the school and a loss of fragile morale in the staffroom. (ERO report)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Of concern, were the adverse effects on students that participants observed.

I was trying to get teachers to work with kids so that they addressed the issue and didn't put the student down. (Middle manager)

We were concerned that many students were not getting the quality of teaching that they deserved. (Trustee)

Over the decline period, the problems described above became worse, eroding staff cohesion and morale. According to participants, the changes began to adversely impact on school expectations and standards, on students and staff, and on the school's reputation.

Potential Predictors:

- **Conflict remains unresolved.**
- **Decision making is not transparent.**
- **Staff morale is low.**

Problems associated with staff longevity

While not all long-serving staff were a negative influence, a significant barrier to effectiveness, and the ability for the study schools to improve, was the number of long serving staff who were resistant to change. In some instances, the negativity emanated from teachers who had been challenged about their poor performance and it was nearly always linked to a lack of recent professional development or study. Even when staff handled their resistance in passive ways, it was still a barrier to school development and effective teaching for students.

I think we had comfortable mediocrity. (Middle manager)

Even all these years later, I still can't accept the docile nature of the old staff. To get them engaged in professional discussion was very difficult. (Senior leader)

Resistance to change usually surfaced when a new principal was appointed. In all three schools, at some stage, some of the long-serving staff formed a group that became a negative force in the school. The problem became self-fulfilling, the longer staff had been

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

in the school, because some lost the confidence or will to apply for another job. Others felt they were no longer likely to get another position even if they applied.

I tried for a while (for a position in another school) but eventually I gave up trying. I think my career was damaged by coming to this school and I think I stayed here too long. (Middle manager)

The thing is that the ones that the school is left with are bitter and twisted because they don't get promotion. (Senior leader)

I saw this happen at our school. Staff had been there too long for their own good professionally, but had lost confidence to move on elsewhere. (Senior leader)

Not all long-serving staff were resistant to change. Some were regarded as still being active learners, open to ideas and willing to engage in post-graduate study. It was noteworthy that some research participants wished they had realised, earlier in their careers, the powerful influence their own study eventually had on their breadth of understanding, motivation and knowledge.

The study that I've been doing has increased my confidence, my knowledge and my awareness and global thinking of how things work. (Senior leader)

With the benefit of hindsight I would have done study a bit earlier. (Senior leader)

The open-minded and adaptable long-serving staff did not join the negative group so they did not contribute to the decline but nor did they positively influence their negative long-serving colleagues.

Potential Predictors:

- **Low staff turnover occurs over long periods of time.**
- **Staff are resistant to change.**
- **Significant numbers of staff have had little interaction with other schools and/or have not participated in post-graduate study.**

Familial and professional role conflict

Over the decline years, there were instances when partners, husbands, wives, siblings and children of school leaders were employed in the same school, creating a conflict between the familial and the professional roles. Sometimes these appointments were made by their family member or by their partner. There were occasions when communication problems within the school were attributed to the relationship. Other times, research participants described situations where they felt power was abused by the partner of a school leader or trustee, or by their family member.

Problems were exacerbated when one party held a key position or a high leadership position. Study school participants provided several examples:

His wife became the accountant. She wasn't a qualified accountant and here she was in charge of all this money... he would simply fax her and say "right I need another \$1000" ... and she would just do it. (Support staff)

There was this problem of his wife having a totally inappropriate role in the school. Eventually I was faced with the moral dilemma of where I stood (on an important issue that affected both family members). (Senior leader)

When a contentious school issue involved either family member, the situation became difficult for other staff in the school. In the study schools, some staff felt unable to address issues that they thought needed to be addressed.

I was disinclined to go to the principal, because his daughter was the problem, and say "look there's an issue here". (Senior leader)

Other participants felt penalised or judged by one family member, if they were perceived to be unsupportive of the other one.

As the head of department, I had to make the decision as to whether she went from list A to list B and I said "no" she is not good enough. Standing up to your DP and saying his wife was not good enough, especially when he had been preparing all her lessons for her, (was difficult). (Middle manager)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

*They were husband and wife. It's like there is this power thing that started to happen where they supported each other. My loyalty was divided between each of them and also the rest of the staff.
(Middle manager)*

Not every situation involving employed family members created problems. There were, however, examples from all three study schools when the employment of family members or partners in the same school changed the dynamics, creating difficulties. Communication lines in the school were impacted. Situations became especially problematic when one family member was involved in a contentious issue, or was in a high status or powerful position.

Potential Predictors:

- **A family member of a staff member in a senior or influential position is also employed in the school.**

The consequences of a deputy principal not being appointed principal

All three study schools experienced severe problems when a deputy principal (DP) who had been at the school for some time, became the acting principal during the period between a principal leaving and a new one being appointed. Participants used strong descriptors like *corrosive*, *bitter*, *manipulative* and *agitating* to explain how some DPs reacted when they were not appointed to the permanent position of principal.

There was immediate huge tension ... S/he was very bitter and angry about it. (Middle Manager)

And then all hell broke loose. (The DP) started agitating about why this (new principal) was appointed over him/her. (Trustee)

The problems escalated and involved more than managing the feeling of the non-appointed DP.

So while (the principal) was out of the scene (sick leave) the DP, who'd wanted the job right through and never got it, undermined him/her again with the board of governors. The DP was quite malicious in her/his attack and really put the knife into (the principal) with the board. When (the principal) came back (the DP) stepped back into her/his area but the damage had been done. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I remember sitting in the staff room feeling really frustrated. (The DP) would say “Oh no, we’ve done that before and it didn’t work then, it’s not going to work now”. S/he wasn’t prepared to try new things. (Senior leader)

It puts up a whole lot of barriers for the new principal coming in and the DP is in the very sweet position of being able to watch this new person who got the job over them struggle with a whole lot of loyalties. (Senior leader)

In all three instances, the staff became divided in their loyalties between the non-appointed DP and the newly appointed principal. In two instances, the over-looked DPs were perceived to be actively undermining their new principal. These two DPs were interviewed. While neither admitted to undermining their new principal, they were aware of the staff factions that resulted, in part, from their opposition to changes being promoted by the principal.

I could not believe some of the changes s/he was making. There was no way ----- was going to work in our school and most of the staff knew that. S/he brought those ideas from the previous school and they were entirely unsuited to our area. (Senior leader)

Potential Predictors:

- **In the process of appointing a new principal, an ambitious deputy principal is appointed to the position of acting principal in the interim.**
- **A deputy principal applies for the position of principal and is not appointed.**

External Influence, Power and Authority

As well as the internal organisational issues that the study schools faced, they experienced difficulties in liaising and interacting with other organisations and individuals. Factors beyond the control of the study schools, but within the control of the outside agencies, became manifest during these interactions and contributed to the decline of the schools. The agencies included the MOE, ERO, PPTA and STA. The media, other competing schools and some independent consultants also featured in negative outcomes for the study schools.

Ministry of Education⁵⁷ support was difficult to achieve

When study school personnel finally accepted that their schools needed external help, they found it difficult to obtain in a timely way from the MOE. The process of obtaining and managing the support was fraught with problems, delays, frustrations over response time, bureaucratic requirements and contests over control and ownership of solutions.

Lateness of response/ reluctance to act

When decline began in the study schools⁵⁸, shortly before the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, the responsibility for schooling support or intervention lay with the DoE. I have been unable to locate any evidence to indicate that DoE staff were aware of study school problems or of supportive or intervening action.

A small number of research participants who were involved in the study schools prior to Tomorrow's Schools cited instances where the inspectorate had failed to identify serious problems with the performance of some principals.

I remember reading one of those reports and it was glowing about (the principal). They had it (wrong). (Senior leader)

It must have been blindingly obvious to inspectors and department personnel that we were getting deeper and deeper into strife but nothing happened. (Senior leader)

After the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, study school leaders described their perceptions of the MOE in the early days as being *remote, hands off, silent backroom people, nebulous, quiet vacuous group who say nothing and do nothing and are into critical parent mode rather than adult-to-adult mode.*

There were examples of a reluctance, slow response or major time-lag by the MOE in taking action to support or challenge schools having difficulty.

⁵⁷ It is important to note at the outset of this discussion that MOE processes and procedures changed during the study school decline periods, and have further changed since then.

⁵⁸ The periods of decline each spanned approximately 11 or 12 years. In one study school the decline began in the mid 1980s. In the other two it began around the late 1980s, just prior to the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Under (the new principal) the school has taken some important steps towards rebuilding of the school. After a long wait of over twelve months and after many changes to formats, requests for additional information and the expending of much time and effort in negotiation, the plan was approved by the Treasury and then the Minister of Education. (Research evaluation report)

Clearly their boards are not ready to approach the MOE to begin such a consultation, and the approach should not come from the MOE at this stageThey (trustees, the principal and the staff) are most anxious to know when the business case thing will start? I assured them that the MOE never sleeps and I would pass this all on to Wellington. (MOE internal email)

At some stage each of the three study schools wanted help and support from the MOE to resolve problems that were caused by other schools, other principals or by parents. There were situations when the study schools were powerless to act and their leaders were frustrated or angry at the apparent lack of supportive action from the MOE.

This situation where (a neighbouring school) is flouting the law has been public for some time, yet there has been no action, visible, taken against the offenders. (Chairperson's letter to MOE)

MOE reluctance to become involved, for example in the instance referred to in the cited letter, made it clear to study school personnel that, in the era of school self-management, the MOE did not see its role as interfering in what was intended to be a self-regulating market.

Financial support was difficult to obtain

At the stage that the decline process began in each study school, all three were experiencing financial difficulties. They did not have the financial resources to diagnose their needs, recruit development support, or implement review or ERO recommendations.

(The study school) used to track student lateness and attendance but stopped doing it because of a lack of money to pay for staff to input the data and process it. (Evaluation report to MOE)

I have not been able to find any evidence of special support prior to Tomorrow's Schools, other than advice and one review, from school inspectors. Since Tomorrow's Schools, and after a period of non-intervention, financial support was provided through funding the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

services of consultants, financed action plans, property development, funding provision agreements and funded statutory interventions. A key aspect of MOE intervention was to finance support in ways that the MOE and Treasury could be assured of acceptable outcomes. Sometimes the schools found it difficult to provide sufficient assurance of outcomes that were required.

The message from the planning team is that it (a proposal) should be strengthened to anticipate the searching questions that both Treasury and the Minister are likely to ask before committing a large amount of money ... (MOE email to school)

Problems accessing enough funding and equitable funding in a reliable and timely way were strongly evident in the memories of the participants and in MOE documents. At times, requests for financial support were refused.

There is not much direct help we can give. However we make the following recommendations as support:

- 1. Your school could enter into a contract with another principal to work with you ...*
- 2. You could hire another consultant ...*
- 3. You could approach STA for advice and guidance*

.... However don't allow yourself to sink. If you need further suggestions re suitable principals or any other advice be sure to ask ... (MOE fax to principal)

At other times, school leaders felt that MOE personnel did not understand that the expected improvements required financial backing to achieve.

There really seems to be a need to change community perceptions. Why do so many pupils bypass the school? I suggest that there is a community perception that the school is failing academically. We both know that a major driver that affects the schools potential performance is the socio-economic factor. (MOE letter to study school principal)

(Reply from principal to MOE) We know we need to increase our roll numbers. We know that the academic performances of our students compare unfavourable with the performances of students

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

in other schools. What we also know, and what is not revealed in your statistics, is that we lack the resources to break the cycle of failure which we are locked into and which constantly saps the morale of staff and students.

When money was offered, it was sometimes not enough to do what the schools, and external consultants, felt was required. On occasions the finance was offered as a loan. The study schools' BOTs were anxious about agreeing to a loan that they were not sure they would be able to repay.

It is proposed to joint Ministers that the financial provision ... in the form of a loan, conditional upon the schools completion of performance milestones (the school) will be required to input quantitative data into the system at each of the milestones identified in the performance plan. This will be checked by the Ministry of Education for quality. (MOE proposal to the Ministers of Education and Finance)

We thought that the schools that beat a regular path to the Ministry's door and didn't just knock on the door but opened it, slammed it open and thumped on the table, were the ones that got the money. We tried that but it didn't work. (Senior leader)

As a consequence of a bad ERO report, it seems that these schools expect to be given financial support to get them "back on line" An urgent need to re-assess curriculum or professional development could perhaps be considered as a grant but only if the school does not have the resources to pay. (Internal MOE email)

Other times, MOE personnel agreed to funding but the schools had to wait long periods of time, sometimes more than a year, to receive the funds. The cause of the time lag appeared to be the need for all decisions to be approved by the head office in Wellington, Cabinet and/or Treasury. The long and unpredictable delays were a particular problem if the school, on being promised the funds and pressured to produce outcomes within agreed timeframes, had gone ahead in good faith and employed or contracted people to do the required work.

When I asked "when is the money coming?" first I was told it has to go to Cabinet for approval, then I was told it had to go to Treasury again, and then I was told that Treasury had some doubts

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

about whether it was worth doing, by which time I had spent a hundred thousand of it. (Senior leader)

... (the promised funding) is still not signed off in Wellington. Our ability to plan for the future and in particular to attract a wider selection of the local community to our school is being hampered We originally had every reason to believe that the business case would have been in full swing by this time last year; we are becoming nervous that June/July (next year) may also pass us by. (BOT letter to MOE)

There were examples of changes by the MOE to the rules, the process and/or the amount of money, after it had been agreed to or *promised*.

I regret to inform you that since the initial indication of possible financial support was made, that the system for application has changed My other colleagues, with whom the board has been dealing, also join with me in regretting that the process has changed over the time. (MOE letter to BOT chair)

The difficulties of accessing funds and the unreliability of the process, sometimes left school personnel and trustees angry and exhausted and, in their opinion, slowed the process of reform.

Reporting and bureaucratic requirements

Associated with the need for the schools to be accountable for support funding, were reporting processes that included verbal reports, meetings, written reports and evaluations, milestone reports and an electronic reporting tool called FPAM. School personnel were accepting of the MOE's need for regular progress reports and for clear expectations regarding outcomes but they were often frustrated by the time required, confusion around the style or format required and being required to trial new systems before they were functioning efficiently.

We were the cart before the horse and they kept changing the rules When I did the first milestone report I decided to play their game and said "okay if that's what they want, that's what they'll get" and I produced it, but what a waste of time. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I do think that there are some lessons to be learnt here over the frustrations we all experienced over this. A system for both the school accountability and the MOE processes would be extremely useful as a guide for future users. (Internal MOE email)

Another source of frustration occurred when the MOE set a very short timeframe for the school to fulfill its requirements, but the MOE did not deliver on their side for a long time.

S/he would ring us on a Friday and say “can you get that to me by Monday?” And so we would work all weekend and get back to him/her on Monday and then we’d never hear anything. (Senior leader)

We had to spend even more money and engage an accountant to prepare the information required by the Ministry of Education, but more than a month after making the application, we are still waiting on a reply. (BOT chair letter to Auditor General)

The significant changes and improvements that finally moved the study schools out of the decline cycle were interventions paid for by MOE funds.

I am really grateful to you and all the Ministry staff involved for your support for (the school). There is no doubt that without your intervention, the school would have died. (School letter to MOE)

Research participants felt frustrated by what they perceived to be an inadequate and slow response from the MOE to help them halt the decline. It is beyond the scope of this research to determine the extent to which the reform of the study schools may have been faster and more effective if MOE support had been more timely and adequate.

Potential Predictors:

- **MOE systems for responding to school decline are inadequate.**
- **External intervention happens too late.**
- **Setting up appropriate support processes takes too long or requires more effort than the school can sustain.**
- **School needs are inadequately assessed.**

Education Review Office methodology⁵⁹ and reports

ERO reports eventually played an important role as catalysts for change in the study schools. The first critical review reports became a mirror for school personnel in denial, and eventually resulted in the MOE taking some action.

They (ERO reports) shook the place into reality. (Support staff)

I thought ERO was the best thing since sliced bread. They may not have been entirely fair but they held up a mirror for us to look into. (Trustee)

The early ERO reports, however, did not identify some major problems, including leadership performance issues.

The (ERO) report hints at some of the key problems but does not state them in a way that accurately reflects the crisis the school is currently in. (Report to MOE)

The problems were essentially suppressed the time before. When they did finally bring out the honest report, by that time (the new principal) was starting to address the issues and it was the time when they needed to sort of hold back. Previously when the issues weren't being addressed was the time to put the boot in and they didn't. (Senior leader)

An example of the inadequate identification and attribution of problems was a review of a study school at a stage when staff and trustees were seriously concerned about the principal's performance and shortly before the principal was dismissed. There was no reference in the confirmed ERO report to the principal's performance. In the final recommendations, the only references to personnel included the need for *the governance role of a trustee to be more clearly defined as the job of overseeing the school*, and the board ensuring that *policies and procedures be written and approved, appointments are documented, a board training programme be established and an EEO programme be developed.*

Another example of the under-reporting of serious issues was one ERO report that stated ERO was *not assured that the school is a safe place for students*. Questionnaire data collected by an independent reviewer, in response to the report, identified that students were unsafe

⁵⁹ ERO methodology changed a number of times since the first reviews during the first decade of Tomorrow's Schools.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

because of *verbal violence* and *widespread physical and emotional violence*. The data also revealed that staff were unsafe because of *bullying and verbal violence from students*.

Nor did the reports clearly identify who was responsible for major problems. These early reports made general reference to board responsibilities when, in some instances, the problems were caused by school leaders.

They talked about the board needing to do this, and the board should do that. It wasn't the board that was the problem. It was some of the school leaders who were the problem. I know the board is responsible but so are the leaders. The report should have been specific so people would know what to do. (Middle manager)

Perceived problems with the review process

There were some aspects of the review process that participants identified as being of concern⁶⁰. Some reported having told ERO about school problems that were not reflected in the report.

I can remember telling ERO exactly what was going on in the English department. It was all whitewashed. In fact it came out (in the feedback) as one of the few departments in the school that was actually doing the job. I have never spoken honestly to ERO since to be honest. I have got no confidence in them. (Middle manager)

There was also evidence of school personnel not being honest and concealing important concerns from the reviewers, as the following participants rationalised:

It is probably a bit like someone coming into your home and questioning you about how the whole thing is running. You kind of protect your family. You want to be honest but the constant criticism was so hurtful ... based on poor and shallow judgements. (Middle manager)

I gave a lot of leading things to ERO but none of them were picked up. I wasn't going to divulge information that was unnecessary. They didn't pick anything up. They wrote a good report. (Support staff)

⁶⁰ The views of the research participants need to be seen in the context of their involvement in a declining school. They may not have been able to distance themselves from the threat posed by external evaluation and may not have fully understood the purpose of external evaluations.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

However, when the review did not identify the hidden problems people lost confidence in the quality of the process. Some participants were aware of the dissonance created for them by the process.

So you were caught in a kind of dilemma, quite angry about the criticisms and how unfair it appeared to be and yet also understanding that there were things that needed to be changed. (Senior leader)

Report accuracy and wording

The wording used in ERO reports, and the impressions the words conveyed, were very important to study school personnel because the reports became public documents and because the media picked up on words and phrases for publication. There were examples in the study school reports of comments which school personnel thought were inaccurate or unbalanced. Some examples are provided from a school's written response to a draft ERO report (MOE file copy).

ERO report: *"The head of department has not produced a development plan ...*

School response: *At the time of the review there was no HOD⁶¹. The position had been advertised but not filled. The interim teacher in-charge had produced a plan.*

ERO report: *"(Typing) is currently being taught by some teachers who have limited experience of, or training in, teaching the subject".*

School response: *All permanent typing staff are qualified. During the ERO visit a short-term relieving teacher, a (teacher trainee) graduate from the commerce department, was employed.*

In the instance quoted above, ERO personnel did not make the changes to the final report as requested by the school. The example is not cited as a judgement on ERO decisions but rather to illustrate the frustration of study school leaders when they thought a report was inaccurate. As well as feeling *aggrieved* at inaccuracies, trustees and leaders objected to comments they felt were *unbalanced, unhelpful* or *patronising*.

⁶¹ Head of Department

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

ERO report: “The board should explore all avenues and strategies to recruit and retain qualified teachers, particularly for those subjects that are inappropriately staffed”.

School response: This advice is patronising. Does ERO believe this statement will in any way help the board? In term 1 the board spent \$2,300 out of its very restricted budget doing exactly what the ERO comment exhorts it to do ...

They made an error in the report by stating that they observed some classes with up to 25% of students absent. Despite efforts ... to show that our student absenteeism is at least as good, if not better, than any other schools according to statistical returns, they did not remove this erroneous comment. (Trustee)

The difficulties and perceived *intransigence* of some reviewers seriously damaged the relationship the study school personnel had with ERO. These perceptions of study school personnel, however, need to be interpreted in the context of some being in denial about the extent of the problems in their school and possibly lacking in their understanding of evaluation methodology. School personnel and trustees did not respect or trust the review results because of flaws they perceived in the process and in the report wording. On reflection, participants felt that valid criticisms ERO made of their school were often ignored by school staff and leaders because of the perceived flaws.

Publicity following the publication of reports⁶²

The main ERO related problems experienced by the study schools were the publication of the reports, the negative media publicity and resultant loss of confidence by the students, staff, trustees and the parental community. BOT minutes from one school reflect the impact publicity had on attracting new trustees at board election time.

The principal paid tribute to the board, reflecting that when elected they knew they would face hard times as ERO reports were quite damning with statements that the BOT was unable to carry out its responsibilities. (BOT minutes)

⁶² ERO reports are in the public domain and could be accessed under The Official Information Act 1982, even if they were not published on the ERO website.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Damage to the schools' reputations, in turn, contributed to falling school rolls and, therefore, escalation of decline. In subsequent reviews, some study school staff tried to protect their school from further negative publicity.

It is very difficult to be honest with them because you are trying to protect your school and you want the best report possible and so I'm not going to tell them that I've got a real problem with one of my DPs. If I knew it was going to be an in-house report that came to the school (I would tell them). If it wasn't going to be in the public arena I'd feel more open. (Senior leader)

I feel that if you talk to ERO and are really frank with them that it ... may just end up exacerbating the problem. (Middle manager)

A key function of an ERO review is to identify school ineffectiveness and to report on it. Because the reports are available to the public and the media they were very important in shaping the reputations of the study schools.

There has been a major difficulty in recruiting staff and this has been worsened by the publicity surrounding the ERO reports. (Research report for MOE)

Study school trustees, staff and students felt *named, blamed* and *shamed* by the reports and parent confidence in the schools was eroded.

The community's confidence in the school is severely dented and made worse by the ERO report. (MOE file note)

The frequency of follow-up reviews

Most ERO reviews take place in a regular cycle of approximately three years. In line with appropriate and normal practice, once a study school was identified as being at risk or in difficulties ERO revisited and re-reviewed after a shorter timeframe. These special reviews were very stressful for study school staff. Of particular concern were the six-monthly and annual review reports that re-reported the problems which had been initially identified, rather than reporting on the progress, or lack of it, in the time since the initial review.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

(The school) has been reviewed 5 times in the past 4 years. An unintended effect of these numerous inspections is the growth of a siege mentality in the staff, who feel their best efforts go unrecognised. The implication of these multiple reviews is that the school has substantial inadequacies.... Ten of the 16 (requirements) are complete or partially complete. Given the short time between reviews this is a remarkably good achievement. (Internal MOE note)

Study school participants felt that the effort and progress they were making was not reported or affirmed in the review reports. As the above note demonstrates, *the more blamed and shamed* school staff felt as a consequence of the reviews and the media, the less motivated staff became to keep trying to improve and the more exhausted they became. Associated problems occurred when there was an expectation that a school could demonstrate improvements in student achievement over six months or a year.

All these reviews are very disruptive and time consuming and are wearing people out. (MOE notes)

The ERO reviews and reports alienated even the staff and trustees who accepted there were problems and wanted something done to improve their school. The publicity appeared to disempower some study school leaders who felt overwhelmed by the extent of the problems identified. One leader noted that a critical ERO review could only be a positive catalyst for change if there were *the right personnel in the school to affect that change, otherwise the culture of blame and denial took precedence.*

Potential Predictors:

- **ERO review recommendations are ignored or rejected without being considered.**
- **ERO reports do not identify existing problems.**
- **ERO recommendations are unrealistic.**
- **A follow-up review occurs too soon to allow a school to make sufficient progress or repeats previous concerns rather than focuses on progress or lack of it.**

Post Primary Teachers Association⁶³

As with the other educational agencies, PPTA was at times a positive force in the schools and at other times had a negative influence on school culture.

Within each school there is a series of leadership subgroups. The school branch of the teachers' union is an important example of this. It can be a valuable source of wider perspectives and a counterpoint where power relations may have become imbalanced ... but it is also liable to be hijacked by disaffected staff, who at times have a destructive or overly ideological agenda. (Senior leader)

Major problems, experienced by all three study schools, arose when leaders and trustees were trying to deal effectively with teachers who were not performing, were tired, or who were resistant to any change or development. A very important aspect of halting the school decline was to improve the performance of some teachers and to stop unprofessional behaviour. There were instances when PPTA field officers who, through what a study school participant called the *vehemence of their advocacy*, made it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for school leaders to achieve the desired changes.

The previous principal was not prepared to contest the teachers' union over the competency of some staff, even though he was concerned about the quality of some of the teaching. (Report for MOE)

The PPTA are trying to make it into a three stage process. Letters have been written to five teachers (beginning competence procedures). PPTA will fight tooth and nail to delay or stop the process. They see it as a mission. (MOE file note)

Learning opportunities for students, adversely affected by poor quality teaching, continued to be compromised.

The kids and the parents and the staff knew which teachers were not giving the kids a good deal but it was impossible to shift some of them. The PPTA branch people inside the school and the union itself made it too hard for the principal and board to see it through. (Middle manager)

⁶³ PPTA is a teachers' union. Its key responsibility is to advocate for its members. In the study schools PPTA field officers were most often in an advocacy role for a teacher whose performance or behaviour was being challenged by the principal, on behalf of the school.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Three teachers, put under review three years ago, have made small improvements but, in the views of the students, senior staff and curriculum consultant, are still not providing quality teaching programmes and are not meeting student needs....It is the view of the principal that PPTA have judged their performance to meet the minimum competency requirements and that there is nothing more the school can do in this regard. (Report to MOE)

Study participants generally saw both sides of the situation and often concluded that whether the best outcomes for students were achieved or not depended on the skills and the attitudes of all the parties in the discussion.

If PPTA is involved in the process, they can be a very powerful force for change, but if you get the wrong person in there ... your hands are tied and you can't do anything. But it is also sometimes a lack of courage on the part of principals, or the STA advisor. (Middle manager)

There were times in all three study schools, especially when efforts were made to improve the performance of some teachers, that the school's PPTA branch became the support group for disaffected teachers and for teachers under scrutiny because of their performance or behaviour. Branch meetings became the catalyst for criticism of school leaders and *for moaning and grumbling about almost everything, especially any requests for changes.*

As grievances were aired, the meetings got worse until we all avoided them like the plague. The group ended up being only the negative and incompetent teachers supporting each other. (Middle manager)

The latter scenario was similar to those described in all three schools at some stage. For a period of time, the PPTA branch meetings attracted less and less members because of the negative attitudes of a small group that became vocal, and united. Some staff, who had previously attended meetings, felt it was easier to opt out and join the silent majority than to challenge the vocal minority.

It was too hard to stand up to them because you became the target of their nastiness. I realise now that I was part of the problem by letting them get away with it. (Middle manager)

Potential Predictors:

- **Union field officers protect poorly performing teachers.**
- **Union members stop attending school branch meetings because of the negative nature of discussions.**
- **There are entrenched and negative leaders and/or members of the school branch of the union.**

School Trustees Association⁶⁴

Neither the local nor national branches of STA were spontaneously mentioned, during interviews, in relation to what happened in the study schools. STA was only occasionally mentioned when participants were asked what they would do now, with the wisdom of hindsight, to prevent or halt school decline.

The School Trustees Association had some stuff there (at the training session). They are there to tell you about their model through their manual. They are there to deliver a number of contracted outlooks about this mechanistic split between governance and management, but I don't believe they are responsive to individual schools. (Trustee)

Opinions provided about the study school BOT training by STA were seldom complimentary.

Their training for boards was inadequate because it was a "one size fits all" model and our board couldn't apply that to its own situation. (Senior leader)

Responding to questions posed by me about the role of STA, participants described STA personnel as having carved out a niche for themselves in employment or litigious situations and as advocates for BOTs in a dispute with a staff member or parent. The STA telephone Help Line was respected as an important source of expert advice for employment, legal and governance issues. Employment advice was valued when it was effective, but this was not always the case.

⁶⁴ This association has very since undergone structural changes that have resulted in all of the Association's business being run from the national body (NZSTA) based in the capital. As well as the national head office, each region had its own Association. Services are provided in a range of delivery modes.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The Union (PPTA) walked all over us and the STA advisor just sat there and didn't seem to have an answer for them. (Senior leader)

In summary, it appears that STA advice and support was limited mostly to employment advice, rather than the type of comprehensive support the study schools needed.

Potential Predictors:

- **STA employment advisors do not support a school sufficiently to deal effectively with poor staff performance or behaviour.**

Competition between schools

All three study schools were adversely affected when neighbouring schools actively competed for local students. Competition between schools was not a new phenomenon but with the advent of Tomorrow's Schools legislation, some of the ways the competition occurred were new. The devolution of decision-making to school boards of trustees, combined with a non-interventionist stance taken by the MOE, allowed individual schools to attempt to change their structure⁶⁵, taking students from the neighbouring secondary schools.

We were all in competition and all for bums on seat: "my school is better than yours". (Senior leader)

The effect on two of the study schools of a neighbouring school recapitating was an immediate drop in roll numbers, with the number of new entrants to the two secondary schools halving for the following year. Providing further details or examples of what occurred would almost certainly identify the schools. Suffice it to say that some neighbouring schools were acting in unethical, and possibly illegal, ways.

Some free-market issues are more selfish than others. Some principals are predatory neighbours. (Senior leader)

⁶⁵ Schools attempted to restructure through "recapitating". An intermediate school (normally catering for students from years 7 and 8) would retain students for their year 9 and/or 10 years. This reduced the number of students who would normally move on to attend the neighbouring secondary schools.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The small size of the school roll and its vulnerability because of the actions of the local contributing schools did not make the position (of principal) highly sought after. (MOE report)

Requests from school leaders and trustees for the MOE to investigate or intervene initially did not achieve any action. For instance, a principal faxed the MOE *lodging a formal request for an investigation* into the actions of a neighbouring school. A MOE file note attached to his request notes the request and adds:

Ministry to take no action in the meantime. (MOE file note)

All three study schools were also adversely affected by activities that were less overt, such as an intermediate school not allowing the receiving high school to have access to student records or to talk with potential parental clients. Evidence of competitive activities occurring is provided in a report commissioned by the MOE in preparation for an intervention in a study school:

- *financial inducements for students to enroll early at the contributing school*
- *parents and students feeling pressured not to enroll at the secondary school*
- *completed enrolment forms, given by parents to the contributing school, not being passed on to the secondary school*
- *parents needing to secretly enroll their child at the secondary school (MOE commissioned report)*

School leaders of one study school were informed by parents that neighbouring intermediate school staff and trustees were giving negative messages to their parents about the secondary school, including repeating the rumour it was going to be closed. Minutes record these concerns being discussed at a board meeting.

11.2.1 (Community parent) reported her concerns that rumours alleging (the study school) closure appear to have been emanating from (neighbouring school) staff to their students who have carried the message home.

11.2.2 It was considered no gain would be made by complaining directly to (the neighbouring school) administration.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

11.2.3 (A trustee) suggested wider publication of the school's business plan would reassure the community that there is no intention of (the study school) closing. (BOT minutes)

The study schools all suffered from reductions in student numbers, threatening their viability, in part as a result of inter-school competition. Their higher decile neighbours did not experience the same difficulties. An independent review commissioned for the MOE noted that “*There are a number of roll-related factors that will impact on (the study school's) attempt to increase its roll, regardless of the demographics*”. Two factors listed included:

- *Ministry of Education structural support for (neighbouring) schools whose rolls are growing and who wish to increase their rolls further.*
- *The approval for (a competing school's) change of class application that will mean it competes for students.*

Potential Predictors:

- **Changes in the structure of schools, involve competing with neighbouring schools for students.**
- **School staff or trustees undermine another school overtly or covertly.**

The media

Local and regional newspapers played significant roles in the dissemination of education related commentary on the study schools. The emotive nature of headlines and the content of articles played a role in adversely effecting the reputations of the study schools. The following examples of newspaper headlines followed one study school's ERO report:

School told to shape up or else

Another school board facing the sack

Students grade teachers on classroom performance

Criticism continues for ----- school

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

On occasion, television coverage and magazine articles also made an impact, always negative, on the way the public viewed the schools.

There have been two periods when the roll has dropped significantly. The decline is associated with ongoing and negative publicity about the school ... in the media. (MOE historical report)

All three schools were in the process of declining when ERO was established. At that time, ERO reports were publically available to the media at the same time the schools received them. Newspaper articles were sometimes the first notification students and staff had that their school had received a critical ERO report.

It was such a shock to see us in the paper. The press gave it an emotive heading and selected the low lights out of the report. The good bits were hardly ever included. (Senior leader)

As well as publicity about the ERO reviews, local papers published articles that left school staff and students *feeling beleaguered and bounded*. There were occasions when they felt *set up* by a journalist. Specific examples cannot be provided because they would identify schools. Study school leaders and trustees were not trained to have skills in public relations and sometimes felt they did not handle the media well. Following one publication, that school staff felt was *unfair and unbalanced* and that contained *clearly misleading information*, a school leader phoned the journalist to protest.

Her response was "oh that's just a detail".... basically "we're not going to let the facts spoil a good story". (Senior leader)

There were two reported occasions when trustees went to a local paper in order to get publicity that they thought would advance their own position. In each case the resultant publicity was damaging to the school because it indicated to the public that there were problems and/or discontent at the school.

Potential Predictors:

- **Negative media coverage of a school.**

Consultants and facilitators

During the various interventions, a number of consultants and facilitators worked in the schools. Sometimes they were selected by school trustees or leaders and other times by MOE personnel. Some consultants were involved over long periods of time and others on short term contracts. Documents show that consultants were involved in a range of areas and tasks including leadership support and advice, financial advice, historical analysis, viability assessment, policy development, identifying needs and problems, performance management, property development, independent reviewing, research and BOT training. Their effectiveness and credibility ranged, in the views of the research participants, from being highly effective, to being *a waste of space*. Effective consultants were valued because they built a trusted partnership with the schools and had the advantage of being independent while being perceived as a partner working in the school's interest.

The first breakthrough was when ---- came and worked with us. We trusted ---- to listen to us and then a good relationship developed because s/he was on our side. (Trustee)

The employment of specialist consultants has had a significant effect in changing the culture of the school. This approach has enabled trustees to retain control of their policy direction while profiting from specialist expertise in meeting identified needs within the school. (ERO report)

Not all consultants provided an effective service and participants were very critical of some, especially some who *were imposed by the MOE*, who did not have adequate knowledge, skills or credibility, in the views of school personnel.

S/he was an accountant and knew nothing about schools or education. We all wasted hours explaining things and s/he didn't come up with anything we felt made sense. We had to go along with it because that was the only way we would get any money to do what we needed. (Senior leader)

It is the view of the board that the reviewer did not follow the brief he was given and that he merely repeated what the teachers told him rather than making an independent professional judgement. The report also contains factual inaccuracies. In the light of the above, the board rejects the validity of the contents of the report. (BOT letter to HOD)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

A role that consultants played was to identify study school problems, issues and needs in order that appropriate support could be provided by the MOE. When diagnosis of the needs was not sound, it had the potential to result in inappropriate or inadequate intervention strategies and timelines. All three study schools experienced this on at least one occasion.

Potential Predictors:

- **Consultants/facilitators do not have the appropriate skills or experience.**
- **School needs and problems are not accurately or adequately diagnosed.**

In this section of the chapter the institutional pressures that the schools experienced have been described and linked with their potential to predict decline. Some of the pressures resulted from the interactions with external agencies. Other pressures came from groups within the school, as the various stakeholders acted and reacted in relation to the issues and problems they were experiencing. The influences described in this section are intimately connected to the micro or personal influences outlined in the next section of the chapter.

PART THREE: MICRO (PERSONAL) INFLUENCES

Individuals in the study schools described a range of personal responses to other people, groups and situations with which they found themselves grappling, both prior to their school declining and during the decline phases. These are illustrated in Figure 9. All the study school participants held positions of status, leadership or influence in their schools. They were people who were involved beyond the level of a classroom teacher, who had access to school-wide information and, with the exception of support staff, were involved in school-wide decision making. Because most participants held senior appointments, they were in a position to observe other leaders, including the principal, and to make informed judgements about their behaviour and performance. This section of the chapter outlines ways in which the personal responses contributed to, or attempted to mitigate against, the decline of the school.

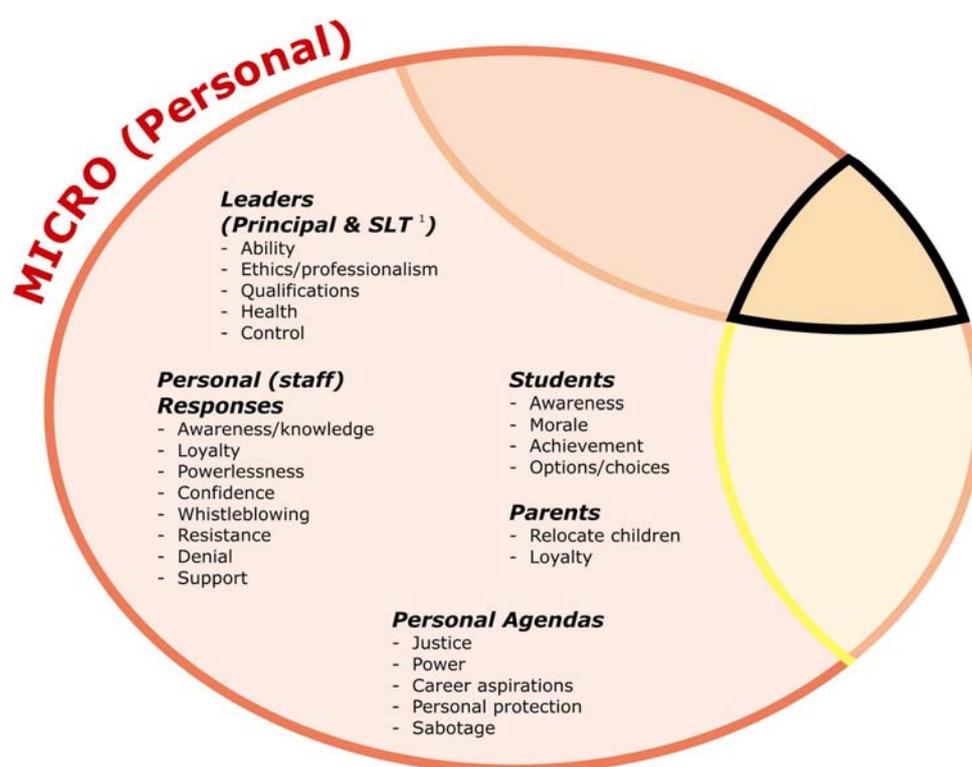


Figure 9 Potential predictors: Micro (Personal)

Inadequate and Ineffective Senior Leadership

The study schools had some senior leaders who were well respected and others who appeared to be ineffective and/or destructive. Staff and trustees experienced a range of problems with a number of their principals and deputies that included lack of experience or ability, poor change management skills and unprofessional or unethical behaviour. Some leaders suffered health and stress problems that influenced their performance.

Lack of experience and ability

In the view of study school participants, most of whom were senior school leaders themselves, some leader colleagues were poorly qualified, had *inadequate leadership experience* and had been appointed beyond their ability to effectively perform. Three study school principals lacked leadership experience at the level of a deputy/assistant principal. Two others were appointed to principalship from the level of heads of departments. One principal had not had leadership experience in a New Zealand school prior to the study school appointment. At least two did not have university degrees.

S/he came in at a time of huge change and didn't have either the academic background from a degree in educational theory or the experiential background to cope. (Senior leader)

Some principals and senior leaders were considered to have been good teachers but were regarded as poor leaders, managers or administrators.

Kids came to see her/him for counselling or discipline and s/he'd write things down and put it in the filing cabinet. S/he kept buying more filing cabinets and every kid in the school had their own folder. S/he had very little effect on the behaviour in the school but had a really good time filling the filing cabinets. (Senior leader)

Others leaders were described, during the interviews, as being competent administrators but out of touch with student needs and lacking an educational vision.

People felt inspired and enthusiastic when (the principal) spoke but, I suddenly realised, every time the speech was the same. There was no thinking substance. (Middle manager)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

S/he did not seem that interested on what was happening in our classrooms. The admin and paperwork took priority. (Middle manager)

There were periods of time in all three study schools when there was more than one member of the senior team not performing well, and when the principal did not manage the non-performance of senior leaders effectively.

(Two HODs) asked “what are you going to do with (The DP) for goodness sake?” (The principal) said “well what can I do? Anything I give him to do he’ll stuff up”. They said “You have to give him some jobs”. (The principal) would take jobs off people who didn’t do them properly and then they did less and less and the rest of us did more and more. (Senior leader)

Some leaders lacked skills in communication and in relationship building with staff.

I would describe it as a basic level of professional incompetence. A manipulative way of dealing with management and (the DP) was basically insensitive. (Senior leader)

The staff never knew whether (the principal) would be positive or negative. On a day to day basis s/he would switch. (Senior leader)

A lack of judgement, by some senior leaders and principals in particular, sometimes had long-lasting consequences, especially when it came to appointing and managing staff.

Over the past two years there have been three changes in deputy principal. For different reasons each change has resulted in conflict, disruption and considerable anguish and has taken up a great deal of the principal’s time. More care needs to be taken with making appointments. (MOE report)

Staff weren’t dealt with very well. In one specific case we knew about, the most incompetent and corrupt and negative person in the school was lauded (by the principal) as the best. It was a complete reversal of all legal, moral and ethical mores and that says heaps about the principal of the day. (Senior leader)

Poor change management skills

Some principals were regarded as poor change managers. The ineffective handling of change manifested itself in concerns about the level of consultation with staff or board, especially if there was little or no consultation, or if it was regarded as false consultation.

(The principal) talked a lot about democracy and all having input. We all have a say and there were meetings all over the place. One way to control things is to provide so much information that they are just swamped. (Senior leader)

Other problems occurred with the pace of introducing change, and with the inability to make decisions or see through the implementation of plans.

It was indecisive leadership. It doesn't matter whether you like the decision or not ... but someone has to make those decisions. (Middle manager)

One thing you read in management is that when you come in, you look around first. You don't just come in and throw the baby out with the bath water. Well s/he did, and it didn't work. (Middle manager)

(The principal) did a lot of paper work, produced all these books of guidelines. You would read what was supposed to happen but the actual reality did not match what was written in the guidelines. Things never quite got finished. (Senior leader)

Some principals were described during interviews as well-meaning or likable people but were not considered to be highly effective leaders. In the opinion of participants and independent reviewers, they were not strong enough to deal with challenging situations or effective enough to pull their school out of the decline.

There were years of ongoing problems with governance and management and inadequate leadership by the previous principal. (MOE report)

S/he has a kind heart and I think we all felt s/he had the students' interests at heart but – and everyone will probably say the same thing, that s/he just lost the plot. (Support staff)

The principal has been unable to provide effective leadership. (ERO report)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Others were considered to be controlling and manipulative to the extent that staff and trustees resented and resisted the actions of the principal.

S/he appoints people s/he wants and people s/he doesn't like go because they get treated badly and so s/he ends up being surrounded by supporters and people who won't challenge, and if they do challenge they get punished. (Senior leader)

Principal health and stress problems

There are strong indications that problems related to either health or stress, adversely affected the performance of some principals, or were cited as a reason for the poor performance. The exact natures of these problems are difficult to determine, beyond the knowledge and judgements of the participants and the information given to staff at the time. The details of the evidence would identify individuals. Health issues were cited as the reason that two study school principals retired. In each instance, at different schools, the information was announced to all staff at a meeting.

Two principals, in different schools, displayed behaviours that caused study participants to think that they were emotionally or mentally unwell.

I had a friend on the board and s/he was a psychologist. S/he talked about the principal's behaviour being classically paranoid, so we were not just imagining there was something wrong with him/ her. (Middle manager)

As well as interviewees reporting that some principals were stressed, there is a letter on file from one study school principal which provides insights into the stress involved in leading a declining school.

My time at (the school) has been unrelentingly stressful. Had I known what was ahead of me when the principal's position for the school was advertised ... I would never have applied for the job (Principal's letter to MOE)

Unprofessional and unethical behaviour

Some leaders lost the respect of their staff and trustees, and their credibility as leaders, because they behaved unethically or unprofessionally. Examples of behaviours, described during interviews, included *having favourites, sexual relationships with staff*, and being *bullying, unpredictable, lying, insincere, disloyal, manipulative, self-centered, dishonest and withholding information*.

There was no strategic vision at all in terms of education. Rather, there was a strategic vision for her/himself in terms of survival. ... it wasn't too long before I totally lost faith in him/her.
(Senior leader)

(The principal) used to play golf instead of doing professional development at conferences. (Senior leader)

He had been particularly unprofessional with female staff. It was common knowledge that there were a number of women (on the staff) he had liaisons with. We all saw him holding hands with one during a staff meeting. (Middle manager)

Four of the study school principals spent what was considered by participants to be too much time out of the school. Staff interpreted this behaviour as indicative of a lack of interest in the school, a means of coping or a means of escaping work.

Research participants expressed a range of emotions which they experienced when they learned that their principal, or one of their senior leaders, had crossed ethical or professional boundaries. Emotions included anger, disappointment and feeling *ashamed, embarrassed, afraid for the school, disgusted and demeaned*. Examples of such breaches of ethics included *providing glowing references to get rid of a teacher, backstabbing other schools to get students, dishonesty, corruption, taking school property home for personal use, taking short cuts with planning permissions, and inflating school roll numbers*.

Roll cheating was something of a "gentleman's game" in those days and (the principal) took this to extremes. (Senior leader)

(The principal) lost her/his job because s/he cheated the system - ghost cleaners - to get extra funding for his/ her low-decile school. Although, this was never made public. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Some of the senior leaders, and principals in particular, contributed significantly to the decline of their school through their unethical and unprofessional behaviour. Others, while not contributing actively to the decline, were unable to halt it through their inability to effectively manage the pressures from outside and inside the school.

Potential Predictors:

- **Principals do not have adequate senior leadership experience.**
- **Developments and change are not managed well.**
- **The principal is unwell or stressed.**
- **Groups or individuals receive (or are perceived to receive) favoured treatment.**
- **The principal is often out of the school.**
- **The principal does not model ethical and professional attitudes and behaviour.**
- **Dishonesty or lack of honesty by school personnel occurs with respect to issues or documents.**

The Potential for Personal Responses to Help or Hinder

There were actions and behaviours of individuals and groups that contributed to, and escalated, the decline. There were also times when a lack of action contributed to the decline.

Lack of awareness of problems and control of information

Research participants described how the more senior the position held by a member of the teaching staff, the more likely it was that they were aware of issues and of the indicators of the decline. Participants reflected on their lack of awareness of the wider school issues when they had been classroom teachers. Even as a Head of Department (HOD), they described being primarily occupied with issues that had a direct impact on their department, rather than on issues affecting the whole school.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I had become an HOD before I left and that is what opens your eyes. Doing a middle manager's role meant admin and it all increases your knowledge of what should be happening and what could be happening. (Middle manager)

In my first week in the school (as the new principal) I came across a pile of unopened cartons which contained assorted curriculum and NZQA⁶⁶ documents. Staff were not aware of the existence of these materials. Moreover, most didn't care. The majority were stretched just coping with the day-to-day school business. (Principal's letter to the Minister of Education)

Some support staff interviewees appeared to be more aware of school-wide issues than middle managers were, but most were not in positions that allowed them to participate in school-wide decision making. The two property managers interviewed had daily access to students, staff and parents, and described having a very full and wide awareness of what was happening in their schools. School counsellors interviewed had information about issues of concern which impacted on individual students and staff. The principals' PAs and schools' executive officers had access to financial information, as well as school, BOT and agency correspondence. Interviewees in these positions reported feeling *frustrated, powerless* and *impotent*.

I would many a time end up in tears and say "I'm not going to work with (the principal) any longer" and then (a DP) would settle me down and call (the principal) a "silly old so and so". (The DP) was sort of spineless really; s/he would never do anything about it and would just go with the flow; didn't want to cause any ripples. (Support staff)

Participants identified with other school staff who they reported were also aware of problems but who felt powerless and unable to act on the information. They were unsure of whom to go to for help, felt that they would not be listened to, or felt that they would jeopardise their own position by taking action.

Everyone is sensitive to their own careers and the principal writes the comments in the referees' reports. The person being the whistleblower couldn't be identified, or their career would be over. (Senior leader)

⁶⁶ New Zealand Qualifications Authority: responsible for national qualifications. These documents would have been important for all school leaders to be fully aware of.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I went to the Ministry and I was told to (go away). There was nothing more I could do because the board was very pro (the principal). (Senior leader)

Members of the school leadership team and trustees, arguably, should have had access to all information related to problems and issues being experienced by the school, as well as all the data and documents that indicated decline was imminent or underway. There were times, however, when they thought their principal controlled, withheld, or gave misleading information.

I realise now that the board should have had a lot more information than we were given. Finances were glossed over and we did not have accurate roll numbers. (Trustee)

The principal used to tell us “----- is my business, butt out, it’s nothing to do with you”. (Senior leader)

It was an appalling situation. (The principal) made sure s/he was the secretary of the board and the treasurer so s/he controlled the agenda completely. The agenda was never published before the meeting. The trustees did not get information they needed and nor did our leadership team. (Senior leader)

The research data do not provide insights into the motivation for such behaviour but reflect the impact such action had on leaders and trustees.

We were so angry when we discovered that people in other schools knew more about what was happening to our school than we did. (Middle manager)

Dissonance, divided loyalties and passive responses

Research participants recalled stages in which they felt confused by the information they were receiving, or not receiving, and by the dilemmas in which they found themselves. Some felt divided in their loyalties to the board, the school, the principal, colleagues and students. Others described feeling clear now about things that, at the time, were unclear and confusing. Participants sometimes provided examples of *defining moments* when the extent of the problems became evident to them. For some participants, the realisation happened relatively early in the decline process. For others, it took a lot longer.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

(The principal) got up and gave another one of his/her very inclusive speeches and then sat down. At that point I thought “wow”; there was no critical leadership. This was a really important issue where the staff were confused and divided I was waiting for the answer. For me this was like a defining moment. At a critical point (the principal) could not give leadership. (Middle manager)

That was my turning point when I thought this is not right. Once you see that, you kind of fit other things into it and you see it a bit clearer, but it took me a long time. I could see then that the management was weak. (Middle manager)

Staff and trustees described how difficult it was to accept the ways some people were behaving and the damage that was occurring for their school. Some staff felt they had a loyalty to the principal regardless of his/her performance or behaviour, and they found themselves in a dissonant position when they believed the school was suffering.

The board would not have listened to me as an individual and there is no way I would have gone behind (the principal's) back because that is not my style. When I talked things through with her/him, s/he often didn't agree but s/he was the principal. (Senior leader)

If the top people do not agree, where do you go from there? It is pretty hard to decide. (Support staff)

While a lack of access to information made it more difficult for some staff to understand the extent of the problems, it was the misguided sense of loyalty which some senior staff felt that stopped them from taking much needed action. For the staff and trustees who were aware of their school's situation, there was a range of active and passive responses. Passive responses included feeling overwhelmed and sometimes there was a type of “fateful” acceptance.

We just sort of trucked along. We accepted the fact that we were there to do our job and not really able to change things. (Senior leader)

I had a way of working it out intellectually that protected me from taking it personally (Middle manager)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Passive responses also included denial or a lack of confidence to act. While these responses sometimes had little direct impact on others in the school, on some occasions a lack of action did have a longer term detrimental effect because it left problems unaddressed.

You got used to living with controversy. Some people just shrugged it off and some people took it home with them. (Middle manager)

Ineffective active responses

Examples recounted by research participants about times when they took action are difficult to interpret with regard to whether they had a positive influence on the school's situation or a negative one. An example, described in the following quote, is the effort that a group of staff made to *stage a coup* in an attempt to force the principal to resign.

They went to (the principal) and s/he was confronted first. They were saying "We are going to take you to the board and this is our case". So they were very fair about it. They didn't run behind his/her back. (Middle manager)

Some staff felt that was a constructive and professional action. Others felt it was unprofessional and unjustified. The school declined during, and after, this principalship as evidenced by a declining roll, low staff morale, the exit of highly respected staff and internal conflicts. Since this principal was ineffective in preventing or halting the decline, it could be argued that the effort to remove her/him would appear justified. Another similar situation occurred in a different school when a DP was appointed to the position of acting principal.

I said the only way we could do anything was for the staff to protest together and we tried to get them to do that but not enough people would put their names to anything. (Middle manager)

Behaviours that were intended to have a positive effect on a school's situation included loyalty to colleagues and to the school and active support for school initiatives.

I could see this was a kind of time bomb that was waiting to happen and it was happening and what you do is get in there and actually start working (to fix it). (Middle manager)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

People were supportive of each other and just sort of took things as positively as we could, even in the really tough times. (Middle manager)

Whistleblowing was another positive effort to achieve change. Participants described the frustration and/or pain, experienced by the people who had taken the personal risk, when their attempts to get action failed.

We tried as a staff to talk with (BOT chair) and s/he did come to a meeting but then s/he said "this is not ethical" and left. (Middle manager)

The DP spoke to the principal and I can still remember what she said about how terrible it was to have to confront (the principal) because (the principal) had given her the position of a lifetime. It was really hard for that DP to confront all these things that had to be addressed and she cried and I was blown away. (Senior leader)

Behaviours that had long term negative effects on the school included denial or unprofessional resistance and selfish responses.

Some of the board and some of the staff ganged up together and were determined to make life as hard as possible for (the principal). (Senior leader)

Relationships were severely tested and there were times that staff behaviour deteriorated.

It was all mud-slinging and it was all taking things personally and it was devolving yourself of any responsibility because you had no control over any of the situation anyway. (Middle manager)

Stress took its toll on individuals and manifested itself in ways that were distressing for them.

The day to day running of the school was awful. I can remember assaulting a student one day because I was so strung out He had been in my office and flogged my pen, and I was so strung out I picked him up and banged him against the wall. (Senior leader)

Highly regarded staff left the school

Some staff, described as some of the most highly regarded, sought positions in other schools and left. While this is a legitimate response at a personal level, the most highly regarded people were the ones to go first and because of the number who left, there was a negative effect on staff morale and on the effectiveness of school leadership and organisation. Eight of the interviewed leadership staff who said they left the school because of the decline, went on to become school principals which indicates that the high regard attributed to them was probably justified.

... and the HODs were beginning to move away and it was quite sad because we had some really neat people who we needed. (Senior leader)

I had done everything I could and could not see how I could force the necessary changes so I knew I needed to leave for the sake of my career. (Senior leader)

When I left I took a side step because I needed time out. The work load was immense and the pressures that were on me were immense. It was a dysfunctional department, so there was a lot of work that needed to be done but there was also all the extra work. Every night I had a meeting or something to go to. (Middle manager)

As word spread about things that were happening at the school, including about staff leaving because they were unhappy or anxious, the rumours had a negative effect outside of the school, both in the local community and in the wider education community.

I had a phone call from teachers college to say "do you know what your principal is up to?" And "Why are so many staff leaving?". People outside were talking about it. (Support staff)

There were certain staff who walked because they were so unhappy They'd go to places like (another school) but still live in the area and they'd bad-mouth the school to all and sundry. (Senior leader)

Some participants applied for other positions but were unable to get jobs, or one which they wanted. Some interviewees described their feelings as they stayed on in the school while it continued to decline.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I felt very frustrated. It is a problem if it's too long since they (remaining staff) have (changed jobs) and they can't get out. Most of the staff tried to get out. The bad staff tried but they couldn't get jobs. Half a dozen of the really good ones were there out of commitment. None of the others were very good but they were trying hard. (Senior leader)

Some staff became convinced that it was the school's poor reputation that was the reason they were not being offered positions.

You are tarred with the (school name) brush and (prospective employers) think you are incompetent and an inadequate teacher. (Middle manager)

Rationalisation and coping strategies

Participants who stayed at the school had a range of strategies for coping with what was happening and with their feelings. Some staff were aware of the problems but, for personal reasons, decided they would stay at the declining school.

Things were hard. I think, for myself, I just thought well I've got my kids, I need to work and I love what I am doing. I'm not going to be put off my work by this and so you drown yourself in your work. (Middle manager)

Others identified altruistic reasons as their motivation to stay.

I felt I wanted to stay because I loved the kids, and I felt they deserved it. If in one little way I could get between people and just try to calm the waters down a bit, then maybe I've done my bit, I don't know. I would like to think in some small way I might have helped them all. (Support staff)

Individuals developed ways to rationalise what was happening that enabled them to cope and to continue working without becoming too stressed. The strategies were sometimes planned carefully and were part of the person's conscious thinking.

I would leave the staff room saying (to myself) "Right, leave that behind. You have people to look after". It was that strong that I had to tell myself "Leave that in the staff room". That is how I managed to carry on. (Support staff)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I think all this kind of bad stuff was spurring us on to find ways to cope. You could get really depressed or you could get really upskilled and knowledgeable and feel quite confident that what you are doing is right. (Middle manager)

Destructive personal agendas

Interviewees cited examples of the personal agendas of some staff and trustees which had a seriously negative influence on the research schools. Not all the people, reported by others as having damaging agendas, were interviewed but data from other interviewees and my own knowledge of the schools at the time were used to triangulate the conclusions drawn about the damage those behaviours caused the schools.

Decision making processes have been slowed down or sabotaged by misinformation, poor communication, pursuit of individual agenda, revisiting decisions once they have been made, open conflict and lack of leadership. There have been instances when trustees have acted independently of the board and this has created confusion, conflict and mistrust. (Consultants report for BOT)

The damaging behaviours described included abuse of power for personal gain or satisfaction; a dogged and uncompromising search for personal justice; the furthering of career aspirations; personal protection at the expense of others; character assassination; and sabotage of the plans of other people.

Some staff were losers and some were winners. There were certain things there that some people saw as opportunities and others feathered their own nests. (Middle manager)

S/he was ruthless in getting his/her own way. I learned to be very careful not to cross her/him and to make sure I did my homework well if I wanted to challenge something. (Senior leader)

Some of the personal agendas described were associated with staff applying for leadership positions but not being appointed. These included the three instances, discussed earlier in this chapter, of DPs feeling very aggrieved at not being appointed to the principal's position, and becoming a negative influence in the school when the newly appointed principals arrived. One of the DPs who was interviewed said s/he felt betrayed and misled when s/he was not appointed because, in the acting principal role, s/he had been trusted to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

serve as the school's leader, had been thanked and had been given affirming feedback from staff and trustees.

Examples were cited of other study school staff who missed out on being appointed to senior leadership positions recruiting support from allies, resulting in factions forming based on which "side" staff supported.

We knew s/he talked about us behind our backs. S/he was instrumental in the development of factions in the school. At the time we needed to be the most united, we were fighting with each other. (Middle manager)

Loss of student and parental confidence

Evidence was provided by staff and trustees that some students in the study schools were aware of problems in their school and were very unhappy about the situation. Students did not participate in the research so the evidence provided is from adults describing what they heard students say and what actions they observed.

There were those things filtering down to the students. There were personality things going on within the staff and the students could see this. I recall one incident where a message was written on the board of a teacher who was having an affair with a senior member of the school. And the words that were written were shocking. (Support staff)

So there was that sort of culture filtering down, coming right down to the students. There were a number of students who were seeing equipment being spirited away from the school so they got into that too. (Support staff)

Staff described the students who left the school, as the decline escalated, as generally being the most able. This, in turn, led to decreases in student achievement and a further loss in community confidence.

Locals sent their kids and we ended up with students who got high scholarships but they were the ones who left first. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

There really needs to be a change in community perceptions. Why do so many pupils bypass the school? I suggest that there is a community perception that the school is failing academically. (MOE letter to principal)

Parents of the students in the study schools played a role in the escalation or slowing of the decline, depending on whether they removed their children to another school, or allowed them to continue in the school. This study did not include a sample of parents but most of the trustees interviewed had children at the school and were part of, and in touch with, their local communities. Some staff also lived in the local community.

The community had lost confidence in the school and it was sending their young ones away and there was a threat of closing the school down. (Trustee)

The importance of regaining community confidence was acknowledged by one school and the MOE through identifying as a key “Desired Outcome” in a funding provision agreement the need to “Restore and maintain student and community and parent confidence in the school”.

Potential Predictors:

- **The principal controls information that prevents staff and trustees being aware of problems.**
- **Misguided loyalty to a colleague prevents school personnel from taking action when they become concerned.**
- **Many highly regarded staff leave in a short time.**
- **Staff are unchallenged about unprofessional/unethical behaviour.**
- **Many parents remove their children from the school.**

Summary of the Findings Related to Decline Predictors

This chapter has presented descriptions of predisposing problems or influences that impacted on the decline of the study schools and that could serve to predict the potential for other schools to decline. The problems and issues occurred at three levels: the societal

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

level, the school and institutional level and at a personal level. Their influence was at times direct and visible and, at other times, indirect and covert. As well as analysing the issues at this structural level, the more profound influences were ideological and political. How individuals and groups responded to change, and how they behaved, largely determined the level of vulnerability for the schools. If enough problems had been solved, conflicts resolved and needs met, the schools could possibly have continued to be strong and healthy organisations. Because issues were ignored or poorly handled, and bad behaviour was condoned, the ethical and professional standards were compromised and the schools became increasingly dysfunctional. Figure 10 illustrates the inter-connectedness of the factors from the three levels and the common influence of unethical and unprofessional behaviours and responses.

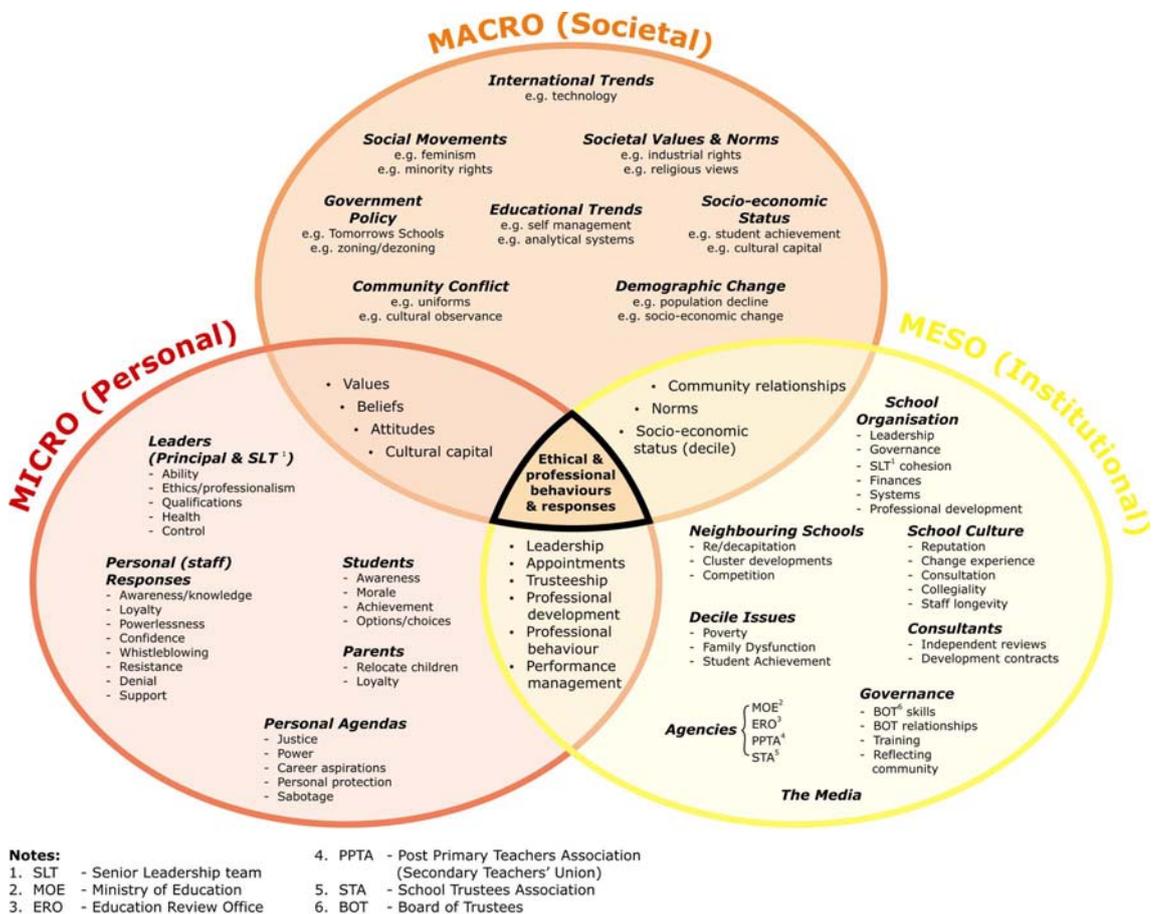


Figure 10 Potential predictors

Unfortunately, predisposing problems, in differing combinations, collectively moved each of the study schools into the beginnings of a process of decline when the problems reached a critical mass that tipped the balance for the school, or when a crisis or catalytic event

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

occurred. Chapter 6 begins by describing the sorts of catalysts or events that were serious enough to begin the decline or that moved the school problems closer to the critical mass required for the negative influences to outweigh the positive.

CHAPTER 6

THE DECLINE PROCESS

This chapter describes the decline process from the time it begins through to an advanced stage. While the process was different for each study school there were common elements and phases. These commonalities are represented in a symbolic way in Figure 11, beginning at what is labeled the “At risk stage”. Because the issues, previously described in Chapter 5, are the same issues which interact to form the decline process, described in this chapter, there is inevitably some repetition. The chapter begins with an analysis of how the decline process began. Sometimes a particular event or crisis was the catalyst for triggering the decline. At other times the decline began when the number of unresolved problems reached a critical mass. Once the decline began, the forces for reform and development competed with the forces for decline and deterioration (Figures 11 and 13). During the decline period a number of interventions took place in each of the schools. These interactions are represented, in Figure 11, with the headings: “Temporary ineffective intervention”, “Short term remission” and “Insufficient intervention”. The details of the timeline for the decline process in each of the study schools differed but the general pattern was the same for all three. A generalised decline timeline is depicted in Figure 12. The chapter continues with an analysis of why these interventions were not effective enough to halt the decline. The increasingly darkening grey colour in the diagram indicates an increase of the seriousness of the situation for the school, as well as an increase in the speed of the decline escalation. The final decline phase occurred when the problems experienced by the schools began to create serious new problems, to the point that the decline became self-perpetuating.

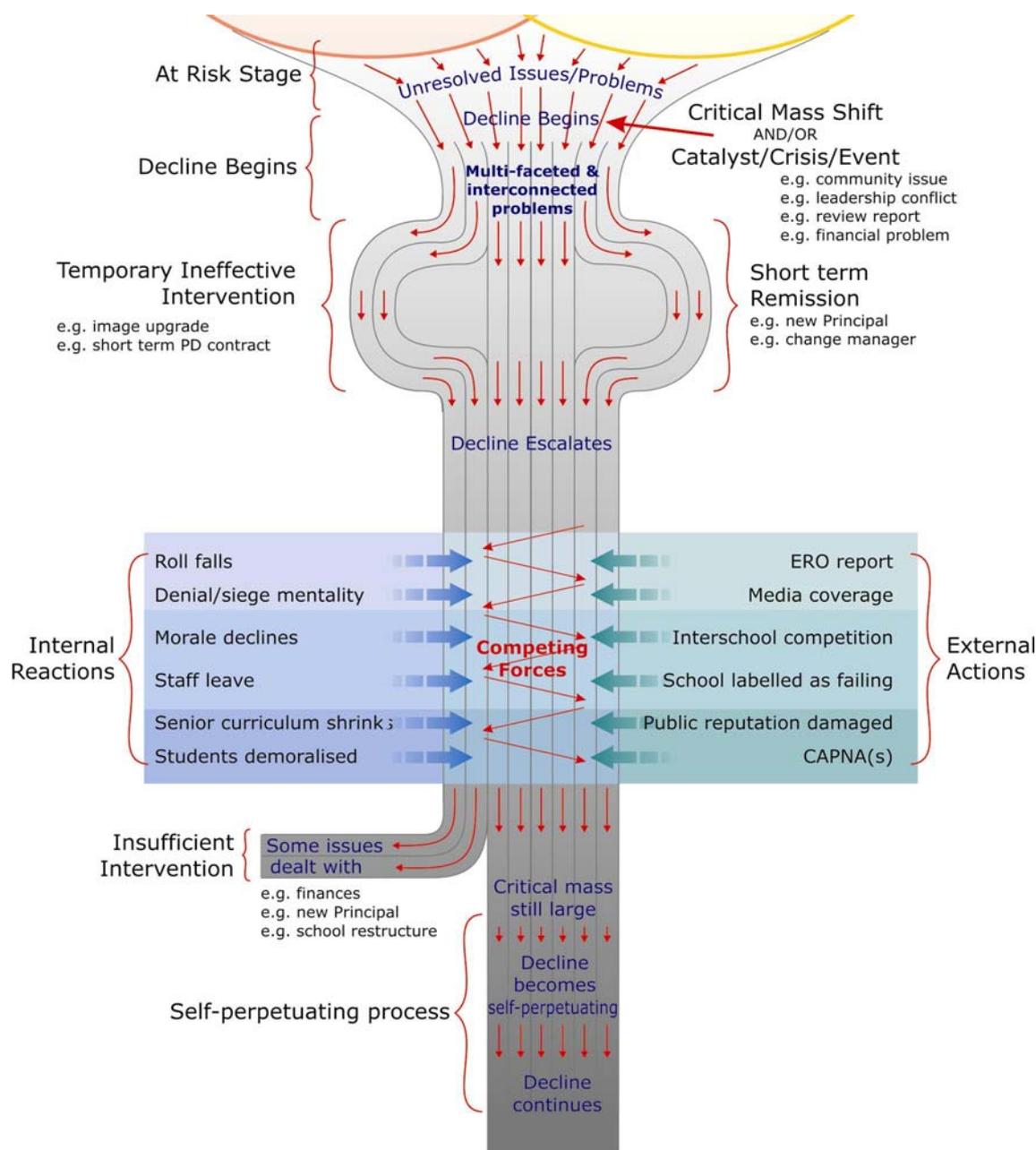


Figure 11 The decline process: Beginnings and escalation

The purpose of the generalised decline timeline figure is to demonstrate the similarities between the three study schools in relation to the ordering of events and their approximate durations. The diagram shows that each study school declined over approximately a ten to fourteen year period. Study school participants who were in the schools during the two or three years of decline, prior to Tomorrow's Schools, became aware of some concerning signs but did not realise at that time that the problems were indicators of what would become a general decline. The onset of the Tomorrow's Schools changes, ERO reviews

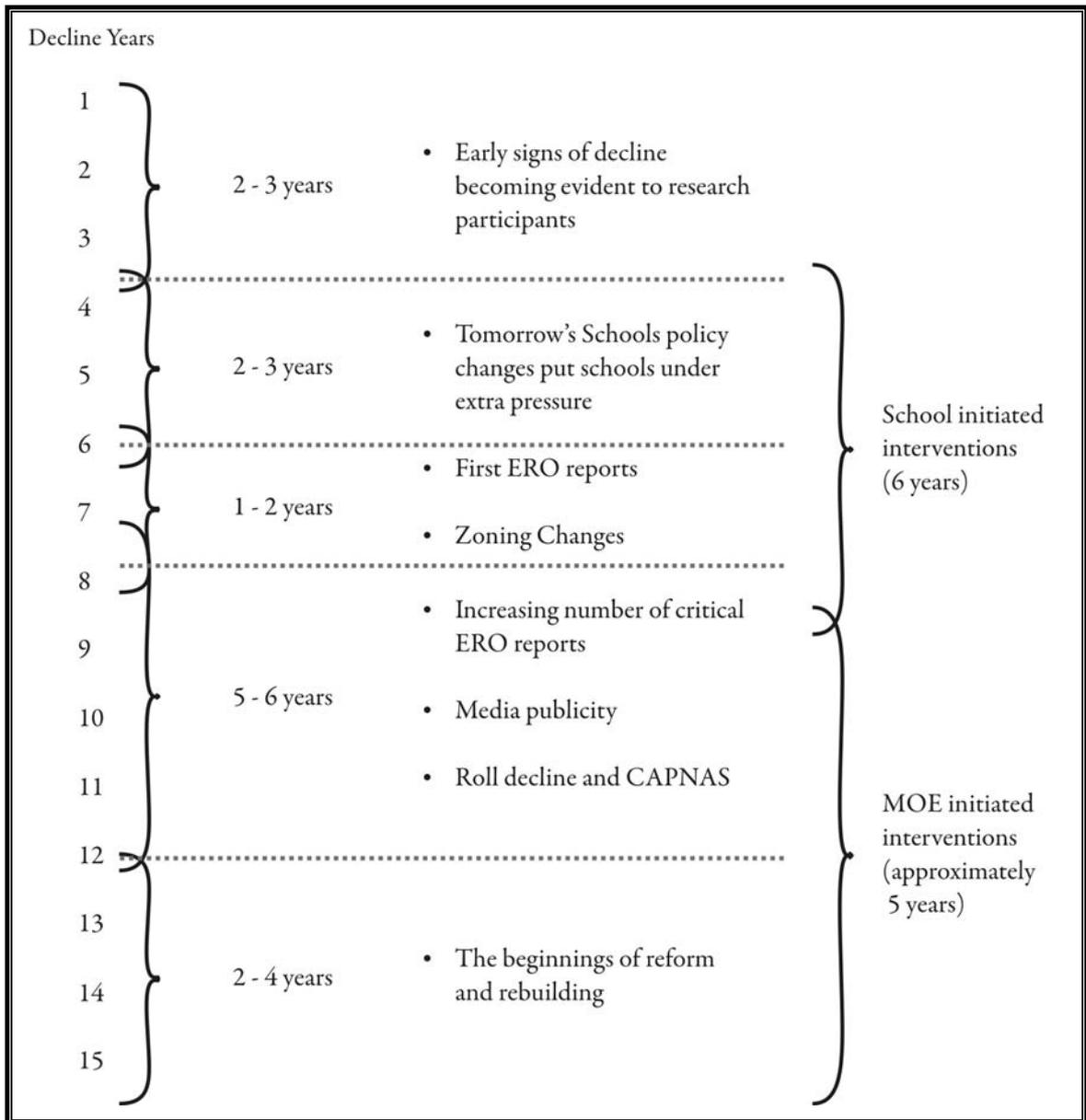


Figure 12 Generalised decline timeline

and changes to enrolment zoning regulations placed additional pressure on the schools at a stage when they were already suffering from compounding problems. Over approximately a six year period, school personnel attempted a number of interventions to solve presenting problems. The school initiated interventions, however, were not sufficient to halt the decline. Decline escalated over a period of five to six years during which the MOE initiated statutory interventions. These statutory interventions eventually led to the beginnings of reform and rebuilding in all three schools over a period of approximately two to four years.

Catalysts, Crises and Critical Mass

If the complex range of factors that impact on all schools are not managed effectively, the experience of the study schools indicates the potential for such factors collectively to act as predictors of decline. Most schools effectively manage the external and internal influences. The challenge for this research was to understand why it was that the study schools were overwhelmed by these influences to the point of entering a spiraling process of decline. The data showed that there were enough pressures and unresolved problems concurrently present in each of the study schools for the problems to reach a critical mass, tipping the schools into the beginning of decline, or preventing them from coping effectively with a crisis when it occurred. For the purpose of analytical distinction and analysis, each of these catalysts of decline is discussed separately. In reality they were interconnected. A crisis added significantly to the critical mass of unresolved problems. A critical mass of unresolved problems made a school more vulnerable to allowing a difficult event to escalate to the level at which it was serious enough to be considered a crisis.

Crises

Each of the schools experienced a crisis in the form of an event with which they were unable to cope. For one school, it was the event itself that appeared to trigger the onset of the decline. For the other two schools, crises significantly escalated decline processes that were already underway. For reasons of confidentiality it is not possible to outline the exact nature of the crises experienced by each of the study schools because to explain the events in any detail would identify those schools. Typical crises could occur over employment issues, appointments, parental dissatisfaction or friction between factions in the school or community. Crises could also occur as a result of adverse media coverage, poor teacher performance or bad behaviour, new policy implementation, leadership decisions or competitive actions of neighbouring schools.

While, for ethical reasons, discussion of specific details of the crises that occurred in the study schools is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is possible to discuss the ways the crises affected those schools at an organisational level and how they affected the staff and trustees at a personal level. The first reaction of school staff and trustees to the crisis event was usually shock. They were confused about the information they received and had difficulty interpreting the seriousness of the issue and deciding what their response should

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

be. Another early reaction was sometimes denial or shifting of responsibility, often by blaming other individuals, groups or organisations. Recipients of blame included individual staff, the PPTA branch group, the principal, the BOT, a group of parents, ERO and the MOE.

We all blamed someone else. The staff blamed the management and the management blamed ERO. ERO blamed the board and the board blamed the Ministry. Some of those criticisms were valid but it did not make one jot of positive progress. We all just took pressure off ourselves. (Trustee)

One of the problems is when people in schools don't own up and say "we have a problem". They blame other people rather than own up and they need to understand that education is very important for the future of the children and they are responsible for that. (Trustee)

Following the shock and denial, it was common for school personnel to experience a range of debilitating feelings including anxiety, anger, guilt and powerlessness.

I couldn't really get any lower than that. I think a lot of people like me lost faith in themselves and I think they lost energy and commitment. (Middle manager)

It just put a black cloud over the top of the school which I think hurt everyone. (Support staff)

Dealing with the crises diverted leaders' time and energy away from day-to-day matters, putting pressure on school systems which were already inefficient and/or ineffective. Systems that were under pressure included finances, property maintenance, administration and documentation, student discipline and attendance, personnel management, compliance management and reporting. Frequently, the systems malfunctioned or were not sound enough to provide the support that was badly needed at that time.

There were governance and management systems that were very murky and they had completely lost where the lines were and who should have been doing what. Financing was all a complete shambles and so were most of the personnel management areas and a whole lot of systems just weren't working. They weren't meeting some of our obligations under the (Education) Act. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Communication, in particular, was often not well managed either within or outside the school.

It got to the point that you couldn't communicate. (The principal) couldn't communicate with us because s/he felt under siege, and we couldn't communicate with him/her because s/he only wanted to hear what s/he wanted to hear. We often didn't get information we needed. (Middle manager)

Participants reported feeling poorly informed and some felt unsure about what they were expected to do. Participants also thought parents felt poorly informed because, when clear and accurate information was not readily available, rumours began which often had a negative corollary. An example was rumours associated with the schools' rolls. When parents and students heard about the prospect of a new school, a neighbouring school's change in status or the possibility of study school closure, it appeared that a drop in the roll was associated with the rumours.

The rumour mill just kept going round and round the district and people would say "Oh you are a teacher. Where do you teach? Oh you poor thing". And you'd have to defend your school and insist it wasn't going to close. (Senior leader)

New families were nervous about enrolling because they were being told that the school might close. You couldn't blame them but we needed those students for the school to stay open. (Middle manager)

Leaders, staff, trustees and parents made personal decisions about their actions and their future depending on how serious they considered the issues to be, their personal circumstances and how their peers reacted to the crisis. While individuals had the right to make decisions that were good for them personally, there were times that their decisions impacted badly on the school. An example was when some of the most respected staff made the decision to leave the school. Participants remaining in the schools said the contributions these respected and capable staff were able to make to the school were lost at a time when they were most needed. Some interviewees reported feeling less confident for the future of their school because they trusted the judgement of the respected staff who had decided to leave.

Reaching critical mass

A second catalyst for school decline was the accumulation of unresolved problems to the point that they reached a critical mass, sufficient for the school to be perceived as being in decline. The unresolved issues and problems described in Chapter 5, and represented diagrammatically in Figure 6, impacted adversely in all three study schools. Study school personnel did not effectively solve and resolve many of the problems and issues they were experiencing. Increasingly, these unresolved problems placed pressure on individuals, on the culture of the school and on organisational systems. As the pressure increased, the schools' ability to respond effectively further diminished. Two of the study schools began declining because of their multiplicity of interconnected problems across a range of areas. The negative influences finally outweighed the positive developments and constructive efforts to solve problems. Thus weakened, the schools were unable to respond effectively when a serious problem or crisis occurred.

The roll was found out to be lots of kids overstated. So the roll went bang down, funding and the staff, everything suddenly went. When (the new principal) came in s/he spent a lot of time just dealing with ... how to cope with losing staff, losing programmes ... and I think it was on its way down from that point. (Senior leader)

As a result of a crisis and/or a critical mass of unresolved problems, each of the study schools moved into a period of decline that lasted approximately a decade. This is depicted in Figure 11 as a darkening grey line with arrows pointing downwards as the decline escalates. The decline process was far from a calm or steady downwards slide, however, as the next phase of the process demonstrates.

Competing Forces

Study school decline escalated as a series of issues and events added to the difficulties. Negative influences competed with positive attempts at improvement during the phase of the decline which is labeled "Competing Forces". The escalating decline, represented by the downward flow in the diagram (Figure 11), is interrupted by the "Competing Forces" depicted in a box as though they happened at a discrete stage of the decline, after it began to escalate. In reality, the actions and reactions, summarised in Figure 11 and detailed in

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Figure 13, happened in different ways and in a different order in each of the study schools during the phase when the decline was escalating. The competing forces, comprising “External actions” and “Internal reactions”, are shown in blue and green in Figure 11. The same phase of the decline is shown in more detail in Figure 13, where the actions and reactions are detailed and linked to the predisposing influences. Figure 13 also shows the level at which the influences occurred: Macro, Meso and Micro. It depicts the contest between the influencing factors which were in part the reasons for the escalation and in part a response to it. The competing forces interacted in ways that determined the speed and process of the decline.

At the same time as the forces were competing in the study schools, individuals, groups, and sometimes agencies, tried to intervene and repair the damage or reform the schools. In Figure 11, these interventions are shown as diversions to the right and left from the main flow. The arrows flow outward away from the main downward flowing column for a period of time and then reconnect back into the downward flowing arrows. This diversion and reconnection depicts a phase of temporary improvement in the school which is not sustained.

This section of the chapter outlines each of the key negative and positive forces which have already been described in Chapter 5. They are revisited briefly here in order to demonstrate their connectedness to each other and the role they each played in the decline process.

Negative forces

The descriptor, “Negative forces”, collectively describes the factors most closely associated with the study schools being at risk and declining. They are outlined in blue on the left side of Figure 13. While positive actions were taken in an attempt to develop, support and improve the schools, the schools became increasingly debilitated by negative influences. Unfortunately for the study schools, the negative forces far outweighed the positive forces, which resulted in the decline continuing and escalating.

Education policy

A number of changes to education policy in New Zealand, during the period when the study schools were in decline, put already vulnerable schools under increased pressure, thus

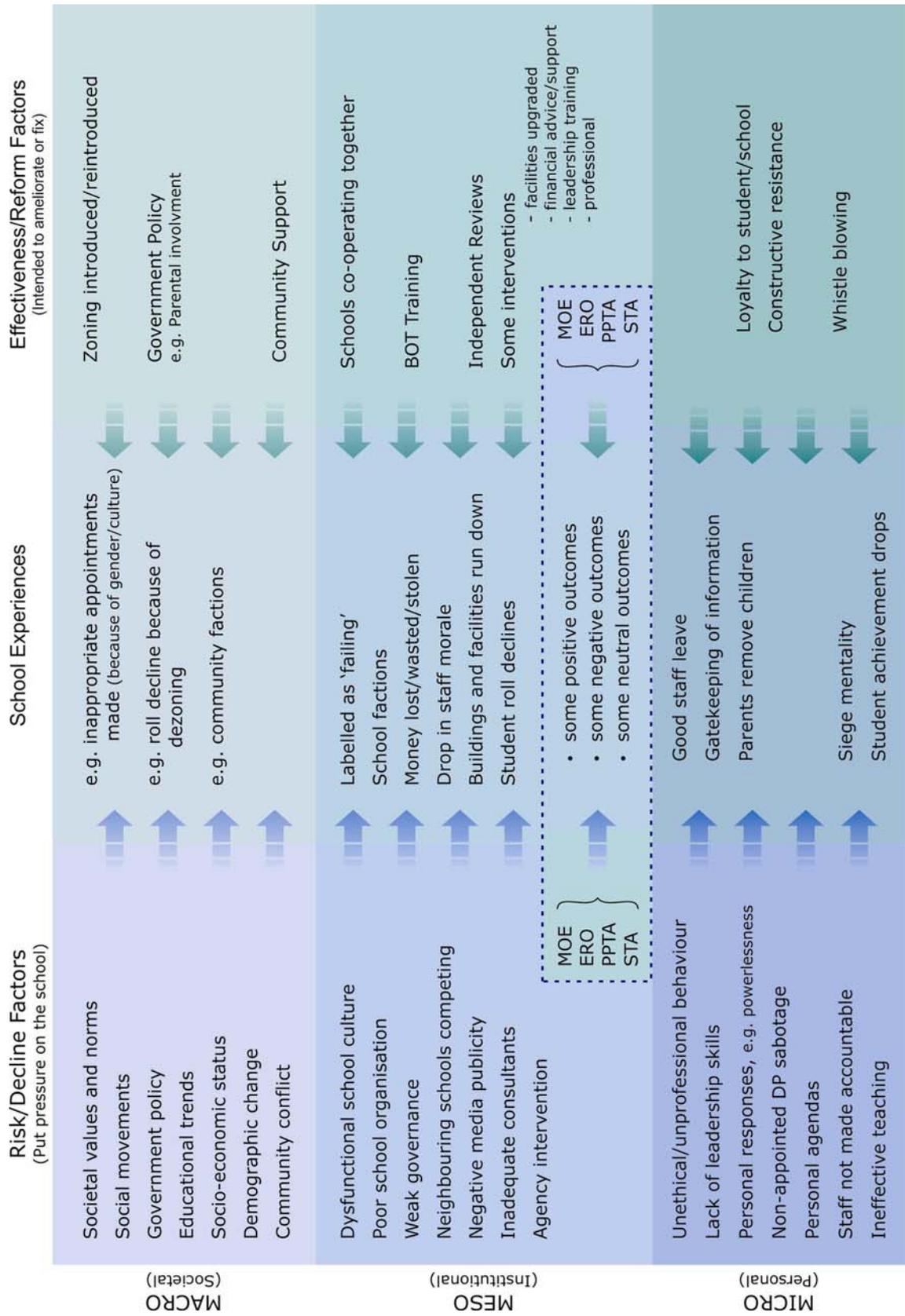


Figure 13 The decline process: Competing forces

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

contributing to that decline. The policy changes, discussed in detail in chapter 5, included some of the demands associated with the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, de-zoning, initial refusal of the MOE to support schools, publicised ERO reports and the nature of the intervention processes of the MOE during the early stages of the Schools Support Project.

Leadership

Poor leadership or lack of leadership was a prevailing negative force at some stages during the decline in each of the study schools. There were nine principals, and many deputies and associates employed in the three schools over their decline periods. Some were regarded as effective and were respected by the majority of staff. Others, however, lacked the skills and experience to lead successfully and some exhibited a range of unethical and unprofessional behaviours that had negative consequences for their schools. During some stages of the decline, the ineffective and/or problematic senior leaders outnumbered and/or outranked the effective leaders.

*S/he was a great DP and virtually ran the school. S/he went on to be a great principal at -----.
At the time s/he was outnumbered by the other useless members of the team and eventually ran out of energy and left. (Senior leader)*

*One of the DPs was very able, and so were some of the HODs, but they had less authority and power than the principal and the other DP so they could not change things that needed to change.
(Middle manager)*

During the course of this assessment the principal handed in (his/her) resignation. This school is in need of the skills necessary to address the chronic problems with which it is afflicted. (Report to MOE)

Some principals were ineffectual in dealing with the increasing number of problems and the unprofessional behaviour of some staff.

While the principal is a genuine and respected person in the community, many people believe that s/he does not have the capacity to turn around the current state of decline of the school. (Report to MOE)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

There were times when some school leaders condoned unprofessional and unethical practices and even participation in them. Standards and expectations dropped as a result of the behaviours being modelled by the leaders.

The principal was late to meetings. It became customary to be late to the start of class, and I'm talking about the teachers as well as the students. (Senior leader)

Even the students knew it was going on. It became accepted as almost normal to take school gear home whenever you wanted to. When the adults did it, it was called borrowing; when the students did it, it was called stealing. (Middle manager)

The school in this latter quote, developed a culture of acceptance around not expecting to have good equipment, not really caring for things, not questioning when something went missing, and not expecting to have things replaced. In all three schools there was a steady erosion of standards and expectations that was largely unchallenged by school leaders.

Governance

Poor quality governance and some dysfunctional boards were negative influences in the study schools. In all three schools, decline began shortly before the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, when the schools were governed by boards of governors. There is limited data in this research project about the boards of governors during that time, except in relation to some of the leadership appointments they made. There is general agreement by research participants that some principal and DP appointments were not successful. Study school trustees and senior leaders reported that four of the appointments made by Boards of Governors were controversial at the time they were made.

The board was divided. One of the board members told me later that some of them regretted agreeing to that appointment. They were pushed into it by the person advising them. (Senior leader)

After the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, trustees and school leaders in the study schools were mostly critical of the lack of effective governance training they received. Not all board members received training and the transfer of knowledge and skills back to individual study school boards was felt to be very fragmented. An area of training that was mentioned by several trustees as being largely overlooked was advice to boards about how

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

to be effective employers, including how to make principal appointments and manage the review of the principal's performance. Trustee interviewees knew, on reflection, there were problems emerging that their principal seemed unable to manage. Several said they felt responsible for not doing more at the time.

We might have been able to sort things out if we had been stronger and more determined to take action. We convinced each other that things were under control, when I think we all knew they weren't. (Trustee)

Another area which became increasingly important, in which trustees felt inadequate, was that of finances and property. Trustees said they were inexperienced at reading monthly accounts and were heavily dependent on the principal to manage the school's finances and to provide explanations. Some trustees felt uncomfortable asking questions of their principal and some principals kept information from their boards. It is possible that a high trust model may have worked if there had been no financial problems and when the principal was honest and making wise decisions. There were examples in the study schools of one or more of these conditions not being met, resulting in financial mismanagement.

I think we all went into shock when we found out what had been happening. We really didn't get proper financial reports and we did not think to check on school systems to make sure this sort of thing couldn't happen. (Trustee)

The trustees who were interviewed strongly regretted not seeking effective training for their whole board, not questioning things that were of concern and not seeking independent advice.

Community conflict/contests

There were a number of instances where broader community conflicts and divisions impacted strongly on the declining schools. When an issue that divided people politically or culturally was being debated in the local community, the same issue tended to divide trustees and staff inside the school at a time when schisms and factions added to the fragility of the schools. There were also occasions when a school issue polarised parents and staff on the basis of groupings that existed outside of the school. Trustees reported that parents found themselves in the position of trying to decide which *side of the story* to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

accept. Differing perceptions and values, as well as sources of information, played a role in the decisions that parents made.

The community was quite split in some ways Around (area A) you've got an urban, conservative, mainstream sort of community. Then around (area B) you've got the alternatives, far more liberal type of person. I think some of the board members lived in (area A) and they were supported by the staff that lived in that area, so they captured the thing and then tried to impose it on the school. (Senior leader)

Political frictions and rivalries of the past became evident between people. (Report to MOE)

The main way that community conflicts and issues escalated the decline was when families withdrew their children from the school, escalating the falling roll. As well as the impact of a falling roll, the tensions caused by conflict took their emotional toll on school staff and trustees.

Board meetings were tense and there was a sense of having to walk on egg shells. (Trustee)

(We lost) that sense of collegiality and being on the same page. Once relationships broke down, there were problems because a school is such a relational community. (Middle manager)

Teacher Unions

There were examples reported from all three study schools of the secondary teachers' union⁶⁷, PPTA, having a negative influence and contributing to the escalation of decline in two ways. First, union field officers, acting as advocates for union members, sometimes contributed to a school's decline by defending and protecting non-performing and/or badly behaving teachers. The principals and trustees were often frustrated in their attempts to require change and improvement from a teacher because the leaders *were worn down* by the process required by union advisors and/or by the unpleasant nature of the interactions.

⁶⁷ New Zealand has two main teacher unions. Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) is the voluntary union and professional association of secondary school teachers. New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI Te Riu Roa) is the largest educational union in New Zealand for primary, intermediate and middle schools' teachers.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

It was relentless and exhausting trying to do what we knew was right for the students. There was not a teacher in the school who would have wanted their child in ----'s class. Year after year another cohort of students had their learning put on hold in that class because the union blocked all the school attempts to do something. (Senior leader)

The hours we spent were huge and it got us nowhere because the PPTA officer was an arrogant bully who kept threatening PGs⁶⁸ and would not listen to any of our evidence. We could not afford to pay for a lawyer and the STA person just wasn't up to the fight. (Senior leader)

We came out of each meeting feeling abused and as though the school was at fault. No matter how hard we tried to collect evidence there was always a reason why we could not use it. (Senior leader)

Interviewees reported that parents and students could not understand why it should take so long for poorly performing staff to change or be required to leave the school. School leaders, including trustees, were unable to explain and some felt guilty about not being able to take effective action.

Everyone knew s/he was a lazy and hopeless teacher. Parents complained and students got angry but no matter how hard we tried to do something s/he managed to keep the job. Each time we collected the evidence, the union said s/he was technically competent. S/he would put in a big effort for a few weeks and then just go back to being hopeless as soon as the pressure was off. (Middle manager)

I felt so embarrassed having to front up to parents. In the business world incompetent people would be gone but in schools it seems that you have to just about be an axe murderer to lose your job. (Trustee)

There were examples of principals who made mistakes implementing the employment process and who were challenged about such missteps. But there were also examples of teachers who used their union connections as a threat and there were leaders who felt intimidated by the prospect of litigation. As decline began in the study schools, the stress, pressure, time demands and financial costs made it difficult to work through a competency

⁶⁸ A Personal Grievance is a claim that can be brought by an employee against a school BOT if they believe their employment contract has been breached.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

or discipline process and it became increasingly beyond the capacity of the schools to accomplish.

The second way participants observed the teacher unions contributing to school decline occurred when the union branch in a school became the focal point for increasing negativity and resistance. This happened in all three study schools on a number of occasions. Teachers who were put under pressure to improve their performance, or those who were challenged because of their unprofessional behaviour, tended to group together and seek support from each other, from active union colleagues and from field officers.

The union meetings were a sham. They were where all the moaning and groaning people who complained about everything did their moaning. They did not represent the view of the majority of staff but they acted as though they did. (Middle manager)

Occasionally the negativity was seen as intensifying when the field officer visited the school, listened only to branch spokespeople and gave advice that strengthened the resistance.

It made us (senior leaders) so angry when they (PPTA branch members) called in the field officer, told him/her a lot of rubbish and then came back to us telling us what we could and couldn't do. (Senior leader)

The role of union field officers in providing advice and advocacy for their members has the potential to be destructive for the school, if the advice is based on a one-sided or inaccurate account of events. The study schools appeared to suffer from the effects of unbalanced advice from field officers and from their protection of poorly performing teachers.

Destructive personal responses

Staff responded to being part of a declining school in a wide range of ways, some of which were destructive and which had negative consequences for their school. Negative responses included a lack of awareness of the decline beginning, confusion over mixed messages, divided loyalties, feelings of powerlessness, rationalisation of their own actions, finding coping strategies, and gate keeping of information. There were also active responses like resignation, sabotage and whistleblowing. The responses that especially contributed to the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

escalation of the decline were those that blocked or hindered positive change and those that added to the negative forces.

There were lots of reasons why people did not do anything: partly lack of knowledge, partly everyone is on their treadmill and partly because you don't get that big picture when you are in the middle of it. It's a time when those factors which stop you doing anything are probably going to have a stronger effect on you if you do nothing. (Senior leader)

Personal responses that blocked or hindered change included attitudes of denial of the seriousness of the situation, blaming and scapegoating of individuals and agencies, the decision by highly regarded staff to leave, and the reluctance or inability of some MOE personnel to act decisively.

For us it was about survival. We were so focused on self-protection and getting through each day that we didn't want to believe what people were saying. (Middle manager)

Even though we could prove it was happening, the ministry wouldn't take any action to stop our local schools from blocking our access to parents. (Senior leader)

Personal responses that added to the negative forces included the unethical and unprofessional behaviour of some staff, ineffective leadership, the decision of poorly performing staff to stay, the protection of poor teacher performance by some union field officers and power plays by staff or trustees.

Unethical/unprofessional behaviour

Study school data provided wide-ranging examples of behaviours that were unprofessional and/or unethical and which resulted in negative impacts. As previously explained, behaviours ranged in seriousness from occasional illegal acts to more frequent unwise decisions and actions. Some of the serious behaviours gave rise to crises or, at least, adverse reactions within the schools. The less dramatic behaviours played a key role in changing the school culture into one that became accepting of unprofessional behaviour such as lies, bullying, backstabbing, rudeness, negative responses to suggestions and resistance to change.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

More often than not at staff meetings someone would have a go at someone else. Lots of us avoided the staff room and stayed in our classrooms because the staff room was not a happy place to be in. (Middle manager)

In all three schools, the school PPTA branch became the channel through which disaffected staff united to express their anger and frustration and to resist and block changes that school leaders were trying to facilitate.

There were letters going backwards and forwards between the PPTA branch and the principal. (Trustee)

Every time the PPTA met it was a slanging match. It was all the teachers who were not performing because they supported each other and were threatened by what management were trying to do to improve things. (Middle manager)

Positive change was hindered and the negativity that was generated contributed to the decline escalation.

The problems were caused by some staff. This group (of staff) needled and needled away at (the principal) and as new staff came in they would gather them under their wing. We had a good board that were local businessmen and genuinely interested in the welfare of the school but they did not realise how serious things were. (Senior leader)

There is consistent evidence of conflict, resentment and resistance by many employees to management directives. (ERO report)

Some bad behaviours became frequent and almost accepted as normal or inevitable to the stage that they were rarely challenged. Some of these behaviours caused unpleasantness for staff, for instance rudeness, backstabbing and bullying. Other behaviours caused inconvenience to others such as lateness to meetings, not meeting deadlines and poor quality work.

There was so much backstabbing amongst the staff that you didn't know who to trust and you were careful of who you spoke to. You didn't know what to say to whom. (Support staff)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Changing attitudes and habitual behaviours was a challenge that could not be affected in a short time. Although this was sometimes recognised, it did not always result in long-term solutions being put in place.

The consultants won't have sufficient impact to alter (staff) perceptions and deal with industrial problems. (MOE file note)

Ineffective performance

Poorly performing teachers and school leaders had a very negative influence on the reputation of the study school and on student opportunities. Evidence of problems with the performance of some teachers and leaders was provided in the interviews and in MOE documents. As the schools declined the remaining staff reported feeling under increasing pressure to perform effectively and make the necessary changes so that public perceptions about the school would improve. Some staff reacted badly to such pressure and their reactions resulted in negative consequences.

HODs who'd been here a long while had got quite lazy and weren't doing a good job (The principal) demanded accountability and they hated him/her for it. Some simply resigned and walked into another school as an assistant teacher. Some just spread rumours around the community. Parents told us they did, and said "don't go near that school". So the numbers started going down. (Support staff)

There were a few (teaching staff) who ... did not want to make any change in any shape or form. As the year progressed they became more vocally negative. This put pressure on the senior staff as well and made it difficult for some of the systems to work as they should have. These people sometimes work against the developments rather than with them, and they sometimes blame anyone who makes them accountable. (Report to MOE)

Furthermore, some school leaders were not able to deal effectively with the performance problems and there were some who made no attempt to take action. Poor levels of student achievement eventually became the focus for ERO, MOE and the media. Trustees felt that they had not been given clear, full and honest information on student underachievement. School leaders felt overwhelmed by the pressure they perceived to increase student achievement significantly in a short period of time.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

If we wanted the money that we needed to improve things, we had to agree to ridiculous targets like improving our external exam results every year. We knew we couldn't make that much difference in a year but in the end we just agreed to what they (MOE) came up with. ERO were even more ridiculous. They gave us six months. We couldn't even produce evidence in that time. (Senior leader)

Some staff began to blame students for the problems.

Teachers complained that students did not help themselves by not doing homework, wagging, being late to class and not paying attention in class. (Middle manager)

Agency support and/or intervention

Interventions contributed negatively to study school decline when some aspects of their design or process had more negative than positive outcomes. The interventions and support for each of the three schools took a number of forms. Some were initiated by the schools themselves when leaders or trustees realised they needed help. Others were initiated by an educational agency and usually involved MOE, ERO, STA and PPTA. Figure 13 depicts these key agencies as having both negative and positive impacts on the study schools. ERO intervened through their reviews and recommendations to the MOE. STA and PPTA became involved when there were employment issues. The MOE became involved informally and formally in activities that ranged from audits and providing advice, to full statutory interventions including business cases.

During the early stages of decline, there were very few attempts at intervention because the study schools' personnel were not sufficiently reflective to recognise the seriousness of their situations until the decline was advanced.

I think in those early days there weren't interventions. I don't recall anything happening. I think we just boxed on. I don't recall ever going and seeing anyone about it. (Senior leader)

It's only now that I realise we could have changed things if some of us had acted earlier but we did not realise how serious things were. (Middle manager)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The earliest school initiated interventions either were not effective or were not sufficiently wide-ranging to prevent decline or to halt it. Figure 11 represents these as a “Temporary ineffective intervention” or a “Short term remission”. School initiated interventions took the form of a number of independent reviews by different consultants, including leadership reviews, principal appraisals, department reviews, financial reviews, and whole-school reviews. Some MOE commissioned reviews did not gain acceptance from school leaders, who felt the process was being imposed on the school, and so little or no action was taken on the review findings. Some interventions failed because of the quality of the facilitation or because the reviewing was inadequate.

It is the view of the board that the reviewer did not follow the brief s/he was given and that s/he merely repeated what the teachers had told him/her rather than making an independent professional judgement. The report also contains factual inaccuracies. (BOT letter)

The ministry sent this (consultant) in to do a needs-analysis and write recommendations. He knew nothing about schools and what he came up with didn't convince us in the slightest so we just filed it. (Senior leader)

It was evident from the interview data that, as the decline escalated, the study schools needed significant and sustained advice, support, and financial assistance to turn them around. In the longer term, ERO played an important role by reporting the seriousness of the problems, which led to action by the MOE. However, study school participants reported that the consequences of the negative reports being published, and the lack of credibility afforded to ERO by school personnel, had more negative than positive short term outcomes.

As a result of pressure from ERO reviews, the MOE became active in requiring each of the study schools to participate in a reform process through schooling improvement initiatives and through the Schools Support Project. While the experiences of the study schools differed, there were experiences they had in common with each other and with other schools participating in similar MOE initiatives. The negative experiences the schools had in common included a lack of ownership by school personnel for some interventions; feeling unlistened to, blamed and criticised; extreme frustration about accessing funding in a timely or appropriate way; a lack of respect for some of the consultants and advisors who were selected by the MOE; resentment and frustration over onerous reviewing and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

reporting requirements; feelings of unfairness and inequity in the level of support for similar or neighbouring schools; and anxiety over being required to meet unrealistic targets in an unrealistic time-frame.

If only they (MOE personnel) had listened to us I'm sure things would have improved much faster. We got worn down by the pre-determined process and the bureaucracy. We banged our heads against the brick wall but it made no difference at all. (Trustee)

STA is the key agency with the role of providing support for school boards of trustees. When trustees were asked from where they sought help and advice, none mentioned STA. There were no instances I could find in school related documents that the study schools' boards sought general advice or help from STA at any stage. Most participants felt that, while STA personnel were sometimes helpful regarding employment issues, they were primarily there to help the principal with staffing issues, rather than to give effective support to boards that needed help. Trustees felt their Principals did not encourage them to seek help or advice from STA. Opinions about the ability of STA to help a school at risk were not high during the decline periods.

STA did not have access to any funds to help us buy the expertise we needed and they did not have the level of expertise. (Senior leader)

The factors collectively described as the negative forces became increasingly dominant as decline escalated.

Positive forces

“Positive forces” collectively describes efforts made to prevent or fix problems by school leaders, trustees and individual staff. These factors had a positive influence on the study schools even though, in the longer term, they did not prevail over the negative factors. They are depicted in Figure 13 on the right side in green. The study schools were selected for this research because they had declined and failed. Therefore, by definition, during the battle of the negative versus the positive forces, there were not enough positive forces. Their lack of success could have been due partly to the power of the negative forces that prevailed, and partly to a lack of effective performance by leaders, governors, facilitators, trainers and policy makers.

Training for boards of governors/trustees

The study school boards, before and after Tomorrow's Schools, sought and received advice and support from time to time. Prior to Tomorrow's Schools secondary school boards of governors had educational advisors as members, in addition to appointed members. Trustee participants from that era said there was little available by way of training for school governance. At the beginning of Tomorrow's Schools, training was provided for newly elected boards of trustees members. This was necessary because the governance responsibilities under the Tomorrow's Schools regime are wide-ranging and previously the primary schools had not had governing boards. STA, however, was a new organisation and in the process of being established when its support for schools was needed the most. Trustees in all three study schools received some training from STA in more recent times, including during the decline periods. It is difficult to assess the helpfulness of the advice and training because participants made more negative than positive comments about the usefulness of the training. It is possible, however, that the escalation of the decline in the study schools could have been faster without the training and advice.

Schools cooperating

All three study schools eventually became participants in cluster developments that provided significant support for the schools individually and collectively. Nevertheless, during most of the decline periods there were few examples of inter-school cooperation between the study schools and their neighbouring schools, in contrast to a number of examples of competition or a lack of cooperation. At the time of the attempts at school cluster cooperation, I observed school personnel becoming frustrated at MOE control of the initiatives and at the bureaucracy associated with compliance and reporting requirements. It appeared that the lack of school autonomy prevented some schools from making an effort to cooperate.

Interventions

There is interview and documented evidence of some aspects of interventions having a positive influence, at least for a short time. A number of interventions were attempted during the decline phase. During the early stage of decline, some interventions were initiated by school leaders and others by trustees. Although they were not sufficient to halt the decline, they raised awareness inside the schools of problems and issues that needed

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

resolution. As the decline escalated and ERO reported on problems, the MOE became involved in requiring and organising interventions.

Some interventions were somewhat effective in addressing a specific issue. Examples included an inspector's visit⁶⁹ that resulted in two teachers being put under performance reviews; a roll audit that forced a school to review and report accurately on the number of students enrolled; an ICT⁷⁰ review and plan completed to address a school's lack of technology; a critical auditor's report prompting the need for financial problems to be addressed with the help of an advisor; an independent review of a department resulting in an HOD deciding to leave the school and a principal resigning after being confronted by a group of senior staff. While none of these interventions were wide-ranging enough to address the range of problems the schools were experiencing, they sometimes succeeded in addressing one specific problem that could have contributed to faster escalation of the decline, had it not been addressed.

Some leadership changes appeared, for a short time, to result in positive outcomes in the study schools. Figure 11 shows these as a "Short term remission". The appointment of a new principal and the election of a new BOT were two examples. In each case, the school staff and community were pleased at the people appointed/elected and were supportive of early attempts at changes and developments. However, once changes were initiated regarding the behaviour and performance of some staff, their resistance was strong enough to halt the process. In both situations the new leaders were unable to effect enough change to solve the many problems in the schools. Whether the temporary remission of the problems should be categorised as a positive force is a moot point.

Effective performance

One very positive force in the study schools was the performance of some individuals. Independent experts reporting to the MOE and ERO reports provided evidence that some school staff continued to perform at a very high level throughout the period of decline in spite of being surrounded and adversely affected by other staff who were demoralised and/or were underperforming.

⁶⁹ Prior to Tomorrow's Schools.

⁷⁰ Information and Communications Technologies.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The personal commitment of the teacher-in-charge has been the significant factor underpinning the positive momentum of the ----- department. (ERO report)

High performers included teachers, office staff, counsellors, DPs and deans⁷¹. It is not possible to measure the extent to which their good performance had a positive influence on the school or whether or not it contributed to slowing the decline. It is clear that well-intentioned and committed leadership, ethical decision making, and initiatives that individuals and schools took to get appropriate professional development, contributed to challenging the negative influences that were undermining the schools. In two of the schools, when the constructive leadership was at a senior level, the decline temporarily went into remission (see Figure 11).

Things started well when (the new principal) arrived and I was very hopeful that we had turned the corner but it didn't last. As soon as members of the old guard were put under pressure to perform they succeeded in bringing the school to its knees again. (Middle manager)

Constructive personal responses

Another positive force resulting from the actions of individuals related to their attitudes, decisions and behavior. A discussion of these personal responses appears in the section on “positive forces”. Even though they were not always successful, they each had the potential to effect important changes and they were ethical actions which required courage. Across all three schools there were instances where staff members remained loyal, hard working and effective. Regardless of all the problems happening around them, they continued focusing on the needs of the students and being supportive of colleagues. Some, however, were not of sufficiently senior status to have a positive influence on the decline process. Some senior staff chose not to take any action. Staff in relatively senior positions reported feeling that the action required to remedy or challenge problems seemed daunting.

They (HODs) don't think they can. The power of solidarity and unified action doesn't even occur to them. One person can't do it. It is dangerous for even two but if it is a wide-spread feeling they should get themselves together and go. (Senior leader)

⁷¹ Most secondary schools appoint some teachers to a deaning position to provide pastoral care for students.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The only way would have been mutiny. My memory says that we actually sort of talked about it once or twice. We would just sort of say “well look, management is not working but what can we do about it”? Then nothing would happen again. (Middle manager)

There were other staff who said they were so unhappy with what they saw happening in their school that they became activists or whistle blowers in an attempt to get action which they thought was needed. They reported that these decisions took courage and were seldom effective.

One of the senior teachers did approach board members secretly, privately to complain ... but I think it was just ignored. (Trustee)

When the crunch came and different staff members really started talking about things and saying “(the principal) has got to go” I said “I’ll write a letter and some of you sign it”. They all said “yep” but when I’d written the letter no-one would sign it. (Support staff)

Research participants who had made an effort to challenge leaders or trustees over problems in their school described how taking such action took a personal toll.

I was exhausted by the whole thing but I still couldn’t sleep at night either so I went from day to day feeling utterly miserable. (Middle manager)

I was in a no win situation. I felt bad until I tried to do something but after making the phone call, I felt sick. I decided to leave because I could not cope with the stress. It wasn’t fair on my family. (Senior leader)

One of the most effective acts that was reported in the interviews was spearheaded by a senior leader because s/he was very concerned about some of the actions taken and decisions being made by the principal. Supported by other senior leaders and middle managers, the group confronted the principal with the issues and persuaded the principal to resign. Parents, students and most staff were unaware of what prompted the resignation. Leaders also made various decisions that could be judged to be positive or negative in relation to how the school was affected.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

It came to an end when (the principal) resigned. S/he got quite sick with (a named illness). I just think that health wise and because of people against him/her and because the ERO report was not crash hot ... s/he recognised that and didn't stay on like a lot of other principals who want to prove themselves right. (Middle manager)

There were several examples of members of staff taking an issue of concern to the chair of the board of trustees. However, none of these reported occurrences resulted in an outcome that changed the problems which the school was experiencing.

Unfortunately, for the study schools, the positive forces were unable to exert enough pressure to overcome the negative forces that were working against them. Describing what happened to each school as a metaphorical “war” is not overstating the experience and that metaphor could be extended to describe the devastating effects on the local community, on individuals who were psychologically or emotionally wounded, on careers that became casualties and the long-term trauma that made healing and repairing difficult. It is artificial to separate the discussion of the factors that comprised the competing forces from the discussion of the escalation of the decline because they were happening at the same time. The reason that the escalation phase has been presented separately is to emphasise the negative forces which had a particularly strong escalating influence.

Escalation of the Decline

The process of school decline, identified in this research, was dynamic and it intensified and accelerated as negative forces interacted and coalesced. When the impact of the negative forces continued to outweigh the efforts at positive intervention, the decline escalated until it reached the stage where some of the issues and events contributed to a self-perpetuating spiral of decline. In this section, there is a description of some of the factors most closely associated with decline escalation for the study schools. The key factors at this stage of the decline were poor leadership, the resignations of key staff, unwise appointments, competition from neighbouring schools, declining staff morale, declining student achievement, ERO follow-up reviews, negative media publicity, poorly designed and under-resourced MOE interventions and the devastating effect of a declining

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

roll resulting in the CAPNA⁷² process. Each of these increasingly negative influences has been discussed previously as predisposing influences, and also as negative forces. This time, they are described in the context of being especially problematic for the study schools because the decline gained momentum as a consequence of their continuing influence.

Leadership behaviour

As the decline escalated, school trustees and leaders adopted personal responses that sometimes made the situation worse. Denial of the seriousness of the issues was a common response.

You wind up being ruthless about all criticism, not just the unfair criticism. So you become unable to receive criticism even when it is constructive. And then of course the people that want to be loyal to you stop criticising you which is a bad thing. (Trustee)

Denial sometimes took the form of avoidance behaviours. Some principals stopped meeting with local cluster groups. Two principals increasingly spent less and less time in their schools.

When I came to (the school) there was major failure that was being glossed over The administration was in denial and the principal was adopting the survival tactic of frequent absences. (Senior leader)

Time was never available for an appointment and that type of carry on. (The principal) didn't spend an awful lot of time in the staffroom. It was that avoidance. Not even talking with anyone, the communication stopped. (Support staff)

I probably covered up for (the principal) for far too long in terms of keeping things ticking over and covering up for his/her absences. (Senior leader)

As the latter quote indicates, some senior leaders protected and covered up for others out of a sense of loyalty they subsequently considered inappropriate.

⁷² CAPNA (Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis) is the acronym for the process used to identify the teachers to be made redundant as a school roll falls.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Transference of blame for the situation was another frequent response. ERO, MOE and the media were often used as scapegoats. There were examples of principals blaming their board and/or staff; boards blaming their principal; staff blaming their principal or senior leadership team; and senior leaders blaming their principal and board chair. Triangulation of the research data and my observations indicate that sometimes these concerns were justified and sometimes they were not. Whatever the situation, naming and blaming, without constructive action, tended to make matters worse. Several research participants used the words siege mentality to describe the situation they experienced when school staff felt so embattled that they became defensive and self-protecting.

As I recall it was a bit like Zimbabwe. There was just this complete inability for new ideas to filter through to the management of the school because of the siege mentality. (Trustee)

Instead of the school leaders acknowledging the seriousness of the problems and accepting responsibility to take appropriate action, the responses outlined above made the existing situations worse and, in turn, contributed to the emergence of new problems.

Resignations and appointments

In the study schools, decline escalated as a result of staff resigning and a reduction of the number and quality of applicants for vacant positions. Staff felt increasingly frustrated at the problems not being effectively managed. There is evidence in the interviews and documents that the most respected and the most able staff left. They left either because they did not want to live with the stress and frustration or because they were worried about the potentially negative impact on their careers of being associated with a failing school. There is general agreement that the less effective staff were often unable to get other positions and so the school *lost the best people, ended up keeping the less able ones and could not attract good replacements*. As the reputation of the schools declined, MOE documents provide evidence that the number of teachers applying for advertised positions declined. This issue was particularly acute for senior leadership appointments, including principal positions. One of the study schools had temporary “acting” principals while efforts were made to recruit an appropriate leader.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

With each change in leadership there were changes in expectations and the way each principal wanted things done. Many of the problems were not properly addressed or dealt with in any consistent way and most staff felt the school was “in a holding pattern”. (Report to MOE)

The challenge of keeping good staff, dealing with ineffective staff and making excellent appointments were connected.

School competition

There were several aspects to the issue of schools competing that created particular pressure for the study schools. The main detrimental outcome was a decline in the student roll. This was partly a result of another school retaining students and/or its teachers and principal bad-mouthing the study school to the extent that students, who would normally have progressed to the study school, elected to travel further to another school.

It is unlikely the school can increase its roll to any great extent when its main contributing schools are actively working against students going to ----. (Report to MOE)

The effort and complex process required, in an attempt to stop the unethical actions by other schools, caused school leaders serious frustration. The frustration of the school leaders was exacerbated by an apparent unwillingness of MOE personnel to take any action. MOE support was initially restricted to advice on how to attempt to resolve issues through dialogue with neighbouring boards of trustees. Because the problems were advanced, this strategy was not realistic.

Student achievement

The more fragile the study schools became, the worse their student achievement results. Some newspapers published “league tables” of results in national examinations in which the study schools did not rate well. The confidence of parents and students declined.

We all dreaded the inevitable league tables that would come out after the external exam results became available. Teachers were anxious, students embarrassed about what other kids said about their school and the relationship with the board became strained when they put pressure on the principal. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

When the schools fared badly in the league tables, and parents and students lost confidence, school leaders pressured teachers to improve performance. Attempts at change management often backfired.

Senior management has recently attempted to impose changes at a pace that has not been accepted by all staff. This has had a negative impact on the student learning. (ERO report)

The most respected and able teachers found it easy to get another job and many left the schools. These were the very teachers who could improve student engagement and achievement. As the most able staff left the schools, and the most able students left, it was inevitable that school-wide aggregated achievement results would further decline. Participants said they lost confidence in their ability to raise student achievement and some teachers began to blame the families, as well as the students, for the low achievement.

ERO reviews and adverse media publicity

The publication of ERO reports caused increasingly serious repercussions for all the study schools. Declines in staff morale, school reputations and student roll numbers were, in part, attributed to critical ERO reviews. It was critical, therefore, that review data were valid and that the reports were accurate, balanced and fair. There were concerns expressed, at the time of the decline and during this research, about the skills of reviewers and the validity and credibility of the review process. The greatest problem for the schools, however, was the public nature of the ERO reports. Media were eager to publicise critical reports and the publicity further damaged the schools' reputations.

Everybody wants to be proud of their school. It is like schools and churches and sports clubs, these are very important communities that build strength in a wider community and the moment any of those institutions are trashed, you lose faith in your own community. That is why ERO would be the worst people to bring in. The bad press that results from their visits is never worth it. (Senior leader)

Community confidence in the school is severely dented and made worse by the ERO report. The downwards spiral looks as if (the school) could be not viable within two years. (MOE file notes)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Another major concern for school stakeholders was the frequency of the follow-up reviews because there was the associated expectation that the school would demonstrate improvement in the short time-frame since the previous review. When an ERO report identified major concerns requiring major changes in attitudes, skills and performance of staff, such change was impossible to achieve in a short timeframe. School personnel said they felt they were being *set up to fail* because the report requirements were unrealistic. While the schools could demonstrate constructive actions and progress over six months or a year, they could not demonstrate improvements to student achievement results in that time. Some follow-up review reports repeated the concerns identified in the original report, so it appeared to the public that the school had not made enough progress.

Media were always ready and, according to respondents, they were often eager to report problems being experienced by the study schools. This resulted in the media being directly associated with the escalating decline and not merely the reporter of it. The findings of a negative ERO review were newsworthy and, because the frequency of the reviews increased⁷³ as soon as a school was identified as struggling, negative publicity increased in volume and frequency. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some papers and magazines also printed negative articles that, in the views of most school staff, were not fairly balanced or accurate.

People felt let down by (the journalist) and felt it was unjust. (The article) told lies about the school. (Middle manager)

I think they (parents) were affected by the media attention. They thought it was a bad slant on their community and on them. (Middle manager)

At the same time, some trustees and parents used the media to score points or promote their personal positions on controversial issues.

(Magazine) then "did us". Because the parents who had taken their kids away from the school were a sort of intelligent group of parents, they were the ones that could speak to the media. At that time ... we did have a lot of disgruntled people here. (Senior leader)

⁷³ Some re-reviewing occurred at six-monthly intervals.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

As already mentioned, publication of the league tables by newspapers and magazines was a major problem for all three study schools. Although it is likely that parents who took their children out of the school were influenced by a number of factors, rather than just a media article, research participants believed that negative media attention was one of the factors with the greatest influence on parents. The publicity negatively affected the morale of staff and students each time an article appeared. Staff, concerned for their careers, said they felt embarrassed and disadvantaged by being part of a school receiving such negative public attention.

I felt I had left it too late to try for another job because everyone in the country now believed the school was crap and would see it on my CV and throw it in the rubbish pile. (Middle manager)

There was only one participant who mentioned attempts to manage the media and, for this school, the realisation of the importance of that need came too late to stop the continuation of the decline.

It took us a long time to work out that we needed to spend public relations money. We were so short of money we were busy trying to find ways to save money and not to spend it. It was too late in the piece but we engaged a PR consultant and that PR consultant guided us into feeding all the local papers and metropolitan papers with more productive pieces of work. (Trustee)

MOE interventions

All three schools required the resourcing and support, provided through MOE intervention, to repair damage, rebuild and develop back into viable and healthy schools. Most of the early MOE interventions, however, created new problems and stress for school personnel. The time taken for the MOE to act and have strategies in place for support was a problem for all three study schools. So, also, was the nature of the proposed intervention when the decline had become severe.

It is very clear that the school is in an extremely serious situation and will not be able to be remedied, even in the longer term, without significant intervention. This confirms my earlier opinion that it is not strategic planning that is needed (previously required by an MOE agreement), but an urgent and decisive action plan. (MOE email to MOE)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Some MOE interventions required the school to use borrowed money through a suspensory loan to enable school leaders to take the necessary action to fix problems. Other times the school was advanced money by the MOE on the understanding that the school would have to refund the money if final funding approval was not achieved. This need to borrow placed the school under so much financial pressure that other aspects of the school's functioning were put at risk, such as teaching programmes and curriculum budgets. New problems were added to the existing pool which, in turn, negatively shifted the critical mass of issues. At other times, the funding was uncertain, was not available when it was needed or was inadequate.

Operation within income proved exceedingly difficult in the first half of the year because of the time lag between money owed and promised by the Ministry of Education and the actual arrival of the funds. (MOE report)

We need funding urgently because the account we have been using is about to run out and the staff who are doing the work are employed for the year. (Principal email to MOE)

After a month working in a seriously under resourced school I approached the Ministry and was told that the proposals were in the government's budgetary cycle and therefore confidential, but expected to be approved by the end of June. By then it was obvious to me that the school could not wait until June for some support to show that it had a future. (Principal letter to MOE)

You may proceed to implement other aspects of the proposed business plan and pay for them from (the school's) operations funding. In the event that the Government approves the business plan for the school, these costs may be reimbursed. (MOE letter to school)

Reporting and accountability expectations were sometimes unreasonable and unrealistic, to the extent that even some MOE personnel recognised the problems.

The earlier timeframes were not realistic. It is suggested that these outcomes will not take place immediately but will manifest themselves over a period of 3-5 years and be the result of a systematic process of resourcing and reforming the school. (MOE report)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

MOE interventions were designed to support and reform the study schools when their decline was well advanced. Study school participants were angry that the programmes that were intended to assist reform at that time, instead, sometimes exacerbated decline.

CAPNA Process

A Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis (CAPNA) is a process that secondary schools must follow in order to identify which staff members will be made redundant when student numbers drop. As the study schools' rolls fell, they were required to reduce the number of teaching staff employed to match the staffing allocation provided by the government. The study schools all went through this process at least twice.

Morale is affected by the CAPNA requirement to terminate up to 6 teachers. (MOE internal memo)

We had to CAPNA several staff. Once you start doing that it has a tremendously demoralising effect on staff. (Senior leader)

Our roll is going to drop and is currently below (what we are being funded for). Losing some staff and dropping some senior positions now would be pretty vicious on staff morale and destructive of the rebuilding efforts we are making. The positive effects of our recovery plan will be smashed if we have to identify some teachers who will be terminated next year. (Principal's letter to MOE)

Further, interview data indicated that teaching staff felt vulnerable and demoralised because some colleagues lost their jobs. Senior leaders and trustees often felt frustrated because teachers they wanted to keep were sometimes identified as the ones to leave, rather than teachers who were not performing as well⁷⁴.

We had an opportunity to get rid of an idiot who was the most shocking ... teacher you had ever seen. We had tried to get rid of her/him through the right processes but the union dug in and STA rolled over. We could have manipulated the CAPNA to get rid of him/her but (the

⁷⁴ The CAPNA process identifies the teaching position(s) that become redundant through an analysis of curriculum needs in the school at that time. It is widely believed that many principals manipulate the process, through the numbers they provide on student subject choices, to get rid of teachers they think are performing poorly. In the following quote, the principal is perceived to have followed the process to the letter, resulting in a poor teacher keeping their position and a popular and effective teacher having to go.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

principal) was so moral that we did everything by the book and we CAPNA'ed a teacher called -- --. That set the kids off when their best teacher had to go. (Senior leader)

The CAPNA process, for professional staff, was a very tangible and visible symbol of the school's decline. It resulted in a diminished senior programme for students. It also left the school boards paying a disproportionate amount of reduced funding on support staff or needing to make some people redundant.

The school has now had two CAPNAs over the last four years. There has, however, been no equivalent CAPNA of the support staff, and in order to budget our money it will be important to look carefully at the needs of the school, staff and students and restructure appropriately. (School annual report)

Each of these negative events and experiences added more stress for individuals and more pressure on systems that were already functioning at a depressed level. Decline escalated because the number of problems increased and the capacity of school personnel to deal effectively with them diminished. Staff and trustees lost confidence and felt *battle weary*, waiting for the next blow to hit. They were so busy being reactive and responding to events, they stopped being proactive and planning ahead.

Self-perpetuating Phase

Decline became self-perpetuating when the negative forces created problems that compounded and, in turn, created further new problems at an increasing rate. Because of the complexity of the actions, and interactions, and reactions, it was often impossible to determine which of the factors were most strongly associated with the escalation of decline. Before and during the early stages of the decline there were staff who were in denial, who resisted pressure to change or who simply did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation. As the decline progressed to this stage, however, more staff and trustees accepted the need to change and did what they could to rescue their school from failure.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

We really worked our butts off to try to get that roll up. We had information evenings and we got about six parents along. But it wasn't for lack of effort. We all worked tremendously hard. It just seemed to be a rollercoaster but mostly downs, not ups. (Senior leader)

Participants who were in the study schools at this advanced stage of the decline described feelings of powerlessness because, regardless of how hard they worked, newly created problems were arising faster than existing ones could be addressed.

Discovering what might work was difficult because wherever we would look as a board, there would be things that weren't right. (Trustee)

Because the problems were systemic, you could fix bits but you needed to do a whole restructuring ... and nobody has got any simple answers. (Senior leader)

I often felt that things were out of control. Because our good staff were leaving there were new staff who needed help but less senior staff to provide the help. This resulted in unsettled students and behaviour problems which in turn put us all under more pressure to fix the fall out. Then we had more graffiti and vandalism but less money to clean it up and that caused the school to start to look uncared for, and on, and on, and on. (Middle manager)

Leadership capacity diminished as many of the most able staff left the school. Poor performance by some principals and senior leaders meant that the issues were not managed effectively and so the decline continued to escalate.

I think it had been declining for about 14 years before I got there. Factor in three principals who at various times and in different ways were not doing their job properly. (Senior leader)

I think (the leaders) had pretty basically lost faith in their ability to change the school at that point. It was definitely a very defensive mode that they were in and it was trying to get through, literally one crisis to the next. (Trustee)

Study school participants reported that the harder they worked, the more exhausted and demoralised they became. The outcomes of the negative influences created new problems. Although there were interventions, they were not sufficiently effective or sustained to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

prevent the decline from escalating to the stage at which problems became self-perpetuating.

Associated with the drop in roll numbers has been the loss of good teaching staff, a contraction of curriculum subjects offered, and a reduction of the sport and extra-curricular opportunities available to the students. The school has struggled financially. (Report to MOE)

The publicity this week has been unbalanced and detrimental ... as well as causing general parent concern and low staff morale; it has directly cost the school a professional appointment. An excellent Maths appointment was made on the Friday before the media comments but was lost to the school on the Tuesday because of the adverse publicity and resulting perceived reputation of the school. (Principal's letter to the Minister of Education)

The flow-on effect of the bad publicity, low staff morale and shrinking senior programme had a detrimental effect on the students as well as the staff.

It is a self-fulfilling thing, a downward spiral. That had an effect on the students as well. (Middle manager)

At this time more and more students were becoming unhappy. It impacts on you in the classroom and it got to the point where the school had quite an anarchic feel about it and it was difficult in the classroom because of that. (Middle manager)

Findings as to chronic performance deficiencies, sub-standard education services and continuing failures in students' educational progress are confirmed. (ERO letter to MOE)

As discussed in the previous chapter, effective leadership by the principal was a necessary but not a sufficient condition to prevent or to halt decline. Damaged relationships, factions and conflicts affected all of the study schools and contributed significantly to their reputations being damaged and to a loss of community confidence in the schools. The damage to the schools' reputations was intensified by media coverage and sometimes by consultation exercises.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

I am concerned also about the role that public consultation can play in matters such as these. I am advised that there has already been extensive consultation but that the main outcome of this has been polarised opinions to which people are publicly committed. (Letter to Minister of Education)

I can remember we had a series of seminars on how we could improve the school and in a way that made things worse because it gave those that were against us for whatever reason a forum to express that and so spread the anti feeling throughout the place. (Senior leader)

A common thread was related to *systems inadequacies and failures* both within the schools and within the wider educational system.

Systems of benchmarking student performance and measuring improvements were begun ... the student attendance absence tracking system proved only to be partially operational due to the administration computers not being networked. (Report to MOE)

Another common thread was, at best, the inability of some staff and trustees in the school to see the seriousness of their situation. A possible worse scenario was the unwillingness of some people to accept what they were being told. Participants felt that many staff had lost touch with how most schools function or what professional and effective leadership was like.

I was a bit too close to (the principal) and too used to dealing with a diminished leader to be an accurate observer of his/her deficiencies. Loyalty and the insidious nature of decline can prevent people from speaking out. (Senior leader)

It was difficult to get things right because of the people who were involved. There was some terrible leadership with the middle management of the school. It was the worst I had seen anywhere, so the curriculum delivery was terrible. (Senior leader)

On top of all of the above, the finances and staffing of the schools dropped as their rolls dropped. As a consequence, schools no longer had the economies of scale to develop or operate the way they needed to effectively function. New staff were no longer attracted to the schools because their futures were in doubt. This applied to leadership staff as well as to teachers and support staff.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

It is hard to attract quality teachers to the school when there is so much uncertainty about the school's future and there is a strong possibility of them losing their jobs as the roll declines. (Letter to MOE)

(The BOT) feel that for the school to survive they must make a good, and permanent, (principal's) appointment now. They believe they need to be able to offer an incentive to attract anyone of sufficient calibre and experience to do the job. There is a danger that for the MOE to agree to this, especially in the light of the recent ERO report ... and the media publicity ... would be seen as saying the school has no future in the MOE's eyes, and the danger of a pre-determined decision if closure procedures were to be begun, is still relevant. (MOE internal email)

The difficulty in attracting sufficiently experienced and credible leaders added to the self-perpetuating nature of the decline. The deteriorating reputation of the study schools made it increasingly unlikely that credible leaders would want to put their reputations on the line by taking on such damaged schools. School personnel argued that a declining school needed leaders with attributes and skills over and above those needed to lead a healthy strong school. One school requested additional financial incentives to attract quality principal applicants. Likewise, the difficulty in attracting quality teaching staff meant that the work of reforming the schools and raising student achievement was less likely to be possible. Study school staff did not have the capacity to undertake the work needed.

... if we are to make the significant changes that the school needs we are going to have to attract the type of applicant required. (Letter to MOE)

It became clear that existing staff could not, on their own, undertake the kind of forward planning required to sustain the school's existence. At that point I decided to bring in relief teachers and a range of short-term consultants to enable us to make progress. (Letter to MOE)

As well as the most able staff leaving, the most able students were reported to be the first to leave.

Of course the other thing is that once you start getting flight from the school it is the best kids that go first. The ones with the drive who are the high achievers. (Senior leader)

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The irony of the situation was not lost on the research participants. A condition of improvement interventions was that student achievement was to increase and in short time frames. What happened initially was that achievement levels fell because the highest achieving students and some of the most able teachers went to other schools.

School closure

Closure was an option that the MOE considered for all three of the schools.

(The school) is currently in an advanced state of decline and is likely to need to be closed within three years, unless radical action is taken. (MOE email)

School staff, students, trustees and parents were aware of the threat of closure and this seriously affected morale.

Management systems and communications were not followed up and there was considerable dissension and low morale amongst the staff Students at the school complain of the lax attitudes of staff and students towards discipline, as evidenced by a high rate of truancy. (Report to MOE)

Prolonged tensions between staff and management in the school and a visible decline in the school roll in the past ten years have led to low staff morale, many teachers leaving the school, a reduction in the number and range of curriculum and extra curriculum activities and a loss of stakeholder confidence in the school. (Report to MOE)

Closure was regarded as a risk by the MOE because of the effect it would have on the local community and because it was more expensive than the cost of reforming the schools.

The costs of reforming (---- school) are estimated to be less than the costs of closure although the difference is not great Possible closure poses high risks to Government and is unlikely to be supported by the ---- community. (Internal MOE paper)

Risks to the MOE if it closed a school were listed in a report as including:

- *The impact on morale of staff and students is significant.*

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

- *There is a threat of legal action in the closure process.*
- *There would be redundancy costs for staff.*
- *Should the option be seriously considered existing staff would be likely to leave as soon as they could find secure work.*
- *The quality of educational delivery would be likely to deteriorate further in the interim.*
- *The current students would need to be absorbed into other schools, possibly requiring upgrades and additions as well as extra staff and resources.*
- *Bus services may be required.*
- *The long term effects of school closure on the self image of those involved could be significant.*
- *There would be no high school education delivery in (the area): many would see this as a failure of government's education provision to meet the needs of communities in this area.*
(Report to MOE)

In the event, decisions were made not to close each of the study schools.

Summary of the Findings Related to the Decline Process

There was no single factor associated with the decline in the study schools, although, Chapter 7 discusses four factors that had a greater influence than others. It became clear that there were many factors associated with decline and the more complex the assortment of factors, the more they became interrelated. There was a high level of convergence when data on the nature of the predisposing factors were triangulated. This chapter describes how the unresolved problems, associated with the predisposing factors (Chapter 5), coalesced and intensified; moving the study schools into decline. The interconnectedness of the problems and co-occurring events, in turn, meant that solutions could not be easily identified. The predisposing factors, along with experiences, patterns and phases of the decline process which the study schools experienced in common, are depicted diagrammatically in Figure 14. The mix of factors associated with the decline of each of the study schools, however, was unique. So were the order in which events occurred, the nature of interventions and the day-to-day

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

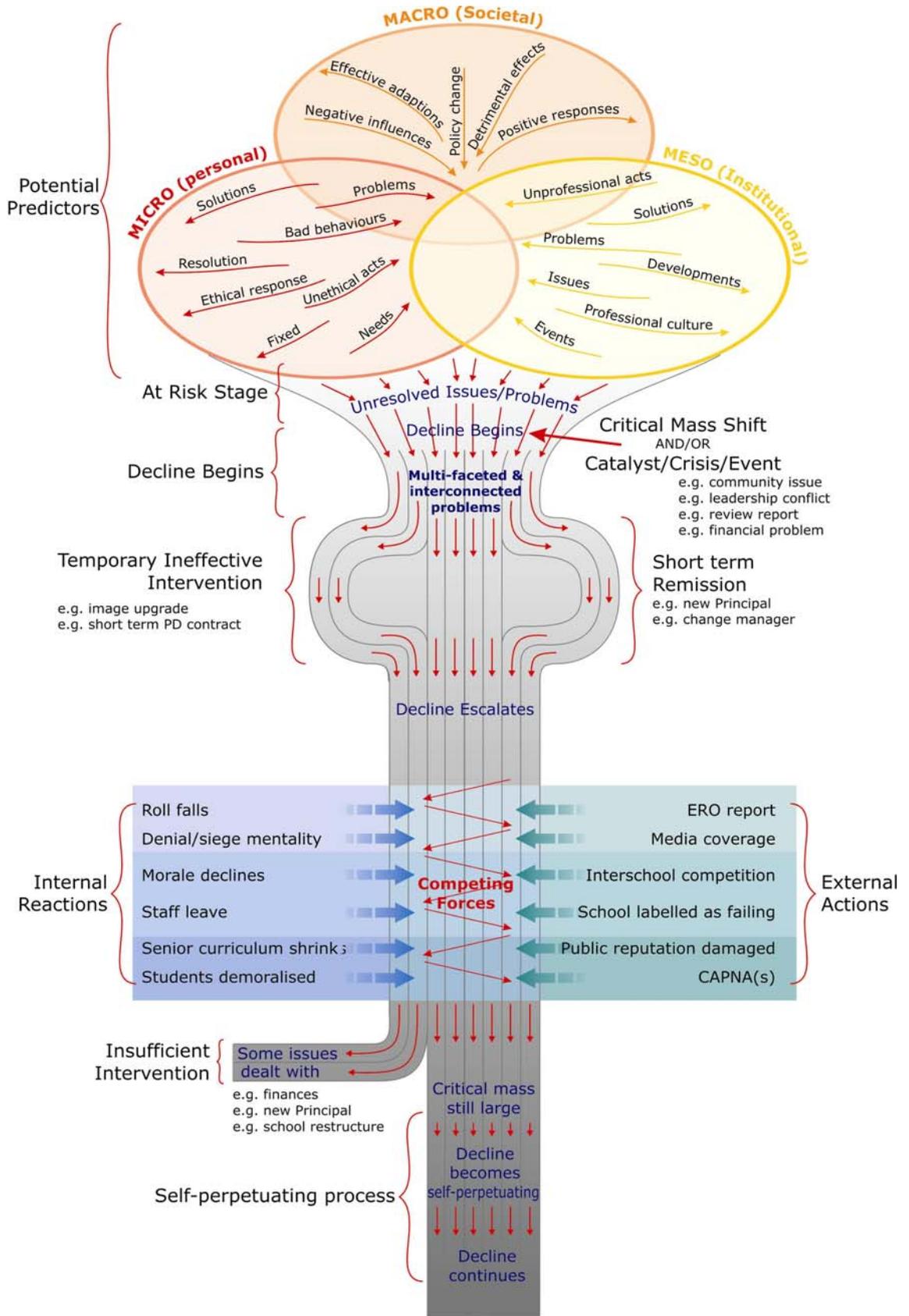


Figure 14 The decline process

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

experiences of staff in each of the schools. The apparent inconsistencies of the varying ordering of events and experiences and the specific mix of factors in each school, however, provided consistent data when common patterns and phases of the decline process could be identified (See Figure 14).

Figure 14 does not show an “end” to the process because the study schools were not closed. There have been schools in which the serious decline, depicted by the dark grey colour at the bottom of the decline process diagram (Figure 14), continued through to closure. A question that research cannot answer is whether or not this could have happened earlier, and with less pain, if the planning of the intervention strategies had been designed around the complexity and uniqueness of each situation and if interventions had been more prompt and effective. The ultimate objective of this thesis is to develop a theory of decline that will assist in understanding how to prevent decline or, at least, provide insights into how to intervene early and minimise the damage resulting from decline. In the next chapter, consideration is given to the main themes that have emerged from the data and their implications for schools, educational organisations and governments in relation to their ability and responsibility to pro-actively prevent schools from getting into difficulties, and/or when decline occurs, effectively stopping it as early as possible.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Ministry of Education data on statutory interventions in schools indicate that decline is still a reality for a number of New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2007). The discussion in this chapter contributes to a theory of school decline through insights into the predictors of school decline, the prevention of decline and appropriate intervention once decline has begun. The main findings from the experiences of the study schools, and from educational advisors, are discussed in conjunction with the literature. In order for this thesis to contribute to school decline prevention and cessation, three important questions need to be answered:

1. What are some indicators or predictors that might alert school leaders, or agency personnel, that a school could be at risk of decline?
2. What can school personnel, agencies and governments do to help prevent schools becoming vulnerable and entering into decline?
3. What can be learned about ineffective intervention that could provide guidance about effective intervention?

The first question is addressed through a discussion of the factors that contributed to study school decline and the complexity and interconnectedness of these factors. The indicators that were derived from the findings outlined in Chapter 5 are listed. Collectively the indicators have the potential to be used to predict school decline. They could be used by school leaders as part of the process of school self review and may also assist with the comprehensive diagnosis of problems in a declining school before an intervention is planned. Secondly, implications for the prevention of school decline are discussed. There are implications for school personnel, for agency personnel and for governments. Question three is addressed through a discussion about intervention in declining schools. When prevention strategies are unsuccessful and a school enters into decline, intervention is likely to be essential to halt decline and to assist in rebuilding the school. Key study findings about why school interventions were not effective provide insights into how agencies and

consultants can intervene effectively. Finally, the issue of school closure is discussed briefly in the context of being a strong rationale for decline prevention.

Indicators and Predictors of Decline

In addressing the first question about what might alert leaders or agency personnel that a school is at risk, a number of indicators emerged from the data as being closely associated with decline. These indicators were developed into a set of propositions that were sent to study school participants and to a sample of educational advisors who work with schools at risk and in decline. Feedback from both samples of research participants was used to validate the importance and implications of the theoretical concepts that appeared to be emerging. The responses from the educational advisors also provided insights into other schools that have recently declined or are currently at risk of decline. Each of the indicators identified contributed to decline in all three of the study schools although the specific way they became manifest and their timing varied for each school. Because each indicator was evident in all three schools, and in many schools mentioned by the educational advisors, it is likely that each has the potential to be a predictor of decline when it occurs in another school.

These predictors, discussed in the previous two chapters, are listed here because they have the potential to inform the discussion on decline prevention as well as the discussion of intervention in declining schools. It is very important that they are not used as a checklist that can be scored or quantified in any way. Some of the indicators can have more than one derivation or explanation and need to be investigated fully and carefully interpreted. An example is “Many staff leaving in a short time” that can be a danger sign or a very positive sign. If the staff who are leaving are mostly highly respected practitioners, it could be a very serious sign of school dysfunction. Even if they are leaving for promotion, if a significant number of leaders and middle managers leave it will make the school vulnerable and overload the remaining senior staff. On the other hand, if most of the staff who are leaving have been identified as needing to change their behaviour or improve their performance, then it could be a positive sign that expectations are being raised and the much needed change is beginning to occur. Another reason for not using the predictors as a check list is the complex and interconnected nature of the issues identified by them. The existence of

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

one of the issues is likely to indicate the existence of some of the others, but not necessarily all of the others. Each school's unique combination of issues must be identified clearly for appropriate action to be designed.

Any individual potential predictor might signal the need for a school to carefully review what is happening. If several predictors are evident, it could be wise for a school to seek the opinion of an outsider, or to seek independent review.

<i>MACRO (SOCIAL) INFLUENCES/PREDICTORS</i>	
Inadequate Responses to International and Educational Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The school does not interact professionally in MOE contracts or in other professional networks and has an insular outlook.▪ The school does not keep up to date with international and educational trends through effective professional development programmes. Financial pressures prevent the school from keeping up-to-date with technologies.▪ The school serves a low socio-economic community and has the lowest decile rating, compared to neighbouring schools.
Socio-economic Status and Demographic and Economic Factors	<p>The area the school serves suffers from a decline in the population of school aged students and/or changes in the status or numbers of neighbouring schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Factions exist between or amongst students, staff, trustees and parents.
Schisms over Societal Values, Norms and Social Movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Changes in government policy require schools to adopt/adapt.
Inability to Respond to Policy Changes	<p>School enrolment zones are removed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Community issues that divide people are brought into the school.
Impact of Community Conflict	

Figure 15 Macro (Social) influences/predictors

MESO (INSTITUTIONAL) INFLUENCES/PREDICTORS	
Decline in student enrolments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrolment numbers fall over several years. Enrolment numbers are low and do not grow
Ineffective Internal Management of Systems	
Poor financial and asset management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial problems occur. Assets/resources are depleted and property is not well maintained.
Ineffective management of poor performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The whole BOT is not well informed about performance issues.
Inadequate principal appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal grievances are lodged against the BOT. Poor performance is not addressed or not satisfactorily resolved.
Poor appointments resulting in performance problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment procedures are informal/unprofessional/illegal. BOT's appoint principals without taking appropriate educational advice
Ineffective school systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ineffective systems and practices continue. There are breakdowns in systems, routines and procedures. There is inadequate record keeping.
Unresolved Issues and Problems	
Governance difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BOT training is inadequate, or not all trustees are involved. There is a close and unchallenging relationship between the principal and board chair. Political agendas are put before students' needs. A BOT is not strong in its governance role. Trustees don't know when or how to seek advice or help
Loss of staff cohesion and morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict remains unresolved. Decision making is not transparent Staff morale is low
Problems associated with staff longevity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low staff turnover occurs over long periods of time. Staff are resistant to change. Significant numbers of staff have had little interaction with other schools and/or have not participated in post-graduate study.
Familial and professional role conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A family member of a staff member in a senior or influential position is also employed in the school.
The consequences of a deputy principal not being appointed principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the process of appointing a new principal, an ambitious deputy principal is appointed to the position of acting principal in the interim. A deputy principal applies for the position of principal and is not appointed
External Influence, Power and Authority	
Ministry of Education support was difficult to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOE systems for responding to school decline are inadequate External intervention happens too late. Setting up appropriate support processes takes too long or requires more effort than the school can sustain. School needs are inadequately assessed
Education Review Office methodology and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ERO review recommendations are ignored or rejected without being considered. ERO reports do not identify existing problems. ERO recommendations are unrealistic. A follow-up review occurs too soon to allow a school to make sufficient progress or repeats previous concerns rather than focuses on progress or lack of it.
Post Primary Teachers Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Union field officers protect poorly performing teachers. Union members stop attending school branch meetings because of the negative nature of discussions. There are entrenched and negative leaders and/or members of the school branch of the union
School Trustees Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STA employment advisors do not support a school sufficiently to deal effectively with poor staff performance or behaviour.
Competition between schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in the structure of schools, involve competing with neighbouring schools for students. School staff or trustees undermine another school overtly or covertly.
The media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative media coverage of a school
Consultants and facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultants/facilitators do not have the appropriate skills or experience. School needs and problems are not accurately or adequately diagnosed

Figure 16: Meso (Institutional) influences/predictors

MICRO (PERSONAL) INFLUENCES/PREDICTORS	
<p>Inadequate and Ineffective Senior Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principals do not have adequate senior leadership experience. ▪ Developments and change is not managed well. ▪ The principal is unwell or stressed. ▪ Groups or individuals receive (or are perceived to receive) favoured treatment. ▪ The principal is often out of the school. ▪ The principal does not model ethical and professional attitudes and behaviour. ▪ Dishonesty or lack of honesty by school personnel occurs with respect to issues or documents.
<p>The Potential for Personal Responses to Help or Hinder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The principal controls information that prevents staff and trustees being aware of problems. ▪ Misguided loyalty to a colleague prevents school personnel from taking action when they become concerned. ▪ Many highly regarded staff leave in a short time. ▪ Staff are unchallenged about unprofessional/unethical behaviour. ▪ Many parents remove their children from the school

Figure 17 **Micro (Personal) influences/predictors**

Most of the external and internal challenges to the study schools, reflected in these predictors, are situations which can be present in all schools from time to time. Because it is not possible for schools to avoid challenging influences, it is important for each school to develop a culture and systems that will make it resilient and able to prevail over potential threats. Fullan, an educational expert on school effectiveness, says the art of continual improvement lies in schools not trying to avoid external forces but to embrace them in pro-active and constructive ways:

Most outside forces that have moved inside, threaten schools in some way, but they are also necessary for success. In order to turn disturbing forces to one's advantage,

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

it is necessary to develop the counterintuitive mindset of “moving toward the danger”. (Fullan, 2000, p.3)

Even if there are some external forces that schools do not think are appropriate to embrace, the experiences of the study schools point to the importance of not avoiding external forces. The same advice applies to organisational and personal challenges to the schools. Educational advisors gave many examples of community factions having a seriously negative influence on some schools.

Ideological divisions are very damaging because they divide communities, divide boards and divide staff. (Educational Advisor)

I have seen religious groups and ethnic groups get control of boards and start to make decisions that advantage their own group at the expense of the rest of the children in the school. (Educational Advisor)

By being unwilling or unable to deal effectively with the challenges, study school leaders put their schools increasingly at risk.

As well as being used to identify decline once it begins, these indicators could be used by school personnel in healthy schools, as part of their ongoing self-review process, as a means of proactively preventing decline. The predictors identify situations that signal the need for school leaders to reflect deeply and carefully conduct self-review in order to ascertain the extent to which the school is at risk. The predictors also have the potential to serve a constructive role for agencies involved in school review, intervention or support in the initial diagnosis of problems occurring in a school at risk or in decline.

The number of potential predictors of decline identified by this study and the interconnectedness of them makes it difficult to diagnose the problems in a declining school and knowing where to begin to change and reform a school even more difficult. Schools are complex organisations involving relationships among groups with differing needs and connections including students, staff, trustees and parents. In addition to the internal dynamics, schools have relationships with other educational organisations in their community and with a wide range of external agencies including, in New Zealand, the MOE, ERO, PPTA or NZEI, and STA. The majority of school staff are professionals with

university degree level qualifications who want to be respected for their knowledge and expertise and expect to have a level of autonomy appropriate for a professional (Stoll & Harris, 2004). Staff serve “clients” (students) who are at the school, as well as parents. Some of these parents are trustees and function as employer of the staff. At the same time, all schools, even those which are effective, are exposed to what Fullan describes as a “plethora of outside forces impinging on them” (Fullan, 2000, p. 581). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) point out that principals are “bombarded” with initiatives which demand their response. Concurrently, principals are managing the internal organisational dynamics as well as a complex network of relationships, unique to their school personnel and the community which they serve (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Hargreaves, 2003; Rosenblatt & Schaeffer, 2000). The scene is, therefore, set for complex interactions, relationships and personal responses and “many different factors contribute to school performance” (NAO, 2006, p. 33).

As the number of unresolved problems grew, they adversely affected school personnel, relationships and systems resulting in new problems being created. Miller (1977), writing on business failure and describing the same phenomenon, said that “weaknesses have a multiplicative effect” (p. 55). Decline escalated as increasingly wide-ranging and interconnected problems coalesced in a self-perpetuating process. A report on English schools that have been identified as declining to the stage of being named as “poorly performing”, identifies ten characteristics common to most of them and some of the characteristics have more than one descriptor within them (NAO, 2006, p. 4). “Poor standard of teaching”, for example, includes “lack of skills and motivation of teaching staff” as well as “lack of engagement by pupils” (p. 4). The decline experiences in the three study schools were similar to each other and to other organisations that have declined. In the study of organisational reform, Burke and Cooper (2000) identify characteristics which declining organisations have in common. These include:

... the absence of long-range planning, the curtailment of innovation, scapegoating, resistance to change, turnover, decreased morale, loss of slack, the emergence of special interest groups (politics), loss of credibility of top management, conflict and in-fighting, and across-the-board rather than prioritized cuts. (p. 12)

The study schools experienced all these characteristics, thus affirming Burke and Cooper’s claim, and placing schools within the wider context of declining organisations. Each

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

characteristic in its own right presented the schools with difficult and complex problems to manage. The similarities in these decline characteristics, however, mask the very important differences with respect to the uniqueness of each school and its particular community, history, culture, experiences and problems.

It is the uniqueness of a school that is critically important in understanding why some schools decline, while others survive or thrive. An understanding of the differences, and the unique combination of issues in each school, is also critical if intervention is to be effective (Barber, 1998; Myers, 1995; Reynolds, 1998; Stoll & Fink, 1996). As a school declines, the number of problems and the negative interactions among them increase. The complexity is greater still because each school develops its own collective interpretation of issues that are then reflected in the school's norms and systems. Educationalists working in the field of school culture and politics have noted that, over time, a culture develops that is unique to that school effecting staff, students and parents. Stoll and Fink claim "it is only through consideration of its individual circumstances and context that any particular school might identify which norms have significance" (1996, p. 98). There were examples in the study schools of aspects of the school culture permeating through to the staff working environment, in particular, but also into classrooms which influenced the students' learning environment. There are clear implications for intervention strategies which need to be tailored so that they are consonant with the culture of a school.

Lodge (1998) explains that the complexity of the situation exacerbates school decline by making it very difficult to unravel the tangle of interconnected problems and to know where to begin to sort out the issues. Fink (2000) cites the adage, "for every complex problem there is a simple answer and it's usually wrong" (p. 74). Simple or quick fix solutions will not be sufficient. Even the appointment of a new principal is not necessarily a sufficient solution for a school in difficulty (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Stoll & Myers, 1998). The "Fresh Start" programme, a reform programme for failing schools in England, demonstrated that the appointment of "super-head" principals was not the answer for schools in difficulty: "Faced with "chronically" ill situations, and intense media-coverage, many super-heads were seen not to last under the increasing pressure, and thus the resignations" (Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005, p. 231). There were principals in the study schools, two with previous principalship experience, who faced similar situations and resigned because they were not able to sustain the pressure. The knowledge and experience which the principals had gained in their previous schools were not necessarily relevant to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

the new situations. Observing similar situations, Valikangas (2006) emphasises that leadership practices are idiosyncratic and tailored to the context and culture of a school. Consequently, these practices are not easily transferable. Stoll and Harris (2004) claim that the tailoring of strategies to prevent decline, as well as the processes of interventions to turn schools around, need to be context specific. The experience of the study schools supports this view. It is hardly surprising, then, given this complexity and the unique nature of each problematic situation that the diagnosis of reasons, the analysis and interpretation of the problems and the finding of solutions is challenging. Simple solutions do not exist, as Nicolaidou and Ainscow explain:

Our inside observations of these very sensitive situations allow us to say that where improvement efforts have failed it is because of the idea that such schools are faced with predictable and straight forward problems. On the contrary, our understandings of such schools indicates that they are faced with complex and, simultaneously, unique issues. (2006, p. 23)

A further complication in designing effective interventions is the difficulty in determining which influences are most strongly associated with a school's decline. External and internal influences occurred in each of the three study schools at different times and in varying combinations. They interacted together and impacted on each other. Each of the activities in the schools was partly a result of what previously had happened and, in turn, influenced what followed. There is often such entanglement of interactions, as Starbuck, Greve and Hedberg concluded from their analysis of organisational crises:

One initial conjecture was that crises originate as threatening events in organizations' environments. A competing conjecture was that crises originate from defects within organizations themselves. Analyses of actual crises suggest that both conjectures are partly true and both are partly false. (1978, p. 112)

Two examples, experienced in some form by all three study schools, illustrate this point. The first was when unresolved problems were reflected in an ERO report. The publication of a critical ERO report damaged the reputation of the school. As the school's reputation declined, the student roll dropped. As the roll dropped, some of the senior programmes were cancelled. As fewer senior options were offered, the school's reputation further declined and the roll dropped again. Each action and reaction is a result of the previous

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

action and a potential trigger for the following reaction. The second example relates to staff longevity. When problems in the schools remained unresolved, staff began making personal decisions about whether to stay or leave. The most innovative and creative staff left the school for good positions elsewhere. Consequently, the remaining staff tended to be older staff and those who were unable to get other positions. The remaining staff showed what Fink called “symptoms of burn out” and were “less inclined to provide leadership for change” (2000, p. 152). Because the remaining staff resisted change, at a time that change was required, the process of turning the school around became even more difficult. A similar situation was noted by Fink (2000) in the schools he studied. Usually, it is not possible to pinpoint the factor or factors that instigated the process of decline because of the number of inter-related issues and also because of the “interactive effects” that are produced (Miles & Snow, 1994, p. 68). Lashway (2003, p. 3) describes a “confluence of forces” which, in the case of schools, was dominated by negative interactions which became self-fulfilling. A similar analogy is provided in my study with “competing forces” (Figure 13) which interacted in different ways and times in each of the study schools. Miles and Snow (1994, p. 83) described organisations going through this interactive part of the process as “unraveling from within”. What happened in the study schools, as the positive and negative forces competed, could easily be described as unraveling.

Decline began in the study schools, largely because of the great number of unresolved problems which had been allowed to accumulate. Being able to respond to pressures and crisis events is a test of the strength of school leadership, culture, systems and the ability to mobilise resources (Fullan, 2000; Harris, 2003; Seville, Brunson, Dantas, Masurier, Wilkinson & Vargo, 2006; Stewart & O’Donnell, 2007). Responding to accumulating problems and to crises is more difficult for low decile schools. Educational advisors noted, however, that high decile schools are just as vulnerable to external and internal challenges but they usually have more resources available to solve problems when they arise and are more concerned about protecting their *image and reputation*. Thesis consultants mentioned resources in the form of *money and fundraising ability*, as well as *the ability to tap into a wide range of professional skills and advice*.

There is a huge difference (in how high and low decile schools manage being “at risk”). The high decile schools have all the same issues and potential problems but they have so much more to lose if parents find out so they tend to take action a lot faster, and they have the money and resources to

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

access good advice and support. Problems are usually resolved in a relatively short time, like a year, and nearly always without the parents or ERO finding out. (Thesis consultant)

Brooke-Smith (2003, p. 38) notes that, “causality is a deep problem for school effectiveness research”. Slatter (1984, p. 55) noted that “the symptoms of decline are easier to detect than the causes of decline”. Unfortunately, the inability to isolate the factors that initiate a complex set of problems makes the issues more difficult to remedy. Because many of the serious problems in the study schools were associated with staff performance and behaviour, a simplistic solution would be to identify who should stay and who should go. However, school personnel did not find it easy to make such judgements. Research participants were often ambivalent about the motives of people and the integrity of their behaviour. Smith and colleagues came to the same conclusion saying, “the “good guys” and the “bad guys”, the heroes and the villains are neither so easy to identify nor are the labels so unambiguously applied” (Smith, Dwyer, Prunty & Kleine, 1988, p. 291). Because it is so difficult to identify single influencing factors, the diagnosis of the range of issues which are collectively associated with decline is difficult. Quality diagnosis requires high level skills and appropriate experience. The study schools suffered at times when needs were not correctly or adequately identified or diagnosed. Plans and actions that resulted from poor diagnosis did not adequately deal with all the existing problems. Hopefully, the wide-ranging list of predictors provided in this chapter will assist future diagnoses to be more comprehensive.

Decline Prevention

This section of the chapter addresses the second question about what personnel in schools, agencies and government can do to prevent decline. Extending Stark’s (1998) medical analogy of a school as a chronically ill patient, prevention is always better than having to find a cure. School decline is difficult to halt once it begins and is stressful for trustees, staff, students and the school community. Research participants emphasised their hope that knowledge gained from this research would help prevent school decline; thus, precluding additional students, staff, trustees and parents from suffering such damaging experiences. Accepting the premise that the prevention of decline is desirable, however, demands a proactive response from school leaders and trustees as well as from educational agencies

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

and governments. The following areas have been identified as having the most potential for the prevention of school decline: fostering ethics and professionalism, encouraging appropriate personal responses, ensuring effective leadership that proactively deals with issues, promoting effective governance, strengthening teacher training and managing government policy implementation.

Fostering ethics and professionalism

A factor that contributed significantly to decline in the study schools was the unethical and unprofessional conduct by individuals and groups that had a major influence in placing the study schools at risk and in contributing to their decline. Unethical and unprofessional attitudes, behaviours, decisions and actions form a strong and frequently recurring research theme in this study. It is not possible to deduce the extent to which high standards of ethical and professional behaviour may have prevented problems or helped to resolve pressures and conflict when they arose. However, the study schools provided evidence of damage caused by the problem behaviours that included resultant financial difficulties, conflict, factions forming, abuse of power, legal and industrial action, school competition, personal stress and lowered staff morale. Similar experiences are documented by other writers. Both Haynes (1998) and Snook (2003) observed that a lack of professionalism and ethics is sometimes reflected in the behaviours of individuals and groups as well as in the cultures of the schools and educational agencies. Ball described such occurrences as the micro-politics of schools which are about power and control, encompass individual and group differences and include, “vested interests, ideological interests and self interest” (Ball, 1993, p. 19). Micro-politics are manifest in contests and conflicts about values, resources, positions, policies and leadership (Ball, 1993; Fink, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994). Ball (1993) used the example of feminism to describe how perspectives extend through “the classroom, the staffroom and beyond the school” (p. 76). The actions taken by some individuals and groups in the study schools ranged from being illegal, at the most serious end, to unprofessional and morally questionable. These attitudes and actions had a strongly negative influence in predisposing the schools to decline and in escalating the decline.

Detrimental effects on the study schools occurred when senior leaders behaved illegally, unethically or unprofessionally. Illegal acts identified in my research included behaviours that met the legal definitions of fraud, theft, assault (verbal and physical), forgery,

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

harassment, slander and bribery. When discovered, some of these illegal acts became crisis events for the schools. Few became public knowledge, however, and only one was reported by the media. There was evidence of unprofessional behaviour by some teaching staff, middle and senior leaders, principals and trustees. These acts included inappropriate personal liaisons, slander, lies, bullying, intimidation, verbal abuse, sabotage, manipulative abuse of power, and withholding information or giving misleading information. Specific examples of unethical behaviour included: falsifying appraisal documents, giving a glowing referee report for an underperforming teacher, threats to expose inappropriate behaviour unless a promotion was made, the employment of family members without jobs being advertised, paying for a magazine subscription through the school budget but keeping the copies at home, and removing application forms from a file to favour one candidate. Participants reported that the higher the status of the person in their school, or the larger the group involved, the more serious was the impact of the unethical or unprofessional behaviour on staff. In the examples provided, more often than not, other people who knew about the actions chose to neither disclose the information nor to take action. On a day to day level, the unprofessional behaviours included put-downs, backstabbing, avoidance, domination, spreading gossip, shouting, and inappropriate familiarity. Some actions, while not illegal, were unprofessional and had a profound influence on relationship dynamics. At other times, students were directly involved and in a position to see unethical behaviour modeled by their teachers. Personal action, inaction and personal agendas played major roles in putting the schools at risk.

Factional conflict within the study schools was particularly destructive, both in contributing to decline and in escalating it. The conflicts were most often a result of adult power struggles and there is no evidence to indicate that the interests of the students were considered by any of the parties. Bryk and Schneider (2003), from their longitudinal study of schools in the process of reform, assert that commitment to the education of the students should always be the primary concern over the interests of individual adults or groups. There is evidence that, when study school staff and trustees became involved in factional conflict, their energy was diverted away from positive school development; thus, lowering the resilience of the schools and, in the longer term, disadvantaging students. Research conducted in poorly performing English schools found that “over half ... benefitted from the support of other schools” during their efforts to improve (NAO, 2006, p. 42).

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Unprofessional actions by staff and trustees in competing neighbouring schools adversely affected all the study schools. Alvy and Robbins, in their article for newly appointed principals, advise that, “principals who are committed to ethical leadership make an unwavering moral commitment to behave justly, promote student success, support teacher growth, and foster quality relationships in the school community” (2005, p.51). The study schools, and some of their neighbouring schools, did not always have leaders who acted ethically. Research consultants provided examples that show such practices are current today and researchers in other countries (Bending, 1993; Hargreaves, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) have noted the destructiveness of similar practices. Hargreaves and Fink take a strong moral stance on what they consider an issue of social justice and for which school leaders are the guardians, “Sustainable leadership does no harm to and actively improves the surrounding environment. It does not raid the best resources of outstanding students and teachers from neighbouring institutions. It does not prosper at other schools’ expense” (2006, p.19). Personnel in neighbouring schools actively undermined the reputations of the study schools and deliberately worked to increase their schools’ rolls at the expense of the study schools.

Previous research on school crises identified the serious impact on a school of unprofessional behaviour. Fletcher, Caron and Williams (1985, p. 46) listed behavioural incidents that led to a school crisis: apathy toward work, recalcitrance, dress, manners, obscenities, vandalism, violence, intimidation, extortion, theft, truancy, dangerous behaviour, unacceptable speech and lack of deference. There is a strong similarity between the behaviours in this list and behaviours identified in the study schools. Study school leaders and teachers sometimes acted in passively unethical ways. There were examples of teachers offering uncritical support to colleagues in situations when it was inappropriate. Timperley and Robinson (2000) observed similar problems in the New Zealand schools they studied. Evans (1996) identified the trouble created for a school when change is blocked by a group of teachers. Inappropriate action, or a lack of action, by teachers allowed individuals or small groups in the study schools to create problems and block effective change.

The range of unethical and unprofessional behaviours in the study schools was wide and there are few insights into the motives behind many of the occurrences. Identifying the problems is undoubtedly easier than finding solutions to the complex motives and behaviours behind unethical and unprofessional conduct. Hopefully by raising the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

awareness of the potentially serious long-term influence of unethical and unprofessional behaviours, school leaders will recognise the need for courage and be motivated to gain the necessary skills to take action. An immediate solution, available now to school leaders and governors, is to promote and use professional codes of ethics or conduct and to actively use strategies to stop unprofessional behaviours as soon as they occur.

During the period my interviews were being conducted, the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) developed a Code of Ethics⁷⁵ for teachers which could, “be used as a basis to challenge the ethical behaviour of a teacher and could provide grounds for complaint if a teacher’s practice falls seriously short of these standards” (NZTC, 2004). Such a code could have provided valuable guidelines for staff, and may have been a vehicle that could have been used for challenging inappropriate behaviour.

Encouraging appropriate personal responses

Before and during the decline, research participants experienced feelings of powerlessness, had difficulty deciding what action to take and did not know where to go to access help. There are no easy guidelines for what constitutes an appropriate personal response to very difficult situations when a school is at risk or in decline. The Conflict Resolution Training Network recommends in their training materials⁷⁶ that people decide between “fix it”, “live with it” or “leave it” options. Regrettably for the schools and their students, some of the most respected and effective teachers decided to “leave it” and some teachers and principals, whose performance was identified as a problem, decided to “live with it”. The study by Tippett (2004) of a small declining American school identified the same types of staff responses. The theory of attribution processes espouses the principle that, “in general individuals want to associate themselves with desirable images and dissociate themselves from undesirable images” (Crittenden, 1989, p. 6). As the school decline became public knowledge and the media published critical reviews, some teachers and leaders were concerned for their careers.

Efforts to solve problems were often not effective. Some study school staff used highly inappropriate strategies in their attempts to “fix it” and, in the process, made the situation

⁷⁵ The Education Act 1989 empowered the New Zealand Teachers Council to develop a Code of Ethics for registered teachers. It was completed at the end of 2004.

⁷⁶ This Australian group provides training materials free for groups to use in learning about conflict (<http://www.crnhq.org>).

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

worse for the school. Others, who used brave and professional strategies, such as attempts at whistleblowing, were unsuccessful and resorted to “leaving it” in frustration. Hirschman, discussing employee decision-making, explains:

As a rule, loyalty holds exit at bay and activates voice. It is true that, in the face of discontent with the way things are going in an organisation, an individual member can remain loyal without being influential himself, but hardly without the expectation that *someone* will act or *something* will happen to improve matters. (1970, p. 78)

Whistleblowing was one way some study school employees took individual responsibility to act on what they perceived to be unethical or illegal behaviour. Glazer and Glazer (1999), experts on whistleblowing, have found that such action usually comes at a personal cost: “Whistleblowers and crusaders have a strong cultural commitment to the efficacy of action (but) they had to overcome fear and intimidation” (p. 280). Of concern, is evidence that whistleblowing in the private sector is a form of “occupational suicide” (Perry, 1998; Yamey, 2000). Mieth and Rothchild (1994) differentiate between whistleblowing within or outside of the organisation. When internal whistleblowing is made safe by management, it helps to, “foster emphasis on ethical conduct as an important part of the organisation’s culture (Benson & Ross, 1998).

A question this thesis is unable to answer is whether development in communication skills, conflict prevention and resolution, and interpersonal skills may have provided teachers with the awareness and confidence they needed to deal with the difficult situations in which they found themselves.

Ensuring effective leadership

The possible prevention of school decline could be enhanced by ensuring effective leadership that proactively deals with issues. The literature is extensive on the significant influence of principal leadership on school effectiveness and on student achievement (Stoll & Harris, 2004). Regrettably, poor appointments and a lack of effective leadership were strongly associated with the decline of the study schools. Some principals, senior leaders and middle managers actively contributed to the decline through their actions, others through their lack of action or inappropriate action and some through both. Ineffective

leadership undermined the resilience of the schools during times of pressure. Senior leaders and middle managers are included in this discussion because poor leadership at these levels also contributed to decline. An educational advisor who had observed similar situations in other schools described the problem as a lack of *leadership density*.

The literature indicates a growing awareness of the importance of empowerment of leaders at the middle management level, as well as at the senior leadership level. Capacity building through teacher involvement and ownership is also crucial (Harris, 2003). Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 321) described these important developments as “building general capacity”. Such capacity might have prevented many of the problems experienced by the study schools. Stewart & O’Donnell (2007, p. 249) note that distributed forms of leadership, especially leadership at the middle levels of an organisation, contribute to organisational resilience. The core business of a school is teaching and learning but the core business of leadership is to build a culture which staff value and in which they want to be involved; a culture that Stoll and Fink claim “defines effectiveness” (1996, p. 100). Schools develop, over time, a unique culture that reflects the individuals in the school and the community that the school serves. The culture of a school is a rich and complex blend of factors such as its organisational effectiveness, leadership styles, the relationships of all the participants, longevity and ages of the staff, decision-making processes, consultation expectations and methods and parental expectations. Each school develops its own collective interpretation of issues that are then reflected in the school’s norms and systems. Each of the study schools was severely tested by influences from outside and by internal issues. School personnel experienced increased levels of stress, anxiety and insecurity; factors which Nicolaidou and Ainscow associate with a school being categorised as failing (2006, p. 23). How issues, problems, needs, or crises in a school, are responded to, managed, solved and resolved is pivotal to the ongoing resilience and effectiveness of the school (Harris, 2002). Fullan (1991), an expert on change management, says school leaders play active and modelling roles in building that resilience.

A key aspect of school culture that study school leaders were unable to achieve was involving teachers in sharing responsibility for the well-being of their entire school. Instead, teachers focused on their own classroom and their department. Participants recalled that, when they served as teachers, they did not see themselves, nor did they observe colleagues, as having the right to be actively involved in school-wide decisions. Timperley and Robinson (2000) observed teachers being focused on their own classroom at the expense

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

of the wider school. The educational advisors felt that, in large schools especially, this is still the case today. They described teachers as *tunnel visioned within four class walls* and as having *little relationship with the vision and not sharing the responsibility*. There were no reported examples in the study schools of teachers who were well informed or who took action in relation to issues in their school, until they reached the level of middle managers. Fink (2000) and Hargreaves (1991) describe the isolation or balkanisation of secondary school departments. Study school participants, who later became school leaders, reflected on their lack of whole-school involvement before they reached the level of deans or, more especially, heads of departments (HODs). Even most HODs, at the time, were more focused on their departments than on whole school issues. Teachers and middle managers who were aware of problems in the school, to which they might have responded or taken action, deferred to others in the school who had senior status. Leaders could raise awareness of these issues for teachers and help them to develop skills and strategies so they could fully participate and share responsibility for the well-being of their school.

Study school principals, DPs and HODs needed skills in dealing positively, firmly and effectively with the staff for whom they were responsible. They also needed quality advice and ongoing support because study school leaders described the process as involving a lot of time and taking an emotional toll. Leaders failed to deal with performance and behaviour problems at all levels of the study schools. They also made some poor appointments, especially of other leaders. Fink (2000) affirms the importance of making quality appointments by pointing out that, “It is very difficult in most jurisdictions to remove a teacher once that teacher has received a contract” (p. 162). Some principals inherited a school in which a number of staff were not meeting student needs. Educational advisors gave many examples of this happening in other schools. It is clearly a leadership responsibility to deal with poorly performing staff. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996, p.87) argue, “When a school has one or two bad teachers, this is usually a problem with the individual teacher. When it has many bad teachers, it is a problem of leadership”. Participants said that they now understand how important it is not to ignore performance issues and regretted not taking firmer action earlier. Alvy and Robbins maintain, “to act ethically and with integrity, some principals need to make the bold and sometimes agonizing decisions necessary to relieve a school of the few teachers who do not serve the needs of students” (2005, p. 51).

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Study school leaders sometimes failed to differentiate between being a professional colleague and being friendly or being liked by everybody. Some of the study school principals and deputies were well liked but did not have the strength of character and/or the skills to insist on appropriate standards of performance and behaviour from students or staff. Tippett (2004, p. 121) described a similar situation:

All the presidents of Transitional College in the past 12 years probably possessed excellent traits that would be lauded and appreciated in a less challenging environment. However, the college was not very successful in employing leaders ... who possessed the skills required to resurrect a dying institution”.

Some problematic employment situations that were managed by the study school principals were very difficult. In all three study schools, resistance strengthened as factions formed and as leaders failed to resolve issues and achieve more than the “contrived collegiality” described by Hargreaves (1991). Unprofessional behaviour increased and, when not confronted, contributed to decline escalation. Habits formed that became accepted as part of the school culture and accepted as normal. Because leaders failed to resolve incoherence, described by Fullan (2000) as being necessary for schools to get their act together, the problems continued and good staff began to leave (Fink, 1997; Fullan, 2000; Rau, Baker & Ashby, 1999; Tippett, 2004). Similar employment issues are not uncommon in schools having difficulties, according to the educational advisors.

Staff longevity was another major issue that needed to be addressed. When there were a number of staff who not only had been in the school for a long time but also had not kept up-to-date professionally through study or effective professional development, they resisted new ideas or changes to existing practices and systems. Some long-serving staff grouped together to resist proposed developments and gathered other disgruntled staff around them to complain and to criticise school leaders. The resistance and negative behaviours were exacerbated when long-serving teachers applied for promotions, or outside positions, and were not appointed. Some became *bitter, negative, intransigent* and/or *resistant to changing almost anything*. The loss of self efficacy was accompanied by a loss of confidence and further unwillingness to try new or different things. There were long serving staff who, as active learners, were willing to trial new strategies and accepted the need to change. Some left, however, when change proposals were resisted or sabotaged by others. Hargreaves (2004) affirms that a challenge for school leaders is to ensure long

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

serving staff continue to feel valued and continue to be active learners rather than wishing things would “pass them by”. Whatever leadership training the study school leaders had, it did not equip them with adequate skills of preventing and resolving conflict, managing difficult people and behaviours, confronting issues and conducting challenging conversations. Their experiences indicate the need for initial training in those areas as well as ongoing support for the principal. My research demonstrates that a school’s culture and history are unique, which makes the theoretical knowledge difficult and stressful to apply, even for experienced leaders.

Some newly appointed study school principals entered the situation as the leader who had been appointed over a DP who was acting principal and who applied for the principalship but was not appointed. This is a difficult and complex situation that is not uncommon in schools, according to the educational advisors. The main difficulty occurs when the DP serves in the acting position because it implies that s/he is capable of being the school leader. The DP is thanked and affirmed by the BOT and staff for doing the job in the interim and then feels unappreciated and unvalued when s/he is not appointed. A solution that might go some way towards avoiding the mixed messages and feelings of rejection would be not to put a DP into the acting position if they intend to apply for the principalship. Since this scenario is not uncommon for schools in New Zealand, it could be advantageous for PPTA or NZEI and STA to cooperate in agreeing on ways to prevent these situations in which both the DP and the new principal have a troubled beginning to a critical relationship.

The study schools’ experiences indicate that leadership of a struggling or declining school requires an extra set of skills and dispositions that leaders of healthy schools are less likely to need. Change management skills, in particular, are essential for a leader in a declining school. How change is managed will be different in a struggling or declining school because of the urgency and because of the complexity of the issues being managed (Fullan, 1991). MacBeath argues that, “conflict, dilemma and ambiguity” are normal even in dynamic healthy schools (1999, p.9). In the fragile study schools, these situations were destructive. Educationalists agree that resistance is natural and predictable, if not inevitable, when any aspect of school culture is challenged (Evans, 1996; Fink & Stoll, 1998; Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves, 2004). While competing and conflicting interest groups are not uncommon in schools, Fink warns that, “Few leaders have been trained to handle the politics of conflict or unreasonable demands” (2000, p. 162). It is common to read about how important it is

to manage change well but we are reminded by Fullan and Miles that, “few people really know what that means. The phrase is used superficially, glibly, as if saying it over and over will lead to understanding and appropriate action” (1992, p. 745). Evans, writing on change management, advises that leaders need to learn how to achieve “second-order” change that will alter organisational assumptions, goals, structures, roles and norms (1996, p. 5). By the time decline began in the study schools, all of these aspects of school culture needed changing to some degree. Hargreaves (2003, p.155), referring to the stage when schools need intervention, suggests that schools that are failing or in trouble, “embark simultaneously on a short-term plan for immediate survival that is combined with a long-term strategy for more sustainable improvement”. He suggests that these two phases require different leadership style and skills. There is no specific evidence for this in the experiences of the study schools but neither is there evidence that counters it. There is evidence that the short-term appointments of change managers or a succession of leaders were unhelpful approaches because decisions, made by leaders who were not committed to making them work in the longer term, sometimes produced short-term “quick fix” strategies that were not sustained. Fink asserts that some degree of continuity is required for fragile schools to continue to confidently build on new initiatives (Fink, 2000).

Principals and senior leaders had very different personalities and approaches. Some study school principals were well-liked, though not necessarily respected for their strength of leadership. Nicolaidou and Ainscow found that, “no one leadership style fits best with the peculiarities of such schools” (2006, p. 23). Data in this study highlighted the fact that leadership style was not what mattered. Educational knowledge, leadership experience, across-the-board skills, and strength of character were the things that were lacking in both individuals and teams. It is possible, however, that some of the principals and senior leaders may have coped in schools that were not in decline. Addressing the wide-ranging problems in the declining schools required a level of strength and ability that was exceptional. Educational advisors described similar situations in which newly appointed principals inherited financial deficits, damning ERO reports, demoralised staff, unresolved personal grievance claims and incompetent leadership teams. Such situations arguably call for special support at the earliest possible stage.

Promoting effective governance

Another important factor that could help prevent decline is effective governance training. In 1989, newly elected boards became fully responsible for school self-management, including employing staff and student achievement. Most study school trustees had little experience in any governance roles and some felt inadequate in the areas of employment, finances, property, curriculum, and policy development. The research on schooling improvement has focused mostly on professional factors that influence school effectiveness and the leadership of the principal, in particular. Ranson, Farrell, Peim and Smith (2005) note that, “the literature has appeared reluctant to acknowledge the potential influence of actors other than professionals in improving the performance of schools. The role of parents is now recognised but the contribution of governing bodies continues to be uncertain” (p. 320). While there is research and literature on school governance, there is seldom a causal inference made between effective governance and school effectiveness (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Hawk, 1997; Ranson et al, 2005; Wylie, 2002). Tippett (2004) found that the board of the declining school she studied lacked financial commitment, expertise and general governance expertise. Ranson and colleagues maintain that there is general agreement that “governance matters” (2002, p. 322). The evidence from this study is that governance matters, in both positive and negative ways. The impact of board governance depends on board cohesion, how clearly trustees understand their role, how they relate with their principal, how well they reflect their community and how ethically trustees behave as individuals and as a group. Educational advisors described problems created when trustees *acted independently* of their BOT. Boyne and colleagues agree that poor governance does contribute to predisposing schools to decline (Boyne, Martin & Reid, 2004). This study demonstrates that poor governance can contribute to the escalation of decline.

Conflict outside and inside the study schools placed huge demands on trustees as they tried to mediate or take control of situations. Fink (1997, p. 37) observed similar situations in Canadian schools where, “local controversies that involved the school and a relatively small percentage of its parent population were ignited into a full-scale controversy by “zealots” on both sides”. In my research, there were several instances of factionalism. In some study schools, trustees were themselves in support of one faction and there were times the boards were divided. Both of these situations put pressure on trustees who realised, retrospectively, that they were inadequately trained and equipped for the governance role

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

which was made more difficult when the board was divided. Their training had been in large groups with other schools and too few of the trustees had attended. As a result, the board did not have a collective understanding of its role. Nor did trustees feel they could apply the theory to their own school's situation. The relationships between principals and trustees, particularly with the board chair, had been mostly friendly and supportive but largely unchallenging. There were examples of BOT chairs who were so supportive of the principal they became their closest ally and "gate kept" information from the rest of the trustees. On the occasions when staff attempted to "blow the whistle" on issues of concern, they felt unheard by trustees because no action resulted from the disclosure.

Study school trustees were unsure about where to turn for advice or support. Educational advisors indicated that trustees are probably unlikely to contact the MOE or ERO unless they can be confident of not getting bad publicity and not having control taken away from them. STA need wider and better communication of their ability to help schools. In particular, trustees need help in realising they employ the entire school staff, including the principal, and that they are responsible for the principal's performance. A 1999 survey of New Zealand school boards indicated that only two percent realised this was their responsibility (Wylie, 2002, p. 9). Some educational advisors felt that this is still an area of weakness in BOT performance.

There is the potential for the relationships with parents and community, and between the board, principal and staff, to be especially important when a school begins to decline (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 322). Wylie, in her research into New Zealand schools, described the constructive role boards can play in fostering community relationships when a school is having difficulties:

They were more to the fore in schools which had to confront crises of falling rolls and staff morale after poor and publicly reported ERO reviews. Board members, particularly chairs, were important links to the community in changing community perceptions of the school, as well as contributing behind the scenes to the knowledge and effort of school staff in analysing their situation, determining a path forward, and making changes. (2002, p. 10)

Poor governance contributed to study school decline and boards of trustees failed to take the necessary steps to halt decline once it became evident. Trustees were inadequately

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

trained and felt ill-equipped to challenge their principals' performance. A recent New Zealand report (Office of the Auditor-General, 2008) on the Ministry of Education's role in providing training and support for BOTs is critical of the lack of monitoring and evaluation of the services provided. It found that there is scope to significantly improve monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure the services "meet the needs of trustees, can be used to make appropriate amendments to training programmes, and contribute to improved governance of schools" (p.1). Middleton claims that trustee training is crucial and needs to happen, "not just from time to time, but on a continual basis" (2004, p. 16). Stoll and Fink (1996) argue that quality governance training is likely to benefit students, principals and staff. My research findings show that board training needs to take place in the context of the school and, ideally, with all the trustees working together to establish shared knowledge and understandings that they can relate to their own school.

Managing government policy implementation

My research data corroborates what other educationalists have said about the impact of external factors, including changes in government policy, on all schools (Fink, 1997; Hargreaves, 2004). Crespo and Hache identified the following examples:

The macro-social system constraint conditions, affecting all (school) districts whether they are subjected to decline or not, are the following: the existing social and political climate, a decreasing birth rate, new political and budgetary priorities decided by government, and the general economic context which is one of uncertainty. (1982, p. 82)

Policies that had detrimental effects on the study schools included demands associated with the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, de-zoning, refusal of the MOE to advise or support schools, funding formulae, the publication of ERO reports, trialling the bulk funding of teachers' salaries, and the nature of the intervention processes of the MOE during the early stages of the Schools Support Project (SSP). Ideological trends, resulting from international events, interact with local influences, such as market forces and school competition, to create severe pressure on some schools to retain their rolls and their reputations (Gorard & Fitz, 1998; Kim, 1988; Spreng, 2005). Many researchers agree that low decile schools, in particular, can be adversely affected by policy change (Bending, 1993;

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Datnow, 2005; Harris, 2003; Hawk & Hill, 1996; Lauder et al, 1999; Stoll & Harris, 2004; Thrupp, 1996).

An ongoing discussion on the positive and negative impact of Tomorrow's Schools policies came to a head with the publication of Fiske and Ladd's book, *When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale*. The conclusion of Fiske and Ladd (2000) was that these reforms had escalated problems for schools. Woodfield and Gunby (2003) disagreed with this conclusion. Instead, they argued that the main impact of the reforms was to make existing school problems more transparent. The data from my study demonstrate that both Woodfield and Gunby, and Fiske and Ladd, were correct. School decline and some of the associated and contributory problems schools experienced, after the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools, were established in the study schools before the new legislation. What the new policy regime did was place new pressures on these already fragile schools which exacerbated their existing problems. Policy areas that are crucial in preventing or contributing to school decline include school self-management, provision of school support and improvement interventions, policies that encourage school competition, equity of provision for schools serving different socio-economic communities, the process of funding professional development and funding policies based primarily on the size of the student roll. Stoll and Harris (2004) warn that, "it will inevitably be more difficult to create the optimum internal (school) conditions in the face of relentless, external change" (p. 13).

Competition between schools, which had always existed in New Zealand, affected the study schools more adversely following the introduction of the educational policy changes called Tomorrow's Schools. Fiske and Ladd (2000) describe how problems resulting from inter-school competition were exacerbated when the MOE, for a period of time, took a non-interventionist stand on individual school issues. Competition also led to what Thrupp (1999, p. 191) calls, "the politics of polarisation and blame". Instead of policy makers and the media being, "realistic about ways in which the nature of student intakes and related resource disparities and market positioning can create important constraints and possibilities", they criticised and blamed the schools that needed the most help. Being named as failures and feeling blamed were experiences all the study schools shared. The issue of naming, blaming and shaming schools when they are in difficulty is one on which writers comment, always with a message about the damage it does to people associated with the schools and to the schools as organisations (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Hawk & Hill, 1997; Myers & Goldstein, 1998; Stoll & Myers, 1998). Stoll and Myers point out that, "the

way language has been used by politicians and the media has often exacerbated and prolonged the problems of the schools in difficulty” (1998, p.4). Myers and Goldstein (1998, p. 185) identify three problems with attributing blame to schools that are in trouble. First, it may not be justified; second, whatever is going on inside the school is often compounded by circumstances beyond the control of the school; and, third, it does not help the situation improve. The research data presented in this thesis show that all three of the problems, identified by Myers and Goldstein, were manifest in the study schools. In my study, the perpetrators of the “naming”, “blaming” and “shaming” were reported to be personnel in neighbouring schools, ERO, MOE and the media. Some educational advisors contended that by placing the blame on the schools, the government and the MOE were, and still are, conveniently distancing themselves from the policies that have contributed to making schools vulnerable to decline.

The support that governments provide for schools serving low socio-economic communities deserves particular consideration. There is a direct relationship between socio-economic status (SES) of students and their achievement levels (Hawk & Hill, 1996; Lauder et al, 1999). There is also a direct relationship between the school decile, which reflects the socio-economic level of the community it serves and student achievement at that school. A report, commissioned by the MOE during the early stage of decline in one of the study schools, concluded firstly, “*There is a correlation between both decile and MPI (Maori and Pasifika) roll and the School Certificate⁷⁷ pass rate*” and secondly that, “*The difference in School Certificate pass rates between schools is ... heavily influenced by socio-economic factors*” (MOE report). Stoll and Harris (2004) maintain that, while there has been evidence of this reality for decades, the evidence is often ignored or overlooked by writers and researchers and has often been denied by educational decision makers and government policy makers. West-Burnham (2006) concurs:

School improvement as a model has conspicuously failed to address the link between social factors and educational success. There appears to be a direct correlation between the success of a school (and its students) and the three determinants of personal success – being wealthy or poor, growing up in an effective family, and living in a community with high social capital. (p. 22)

⁷⁷ School Certificate used to be the first of the National Qualifications for secondary students. They sat exams in their fifth form year (now called year 11).

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

While not all low decile schools are in decline or failing, (Hawk & Hill, 1996), the data presented in Chapter 5 shows that they are over-represented in school support and schooling improvement initiatives. Low decile schools have extra challenges that can add to the potential for them to be vulnerable (Clarke, 2005; Datnow, 2005; Fink, 1997; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Harris, 2003; Hawk & Hill, 1997; Murphy & Meyers, 2008; Snook, 2003; Thrupp, 1999). They are more vulnerable because they have less financial resources and fewer human resources from whom to seek advice and help. They are also the least able to challenge the government or to take measures to attract students (Pountney, 2000). Low decile schools face greater barriers to responsiveness, “through the cumulative impact of a range of factors internal and external to the school” (Woods & Levacic, 2002, p.245). Furthermore, the study by Woods and Levacic, in three English secondary schools, found that:

School improvement rates are affected less by social disadvantage *per se* than by local school hierarchies. Schools low down on the hierarchy, which are therefore characterised by socially disadvantaged students *relative* to other schools, have particular difficulties in improving academic results (p. 228).

Each of the three study schools was the lowest decile school relative to other secondary schools in its local area. Educational commentators, including New Zealand educationalists, concur that when schools compete for students, the lower decile schools will struggle (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Lauder et al, 1999; Pountney, 2000; Snook, 2003; Sullivan, 1994; Thrupp, 1999). Low decile schools, therefore, deserve particular consideration and support when significant policy change requires schools to make major adjustments or enter into new developments.

The policy of removing school zones had an instant and detrimental effect on each of the study schools because each was the lowest decile school in its local area. Some of the top achieving students immediately applied to join higher decile schools and were accepted. Some higher decile schools targeted study school students with special abilities and talents in sport or music. Research participants described how their school’s best student role models left. There is evidence, again from New Zealand research studies, that de-zoning does not provide most parents with a choice of school for their children (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Harker, 2000; Lauder et al, 1999). It is the schools, mostly the higher decile schools, which make the choice of students they want to enrol. This thesis provides evidence of the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

detrimental effect on fragile schools from other competing schools and from dezoning. There will always be schools which serve poorer communities and they will always suffer if school competition is fostered through dezoning. This does not mean that the current zoning is equitable or ideal. The data in my study, however, support the assertion by Woods and Levacic (2002) that getting rid of zoning prompts and escalates decline in some schools.

Policies effecting professional development opportunities for schools have the potential to exacerbate decline. The more at risk the study schools became, the more inward looking they became and the less able to access the professional development which could support change. Not accessing current professional development opportunities is, in itself, a risk predictor for a school. In New Zealand, development contracts are usually “contestable”. They are awarded on the basis of a written proposal with costings. Schools compete with other schools to “win” the development opportunity. If a school does not have the people with the time and skills to put together the proposal documents in the format and at the level of quality required to compete, it misses out on the opportunities to which other schools have access (Hawk & Hill, 1997, p. 7). The more the study schools declined, the more insular they became and the less equipped they were to provide effective professional development. The irony is that the more fragile and pressured a school becomes (and therefore, the more important it is that staff participate in quality professional development) the less likely it is that a school will compete successfully for contestable funding (Pountney, 2000).

The New Zealand policy of funding schools primarily on the basis of roll size makes them vulnerable to demographic and societal changes. The three study schools suffered from declining staff morale and found it increasingly difficult to cope with daily demands as student numbers dropped. Sullivan (1994) asserts that the smaller the school, the more vulnerable and the less it has the economies of scale to buffer market forces. As well as impacting on school finances, any drop in roll, regardless of the reason, has a directly negative impact on the quality and security of staffing. Sullivan explains:

From the teacher’s perspective, in a shrinking job market it is obviously safer to be perceived as a good teacher in a good school rather than a dedicated teacher in a school with a sinking roll. So accountability and recognition of good teaching is no guarantee of a good working environment in a market system. (p. 13)

Educationalists working in the area of school improvement agree that the local variability of schools is important if implementation of reform policies and strategies is to be effective. It is likely that policy cannot mandate what matters (McLaughlin, 1990) and that, “centrally developed reform policies and strategies will not lead to the desired educational change in *all* schools” (Luyten, Visscher & Witziers, 2005, p. 273). Nicolaidou (2005) says this particularly applies to schools in difficulty where the unique characteristics of each school need to be understood and accommodated.

Governments, through their policies, have the potential to facilitate or impair relationships and practice in schools (Snook, 2003, p. 183). As well as the detrimental impact of some government policies, the pace of policy change needs to be carefully planned by the government of the day. It is likely that special support may need to be planned in advance for schools known to be having difficulties. The more fragile a school, the less able it is to cope effectively with change, whatever form the change takes. McLaughlin (1990) warns that simply removing constraints and obstacles, however, does not by itself ensure more effective practice. Stoll and Harris (2004) explain that researchers, active in the area of schooling improvement, have found that schools are more able to improve themselves if external conditions are reasonably stable and the schools are not exposed to, “relentless external change” (p. 13). In New Zealand, and Fullan (2000, p. 3) claims internationally, “government policy has become increasingly demanding”. If, as seems likely, schools will be subjected to constant change as the world, society, families and technologies continue to change, major changes in education policy should be accompanied by a range of support strategies that are tailored to the needs of different types of schools. The evidence from this research leads to the same conclusion that Ainscow and colleagues reached: that any school that is at risk, or in decline, will not have the internal capacity to solve its own existing problems, let alone embrace any new requirements (Ainscow, West & Nicolaidou, 2005). Individualised support should be seen as an investment that may prevent the need to repair and fix problems later.

Coping with Decline and Intervention

The third question asks what can be learned from this study in relation to effective intervention. Study school participants and educational advisors concur that effective

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

interventions are necessary so that schools in decline can halt the decline and also repair and rebuild. If school personnel knew how to fix the problems they would have done so. Furthermore, as decline escalates, the likelihood of a school being able to fix itself becomes increasingly unlikely. The discussion in this chapter considers implications for school and agency personnel and for change facilitators. It provides a rationale for external intervention, outlines the dilemma of how to access help and discusses the implications for the MOE intervention process, ERO methodology, agency interactions and for independent review and support.

Why external intervention is required

The starting points for intervention are awareness and acceptance by school leaders of the need for change. The study schools, and the schools discussed by the educational advisors, had become insular, inward looking and had lost the ability to comprehend how a healthy school operates. A report on poorly performing English schools noted that “Schools with weak leadership teams generally fail to recognise their weaknesses” (NAO, 2006). The siege mentality adopted in the study schools is a phenomenon observed in the wider organisational world by Boyne and colleagues (Boyne, Martin & Reid, 2004). Sarason (1991, p. 125), an expert on organisational failure, argues that, “an outside agent for change is necessary – that is the change will not or cannot come from within” and that major changes usually necessitate outside advice, guidance, support and/or resourcing. The study schools’ experiences demonstrate that willingness and capacity of personnel and resources adequate to enable the necessary improvements are important, as are the skills and attributes of change facilitators. If school self-review systems are not adequate, each of the educational agencies that work with schools has opportunities to identify schools potentially at risk: ERO through its regular cycle of reviews and receiving of complaints/concerns; MOE through its Schools Support Services⁷⁸ (SSS) and its receiving of complaints/concerns; School Trustees Association through the information gained from its “Helpline” and from the work of field officers; and the teacher unions (PPTA and NZEI) from information gained by their field officers. As well as a proactive response from agencies, there are implications for facilitators, reviewers and developers.

⁷⁸ Government contracts provide funding for providers to support schools that ask for help, or are identified as needing help.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The study schools experienced a range of external interventions, none of which were effective enough to halt the decline during the period of the study. Educational advisors provided evidence of other schools which had had similar experiences with ineffective interventions. Interventions that are designed to stem decline and repair damaged schools come in many shapes and forms and, “are typically implemented as packages, not discrete actions” (Brady, 2003, p. 21). The international literature on school reform, and the research data from this study, suggest that few interventions are very successful or sustained (Datnow, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Brady (2003) estimates that, for schools in the United States of America, a fifty percent intervention success rate is high. The decline process diagram (Figure 14) shows three types of unsuccessful intervention processes experienced by one or more of the study schools: interventions that are insufficient, interventions that provide a short-term remission only and interventions that are temporary and not sustained. Some of these unsuccessful interventions went through a stage in which there appeared to be adoption and implementation of changes and new developments but the interventions lacked a final phase that Fullan (2000) maintains is important: that is, strong institutionalisation of the changes. Study school and MOE personnel assumed that a new principal and/or a new board would be sufficient to ensure that existing problems were remedied. While a change in leadership might be a key factor, Hargreaves reminds us that there is no guarantee that this will be the case (Hargreaves, 2003). This study demonstrates that interventions cannot, and should not, attempt to avoid what Mirel (1994) describes as the political dimension of school reform: local control, power plays, the role of teachers and teachers’ unions, and the hopes and fears of parents (1994, p. 515). Comprehensive and sustained interventions are needed, especially if the decline has been happening over a number of years (Fink, 2000; Fullan, 1991). Strong and sustained interventions, however, are difficult, stressful for all concerned and expensive (Brady, 2003; Fullan & Miles, 1992).

A key reason for the failure of interventions in the study schools was incorrect or inadequate diagnosis of the range of problems that needed to be addressed. The misdiagnosis led to solutions that did not work or could not be sustained. Chapters 5 and 6 provide examples of issues arising from interventions that had been based on an analysis of school needs that were not only wrongly diagnosed but also poorly instigated, inadequately enacted and/or were not sustained for long enough periods of time for positive development and change to be embedded. An example of inadequate diagnosis was the identification of the need for ICT development when a school had neither personnel with

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

adequate skills nor the funds to employ the necessary expertise. Fullan and Miles (1992, p. 745) sum up a recurring theme from the literature on school interventions by warning that, “it’s hard to get to a destination when your map doesn’t accurately represent the territory you have to traverse”. Moletsane (2002) advises:

To be successful, effective guidance, management and support for the intervention need to precede implementation. This requires careful analysis and integration of the interrelationship among the requirements of the innovation, the needs of the target context, as well as the implementation plans. (p.133)

An example of inadequate sustaining of required developments was the management of non-performing staff. All three study schools needed employment advice and professional support over extended periods of time to ensure poorly performing staff either improved sufficiently or were professionally managed out of their positions. McLaughlin argues that, “reform needs to be systematic and on-going; special projects frame the problems of reform artificially and superficially and are so limited in their ability to significantly change educational practices” (1990, p. 15). Educationalists involved in observing interventions describe many “mismatched solutions” (Cuban, 1990). Learning from the experiences of the study schools and the educational advisors, interventions need to seem relevant and achievable to the teachers involved. According to Datnow, intervention strategies need to, “match the realities of their experiences” (2002, p. 223). Datnow also echoes the experiences of the study schools in stressing that, “normative and political dimensions of change need to be addressed, not just the technical dimensions” (p. 233). Norms that had developed in the study schools, and the unacceptable behaviours of people, contributed to the decline escalation and were obstacles to reform.

There is general consensus in the school reform literature that interventions are more likely to be successful if they are designed well and are context specific, comprehensive and sustained (Chapman, 2005). The complexity of the study school situations meant there was no formula or approach that would work in all situations. Stoll and Fink (1996, p.98) claim, “it is only through consideration of its individual circumstances and context that any particular school might identify which norms have significance”. Joyce (1991) not only advises learning from approaches that are shown to be effective but also stresses the importance of being open minded about the approach, depending on the needs of the particular situation. Single strategy interventions are less likely to succeed than “mixing and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

matching to develop a comprehensive approach” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 321). Educational advisors said that facilitators are most effective when they put student needs first, can establish rapport with governors and leaders, have a wide experience with highly effective schools as well as dysfunctional schools, have specialised local knowledge and are skilled in the collection and interpretation of valid data. Facilitators need to be strong and keep up the pressure for change. Brooke-Smith (2003) said their most important attributes would include “adaptivity, sensitivity and intuition” (p. 9). Study school participants and educational advisors emphasised the importance of facilitators being able to establish *rapport, trust and respect*, as well as being *a highly skilled person who is able to rise above the cacophony, can think strategically and can deal with people in a professional and ethical manner*.

In considering the complex question of where to begin the process of reform, the study schools experienced a range of approaches that included a focus on the teacher, the classroom and the whole school. Some educationalists have expressed concerns as to whether the school is the appropriate unit of analysis, arguing that subject departments or individual classrooms should be the “unit of change” (Harris, 2001; Harris & Bennet, 2001; Sammons, Thomas & Mortimore, 1997). As the decline phase became established in the study schools, individual teachers, as well as departments, were adversely affected and changes were needed for the school as a whole. Even in the early stages, when it was possible that decline could have been prevented, many of the problems were school-wide rather than particular to teachers or departments. The analysis of the issues and the solutions needed to be addressed at a whole-school level.

Seeking help

Study school participants realised, on reflection, that they did not seek help early enough. School leaders had great difficulty recognising the need to ask for help, left it later than they should have or felt very anxious about discussing their concerns with anyone, even inside their school. Levine (1978) explains that, “organisational atrophy is a common phenomenon in all organisations but government organisations are particularly vulnerable because they usually lack market generated revenues to signal a malfunction and to pinpoint responsibility” (p.319). A number of participants alluded to the notion that it was someone else’s responsibility to take action. Upon reflection, some participants, during the

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

research interview, were still unclear about their own personal responsibility and about who should have taken responsibility to act.

When ineffective or destructive school leaders were considered to be a significant factor associated with the study school's difficulties, participants, who were leaders themselves, said it was very difficult for personnel in lower status positions to have the confidence to express their concerns or blow the whistle, even to other colleagues. On reflection, however, some participants reported that they wished that they, and others, had *been brave enough* to do more. Those who decided to ask for help were unsure where to go, did not follow-up on their first request and did not achieve effective responses. When study school participants were asked if they would act differently today, most seemed more eager to take action but were still ambivalent about what action they would take. Educational advisors also expressed degrees of ambivalence about appropriate actions. As well as the questions of "Who should seek help" and "From where?" there is the more complex question of, "What sort of help is needed?" Fullan (2000) says there is a tendency for school personnel to look at symptomatic solutions rather than fundamental causes. School personnel admitted wanting *the magic bullet, the simple answer and the non-existent simple answer*.

Because of the complexity of the problems, the help required to address them needed to be wide-ranging. While the study schools were receiving advice and support and trying to make the necessary changes, the most urgent and critical need was to maintain the student roll. This involved keeping the support of parents. Mirel explains that keeping parents on-side when a school is having difficulties can be challenging because reform, "confronts deeply held values and exposes some of the most fundamental passions surrounding parents' hopes and fears about their children" (1994, p. 518). There is research evidence, however, that not all parents will choose to remove their children from a declining school, even when they know it is in trouble because they want their children close to home in a school they already know (Bell, 2005, Schemo, 2002). The study schools were adversely affected by some parents removing their children. It is impossible to know whether the decline in student numbers would have escalated, to the same extent, had zoning not happened and had the MOE intervened in competitive decisions made by other schools.

To summarise, there is no simple conclusion or general guidelines to be given about "who should do what" regarding seeking help because each school's situation is complex and unique (NAO, 2006). It is clear that people inside a declining school are likely to need

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

someone from the outside to signal when action needs to be taken. They will also need advice and support in deciding how and where to begin in finding the most appropriate solutions.

MOE intervention

All of the study schools crucially needed MOE interventions to halt and reverse the decline. There are lessons from my study about intervention which are specifically relevant to the New Zealand context, even though there have been changes in the nature of MOE interventions since this research was conducted. There are also lessons about interventions that have relevance for other countries. Initially, when the study schools needed help, the MOE's policy of non-intervention allowed the decline to worsen. Brady (2003) notes that problems in schools were exacerbated during the era of Ministry non-intervention in the free market. Spreng (2005, p. 71) says the hands-off policy of the MOE towards failing schools was based on "erroneous assumptions". Although most study school personnel did not welcome state intervention, the forced interventions were important. Most study school personnel were unaware of the seriousness of their situation or in denial about it. Educational advisors said it was common for personnel in schools at risk or in decline to not acknowledge their vulnerability. Mintrop (2004) maintains that, even if school personnel accept they need help, they may not have the resources to purchase the help they need. Fink draws attention to a wider concern:

Regardless of whether a school is categorized as "failing" or "cruising", without significant interventions at key junctures I would suggest that most, if not all schools, will tend to deteriorate to the point where interventions may have to be dramatic. (1999, p. 134)

Initially, however, some MOE interventions placed severe pressure on the schools at a stage during which the schools were unable to manage the day-to-day demands, let alone handle extra obligations.

Key to successful intervention is that it begins as early as possible (NAO, 2006; OAG, 2008) and is based on a thorough and valid diagnosis of *all* the issues. Spreng (2005) also came to this conclusion in his thesis in which he compared the New Zealand experience to that of two other countries. Current ERO reviews might alert the school and the MOE to

the fact that there are problems that need to be addressed but these warnings need to be followed with more in depth analysis of the issues that does not become publicly accessible. The school needs to retain a sense of ownership of the reform process if it is to succeed in a timely and lasting way (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Wylie points out that New Zealand systems, “have a tension running through them which often opposes boards and the central agency (MOE), and pits one school against another. Support (is) on a largely ad hoc basis, leaving much up to individual schools and the people in them” (2002, p. 13). This was very much the experience of the study schools at the early stages of decline but with the MOE holding control over the resourcing of support. As Spreng (2005) noted, however, the MOE adjusted its responsibility to designing and coordinating responses to school failure rather than directly carrying out the process of reform.

The facilitator(s) of the intervention need to have appropriate skills and experience and need to be people who the school personnel respect, trust and with whom they want to work. According to Bennett (2001), mere compliance by school stakeholders will result in a temporary solution that will not be sustained. A key finding of my research is that, as far as possible, the control of monitoring activities should reside at the school level. Willms (1992), writing on how to monitor school performance, agrees and adds that the control should extend to decisions concerning the kind of data collected, who has access to the data, the types of analysis conducted, and the content and distribution of reports. At the same time, Fink (1999) warns there is a tension between not exerting enough pressure for change and applying too much pressure. Mintrop elaborates: “Pressure is a double edged-sword. It may challenge people to increase work effort, but also make them want to leave if they do not value the pressure as serving a worthy purpose” (2003, p. 27).

As soon as a commitment has been given, or an action plan has been developed, and there is an agreement about appropriate support, the MOE needs to deliver on its promises and provide the support or funds in a timely way. A school needs to be able to take action, commission reviews or development work, appoint people for key purposes, and inform its students, staff and parents. Murphy and Meyers (2008, p. 322) advise that, “Failing schools need ample fiscal resources to turn around” and note that, “there are cases where the additional financial resources have ended too soon for the schools to completely implement their interventions fully”. Fiske and Ladd (2000) said that some New Zealand schools were constrained in taking reform initiatives because of short-term funding

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

commitments. The study schools were three such schools and the constraints escalated their decline. Every delay meant a further escalation of the problems which became increasingly difficult to solve.

The process of school accountability to the MOE needs to be clear, realistic and practical. Using a medical analogy, the MOE evaluation and reporting process must not be so cumbersome that the cure becomes worse than the original condition. Fullan said such a problem is caused by external agencies focusing on “paper work, not people work” (1991, p. 79). The study schools experienced similar problems to other schools at that time, in coping with what were felt to be unreasonable timeframes and excessive MOE accountability requirements. Fiske and Ladd explain:

Funds were allocated for short periods, typically six months, and release of additional promised funds was made conditional on meeting certain milestones. In the event that schools failed to meet these milestones, they were obligated to return the funds with 11 percent interest. (Fiske & Ladd, 2000, p. 270)

As part of the accountability measures, there were times when the study schools were over-evaluated. The literature provides examples of other schools that suffered, “overlapping periods of trial by media, trial by ordeal and trial by inspection”, as noted by Fletcher, Caron and Williams (1985, p. 113). Time and physical and emotional energy are at a premium for senior leaders in a school that is in decline. Every extra demand takes away from their ability to be working professionally in their school at a time when their professional leadership is most needed. It is very important that evaluation requirements and reporting procedures are practical and reasonable. The over-burdening of school leaders and trustees, in the name of assisting them, is not unique to New Zealand, as Brook-Smith explains:

In the UK ... there has been a strong sense of excessive and suffocating interventions in schools from government This means that policymakers and researchers in the wider environment will need to understand and make allowances for the internal self-organising nature of individual schools and colleges This may involve a change of mindset by policy makers in which intentionalism, agency and a primary focus on ends ... give way to more non-linear approaches with

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

primary focus on means and relations and dynamic and creative process. (2003, p.108)

Educational advisors warned that the MOE *sometimes jumps to bad conclusions*. They stressed the importance of ensuring that *no assumptions should be made* about the reasons for, or the nature of the problems. The needs analysis should include an examination of the community as well as of the school. The experiences of the study schools show that the diagnosis of problems was sometimes poorly done. Educational advisors said, in their experience, the reason diagnosis of school needs is poorly done is because it is *dependent on the skills of the people involved*, and these skills are sometimes lacking. If interventions are to be effective, they must be planned on the basis of a full, *in depth* and thorough diagnosis of the problems and the needs.

Once a full and valid diagnosis of needs is translated into an action plan with appropriate support and resourcing, the intervention needs to empower the school and its personnel for the long term. Murphy and Meyers (2008) concluded that, “When teachers do not buy into the turn-around intervention(s), failing schools do not improve. Therefore, teachers should probably be seen as partners and facilitators in the turnaround process” (p. 322). Study school participants and educational advisors observed that if the MOE is perceived to control the process, then school participants are likely to feel disempowered. Fullan (2006) noted that problems of school disempowerment were created by agencies in other countries. Some study school interventions were not continued long enough for the changes to become embedded and for the schools to become strong enough to sustain them. Educational advisors commented that the MOE *has a habit of withdrawing too quickly*. The tendency to withdraw support before change is embedded and established is not unique to New Zealand (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Judd (2000, p. 5), talking about educational reform in Britain, said that, “the problem with government policy is short-termism”.

The main period of MOE intervention in the study schools was during the era when the government and the MOE were developing new ways to interact with schools in difficulties. Whether or not the problems which the schools experienced with MOE processes were teething problems or whether such tensions are an inevitable outcome of such interactions is debatable. Taking the latter position, Fullan notes that:

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The difficulties in the relationship between external and internal groups are central to the problem and process of meaning. Not only is meaning hard to come by when two different worlds have limited interaction, but misinterpretation, attribution of motives, feelings of being misunderstood, and disillusionment on both sides are almost guaranteed. (1991, p. 80)

In addition to the wide range of unresolved problems in the declining study schools, further problems occurred because of the way the MOE managed the interventions. As a result, existing burdens were exacerbated and the decline was prolonged.

ERO reviews and resultant publicity

External reviews or evaluations are a double edged sword as the experiences of the study schools⁷⁹, and the literature, have demonstrated (NAO, 2006, p. 12). On the one hand, the first critical ERO review reports were a catalyst for much needed change in the study schools. Nicolaidou and Ainscow (2005, p.237) describe how government prescribed reviews can have positive outcomes because they act as a mirror for school personnel who are in, “a culture of denial” and who “refuse to acknowledge the reality of their situation”. On the other hand, the damage caused to staff, student, and community morale by the review process and the publication of the reports, in the words of study school leaders, *paralysed* and *immobilised* the study schools. Comments made during my interviews with study school participants demonstrated the depth of the pain, stress and guilt they experienced as a result of feeling responsible for the failure of their schools. An English report on the impact of OFSTED inspections described staff and governors suffering “shock, depression, disillusionment ... stress and declining morale” after being identified as requiring special measures (NAO, 2006, p.39). Weiner (2001, p.8) said that, “the designation of failure had disastrous implications which extended to the students of the school”. Providing examples of teacher experiences, Weiner concluded that they express, “despair at their powerlessness over what the inspection process has done and is doing to their institutions, their colleagues, their students and themselves” (p. 7). Personal feelings and self-efficacy were even further damaged when study school personnel felt that they, and their school, were being blamed for the problems, responses noted also by Harris &

⁷⁹ The focus and process of ERO reviews has changed over the years since its genesis, and even during the study school decline periods.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Bennett (2001). Myers and Goldstein described being labeled as failing as “dramatic and even catastrophic”, likening the process to going through a bereavement (1998, p. 176).

There are aspects of the external review process that adversely affected the study schools and contributed to the escalation of the decline. Undoubtedly, the main problem was the public availability of the ERO reports with the resultant negative media publicity and loss of confidence by the parent community. Fiske & Ladd (2000) and Spreng (2005) describe damage to the reputations of some New Zealand schools because of ERO reports which, in turn, resulted in a fall in the school role and an escalation of decline for some schools. Mintrop (2003, p. 21) points out that accountability systems in some American states, “operate on the assumption of organizational stability” and that it is solely this assumption that, “makes it legitimate to publicly expose putative deficiencies of whole schools”. A similar situation exists for English schools where “not only do many schools have to deal with the newly revealed problems (and the blow to their confidence), but they must also do so in the public eye because the inspection results are published” (NAO, 2006, p. 38). Because the media had direct and, for most of the study school decline years, immediate access to ERO reports, the words used in the reports were very important in reflecting and forming the reputations of schools. Whatever the intention of the ERO report writers, school personnel felt *named*, *blamed* and *shamed* by the reports that resulted in damaged reputations and were followed by further decline.

The credibility and skills of some reviewers were of concern for study school personnel. There were times, especially in the early days of ERO, when reviewers had little or no experience with secondary teaching, curriculum or school organisation⁸⁰. It was hard to expect the study school teachers to take seriously some of the verbal feedback given by reviewers who did not understand the secondary school systems, especially student assessment. Undoubtedly, having the task of reviewing schools that were in decline must have placed great demands on inexperienced ERO reviewers. The study schools were experiencing problems with their finances, personnel management, review activities, student achievement, relationships, leadership, communication, change management, curriculum design, pedagogy, data analysis, systems and administration. Each of these areas required reviewers with the relevant experience, knowledge and skills to evaluate and

⁸⁰ This situation was a result of the early practice of setting up ERO teams comprising reviewers with a range of backgrounds from early childhood centers to secondary schools. Today teams are more carefully selected to ensure most reviewers have experience of the level of school they are reviewing.

interpret. Fragile, struggling or failing schools require a review team with collective wide-ranging and current experience, as well as high level evaluation and personal skills. Further, the team needs appropriate time to collect enough data and the flexibility to do it in ways that fit the identified issues. It could be argued that, as soon as a school has been identified as having difficulties, a team of specialist reviewers should be used and the review process should be tailored to each school's situation.

Most ERO reviews take place in a regular cycle of approximately three years. However, once the study schools had been identified as being at risk or in difficulties, ERO revisited and re-reviewed after shorter timeframes. These follow-up reviews were dreaded by the schools and raised complex issues around the balance between the responsibility of ERO to monitor and keep the public informed, and the need for the schools to have reasonable time and support to improve before being publicly criticised again. Of particular concern were the six-monthly review reports that repeated the initially identified problems rather than reporting on the progress, or lack of it, in the time since the initial review. Associated problems occurred when there was an expectation that a school could demonstrate improvements in student achievement over six months or a year. There is general consensus in the literature and by the educational advisors that secondary schools require several years to effect significant change and probably longer to demonstrate measurable increases in student achievement (Fullan, 2000; McCauley & Roddick, 2001).

Because of the potential for the publication of ERO reports to contribute to, and escalate, school decline, it can be argued that the approach to follow-up reviews needs to be carefully managed⁸¹. Changes could include: follow-up reviews being done at more reasonable intervals; progress, or the lack of it, being the only focus for reporting; reports being made public only if the school is not making reasonable progress; and the review being conducted by a team of experienced reviewers with special expertise in evaluating and interpreting the areas identified for improvement.

ERO also needs to be able to evaluate the timeliness, appropriateness and effectiveness of the support being provided for the school. There were times that a lack of MOE support, or unreasonably burdensome accountability requirements, added to existing school problems. If ERO is to operate as an effective independent review agency for schools

⁸¹ It is acknowledged that ERO has reviewed and adapted its processes many times over the study school decline years and since.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

having difficulties, it needs to be able to include the evaluation of interventions as part of its assessment. Accepting that ERO have an important role in the identification and oversight of schools at risk or in difficulties, it would be heartening if once problems have been identified, there could be a course of action that gave schools the opportunity to make progress without being further damaged by the process itself or the resulting publicity. In the study schools, ERO reports were a mixture of important insights and missed opportunities. The important potential of ERO as a catalyst for change needs to be balanced against the damage that publication of review reports did to the already declining schools' reputations and to the morale of staff, students, trustees and parents.

Agency interactions

Some of the problems that the study schools experienced during the decline phase required the involvement of more than one of the educational agencies. Employment issues, for instance, usually involve PPTA and STA. Governance problems might involve MOE and STA. Interventions usually involve MOE and, sometimes, ERO and NZQA. Schools that are in decline have difficulty coping with competing forces and also with the number of agency interactions. While each of these agencies has its own defined role and its independence to preserve, declining schools would benefit if the agencies communicated and collaborated, or at least agreed on what improvement each requires and what support each would provide. A coordinated effort might better serve the interests of students.

Teacher unions have a crucial role to play in advocating for natural justice during the management of employment issues. The experience of study school personnel in interactions with PPTA field officers was that there were often times when the interests of students were put at risk because of PPTA's protection of poorly performing teachers. Educational advisors experienced similar situations with primary school union (NZEI) advocates. Peltzman (1993) noted that, "union concerns and education concerns aren't always compatible" because, "union-style job security is not compatible with flexibility in replacing mediocre or poor teachers" (p. 45). Tippett (2004, p. 82) identified the same issues in her American research saying, "Mediocrity, staff competence, and the inability to terminate staff were issues that evoked much consternation among the participants". There is no evidence, in my study, of PPTA field officers or school branch groups identifying students' needs as a priority; and some examples when this appeared not to be the case.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

PPTA field officers also played pivotal roles in advising study school branch groups that were *captured* by a small group of disaffected teachers and no longer spoke for, or represented, the majority of the school members. Study school leaders said there were times that union field officers listened only to the voices of the minority of negative people and gave advice that was not based on a big-picture understanding of what was happening in the school. This contributed to the deterioration of relationships and to the escalation of the decline.

On the other side of the adversarial divide, STA provided advice to principals and boards when action was taken regarding teacher performance or behaviour. Principals in the study schools were heavily reliant on this advice because the schools could not afford to pay for legal advice. When STA field officers were not determined enough to stand up to the strong stance taken by PPTA, poorly performing teachers were allowed to continue their employment and to damage the reputation of the school, as well as not meet student needs.

The adversarial system of dealing with employment issues was stressful and difficult for most study school adults who were involved with it. This study is not able to provide solutions but does highlight the problem of student educational opportunities being adversely affected because of the inability of agency personnel to negotiate outcomes which made students' needs a priority.

Independent review and support

Over the extended decline periods in the three study schools, there were a number of independent reviews by different consultants. They included leadership reviews, principal appraisals, department reviews, financial reviews, and whole-school reviews. Because the resulting reports were confidential to the school, and because the school personnel and/or trustees had initiated the review and selected the reviewer, the study school participants said they accepted the recommendations and were committed to the process. School ownership of the change process was achieved with the help of some independent facilitators who worked in partnership with the school to effect positive change. Learmonth and Lowers (1998), writing about the role of the independent consultant, said that, "the consultant may also be able to find common ground for those who have positioned themselves apart, and in so doing broaden the sense of common purpose and

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

cooperation” (p. 143). Not all the reviews were well executed, however, and consequently some did not provide valid or adequate guidelines for reform.

Some of the study school reviews were paid for by a school, from its own funding, but most were provided by MOE funded support because all three schools became increasingly at risk financially. Frustrations between the schools and the MOE surfaced in multiple ways. The problems involved the process of MOE funding for reviews as well as the level of financial support and MOE control over who was selected to carry out the reviews. The process of accountability to the MOE, by the schools and the reviewers, became another source of extreme frustration. The schools needed review data urgently, wanted it to remain confidential from the public and wanted to be allowed to employ a reviewer in whom they had confidence. School personnel often found themselves in conflict with MOE personnel over these needs because the MOE had control over the release of the funds necessary to pay for the reviews.

In most cases, when school personnel had confidence in the reviewer, the review recommendations were accepted and actioned to the extent that the school was able, given restricted finances and limited leadership capacity. Examples of useful reviews included a curriculum review, a review of departmental resourcing, a leadership review and an evaluation of new initiatives. As well as being able to build rapport and trust with school personnel, reviewers needed high level skills in data analysis. The study schools sometimes had data available but needed help in knowing how to use it. Learmonth and Lowers (1998) identify the inability to use existing data as a situation common to many schools. When the reviewer was imposed by the MOE and was not considered credible by school personnel, or if the area of review was not one selected by the school, the review recommendations were seldom taken seriously. Examples of reviews that did not result in school ownership or effective action included a review of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), an analysis of school needs conducted by an accountant and a leadership review conducted by a retired principal.

Study school participants and educational advisors expressed the opinion that an outsider can have a positive impact by helping an inward looking school to reconnect with the education world. Because the outsider is perceived as independent of school politics, while also being perceived as a critical friend in partnership with a school, they may help school personnel become more reflective and receptive to making necessary changes. Research

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

participants responded to a section of the propositions which outlined the attributes needed by the independent facilitator/reviewer. Important traits included being credible in the education community, being highly skilled in the areas they are working, having wide experience with other schools (healthy and declining), being able to build rapport and trust with school leaders and trustees, being strong and determined to make changes in the interests of students, being empowering of others rather than being in charge and being open-minded about possible strategies. Consultants and facilitators had the opportunity to make a positive difference through their work in the schools. They were perceived as being able to remain independent from the external agencies that were each seen to have their own agendas that, at times, were perceived to be contrary to school needs. Independent consultants provided feedback for the schools in a form that remained confidential, at least from other schools and the public. This allowed the study school personnel to feel less defensive and be more open to accepting critical feedback.

School Closure

Closure was an option that the MOE considered for all three study schools. Bending's research (1993) into school closure found that the only direct predictors of closure were a demographic decline in the local area and the age of the school buildings. There is international evidence, as well as that provided by the study schools, that governments and ministries are reluctant to close schools because of non-performance (Barber, 1998; Brady, 2003; Meyer & Zucker, 1989). This reluctance stems from schools having the function of educating students, and serving as a focal point for community life (Witten, Kearns, Lewis, Coster & McCreanor, 2003). Witten and colleagues claim that even city schools become a centre of identity for their community and provide a meeting place for parents, residents, trustees, students and staff (Witten, McCreanor, Kearns & Ramasubramanian, 2001). The study schools were important places for community activities, as well as centres of education. Arguably even more unacceptable than school closure, however, is the situation where, "students get trapped indefinitely in low-performing schools (Boser, 2001). Educational advisors confirmed Meyer and Zucker's claim that, "high persistence and low performance" is possible and that many organisations, including schools, exist in a state of permanent failure (Meyer & Zucker, 1989, p. 23).

Discussion Summary

School decline compromises the educational opportunities of students, the careers of teachers and school leaders, disturbs communities and costs governments millions of dollars (NAO, 2006). School closure is expensive and rarely a preferred option (NAO, 2006). These are compelling arguments for preventing school decline. This thesis, through seeking to understand the early indicators of decline and how decline began in the study schools, has produced a set of potential predictors of decline. These could be used by school personnel, during school self-review, to pro-actively prevent decline beginning. They could be used by educational agencies to guide training programmes and to diagnose problems in schools having difficulties. Encouraging ethical and professional behaviour, building leadership capacity, effective governance and teacher training could strengthen school resilience to manage the external and internal pressures that occur for all schools. Careful management of government education policy implementation needs to include support for vulnerable schools, including schools that serve low socio-economic communities.

Once decline begins, it escalates and becomes increasingly complex and severe. If school personnel identify concerns about their school and are willing to take action, any support they need at that early stage could be a prudent use of resources. Unfortunately, because most school leaders of declining schools are unaware or in denial about the seriousness of their problems, it is likely that external intervention will be necessary. The key to effective intervention is a thorough analysis of the problems, followed by prompt, appropriate and sustained support. The less negative publicity a school receives, the more chance it has to avoid the escalation of the decline before it has the opportunity to demonstrate improvement.

Educationalists have identified a key reason that school decline is not halted earlier is that different stakeholders in the school, and educational agencies, often hold widely varying views on the reasons and the solutions for the decline (Fletcher, Caron & Williams, 1985; Learmonth & Lowers, 1998). These widely varying views provide a clue that solutions are likely to be complex. Because closure is unlikely and because intervention and reform are so complex, difficult, stressful, and expensive, a strong rationale for prevention of school decline can be made.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This final chapter outlines the contributions of the thesis and the implications from the study for the educational community. The aim of the thesis was to develop a theory that could explain school decline. I return to the aim and objectives, using these as a framework to reflect on the main contributions of the thesis. Subsequent sections include a summary of the theory with respect to understanding school decline, acknowledging the limitations of the research and discussing possibilities for future research into school decline. Lastly, school personnel are cautioned against assuming that their school could not possibly become “at risk” or decline. It is imperative that they understand the strong rationale for addressing issues and problems early and effectively.

The Aims, Objectives and Contributions of the Thesis

The aim of the thesis was to develop a middle range theory that could provide insights into school decline. The methodology of grounded theory enabled analysis of data collected from participants who were in the study schools during a period of serious decline. Analysis of these grounded data led to a clear understanding of the decline experiences of three secondary schools. The theory began to emerge as data were interpreted and were used to develop a set of propositions. The propositions were sent to research participants to validate the importance and implications of the theoretical concepts that appeared to be emerging. A sample of educational advisors, who work with schools at risk and in decline, contributed data by responding to the same set of propositions. Their responses provided insights into other schools that have recently declined, or are currently at risk of decline. The theory of school decline that evolved is the main contribution to knowledge made in this thesis. Of course such a theory requires further testing and, perhaps, modification.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Within the broad aim of the thesis, there were four objectives. The first was to understand why some schools become predisposed to experiencing problems. Many of the reasons identified are influences from outside of the school which all schools experience. How each school responds to the complex and interrelated external pressures and internal issues determines whether or not the school becomes pre-disposed toward decline. This contribution to theory development provides a means of assessing the potential for a school to begin to decline through identifying predictors of decline. Two contributions of this thesis are providing information on the complex mix of factors that are potential risks and heightening awareness of the importance of prevention or early intervention.

The second objective was to gain a clear understanding of how a process of decline begins. Two different possible triggers of a decline exist. The first is when an already vulnerable school experiences a crisis of some kind and is not pro-active or resilient enough to avert or resolve the problem(s). The second reason a decline begins is the presence of so many unresolved problems in a school that they reach a critical mass and outweigh the school's resources and ability to function effectively. The value of knowledge about how the decline process begins lies in its potential to inform people, inside and outside a school, about the impact of unresolved problems. This knowledge enables them to use the information to minimise or prevent the negative influences before they reach a critical mass so that a school remains resilient enough to cope with a crisis if it occurs.

The third objective was to study the progression of decline by examining several phases in the process. First, the factors that had the potential to slow or halt decline were investigated. Knowledge about how the positive and negative forces competed, and how schools and agencies responded to the situations, provided insights into why some interventions did not halt decline. These insights are important because there is a danger that, unless an intervention is effective, negative forces in the school escalate decline to the extent that it may become self-perpetuating. The more advanced the decline, the harder and more expensive it is to halt.

To understand why decline escalates to the stage of becoming self-perpetuating and very difficult to stop is the last objective. A major contribution of the thesis is to raise awareness of the seriousness of not intervening effectively and of the powerlessness of people to conquer the negative forces once they interact, creating new problems.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

The proposed theory can be summarised as follows:

School decline begins when a school's culture and systems have become weakened over a period of time through an erosion of professional and ethical standards and practices and through an accumulation of unresolved problems. All schools are exposed to a wide range of external and internal influences that require constructive and adaptive responses. Lower decile schools are more vulnerable to external pressures because they have less competitive advantage and have fewer resources on which to draw when they need support. The catalyst for the decline phase to begin may be a crisis event that places an already vulnerable school under extreme pressure or it may be the culmination of a critical mass of unresolved problems. The "at risk" school moves into the first phase of decline, during which many staff and trustees, and most leaders, are insufficiently aware or accepting of the seriousness of the situation. While often efforts are made to improve some aspects of the school, the lack of effective action or intervention allows the problems to increase and the decline to escalate. Schools that decline lose the resilience to deal with normal pressures. They have some school leaders and governors who do not have the leadership ability to maintain standards or deal with the serious level of presenting issues. Positive actions and attempts at school development are outweighed by negative decisions, actions and influences. When a school has been identified as needing help to the point of requiring external intervention, resulting negative publicity exacerbates the existing problems and begins to create new problems. The decline escalates to the point that it becomes self-perpetuating, unless effective and sustained intervention is available. The school is likely to continue to decline until an appropriately designed and sufficiently wide-ranging intervention is sustained for long enough to address the underlying causes of most of the presenting problems.

Implications for Schools, Agencies and Policy Makers

I am cognisant of my obligation as a user of grounded theory to act on the findings. Glaser was clear about the pragmatic nature of grounded theory and his expectations of the researcher:

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

Grounded theory has a strong productive emphasis. It assumes to make the enterprise worthwhile, that the analyst will produce a piece for others in the world at large whether by talk, paper or monograph. It assumes a further contribution to the field. (1978, p. 7)

There are opportunities for me, for others involved in education, and for schools to use these thesis findings, as well as to develop them further and so further test the theory.

Intervention and reform are often so complex, difficult, stressful and expensive that there are compelling reasons for great emphasis to be placed on the prevention of school decline. There are implications for the implementation of government policy. There are implications for school stakeholders and for leaders, in particular. A positive school culture, effective systems and processes, constructive relationships with neighbouring schools, ongoing self review, use of effective outside providers for professional development, wise appointments and rigorous appraisals will support a school to be an effective organisation so that it adapts to external influences and manages change well. An ethical and professional approach, by school personnel, to making their decisions, responses and interactions with others will contribute to a resilient school. Effective communication and an active and constructive approach to problem solving will further enhance school effectiveness.

There are implications for government agencies involved in working with schools. A key finding is that successful interventions are difficult. There are no “quick fixes” for declining schools. Nor is there a “formula” for interventions, because of the complexity and uniqueness of each school’s situation. Interventions need to be designed very carefully with the initial comprehensive diagnosis of the issues being of critical importance. The complexity of the problems, however, must not be allowed to delay intervention because a school in difficulty needs help urgently in order to prevent decline escalating and becoming even more difficult to halt. It is critical that interventions begin promptly, are founded on comprehensive data collection and wise interpretation, are flexible enough to adapt to each different and changing situation, and are sustained until the school is strong in almost all areas of its functioning. Since the publication of critical ERO reports was closely associated with an escalation in study school decline, government needs to consider whether the benefits of the reports being made public, after a school has been identified as being at risk, outweigh the detrimental effects on schools in difficulty.

Research Limitations

Acknowledging limitations of a research study serves two important functions. First, it helps the reader evaluate the validity and importance of the research findings and the conclusions that the researcher draws. Second, any future researcher working in related fields may be able to address the limitations as their research design is developed.

The first limitation of my research is that the study schools were selected because their decline was severe. This decision resulted in the study of extended periods of decline. It is not appropriate to assume that the experiences of the study schools are the same for schools in which the decline is either less severe or of a shorter duration. Rather than generalise from the experiences of the study schools, readers should reflect on the thesis predictors and process in relation to the unique circumstances of their own school.

A second limitation, related to the data collected about the study schools, was its retrospective nature. Not being in the schools for the purpose of researching the decline process placed a heavy reliance on the accuracy and integrity of the data provided by participants and the interpretation of data from documents. Disadvantages could include limitations to accuracy due to memory, especially for some of the details that might have been important, and the propensity of some people to “rewrite history” for a range of personal reasons.

A third limitation lay in my choice of, and access to, interview participants. Some significant study school personnel were not interviewed. Some have since died and a few were unable to be contacted. In particular, the ex-principals were not interviewed and, while there were good reasons for this decision, it does mean that one key viewpoint is missing in each school. With respect to ERO, MOE, PPTA and STA, I relied on documents for evidence without going to agency personnel for their personal views. Neither were school students included in the sample of participants nor parents beside some trustees.

The fourth limitation was my role as the researcher of a topic about which I feel passionate. There is always the problem that one’s views, philosophy and experiences are the lenses through which data are interpreted. My supervisors made me aware that, in my early drafts of the findings, I identified so closely with the issues described by the

participants that I sometimes sounded like an advocate for the study schools. As a result I worked to distance myself and be more objective.

Finally, the inability to gain full historical documentation was a limitation which resulted from ERO's policy of destroying school files after six years, the deletion of MOE files and the loss of historic documents by the study schools.

Areas for Future Research

Having selected school decline as the focus for investigation, an area that has been little researched, there was a strong likelihood that this thesis would raise as many questions as it answered. There is the potential for important research to be carried out in almost every issue and area identified in this thesis.

First, there is a need for further research into how to prevent school decline and into the reasons that school decline begins. Further research on the first stages of decline, namely the predisposing influences and the beginning of the decline, could yield some answers on how to prevent the start of decline.

A second potential research topic is to attempt to prioritise the contributing decline factors. The meso and micro influences are many and complex. They each contributed in different ways to the decline of the study school. If research could identify which factors had the most severe impact, or which were the early influences, the knowledge would assist with prevention of decline, and assist with effective early intervention.

A third research area to explore is how to prevent or stop unprofessional and unethical behaviour of school staff and trustees. Such behaviour had a negative influence on the functioning of the study schools, as well as a flow-on effect to the quality of teaching and learning. At a more fundamental level, there is an opportunity to discover how to teach staff to behave in ethical ways as professional persons. This could include research into the school's role in teaching ethics to students; into the promotion of professional codes of ethics or conduct in teacher education programmes; into the promotion of ethics in school leadership and trustee training programmes and into evaluating how effective schools

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

currently encourage ethical and professional behaviour and what strategies are used to stop unprofessional behaviours when they occur.

A fourth area to research is how to efficiently and comprehensively diagnose the issues and problems in a school that has been identified as struggling, at risk, or in decline. One possible reason that the failure rate of interventions in declining schools is high could be that the intervention strategies have been based mainly on trying to transfer what is known about effective schools into strategies to “fix” struggling schools. There is a need for research to explore ways to design effective interventions in declining schools, as distinct from identifying characteristics of a “healthy” school. At the outset of any formal school intervention, the list of potential predictors in Chapter 7 could be used as part of a formal risk analysis. The research could also involve a study of the “fit” between the diagnosed issues and the action plan or actions that are put in place to remedy the problems. A question that my research could not answer is whether or not the decline could have been halted earlier, and with less pain, if the planning of the intervention strategies had been designed around the complexity and uniqueness of each situation and if interventions had been more prompt and effective. Longitudinal research would enable evaluation of the accuracy and importance of the identified issues, as well as evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies employed to prevent or halt decline.

Finally, the theory that has been developed through this study has derived from the experiences of three secondary schools and from the experiences of fourteen consultants working in many schools at risk and in decline. For any theory to stand up as a useful theory, it needs to have strong predictive power, be relevant to the people concerned, be readily modifiable and have the potential to be validated through its practical application (Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theory of school decline proposed in this thesis has yet to be tested. Lee and Baskerville explain that, “whether research is conducted quantitatively or qualitatively, there is only one scientifically acceptable way to establish a theory’s generalizability to a new setting: It is for the theory to survive an empirical test in that setting” (2003, p. 241). The sensitivity of the topic makes such testing difficult to achieve at pragmatic and acceptable moral levels. Kim (1988) explains that western culture values size and growth, viewing “decline and stagnation as a disgrace” (p. 3). The main difficulty for future researchers is likely to be gaining access to a school in the early decline phases and/or during a significant and extended period of decline. One way this theory could be tested in real school situations would be for researchers to work alongside

facilitators during MOE interventions in order that issues and problems are prevented or addressed and resolved at the earliest possible stage. It is important that the difficulties in gaining access not be allowed to deter researchers from seeking such opportunities.

Final Thoughts

Ministry of Education (2001) data on school interventions and examples provided by the educational advisors, evidence the fact that there are schools in New Zealand, from all sectors, locations, and deciles that are currently at risk or already in decline. Most of these schools now find themselves in a situation they had neither expected nor predicted a few years ago when they appeared to be strong and effective organisations.

Because this thesis is about decline, it presents a rather negative chronicle of predictions and warnings about what might happen to a school if presenting problems are ignored. It would be easy for school personnel to think these warnings could never be relevant for their school. The theory of school decline, developed in this thesis, provides insights into practices that could assist in preventing the potential for decline. My research proposal presented a compelling rationale for a pro-active approach to problem-solving and for reviewing the effectiveness of a school:

The children in the declining schools suffer significantly and the quality of their educational opportunities is compromised during this time of compulsory education. Each child gets only one such educational opportunity, is powerless to influence the process and should be entitled to rely on adults to ensure their school is functioning as an effective learning organisation.

The insights gained from this research encourage me to find ways to test the theory in my own work partnerships with schools. Further, I look forward to learning how others, who are interested in quality educational experiences, use this theory.

Appendix A Glossary

AIMHI	Achievement in Multicultural High Schools. This was a schooling improvement initiative set up by the MOE's Schooling Support Project in 1995. It initially involved eight decile 1 secondary schools (and later a ninth school joined) that had very high numbers of Pasifika students. Over a number of years, the schools worked together as a cluster, and in partnership with the MOE to improve student achievement.
BOT or Board	Board of Trustees. A Board of Trustees is the governing body of a school in New Zealand. It is legally a Body Corporate and has the final authority and responsibility for its school's performance.
CAPNA	Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis. The process secondary schools are required to use to identify which teachers will be redeployed when the school roll drops to the point that there has to be a reduction of teaching staff.
Decile	New Zealand schools are given a decile status based on a set of criteria and calculated using Census information. They broadly correlate to socio-economic status. Decile 1 schools are the 10 per cent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 10 schools have the lowest proportion of these students.
DoE	Department of Education. The government department responsible for schools prior to Tomorrow's Schools.
DP	Deputy Principal. A commonly used title for describing the person second in charge after the Principal, but sometimes used for any member of the senior leadership team.

The Education Standards Act (2001) This Act, along with many other changes for schools, brought more intervention options for the Ministry of Education to select from when working with schools identified as having difficulties.

ERO **Education Review Office.** The New Zealand organisation responsible for the independent reviewing of schools and other educational providers. The Office reports directly to the Minister of Education.

LSM **Limited Statutory Manager.** As one of the statutory interventions the Minister of Education can require of a school, an LMS can be appointed to take governance responsibility for specified aspects of school organisation. Common roles include responsibility for school finances and/or personnel management.

MOE **Ministry of Education.** The New Zealand organisation responsible for the compulsory education sector. It reports directly to the Minister of Education.

MUHEC **Massey University Human Ethics Committee.** Massey University has three Ethics Committees. They have the responsibility for implementing university policies and procedures relating to research, teaching and evaluation activities which involve human participants.

NAGs **National Administration Guidelines.** These guidelines are part of the National Education Guidelines and comprise a statement of desirable principles of conduct for the administration of schools.

NCEA **National Certificate of Educational Achievement.** The main national certificate for secondary school qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. There are three levels of achievement for the certificate. Students can achieve credits through internal and external assessments that go towards this National Certificate.

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

NEGs	National Education Goals. These are the education goals for the education system of New Zealand and are part of the National Education Guidelines.
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research. This is an independent educational organisation with an international reputation for quality research and research based resources.
NZTC	New Zealand Teachers Council. This is the professional and regulatory body for teachers in educational institutions in New Zealand.
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority. This organisation coordinates New Zealand qualifications for secondary schools and in post-school education and training.
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers' Association. The union for secondary teachers.
SEMO	Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara. This was a cluster initiative set up by the MOE's Schooling Support Project in 1997. It involved low decile primary schools with high numbers of Pasifika and Maori students.
SMAD	Schools Making a Difference. The first school cluster initiative set up by the MOE's Schooling Improvement initiative. It involved seven secondary schools in Christchurch.
SIS	Schooling Improvement Strategy. A MOE strategy set up in 1996 to identify clusters of "at risk" schools and implement strategies to prevent further decline.
SLT or SMT	Senior (Leadership/Management) Team. In a secondary school the senior team comprises the Principal and the next most senior

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

leaders who usually hold the title of Deputy Principal, Associate Principal or Assistant Principal.

SNS **Safety Net Strategy.** This was the first component of the SSP and was implemented in 1995. It comprised a range of interventions, informal and formal, that the MOE could action when a school was considered at risk.

SSP **Schools Support Project.** A MOE strategy set up in 1994 to establish a range of support strategies that could be used to assist individual schools and clusters of schools that were identified as having difficulties.

SSS **Schools Support Services.** Government funded contracts that enable providers to support schools that ask for help, or are identified as needing help.

STA **School Trustees Association.** An association of school boards of trustees. During the study period, there was a national body (NZSTA) and local area associations.

Tomorrow's Schools. Tomorrow's Schools is the name the Prime Minister, David Lange, gave to the changes in New Zealand's educational policy through the introduction of the Education Act 1989. The old centralised Department of Education was disestablished and new Ministry of Education and Education Review Offices were established. They both report directly to the Minister of Education. Each school in the country elected a Board of Trustees to independently govern and "self manage" it.

Appendix B Information Sheets

BOARD INFORMATION SHEET

The researcher:

Kay Hawk is carrying out this research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education.

It has been approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee and is being supervised by Prof. Luanna Meyer and Dr Ann Dupuis of Massey University.

Kay Hawk :	Ph:	Fax:	Email:
Prof. Luanna Meyer:	Ph:	Fax:	Email:
Dr Ann Dupuis:	Ph:	Fax:	Email:

Purpose of the study:

There have been New Zealand schools that have declined over several/many years to the point that some official intervention has occurred and a process of reform begun. There are schools that I have worked in that are currently in this process of decline but are controlled by adults who are in denial and are unwilling to take the types of action needed to halt the decline.

The children in the declining schools suffer significantly and the quality of their educational opportunities are compromised during this time of compulsory education. Each child gets only one such educational opportunity, is powerless to influence the process and should be entitled to rely on adults to ensure their school is functioning as an effective learning organisation.

Literature and research searches have produced information on the topic of what makes “effective schools” and some information on factors that cause “failing schools”. Our own New Zealand research has provided guidelines about what schools and the Ministry can do to reform “failed” schools.

There is, however, still an important gap in our knowledge about why it is that schools that are in a cycle of decline continue to decline without effective intervention. Why are the adults involved in a declining school unable or unwilling to take action to stop and reverse the decline?

N.B. We would be talking about the past. It is the period of time (years) over which the school declined that is the focus of this work.

This knowledge could help participants, facilitators and policy makers to take appropriate action at an earlier stage and prevent the decline becoming advanced to the stage at which a reform process becomes difficult and expensive.

Purpose and Research questions

To study schools that have been involved in a process of decline that has been so serious that official intervention has occurred in some form.

The purpose is to gain insights and understanding about the process of decline and how the adults who were involved at the time, report that they reacted and behaved during that time.

Research questions guiding the study are

- How aware were the adults of the extent of the school's decline?
- What intervention options did people have (legal, political, personal)?
- What actions, if any, did they take to intervene?
- Were these actions judged successful? and why?, or why not?
- Why did such actions not prevent or significantly interrupt the decline?
- Why did individuals and/or groups not take further action?
- How did they feel about being involved during the period of decline?
- Did they feel in any way responsible for the decline?
- Were outside agencies aware of the school's problems?
- If so, what actions did they take and why were they not effective enough?
- Retrospectively, what can be learned from the experiences of the adults who were involved, particularly those in leadership positions?

What is required of participants?

The school

The only way the school itself is involved is in making available to me historical school records. I do not require any confidential or "in committee" records so there are no privacy issues. I will make arrangements to have this access at the school's convenience. No other research activities will take place on the school site.

Participants

Each individual participant will be given a similar information sheet and asked for their individual informed consent.

An initial face-to-face interview with me, that will take about two/three hours. This can be done at a time and place that is convenient to them. This is the main part of the involvement but briefer follow-up telephone interviews may be requested either –

- by them, if they later think of other information that might be helpful;
- by me as I gather information that I may want to have their views on.

If they give permission, the interviews will be taped.

They have the right to decide not to take part, to withdraw from participating in the interviews at any stage and to choose not to answer any particular questions.

They will be provided with a typed transcription of their interview(s) to check for accuracy. They can add, change or delete any parts of the transcript before returning it to me. When they have signed it as an accurate account they will also be asked to sign that I can then include it in my data analysis. Once they have given this permission, the data cannot be withdrawn.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I will take every measure possible to ensure that the identity of the school is never known by anyone (other than the two supervisors) and that the identity of the individuals interviewed remains confidential also. I have the interests of the school at heart and am very aware of the dangers to a school from unwanted publicity.

The research notes and tapes will be coded so that it will not be possible to link them to a person or school. The tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Field notes and tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the thesis. My computer has a security access code.

The final thesis will be written in such a way that neither people nor schools will be able to be identified. Direct quotes will be used to illustrate points but will be identified in the broadest categories e.g. (Teacher, Trustee). Because three schools are involved it will be done in such a way as to ensure people and schools cannot be identified by a reader.

Because I have, and will continue to, work in the school in a development role, my contact with school personnel, and the school, will not be unusual or unexpected.

Potential problems/risks

The only one I am aware of is the possible distress that remembering and talking about the past might cause to participants. If this does happen, I will encourage them to tell me about it immediately and we will work out together what they would like done to resolve this.

Potential good

The information from this research can be used to prevent decline in schools, or effectively intervene earlier in a school that is in decline. I give my personal undertaking to use the findings with training organisations, policy makers, educational consultants and school personnel to make a positive difference for schools, staff and students.

Summary of findings

After the thesis has been marked, I will send you a summary of the findings and an update on my plans to use the information to help other schools.

What next?

If you do not want to participate, please let me know as soon as possible. You will not be pressured or contacted about this again.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/021. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate-Professor Kerry Chamberlain, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany, telephone 09 4439799, email K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz.

Purpose and Research questions

To study schools that have been involved in a process of decline that has been so serious that official intervention has occurred in some form.

The purpose is to gain insights and understanding about the process of decline and how the adults who were involved at the time, report that they reacted and behaved during that time.

Research questions guiding the study are

- How aware were the adults of the extent of the school's decline?
- What intervention options did people have (legal, political, personal)?
- What actions, if any, did they take to intervene?
- Were these actions judged successful? and why?, or why not?
- Why did such actions not prevent or significantly interrupt the decline?
- Why did individuals and/or groups not take further action?
- How did they feel about being involved during the period of decline?
- Did they feel in any way responsible for the decline?
- Were outside agencies aware of the school's problems?
- If so, what actions did they take and why were they not effective enough?
- Retrospectively, what can be learned from the experiences of the adults who were involved, particularly those in leadership positions?

What is required of you?

An initial face-to-face interview with me, that will take about two/three hours. This can be done at a time and place that is convenient to you. This is the main part of the involvement but briefer follow-up telephone interviews may be requested either –

- by you if you later think of other information that might be helpful;
- by me as I gather information that I may want to have your views on.

If you give permission, the interviews will be taped.

You have the right to decide not to take part, to withdraw from participating in the interviews at any stage and to choose not to answer any particular questions.

You will be provided with a typed transcription of your interview(s) to check for accuracy. You can add, change or delete any parts of the transcript before returning it to me. When you have signed it as an accurate account you will also be asked to sign that I can then include it in my data analysis. Once you have given this permission, the data cannot be withdrawn.

If you agree to take part, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time with questions or concerns.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I will take every measure possible to ensure that the identity of the school is never known by anyone (other than the two supervisors) and that the identity of the individuals interviewed remains confidential also. I have the interests of the school at heart and am very aware of the dangers to a school from unwanted publicity.

The research notes and tapes will be coded so that it will not be possible to link them to a person or school. The tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Field notes and tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the thesis. My computer has a security access code.

The final thesis will be written in such a way that neither people nor schools will be able to be identified. Direct quotes will be used to illustrate points but will be identified in the broadest categories e.g. (Teacher, Trustee). Because three schools are involved it will be done in such a way as to ensure people and schools cannot be identified by a reader.

Because I have, and will continue to, work in the school in a development role, my contact with school personnel, and the school, will not be unusual or unexpected.

Potential problems/risks

The only one I am aware of is the possible distress that remembering and talking about the past might cause you. If this does happen, please tell me about it immediately and we will work out together what you would like done to resolve this.

Potential good

The information from this research can be used to prevent decline in schools, or effectively intervene earlier in a school that is in decline. I give my personal

undertaking to use the findings with training organisations, policy makers, educational consultants and school personnel to make a positive difference for schools, staff and students.

Summary of findings

After the thesis has been marked, I will send you a summary of the findings and an update on my plans to use the information to help other schools.

What next?

If you do not want to participate, please let me know as soon as possible. You will not be pressured or contacted about this again.

If you are willing, please sign the consent form and let me know. We will make a mutually convenient time for an interview.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/021. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate-Professor Kerry Chamberlain, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany, telephone 09 4439799, email K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C: Consent forms

BOARD and PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me by Kay Hawk. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that the school's name will not be used and that its participation will remain confidential to the researcher.

The information provided to the researcher will be used only for this research and for publications arising from this research.

I agree/do not agree to the school's participation.

I agree for the school to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

School name:.....

Signed (Board Chairperson).....

Signed (Principal)

Date.....

Please return in the attached stamped/addressed envelope to:
Kay Hawk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me by Kay Hawk. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate and I understand I have the right to withdraw from participating in the interviews at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I understand that I will be sent a typed transcript of my interview(s) for me to comment on, amend or add to. Once I have given Kay Hawk this feedback and signed it as an accurate reflection of my views, I agree to have that data used in the research.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used and that my participation will remain confidential to the researcher. I also understand that the school's name will not be used.

The information I give will be used only for this research and for publications arising from this research.

I agree/do not agree to the interview(s) being taped. I understand that I have the right to ask for the tape to be turned off at any time during the interview(s).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

Please return in the attached addressed envelope to:
Kay Hawk

Appendix D Guiding questions for interviews

Unstructured Interviews

Questioning areas

(the questions will be worded to fit each particular school situation and each respondents position, knowledge and experience)

- What position did you take at **** and what attracted you to taking up this position?
- What were your impressions of the school over the first term that you were involved?
- When did you first become concerned about the school and what was it that you noticed?
- Describe the things that happened to the school over the next *** years.
- When was it that people became seriously concerned about what was happening?
- Who do you think was most knowledgeable about what was happening?
- Did any one take any action to try to make changes?
- Were any outside agencies or people involved?
- Do you think any outside agencies were aware of how serious things were getting?
- Did you try to do anything -----?
- What happened when you/*** tried to do ****?
- How were you feeling during *** period of time?
- Looking back now, what do you think were the main reasons for the school's decline?
- In retrospect do you think anything could or should have been done to prevent or stop the decline?
- What do you think we can learn from what happened at ****?

Appendix E Ethics Committee meeting discussion document (26th October, 2006)

Background

- Study schools are secondary schools that have “failed” publicly
- I identified nine in that came into that category at the time
- I selected three as study schools
- They have been promised anonymity as schools, and for the participants
- Dates of events and issues will easily identify some (ERO reviews, media reports, MOE interventions)
- So would the specific names of reports (e.g. ERO discretionary reviews, viability reports, historical reports, business case reports)
- The specific positions held by participants could identify some (Principals PA, Deputy Principal, Counsellor)
- Identification as “School A” would make it relatively easy for anyone involved to make the links between issues, events etc and complete the jig saw

Sources of data (*Suggested solutions in Italics*)

1. Participant transcripts

a) How to identify quotes

- *Senior leader* (Pr, DPs, APs)
- *Middle management* (HODs, Deans)
- *Key staff* (Principal’s PA, Property Officer, Counsellor)
- *Trustee*

b) How to identify events/activities

E.g. (*an illegal act*) i.e. Fraud, Theft, Deliberate inaccurate roll reporting

E.g. (*unprofessional behaviour with staff*) Having sexual affairs with women staff

E.g. (*unethical act*) “Borrowing school property for extended periods”

2. ERO reports

- *ERO report*

School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

3. School documents

- *BOT minutes*
- *Letter from Principal to MOE*
- *Confidential Consultant's Review Report*

4. MOE files released under the OIA

- *MOE to MOE fax*
- *MOE file note*
- *Letter/fax to MOE from consultant*
- *MOE commissioned report*

5. Responses to propositions from participants and advisors

- *Participant/Interviewee*
- *Educational advisor*

Appendix F MOE file documents

ATTACHMENT FOR OFFICIAL INFORMATION REQUEST FOR							JANUARY	VOLUME 5
Date	Type of Correspondence	From	To/With	Brief Description of Subject	Reasons for Withholds			
59	File Note	MOE		Recycled computers for schools Lap Top	A,B			
60	E-mail	MOE		PPTA feedback	A,B			
61	E-mail	MOE	MOE	re contract for consultants re package or extras	A,B			
62	File Note	MOE	MOE	re contractors	A,B			
63	E-mail	MOE	MOE	Re schools	A,B,C			
64	Fax	MOE		attached flyer	B			
65	Fax	College of Education		student evaluation results				
66	E-mail	MOE		visit to	A,B			
67	Minute sheet	MOE		background notes	B			
68	E-mail	MOE	MOE	additional assistance with finance to visit other schools	A,B			
69	Letter	MOE		Contract for service	A,B			
70	Draft Contract	MOE		Forward payment	B			
71	E-mail	MOE		re assistant to re upcoming ERO visit				
72	File Note	MOE	MOE	re MOE Staff extra resources	A,B			
73	File Note	MOE		To support the BOT & Principal	A			
74	File Note	MOE		Meet on Friday with & PPTA				
75	Fax	Registered Psychologist	MOE	registered psychologist re meeting with staff and	A			
76	booklet			Towards a strategic plan	A,B			
77	Report			Position statement				
78	Notes	MOE		meeting with contractor re draft contract	A			
79	File Note	MOE		Guide- councilor				
80	Fax		MOE	Advert for teacher in the latest Education Weekly	A			
81	File Note	MOE		Business case	B			
82	File Note	MOE		Councilor for ed work involved in social work -				
83	File Note	MOE	MOE	Background for appointment	A			
84	File Note	MOE		Teacher resignation	A			
85	Notes			background notes	B			

Appendix G Memo writing

④ *Lack of support*
in NWE, ERO etc

⑤ *Organisational issues*

Themes being explored

① * *+ unprofessional behavior*

- Unethical behaviour and its consequent loss of trust (lies, theft, sexual relations, fraud ??)
- Leadership instability (mental/emotional) and its consequences
- Untrained or unconfident BOTs
- Efforts to ask for help are ignored
- Relationship between Chairperson/Principal too close
 - BOT excluded
 - Principal manipulates
- 'Trickle down' of expectations/standards
- Good people leave/ less capable people stay
- DPs who are weak/self protecting
- Interventions by people who are not effective/credible

② * *Lack of expertise.*

- Leadership appointments beyond their competence
- The leader doesn't 'fit' the community
- Insularity
- *Codes of ethics (not incl adult relationships).*
- *Good people estimate time*

③ • *Unhealthy loyalty to the school.* *Not honest with ERO*

Teach. registered council. Clear governance model is ERO effective model don't NWE operate. Climate of compliance not ethical.

Do levels of themes -

Do not want micro level themes

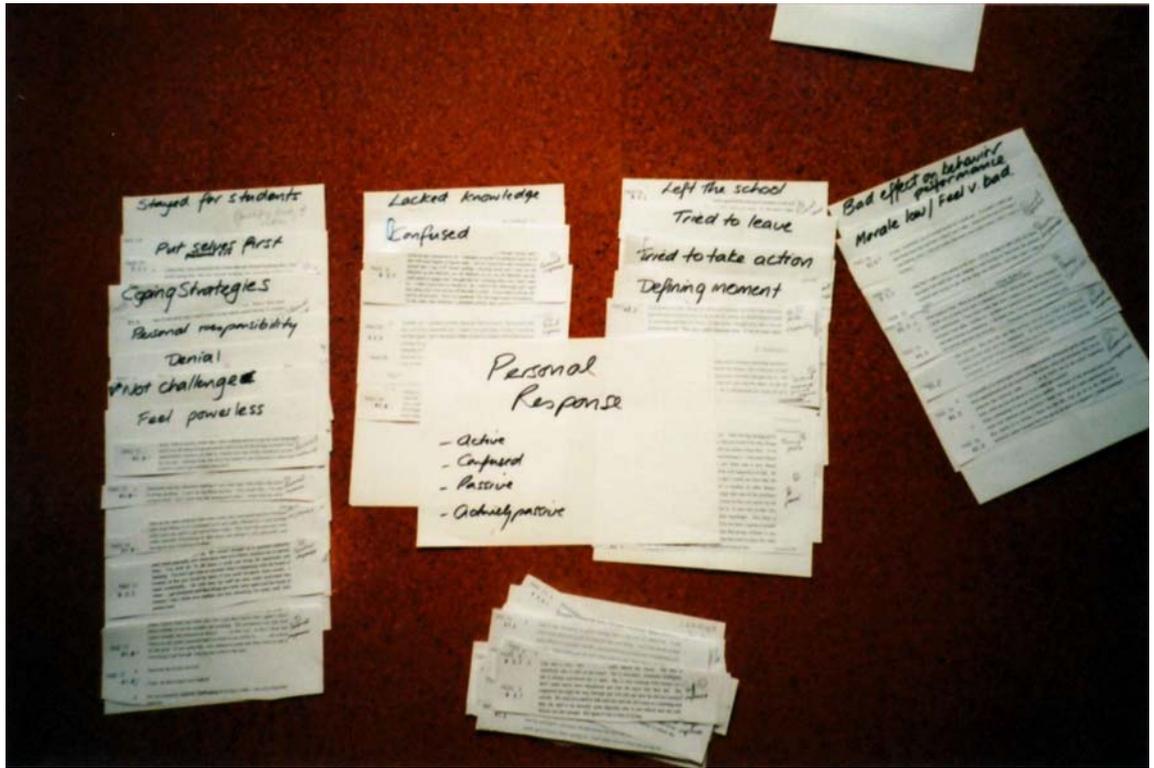
Want profound themes & high level.

End behavior = system of org. unit of control.

Appendix H Data analysis process: Sorting categories



School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention



Appendix I Monitoring sheet

School: _____

Name: _____ Code: _____

- Contact Information
- Appointment made
- Interview complete
- Tape transcribed
- Pages coded
- Copies made
- Copy to interviewee
- Copy returned by interviewee
- First content analysis
- Pages coded and categories confirmed
- Copy made for analysis
- Fully complete

Appendix J Data analysis process: Transcript page

1.6 K0106

6

- PAGE 6
K1.6 A But because I never talk about another staff I wasn't a good recipient of the information. There was a lot of discussion apparently going on.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K So how did that impact on the staff. How did people start to feel. What happened.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A Quite a loss of motivation, trust. There was no leader at the helm. And a lot of 7th former and 6th formers came to me very apologetically, these are such loyal people. And said Miss, what do you think I should do? and I said why did you come hear, why did you come to tell me? You will have to you're your own decision. Because I did not want to be seen as someone who has judged and in fact I rang some other high schools for them- and most of the 7th formers left school and some 6th formers.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K You think that was because of the affairs?
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A Yes they said miss – the kids don't question competence of the leadership, they said we cannot live with the comments in the community. I can't come here any more. I am finding it very difficult.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K Yes.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A So it was just the community perceptions.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K Okay. Alright, so that started to get out and the students started to leave, some staff left, what else happened.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A And it was a shambles. On one hand staff were supporting ~ and also – stole some money, that was another – I personally could not understand, if somebody went through so many donations, someone who was in the position of trust and someone who stole money, how come the management were supporting him.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K That's a good question. What do you think.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A It's a big one, I have thought about it for years and _____ still suffers from that in fact. Its still a problem in some of the staff and that is the lack of ethics.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K It is purely – people make decisions based on nepotism, based on emotions and that has always bothered me.
- PAGE 6
K1.6 K So ?
- PAGE 6
K1.6 A They actually got up and said if you go to (the principal) we will come with you and as soon as thing went down and they knew who was leaving then they changed sides

② Leadership
② Tickle down

② Decline process

② Staff/Students leave

② Ethics

② Ethics

② Decline process

Appendix K Examples of responses to the propositions

Kay Hawk

From:
To: "Kay Hawk"
Sent: Saturday, 11 March 2006 9:20 p.m.
Subject: Re: Research propositions

Dear Kay

Definitely on the right track and most comprehensive. I read through on the screen and the only item I would rephrase is the final one which specifies caretakers, secretaries and counsellors as people of value to interview.

While I agree with the general concept, I would not write it in quite that way. I have personal memory from a range of schools, of unenlightened people in all three roles. I would instead express the principle that key information and insights are likely to be available beyond a school's chain of seniority and formal structures and that approaching people such asis likely to be productive.

I was fascinated to see how well you fingered generic issues. The principal's partner issue is HUGE and I think that alongside the areas you rightly note of entrenched staff, blinkered union attitudes, and favoured groups of all hues, it is wise to note that the employment of partners always carries the risk of other factors competing with professional responsibilities and the higher the power level at which one of the partners is employed, the greater the risk.

I also totally endorse your statement that many teachers are disengaged - understandably so at times.

I will print-off, peruse further and get back to you.
chair issue that you note, but also sees his duty to the school very clearly.

I think the issue of seeking appropriate advice is crucial - and has certainly been a site of major improvement - an area wheredeserve considerable personal credit. I also totally agree with what you say about over-directive mentors.

When I was appointed a principal there was no suggestion that any help might be available - you were on your own, sink or swim. I recall trying to get the assistance of both my predecessors so that I could get my head around the historical/sociological issues of school and community and they had no interest in helping.

I will be back in touch when I have pondered further.

Warmest greetings

----- Original Message -----
From: Kay Hawk
To:
Sent: Saturday, March 11, 2006 5:49 PM
Subject: Research propositions

Kay Hawk
The Education Group

12/03/2006

- When students are grouped (ethnically, culturally, academically and/or historically eg houses: it is essential the Principal is not seen to favour one group over others. The Principal (and other senior leaders) must be seen to be there equally for everyone.
- Agree the same example above created a situation of white flight as Maori students were seen to be favoured over tauwi. Was common knowledge in the community that the school was going to be a Maori school. In the event of a new principal the school is now seen as a successful school for all the community.

Teachers

- Most teachers, even at the level of Heads of Departments, are not very aware of many school issues/concerns. They tend to be knowledgeable about their own direct areas of responsibility and to participate mostly within this realm. Depends on the size of the school. In smaller schools everyone knows what's going on.
- Many teachers, and HODs, think that school leadership is the responsibility of the senior leadership team and that they don't share a collective responsibility for, or have much power to influence, whole-school issues. Exit interviews continue to show that teachers don't grasp the big picture goals and how they pertain to the work undertaken by them

Trustees / BOTs

- Training needs to happen in their own school and be adjusted to their particular situation (ie NOT a one-fits-all package). It can function as a review opportunity.
- Preferable –
- A very close (unchallenging) relationship between the Board Chair and the Principal can block critique and dull perspective. It can also prevent the whole Board having the full information it needs. Agreed – when the relationship is too cosy the rest of the board is disempowered. Knowledge and information empowers.
- Trustees need to know where to go for independent external advice (other than the MOE and ERO) every trustee should be given a list of places (organisations websites, phone numbers etc) of where they can seek advice and knowledge
- Trustees are afraid to be honest with ERO because their reports are public documents. They will conceal problems or concerns. In some cases they do. Recently had an example of this. School is failing badly but everyone colluded to ensure a good outcome.

Level Two: Organisational / Institutional / Agency (Pertaining to schools, organisations, agencies and groups in the community)

Schools

- Some staff and some students will copy behaviours (unethical, illegal, unsafe) that they see modeled by school leaders
*- Occasional by what I know P's are getting from their
BOTS of \$7000 for P to go to conference in Europe -
Now they feel they were bullied into it - they can't afford to
Equipment also*
- The school culture and practices need to reflect the values and expectations of their community - *Yes -
Where sits at risk its often a clash between
those that cause the problem -
Except in unusual places of going communities alignment*
- Habits evolve in schools that become accepted as normal but can be very destructive and different to the practice in most schools
*Yes - very much so - of relationships with kids
Negative relate between P's + kids that kids repeat
eg staff late to class so kids bored + b-d start to lesson.*
- Staff, especially teachers, who have never worked at another school often become very narrow/rigid in their views of how things should be done. They can resist change and resent new people and their ideas. If they have been at the school for a long time, this is even more likely - *Could be a major
component of our risk sites -
"Very common the resistance to change -
"How do we know that what we think is right?"*
- A group of unhappy staff can be a force for good, if they act ethically and professionally in challenging issues
*Absolutely - Can be professional -
Being supportive is a force for good.*
- A group of unhappy staff can be a powerfully negative and damaging force, if they act unethically and unprofessionally in challenging issues
Absolutely - It happens often.
- The negative influence of one strong individual can be the driving force behind a school's decline
*Yes - exactly - Can think of several
examples (Pr)
eg - Pr didn't get the job - they decided he should
be in the classroom (to reduce class nos)
The Pr refused - The staff were constantly
negative and wore the Pr down -*

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School Decline: Predictors, Process and Intervention

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