

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

CLOSE OR BE CLOSED:

**TO WHAT EXTENT
CAN SCHOOL CLOSURES AND MERGERS
BE CONTESTED AND NEGOTIATED?**

Three New Zealand Case Studies:

Masterton District Network Review 2003

Makoura College Closure Crisis 2008

Bush District Community Initiated Education Plan 2009

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In
Education
at Massey University, Palmerston North.

CLAIRE HILLS

2013

**Copyright 2013 Claire Hills
All rights reserved**

Dedicated to

My parents Graeme and Grace Ayson who encouraged me from an early age to value education and lifelong learning

and

My late husband Peter who sowed the seeds of confronting the challenge of doctoral studies

and

our children: John, Sarah, Charlotte, Adrian, Georgina, Timothy, Frederick and Alexandra and their families whose encouragement has been so important to me in my journey towards a Ph.D.

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that the thesis entitled *Close or be Closed: To What Extent Can School Closures and Mergers be Contested and Negotiated? Three New Zealand case studies: Masterton District Network Review 2003, Makoura College Closure Crisis 2008 and Bush District Community Initiated Education Plan 2009* and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same), has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed

Date

ABSTRACT

When faced with school closures and mergers stakeholders have a number of options: they can volunteer to close, they can seek a merger with a suitable partner, they can seek a stay of action by seeking more time, they can invest effort in negotiating an alternative outcome or they can resist closure by fighting to survive as a stand-alone school. Organised individual school and/or community protests are other options that may be used. This thesis explores the contestability of school closures and mergers in post *Tomorrow's Schools* rural New Zealand contexts in both the primary and secondary sectors. The three case studies selected are the Masterton District Network Review 2003, the Makoura College closure decision 2008 and the Bush District Initiated Education Plan 2009.

This thesis will show that the school closure/merger process can sometimes be successfully contested by politicised and determined educational communities. If and when the level of community concern reaches the level of community wide outrage, then politicians may decide to back down. In the Masterton District Review 2003 some schools were more successful than others in contesting mergers and closures. The reasons will be explored. Community resistance was crucial in overturning the Makoura College closure decision in 2008. The Community Initiated Education Plan policy trialled in the Bush District in 2009 resulted in a victory for the stakeholders throughout the region who actively contested the proposals and won.

The research literature in New Zealand, and overseas, shows that school closures and mergers can be expected to cause significant community culture shock. Stakeholders discover that they have a deep emotional attachment to their schools. They usually close ranks as its guardians to defend the Taonga (cultural treasure) and social capital that their school represents. In this process distinct patterns of response emerge. Anger and grief are expressed in on-going outbursts of emotive language. Parents assert their 'right' to choose the most suitable school for their child conferred by *Tomorrow's Schools* and demand clear and transparent communication from the Ministry of Education and to be fully consulted during the process. There is a clear pattern of communication breakdown between the Ministry and local stakeholders. This can be seen in community meetings, protest marches, petitions, contentious debates about transport issues, racism, white flight, demographics, economics, the virtues of smaller schools versus larger schools and the destruction of core communities. The conflict in values leads to community infighting and conflict between schools and with the Ministry and the Minister of Education. After school mergers, stakeholders face the often unwelcome task letting go of the past and engaging in the on-going challenge of creating a new culture where the unconscious taken for granted beliefs and values which had provided the cultural glue for the merging schools must be revisited until a new culture develops which is accepted by the new school community as appropriate to its needs. In the aftermath of school closures abandoned buildings, trapped in prolonged disposal processes, become environmental eyesores in their communities as they slowly succumb to vandalism and arson.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been particularly fortunate to have had Professor Roger Openshaw and Professor Howard Lee as my supervisors. Their long standing reputation in educational research and supervising PhD students is recognised both in New Zealand and overseas. There is a great degree of complexity involved in doctoral supervision. It is perhaps best summed up in the term 'critical friends.' As my 'critical friends' Professor Openshaw and Professor Lee have found many different ways of encouraging me to dig deeper in the search for new understanding about the nature of school closures and mergers. For their unfailing support and their belief in me they have my deepest gratitude.

All researchers owe a huge debt to those who have gone before. The findings of New Zealand and overseas researchers, acknowledged in the bibliography, have provided very valuable insights into the complexities of the school closure and merger process for the communities involved both at the time and afterwards. I have regarded previous researchers as unseen friends on my own research journey.

The media has played a very important role in providing a record of how communities feel about school closures and mergers and how they are affected. Thank you to the *Wairarapa News*, *Wairarapa Times Age*, *Manawatu Standard*, *Dominion Post*, *Dannevirke News*, *Upper Hutt News* and *Bush Telegraph* for permission to use material from their coverage.

Thank you to over forty parents, teachers, principals and school ancillary staff involved in the Masterton District Review 2003 for their willingness to respond to my thesis survey. I thank Peter Nikolaison for permission to use a selection of his aerial photographs of Masterton schools. I am very grateful to Katherine Shaw, former member of the Aorangi School Board of Trustees in Christchurch for her hugely valuable insights into the issues facing her school and its stakeholders during its closure process and the Aorangi Judicial Review.

Thank you to Gareth Winter of the Wairarapa Archive and to Garry and Lindy Daniell for access to their records and collection of media coverage of the 1991 Masterton 'Hands Around Our Hospital' campaign and the on-going protests against health cuts in 1995.

Thank you to Maureen Reynolds, Mayor of Tararua District and Diana Eagle, members of the Bush District CIEP Working Group, Tim White, Commissioner at Makoura College, Rev Rosie McMillan, Vicar of Holy Trinity Anglican Church Woodville and organiser of the protest march against proposed school closures in the Bush District for their assistance. Thank you to the community members in the Bush District schools and the principals who willingly shared their experiences, in particular Nick Beamsley, Principal of Eketahuna School, Anne Corkran, Principal of

Mangatainoka School, Kirsty Silvester, former Principal of Mangamaire Country School, Jo Emerson, former Principal of Hillcrest School, Jo Gibbs, Principal of Kumeroa Hopelands School, Lynne Huddleston, Principal of Pahiatua School, Vicki Maughan, Principal of Ballance School and Gerry McGirr, Principal of Woodville School.

Thank you to the members of the Senior Management Team and my professional colleagues at Chanel College who have encouraged me during my doctoral studies.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my family and friends for their loving support and unfailing encouragement in my extra-mural studies which has always meant so much to me.

NOTES ON THE RESEARCHER

I was educated at state schools, Masterton Central School then Wairarapa College, itself the product of the contentious merger of Masterton Technical School and Wairarapa High School in 1938. I attended Victoria University 1962–1965. In 1966 I married Peter Hills, which was also my first year of teaching. Most of my teaching experience from 1967-1984 was part time except in two separate years when I had three children under the age of five. We were blessed with eight children, John, Sarah, Charlotte, Adrian, Georgina, Timothy, Frederick and Alexandra. I returned to full time secondary teaching in 1985.

Extramural study has long been a source of pleasure, professional development and personal growth. It has also proved very beneficial in providing me with a home based personal interest, which was very important given the size of our family. I commenced extra-mural at the Advanced Studies for Teachers Unit at the Wellington College of Education and Massey University to complete my BA and Diploma of Teaching. This was later followed by a Diploma of Second Language Teaching at Massey University. I completed the Master of Educational Administration degree at Massey University in 1999 and the Master of Educational Leadership degree at Australian Catholic University in 2005. I was accepted into the Ph.D in Education programme at Massey University in 2007.

My first piece of historical writing was as editor and compiler of '*Central School 1865–1990*'. I established the Chanel College archive and edited the annual Chanel College magazine for 10 years. I was also editor and compiler of '*The Story of Catholic Education in Wairarapa 1883–1995*,' written for the St Joseph's College Golden Jubilee. I have also contributed essays to *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography, volumes II and IV* on three Irish Catholic priests who made outstanding contributions to the development of the Catholic Church and Catholic education in the Wairarapa. Like many other New Zealanders I have enjoyed the challenge of engaging in family research: the Caradus and Carr family on my mother's side, the Ayson and Mackay families on my father's side and the Hills, Longuet, Burns and Pullar, families on my late husband's side.

After an initial teaching appointment in 1966 at Sacred Heart College in Island Bay, Wellington we moved to the Wairarapa in 1967 where I have been teaching ever since. I have had the opportunity to teach in five of the secondary schools in Masterton: St Bride's College, Solway College, Wairarapa College, St Matthew's College, and Chanel College where I have taught part time and full time since its establishment in 1978. My teaching experience has therefore included single sex and co-educational colleges, state, private and integrated schools. I am presently Senior Teacher, Principal's Nominee and Head of English/Drama at Chanel College. At various times I have also served as the staff representative on its Board of Governors and later, its Board of Trustees.

My interest in school closures and mergers and emerging understanding of their complexity and potential for leaving a toxic cultural legacy began in 1978 when, as teacher, parent and parishioner, I experienced the contentious merger of St Bride's College for girls and St Joseph's College for boys to form Chanel College. This merger later became the focus for my M Ed Admin thesis: *The amalgamation of secondary schools: a case study of amalgamation culture shock in a rural New Zealand Catholic community (1999)*. Following the passing of the Conditional Integration Act in 1975, twenty-six Catholic secondary schools experienced closures and mergers. Chanel College was the first Catholic secondary school in New Zealand that was co-educational from its beginning. The thesis examined the local stakeholder experience and compared it with the experience of the closures and mergers of Catholic secondary schools throughout New Zealand. Since this time I have taken a close personal interest in how school closures and mergers happen and how communities are affected.

This thesis examines school closure/merger issues within three case study contexts in both the primary and secondary schools in the state education sector. My experience of the Masterton District Network Review of 2003 and the Makoura College crisis of 2008 was as a member of the community in which they occurred. While there are many similarities to be observed in closure and merger processes in the primary and secondary sector there are also distinct differences that arise from the different educational contexts in which they occur.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Title page	i
Copyright	ii
Dedication	iii
Candidate's statement	iv
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Notes on the researcher	vii
Table of contents	ix
List of tables	xiii
List of illustrations	xiv

CHAPTER 1

<u>School Closures and mergers in the New Zealand context</u>	1
School closures and mergers: the policies and the official terminology	
Thesis rationale	
School closures and mergers: the New Zealand context	
The nature of schooling in small rural towns	
Schools as cultural <i>taonga</i>	
Rationale for the selection of the Masterton District Review (2003) as a research focus	
The community response to Government restructuring of education and health in rural localities	
The official rationale for school closures and mergers	
Educational Restructuring in New Zealand 1988 - 2008	
"Tomorrow's Schools" – the impact of public choice theory on school rolls.	
Changing power relationships between local school communities and the Ministry of Education	
How demographic data impacts schooling provision	

CHAPTER 2

<u>School closures and mergers: What can we learn from the existing research?</u>	26
No single body of literature forms an adequate basis for research into this topic	
The need to consult diverse sources of evidence for research data:	
scholarly research, commissioned research reports, judicial reviews, the internet	
The contribution made by the media to our knowledge of this phenomenon	
The importance of schools as social and cultural capital in a community.	
The social costs of consolidation – the impact on families and communities	
New Zealand Research	
International Research	

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

53

Methodological theory and the search for an appropriate methodology
Bricolage as a methodology A personal choice
The role of the researcher
The characteristics of a bricolage methodology in context based research
The importance of diversity of evidence that provides the opportunity for deep and detailed description and allows deeper interpretation of the nature of the closure/merger phenomenon and how it affects communities

CHAPTER 4

64

“The status quo is not an option: The Masterton District Network Review 2003

Masterton – the town and its educational context
The regional impact of “Tomorrow’s Schools”
The East School case: parents explore power relationships in the new context of self managing schools
Masterton District Network Review (2003) in the wider New Zealand context
The changing role of the media after “Tomorrow’s Schools”
The rationale for the review
The network review process and the community response to the proposals
The hidden agenda: the ‘myths’ that influenced the response of the stakeholders
Network review outcomes:
 voluntary mergers
 successfully contested mergers
 unsuccessfully contested mergers
The thesis survey: stakeholder responses
 Community Preference for smaller schools
 Cultural grief
 Closures. And mergers and serious health issues
 East/west divide
 White flight issues
 Minister of Education Trevor Mallard and communication issues

CHAPTER 5

107

It’s not over until it’s over: The Makoura College closure crisis 2009

Makoura College history
The impact of “Tomorrow’s Schools” on Makoura College rolls
Makoura College Board of Trustees announces the closure of the college July 2008
The role of the media and the influence of political opinion pieces
Community protest and student led protest
Treaty of Waitangi issues
The re-emergence of the ‘myths’
The Makoura College Board of Trustees Report
Reversal of the closure decision, resignation of the board and the principal
Student petition refused by the Minister of Education
The role of the Education and Science Select Committee of Parliament
The appointment of a commissioner and a new principal
The journey back: May 2011 the election of a new Makoura College Board of Trustees

'Rural communities don't need schools – Yeah Right! The Bush District Community Initiated Education Plan

Community Initiated Education Plans: the trial of a new strategy to achieve educational restructuring through the closure and merger of schools
 The social capital represented by rural schools in addition to their educational function
 The rationale for the Bush District CIEP - demographic data and falling rolls
 The Bush District CIEP process
 The growing gulf between the Working Party and the community
 Community Communication Breakdown
 The role of the media: TV 1's *Close Up* programme – the turning point in the growing crisis – Minister of Education capitulates in front of a nationwide audience
 The voices of protest
 Corporate support – the involvement of Tui Brewery
 Community protests at community consultation meetings
 Rev Rosie McMillan and the Woodville Protest March
 The impact of the Bush District CIEP in the community

CHAPTER 7

Creating sustainable futures

Review of Masterton District Network Review 2003, the Makoura College Closure Crisis 2008 and the Bush District Community Education Plan 2009
 New Zealander's preference for smaller schools
 Rural communities and the importance of schools as essential social capital
 School closures and mergers and racial tensions
 A legal challenge to school closure: The Aorangi Judicial Review 2009
 Ashburton Borough School: a viable alternative to school closure

CHAPTER 8

Going up in smoke: The disposal of abandoned schools

The hidden costs of school closures
 The prolonged disposal process for abandoned schools
 The social costs for the community
 Damage control: a radical alternative

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Table 32: The Falling Rolls in Wairarapa Schools 1991-1999	206
Appendix B	Table 33: The Falling Rolls in Wairarapa Schools 2000-2010	207
Appendix C	Table 34: Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 1990-1999	208
Appendix D	Table 35: Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 2000-2010	208
Appendix E	Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Letter of permission for the administration of the thesis survey	209
Appendix F	Information letter for participants in the thesis survey	210
Appendix G	The thesis survey	212

<u>LIST OF REFERENCES</u>	214
---------------------------	-----

<u>END NOTES</u>	215
------------------	-----

Chapter 1: School closures and mergers in the New Zealand context	215
Chapter 2: School Closures and mergers: What can we learn from the existing research?	217
Chapter 3: Methodology	221
Chapter 4: The status quo is not an option: The Masterton District Network Review process 2003	221
Chapter 5: It's not over until it's over: The Makoura College closure crisis 2008	224
Chapter 6: Rural communities don't need schools – Yeah right! The Bush District Community Initiated Education Plan 2009	226
Chapter 7: Creating sustainable communities	228
Chapter 8: Going up in smoke: The disposal of abandoned schools.	230

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction to Bibliography	232
Unpublished Primary Sources	232
Media Sources (organised by type and in chronological order)	232
Magazines	233
Media Releases	233
Television	233
Editorials	233
Letters to the Editor	233
Newspaper reports and feature articles	234
Secondary Sources	241
Books, journal articles, official reports, research reports	
Theses, judicial reviews, internet sites	

LIST OF TABLES

Table _ Number		Page
1	Population Statistics for Wairarapa and Tararua Educational Districts	7
2	Government Restructuring of Health Provision in NZ	9
3	Summary Table of Educational Restructuring in NZ 1988 – 2010	14
4	Comparisons of Small School Sizes in NZ	18
5	Components of New Zealand Population Change 2003 – 2008	19
6	Components of New Zealand Population Change 2004 – 2009	19
7	New Zealand Population Statistics: actual and predicted data 1998-2018	19
8	Selected International comparisons in population statistics	19
9	Reasons for School Closures 1997 – 2005	19
10	Changes in Regional School Rolls in New Zealand 2002 – 2004	20
11	Population Forecast Tables of Schools Needed in Rural NZ	20
12	Formal Enrolments in Education in New Zealand 1998 – 2005	20
13	School Closure Statistics 1997 – 2005	22
14	School Closures and Mergers by Region 2005	22
15	History of Consolidation in NZ 1877 – 1950 according to Parkyn	28
16	Primary Schools: Average Funding per Pupil 1991	31
17	Schools Showing Interest in Merging With Another School	33
18	Comparative Table 20 th century school and 21 st century school	46
19	Falling Rolls in Wairarapa Schools 1991 – 1999	67
20	Falling rolls in Wairarapa Schools 2000-2010	67
21	2003 Timeline for Reference Group and Ministry of Education	75
22	Numbers of schools closed in Masterton District 1998 – 2004	103
23	1 st March 2000 – 2009 School Roll by School Type	104
24	Decile Data for Primary Schools in the Masterton District	106
25	Makoura students achieving typical or above level qualifications 2004 – 2006	113
26	2007 NCEA results Year 11 Makoura Students	113
27	Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 1990 – 1999	120
28	Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 2000 – 2010	120
29	Makoura College 1968 – 2013	129
30	Bush District CIEP Consultation Process	136
31	Demographic trends in Bush District Education Plan	139
32	Appendix A Falling Rolls in Masterton District Schools 1991-2000 (complete table)	206
33	Appendix B Falling Rolls in Masterton District Schools 2001-2010 (complete table)	207
34	Appendix C Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 1990-1999	208
35	Appendix D Wairarapa Secondary School Rolls 2000- 2010	208

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Title	Page
1 3 Location Maps of Wairarapa, New Zealand prepared by The Cartographic Art Company 09/2001	2
2 Collage of media headlines from the Masterton Network Review, prepared by Claire Hills	68
3 Map of schools within Masterton prepared by InterLEAD Consultants	72
4 Map of schools outside Masterton prepared by InterLEAD Consultants	73
5 Hiona Intermediate School – the catalyst for the network review Wairarapa Archives photograph	76
6 Cornwall Street School site proposed as a suitable site for a new West side school. Aerial photograph by Peter Nikolaison	80
7 West School. Aerial photograph by Peter Nikolaison	
8 Douglas Park School resulted from the voluntary merger of West School and Cornwall Street School. No extra space was provided for its expanded roll. Photographs Claire Hills	81 82
9 Masterton Primary School prior to rebuilding. Aerial photograph by Peter Nikolaison	89
9 Masterton Primary School after rebuilding: photographs by Claire Hills	90
10 Solway Primary School contested closure and won. Photographs Claire Hills	93
11 Totara Drive School – deserved to survive but did not. Aerial photograph by Peter Nikolaison	97
12 Opaki School – one of the popular rural/urban periphery schools Photographs by Claire Hills	101
13 Lakeview School resulting from the triple merger of Lansdowne School, Totara Drive School and Hiona Intermediate School	102
14 Media coverage collage of Makoura College closure decision prepared by Claire Hills	108
15 Media coverage collage of community response to student petition to keep Makoura College open. Prepared by Claire Hills	126
16 Diagram: Community Initiated Education Plan diagram distributed From the Working Group to schools in Bush District CIEP	137
17 Photographic collage of Kumeroa-Hopelands School prepared by Claire Hills	145
18 Inquiry learning in action: samples of student work from the Kumeroa-Hopelands School foyer recording their participation and protest in the Bush District CIEP	146
19 Photographic collage of Mangatainoka School prepared by Claire Hills	150
20 Photograph 1: Tui Brewery sign on container truck in support of retaining Rural schools. Photographs 2, 3 & 4: banners prepared by Mangatainoka parent based on Tui corporate advertisements	151
21 Collage of media coverage of property crimes on abandoned school sites prepared by Claire Hills	187
22 Harley Street School in its prime. Aerial photograph by Peter Nikolaison	194
23 Harley Street School abandoned and vandalised. Photographs taken by <i>Wairarapa Times Age</i> , <i>Wairarapa News</i> and Claire Hills	195
24 Lansdowne School in its prime. Aerial photograph from Wairarapa Archives	198
25 Photographs of Lansdowne School arson attacks and Richard Williams supplied to <i>Wairarapa Times Age</i> ; progressive vandalism photographs taken by Claire Hills.	199
26 “Say NO to courthouse in your backyard, full page advertisement taken out in <i>Wairarapa News 2012</i> by the neighbourhood protest committee.	205