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# **Women as Governors**

## **Powerful leadership with a difference**

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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*Ehara taku toa,  
I te toa takitahi  
engari  
he toa takitini*

*My strength is not from  
myself alone,  
but  
from the strength of the group*

## Abstract

This research project involved the Board of Trustee chairwomen of six Auckland secondary, co-educational state schools working together over an eighteen month period using an action research methodology. The group met monthly to discuss issues of importance to individuals or the whole group. A high level of trust developed early and the discussions became the focus for the sharing of ideas, strategies and resources as well as an opportunity for shared problem solving and support. The researcher, as a chairwoman, was a fully participating member of the group. The research was guided by a set of research questions. Data collection strategies included group discussions, interviews with each of the chairwomen and with their Principals and observations of Board of Trustee meetings. Data from these sources were brought back to the group who shared in the interpretation of it.

There is no research information on how chairpeople of school Boards of Trustees enact their positions and very little information on voluntary leadership. The voluntary and elected nature of this leadership is an important influence on the motives of the women and on their determination to lead from within and with the group.

The similarities in the motives and chosen styles of enacting the chairwoman's position were many and they corresponded closely to those described in the literature on women's leadership. On the other hand, there were also important differences which the current literature did not seem to explain. It appeared, therefore, to be too simplistic to explain the similarities by taking an essentialist view that could not explain the differences. This thesis looks to a feminist post-structuralist analysis to help understand both the similarities and the differences.

Being a woman was an influential factor in leadership style but not because of gender as such. It was important because of the many subject positions taken up and held concurrently by the women and the ways they had learned to reconcile the conflicting demands of those positions. Some of these positions, such as 'woman', 'mother', 'wife', 'neighbour' and 'community volunteer' are very much products of the discursive ways in which gender relations in our New Zealand society have been constructed. The influence of some, such as 'responsible person', 'victim' and 'nurse' were particular to the unique experience of the person when growing up in their childhood family and within their marriage. The impact of others, such as 'career woman', 'leader', 'educator', 'change agent' and 'trustee' were a result of choices made by the women about how they wanted to construct their lives. The order in which they were taken up and the interrelationships between these various subject positions forced the women to make decisions and choices about how they would work within and between them.

Throughout their lives the six chairwomen had each occupied very similar subject positions and recounted very similar learnings resulting from the experiences. This similarity of experiences accounts, to a large extent for the similarity in motivation and in preferred ways of operating within the chairperson position. The differing orders

in which the various subject positions were taken up appears to explain many of the differences in their confidence levels and operating styles.

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*"We appreciate so much everything you have done for us and the sacrifices you have made. Now that we are growing up we want to encourage and fully support you in your new job, future career and studies. Thankyou for putting these on hold for us."*

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## Glossary

<b>ASTA</b>	The Auckland branch of the School Trustees Association.
<b>Audit</b>	An Assurance Audit is one of the review processes carried out by the ERO. It focuses on the governance role of the board of trustees.
<b>BOT</b>	Board of Trustees. A group legally constituted as a body corporate under the Education Act that has the responsibility to govern the school.
<b>CAPNA</b>	<b>Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis.</b> This is the process by which individual teachers are identified for redeployment. If a school has a falling roll and has more teachers employed than it is entitled to for the number of students it has on the roll, the Board is required to use this process which is outlined in detail in the Teachers' Collective Agreement.
<b>Charter</b>	Each school has a charter that its personnel have written, following Ministry guidelines, that is a signed contract between the school (through the BOT) and the Minister of Education (through the Ministry of Education) It outlines the school's mission statement, includes the National Education Guidelines, and the school's goals for the education of its students.
<b>Decile</b>	All state schools in the country are given a decile rating which ranges from one to ten. It is calculated by assessing the socio-economic status of a sample of the students in the school. The closer the decile is to ten, the higher the socio-economic status of the school's families. Schools that are decile one, two, three or four receive calculated amounts of extra funding <sup>1</sup> . The funding is called <b>Targeted funding</b> .
<b>EEO Report</b>	Boards of Trustees are required by legislation to be good employers and to have both an 'equal employment opportunities' policy and annual plan. They are required to report annually to the Ministry on their practice in this area and this is monitored by the Education Review Office.
<b>ERO</b>	Education Review Office. An independent body that reports directly to the Minister of Education and to Parliament. It reviews the performance of early childhood centres and schools on a regular basis and makes the written reports public. There

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<sup>1</sup> This has since been changed to include schools up to decile nine, but was as stated here at the time of the data collection.

are two types of reviews: an assurance audit and an effectiveness review.

- Governance/Management** These are the two terms that, in the discourse of Tomorrow's Schools, differentiate the respective roles of the Board of Trustees(Governance) and the Principal and teaching professionals(Management). A lack of understanding or crossing the boundaries of these subject positions will often be the cause of conflict in a school.
- MOE** (The Ministry) Ministry of Education. The government body that controls education for New Zealand. It is a signatory to the school charter as one of the partners in the contract.
- NEGs** National Education Guidelines. These were gazetted in 1993 and were deemed to be part of the charter of every school. They include the National Education Goals, National Administration Guidelines and the National Curriculum Statements. They are sometimes called "the NEGs and the NAGs."
- NZSTA** New Zealand School Trustees Association. The national body that represents boards of trustees of all state and integrated schools which pay their membership fee to belong. It is usually referred to as **STA** and pronounced 'star'.
- School fees** Although nearly all state schools charge annual "fees" for enrolled students, they are by law required to be a voluntary donation and must not be forced on parents. Nearly all schools agree that the state funding is inadequate and that schools could not operate without collecting fees. Over the years some elaborate systems have been devised (without breaking the law) to ensure these are paid.
- Suspension hearings/discipline hearings** The Education Act lays down very detailed procedures that a Principal and a Board is required to follow if a student is suspended. It is a complex process and, if the student is under 16 years of age when indefinitely suspended, it must be completed within seven calendar days. It requires extensive documentation and a hearing.
- Trustees** A secondary school Board comprises the following people-  
 The principal  
 An elected staff representative  
 An elected student representative(optional)  
 Between 3 and 7 elected trustees  
 Between 2 and 6 coopted trustees(optional)  
 Each of these individuals is a **trustee** and has equal voting rights. A chairperson is elected annually and has extra responsibilities as well as a casting vote.

A Board could have a minimum of five **trustees** and a maximum of sixteen. There must always be more elected than coopted trustees. (Catholic integrated schools are an exception.)