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*Reviewing a school's  
core values:  
One Aspect of School Self  
Review*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Educational Administration  
at Massey University.

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# *Abstract*

In 1993, the New Zealand Government mandated the requirement that all schools must have in place an on going programme of school self review ( National Administrative Guidelines, 4,ii). This thesis takes the position that, in 1999, most schools have met the obligation to implement self review programmes, but that many of these programmes are not resulting in the aimed for and hoped for, lasting school improvement.

It is the contention of this thesis that failure to achieve on going school improvement through school self review is, in part, due to the structure of many current school self review programmes. At present many schools perceive self review as review of every thing that happens in schools. This perception may mean that valuable time and energy is being wasted on reviewing a wide range of tasks and activities that have only indirect bearing on the primary purpose of the school, teaching and learning. Stewart and Prebble ( 1993) argue that this perception may also lead to wasting time in reviewing the very areas about which boards are already well informed

This thesis takes the position that school self review should be viewed from a more holistic perspective than is currently being done by many schools. In particular, it is argued that school self review should be conceived around a small group of core activities which centre directly on the main mission of the school, that is teaching and learning. One such core activity, according to Stewart and Prebble (1993), is the management and development of a school's culture.

For the purposes of this thesis, school self review is understood to mean the process of review of all school practices with the intention of improving practice. For self review to be successful in this context, it must be carried out in a collaborative school climate of open honest communication, mutual support and mutual responsibility. For self review to be effective it must also be planned, systematic, on going and it will involve collection of data through illuminative, participatory and responsive inquiry modes. This data in turn will be collectively analysed and critically reflected upon to ascertain whether school practices are realising the school's mission and vision.

A literature review in the fields of educational evaluation, monitoring, school

self review and school improvement examines the connections between school self review and school effectiveness and improvement. The literature review also considers the associations between school improvement, school effectiveness and school culture. Within the review of school culture, the role of the school principal in managing and developing a school's culture is considered.

Using knowledge gained from the literature review, a school self review trial is carried out in a case study school. This self review trial aims to improve teaching and learning in the case study school by collaboratively developing, implementing and analysing one aspect of a school's culture, the core values of the school. The trial is made up of nine activities which involve part or all of the school community in developing and implementing methods to review their school's core values. In the course of the self review trial, concepts of school effectiveness, school improvement, school culture and educational values are examined and discussed.

In brief, the trial found that: it is important for schools to review that which is valuable to them and to take responsibility for their own improvement; for school self review to be effective, the review must be for self accountability purposes and it must involve all of the school community; and if understanding the symbols and culture of a school is a prerequisite to making a school more effective, then part of school self review should involve looking at the 'larger picture', that is, the core values of the school community.

The findings of the case study, self review trial are combined with conclusions from the literature and with concepts from current theoretical perspectives in an effort to identify specific self review conditions and practices that contribute to and foster improvement of a school's culture. These identified successful strategies are finally amalgamated into a model for reviewing a school's core values, which it is hoped may be able to inform and guide others interested in reviewing this particular aspect of a school's culture.

In conclusion, this thesis found that the field of self review of a school's core values, is a field that has received little attention to date. Therefore, this thesis concludes with suggestions for further investigation in the domain of self review of a school's core values, beliefs and understandings. In particular, this thesis suggests that research is needed on the role that core values play in school effectiveness.

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