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School Self-review:

towards a theory for practice.

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

An on-going programme of school self-review has been a mandatory requirement for schools in New Zealand since 1993. This study takes the view that the nature of school self-review is not well understood by practitioners or policy makers, that the motives or purposes behind its promoton by those in authority are often mistrusted, that there is a need for a clarification of what is meant by the term, and that an improved theoretical understanding would aid practice.

Following a review of the literature in the field of educational evaluation and school improvement, the study sets out to survey the nature of school self-review currently being carried out by primary and intermediate schools in New Zealand and the reasons why schools have become involved in self-review. The approaches followed by schools vary in frequency, scope and focus, decision-making, and in methods of data gathering and analysis. School self-review is generally seen by practitioners as aimed at whole school improvement with public accountability as a somewhat reluctantly tolerated by-product of the process.

The findings of this survey are combined with conclusions from the literature, and with ideas from some current theoretical perspectives, in an effort to identify a number of theoretical conditions and considerations which may guide those interested in the design and implementation of programmes of school self-review.

The concepts of evaluation and review are examined, and the relationships between evaluation and review explored and discussed. A collaborative, reflective and critical approach to school self-review is suggested as a professional-contextualist alternative to the pervasive technocratic reductionalist approach.

School self-review is presented as a functionally integrated, strategically planned, but contextually responsive programme of collaborative self-reflective/self-evaluative activity operating within tight constraints of time, resource, and methodological imprecision, which is dependent upon the participaton and knowledge-in-acton of participants.

To successfully develop and implement such a notion of school self-review schools must develop conditions supportive of free, open and honest communication amongst all participants aimed at the uncovering, clarification and redefinition of values,

expectations and intentions. Systematic, on-going, functionally integrated but manageable data collection processes, operating within illuminative, progressive, participative, and responsive inquiry modes, which are dedicated to the discovery of truth and the interests of social justice, are seen as key conditions for successful school self-review. Collaborative analysis; reflective critique; democratic, culturally sensitive and morally just leadership; together with, commitment to personal learning and self-improvement action; the development and holding of a shared vision for improvement; and, the formulation of consensually determined plans of development action, are also suggested as necessary conditions.

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