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**CHANGING SCHOOL PRACTICES: THE IMPACT OF
SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT ON PRIMARY AND AREA
SCHOOL ORGANISATION AND LEARNING
MANAGEMENT**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education
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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an investigation of how principals construct meaning from experiences as they work through a School Development initiative. The study is not a formal evaluation of a particular strategy nor a comparison between different strategies. Its purpose is to understand more clearly the interface between principal thinking and action, and the development of coherent practices that lead to more effective teaching and learning in a school.

Three case studies provide the data for the dissertation which focuses on the workings of schools following the major administrative changes in New Zealand education of 1989 in the establishment of self-managing schools. This context is further elaborated to consider the crucial role of the principal, how a School Development approach operates, and the conflicting positions of educational and reflective thinking, and managerial action.

Throughout the case studies five propositions developed from personal experience and research findings are used to gain understanding and as indicators of principal thinking and action. The case studies occurred sequentially beginning with a residential design (Case Study A), having both residential and networked modes (Case Study B), and progressing to the inclusion of an audio-graphic component where there were large geographical separations between the groups of schools (Case Study C).

Data gathering, use of teacher narrative within professional discussion, and a critical reflective stance were recognised as essential elements of the School Development approach. A commitment, by schools, to the ensuing hermeneutic practice tended to spread into other more casual staff interactions further supporting the concept of school as community.

It is proposed that there are three critical periods for schools engaging in this kind of School Development activity. The first involves the link between personal and institutional development. A second involves networking and the third is when individuals and the school as a whole combine to celebrate successes. A visual metaphor constructed around sigmoid curves is presented for mapping and planning.

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This research draws on and extends the knowledge developed from an eighteen year teaching partnership with Tom Prebble. The project schools drew heavily from our 1993 publication *The Reflective Principal: School Development within a Learning Community*. This book is the source for some discussion in Chapter 1 and in the definition of terms used within the School Development process.

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PREFACE

Involvement in Principal Development

As a practising principal I became committed to applying a reflective model of school development to my own work. From time to time academics from Massey and Auckland Universities would adopt a consultancy role and provide both insight and feedback into the developing strategies. As some of this work resulted in video tapes being available to other schools, I became involved in the national scene of developing educational administration.

Whenever other academics were involved with me in the process at school level, I began to discover a much greater degree of critical analysis occurring across all the leadership areas. This intuitive beginning of a critical reflective approach rapidly translated into the early 'Reflective Principal' courses which still continue at the time of writing. Here a residential course was structured to provide experiences in critical reflection outside of the busy school day. It was fashioned around the belief that principals, once inducted into such a process in sympathetic surroundings, might continue to apply some of the elements on their return to their schools. There was also an opportunity to induct large numbers of principals into the concepts of school development. Groups from courses sustained a measure of dialogue once back in their districts and many returned a number of times to courses designed to refresh and extend the process.

For a number of years beginning in 1990 I facilitated principal development contracts for the Ministry of Education and principals who had attended these reflective courses became local facilitators and mentors within these programmes. Others who wished to take a local leadership role in these contracts attended Reflective Principal courses in order to refine their knowledge and skills.

As the press for accountability grew, the courses were supplemented by a computer network used to encourage more frequent reporting and discussion amongst the participants and back to the facilitator. Growth of the technology and the possibility of involving remote schools, not previously included led to the audio-graphic approach which is at the core of Case Study C.

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