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CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
A CASE STUDY OF A NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Doctor of Education

at Massey University, Albany.

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ABSTRACT

Capacity building is now mentioned synonymously with school improvement in much of the literature. However, research on the topic is limited (Hadfield, Chapman, Curryer and Barrett, 2004) and generally undertaken at the micro level of school functioning. There is an absence of debate on political, economic and social trends with implications for capacity building (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; Gray, 2000). Hopkins, Beresford and West (1998) claim the concept lacks clear articulation and definition.

This inquiry explores capacity building for school improvement in one low decile, multi-cultural, New Zealand primary school. This research is framed by four aims: to undertake an investigation on processes that enhance improvement, namely, capacity building for school improvement; to define capacity building; to conduct an in-depth study of influences (external and internal) on capacity building for school improvement; and to record the journey of one school in building capacity for improvement. The inquiry is positioned within an interpretivist paradigm, employs a case study approach and grounded theory methods for data analysis and interpretation. Research questions that guide this investigation are:

- How is capacity for school improvement defined – what are its features?
- How do internal school factors – vision, stakeholder activity, culture and professional development – evolve capacity?
- In what ways do external wider societal factors influence the development of capacity?
- What links exist between capacity building and improvement as evidenced in this school setting?

Data suggests that capacity building for school improvement is time and context dependent. Its conceptualisation is unique to setting. Capacity building for school improvement is a response to meeting individual, collective and systemic needs in ways that sustain equilibrium while moving in the direction of improvement. Attributes inherent in its construction are vision, stakeholders as change agents, school culture and professional development. The main practices are: knowledge production and utilisation; switching-on mentality; and division of labour: roles and responsibilities. From attributes and practices emerge four themes: situated activity; connectedness; leadership, governance and management; and outcomes. Attributes, practices and themes explain capacity building for school improvement in one setting. The capacity of an organisation, to manage tensions and address need, ensures individual, collective and systemic equilibrium while moving in the direction of improvement.

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that the research project entitled:

**Capacity Building for School Improvement
A Case Study of a New Zealand Primary School**

and submitted as part of the Doctor of Education is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research project (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: P. Stringer

Patricia Stringer

Date: 21/02/08

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