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**An exploration of teacher engagement practices with families
of primary aged students categorised as at risk of educational
underachievement**

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Abstract

Current education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand signals that parents of students who are 'at risk' of educational underachievement should be drawn into the educational field to assist those children to reach the outcomes specified by the normative National Standards framework. An 'educationally powerful relationship' is advanced as being the optimum way to link home and school.

Framed in this way, the home/school relationship emerges as an instrument of governance. The re-calibration of education-as-governance represents an emergence of teacher/parent relations as a means to address at-risk sub populations. Caught up with the administration of 'at-risk' families, the work of the teacher reflects capital(ism) in its tendency towards a crisis in social reproduction more generally. Identified by Nancy Fraser, this crisis refers to both the undermining and the overuse of the capacity of actors to establish emotional bonds, and of the contradictions that consequently emerge. Similarly, in the field of education, the emotional capacities of teachers are put to work to meet bio-political ends of producing productive populations.

This research asks teachers to talk about their experiences of engaging parents of 'at risk' children. Using an inductive methodology, underpinned by a Foucaultian theoretical framework, data was generated by conducting semi-structured open-ended interviews in the Marlborough region. Findings point to a series of further contradictions at the site of the school. The following contradictions speak of the discontinuities inherent in the work of the teacher.

Constituted to provide universal education, schools have established corrective mechanisms with which to address student underachievement. Accommodating the effects of adverse home conditions, teachers predominantly rely on in-school learning. Teachers try to be approachable yet may find themselves acting in ways that are

inconsistent with their knowledge of family systems because of administrative requirements associated with the operation of National Standards. School management systems may disrupt tentative relationships with parents amplifying the tendency for parental involvement to diminish as children advance through the school years. It transpires that institutional practices work against the establishment of an effective home/school relationship, thereby illustrating the contradictions within Fraser's crisis of social reproduction.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter One-Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research objectives.....	3
1.3 Educational reform in late modernity	3
1.4 National Standards.....	4
1.5 The Education Review Office	6
1.6 Social conditions in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand	7
1.7 School funding.....	8
1.8 Chapter outline.....	10
1.9 Conclusion	11
Chapter Two-Theoretical Framework.....	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Governmentality	14
2.3 Bio-political power	15
2.4 Responsibilisation	17
2.5 Power-knowledge	18
2.6 Conclusion	20
Chapter Three-Literature Review	21
3.1 Introduction.....	21
3.2 Managerialism in education	21
3.3 School expectations of the teacher	24
3.4 School expectations of the child.....	25
3.5 School leadership	26
3.6 Communication systems.....	28
3.7 Parent characteristics and neighbourhood stress.....	32
3.8 Teacher education.....	34
3.9 Home/school relationships.....	35
3.10 Parent-teacher conference	38
3.11 Social class as a determinant of school involvement.....	39
3.12 Poverty and child development.....	42

3.13 Social exclusion	45
3.14 Conclusion	46
Chapter Four-Methodology	48
4.1 Introduction.....	48
4.2 Methodological considerations	50
4.3 Ethical considerations	52
4.4 Research parameters and data reliability	52
4.5 Participant recruitment.....	52
4.6 Data collection and transcription	54
4.7 Conclusion	55
Chapter Five-Data Analysis	56
5.1 Introduction.....	56
5.2 'At risk' student profiles.....	56
5.3 Student engagement strategies.....	61
5.4 Home/school partnerships	64
5.5 Strategies to engage parents	67
5.6 The effect of school structure	70
5.7 Barriers to parent engagement	73
5.8 Conclusion	77
Chapter Six-Discussion	81
6.1 Introduction.....	81
6.2 A series of anomalies	82
6.3 Declare the contradictions.....	91
6.4 Implications for further research.....	95
Chapter Seven-Conclusion	99
References	106
Appendix 1 – Information Sheet.....	114
Appendix 2 – Consent Form	116
Appendix 3 – Authority for the Release of Transcripts.....	117
Appendix 4 – Interview Questions	118