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An Exploration of Board of Trustees' Perceptions of their Impact on Student Learning

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ABSTRACT

The radical changes within the Tomorrow's Schools reforms came to fruition in 1989 amid much debate about the ideology that underpinned the change and the capability and roles of boards of trustees. The roles of boards have evolved from a primary focus on compliance to the current focus on student achievement. This has raised the question of whether trustees, individually or collectively, have an impact on student learning through their governance roles.

This small-scale study sets out to explore the perceptions of a small group of trustees. It uses a qualitative framework, based on data from semi-structured interviews with ten trustees across five primary schools. The interview data was supplemented with school and sector-based documentation. The study sought of trustees their perceptions of their impact on student learning through an analysis of the data, and with consideration given to participants' context.

The literature review provides an historical review of Tomorrow's Schools and outlines how boards are enabled, or constrained, by aspects of the governance model.

The findings of the study suggest that trustees perceived that they had both a direct and indirect impact on student learning. It identified challenges for trustees related to the governance-management model, and how trustees understood student learning. It highlighted a perceived lack of support for trustees and a need for improved quality and quantity of trustee training, as well as noting the influence of compliance on trustees' thinking.

This study raises questions about the support that the current governance model provides for student learning and concludes with a range of recommendations for policy-makers and for future research. It suggests that, in relation to student learning, Nash's (1989) comment that the 'jury is still out' about the effectiveness of the model may still be valid.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The new model of *Tomorrow’s Schools* was deliberately designed to be a radical departure in education administration” (Lange, 1999)

“Schools today aren’t the schools we planned in 1989”
(Lange, 1999)

The Right Honourable David Lange was both Prime Minister and Minister of Education when *Tomorrow’s Schools*¹ came into being. If he believed, a decade on, that the outcome was not what was originally planned, then what governance model do have we now, and does it support student learning?

I started in principalship in 1986, under the then Department of Education governance model. I have recently begun inducting my ninth board of trustees since the introduction of *Tomorrow’s Schools* in 1989. I have seen the *Tomorrow’s Schools’* model of governance develop and I have developed alongside it. The *Tomorrow’s Schools* governance model has always been of personal interest, it seemed to hold so many contradictions. The difference between the pre-1989 system and the current system has become more apparent to me as I have gained experience and also political awareness, both being supported by professional reading and study.

A number of questions have arisen over a period of years: why did we go down this path? How political was the decision? How was it that a change in educational administration, as radical as it may have been, could make such a change to the ways in which schools worked, moving from co-operation to competition? Were the needs of the learner at the centre of the decision? These questions were discussed with colleagues, became a focus for my reading and debated during post-graduate study - but they were never conclusively

¹ *Tomorrow’s Schools* is italicized as it was in the foundation document.

answered. These questions sowed seeds of doubt about the system itself, and led me to thinking about its relationship to supporting student learning.

Supporting student learning has always been a focus for me, and I believe also for the boards that employed me. However I do not recall ever asking them any of the above questions, or why they stood for trusteeship, what they hoped to achieve as trustees, or whether they believed that they had an impact on student learning. I thought I knew those answers and they were simply taken for granted.

Further study made me reflect upon the changes I have seen and made me aware that there was a gap in my understanding around the governance model we work in today. It was the voice of trustees. I have often heard the statement that “my school would be the same if the board didn’t turn up” and wondered how these feelings had arisen and whether Hess’ (2008) question about boards being “up to the challenges of twenty-first century governance” (p. 219) required consideration. What roles do boards fulfil? Are they effective? Is this governance model working? Is it the best we can have for our learners?

The devolution of school governance from centralised control to local boards of trustees (BOT) was a key feature of *Tomorrow’s Schools*, “placing the decision-making as close as possible to the point of implementation [with the belief that] it will lead to better learning opportunities for the children of the country” (Lange, 1988b, foreword). With the reforms having been widely and robustly researched, I assumed that there would also be a range of research that discussed the link between trustees and student learning, yet was surprised to find little evidence of this. It appeared that this, as it was with my boards, may have been taken for granted. While many have written of the impact of the changes from a range of perspectives (Alcorn, 1990 & 2011; Butterworth & Butterworth 1998; Codd, 1999, 2005; Gordon, 1993; Court & O’Neill, 2011; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Levin, 2011; Nash, 1989; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Robinson & Ward, 2005; Thrupp, 2004; Wylie, 1997, 2007a, 2007b, 2012), there was little

reference to whether trustees had considered their impact on student learning. It appeared that no one had considered the nature of trustees' impact, i.e. was it a positive or negative; was it direct or indirect and what exactly did trustees do that they thought impacted on student learning? This study set out to generate conversation around trustees perceptions by hearing their missing voice and investigating if they, themselves, **perceive** that they have an impact on student learning, and if so, how and to what degree.

An investigation into the New Zealand governance model, and some internationally (Maha, 1997; McKay, 1994; Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2009; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands, 2012), show that there is a quantity of research from governments' perspectives, but far less from those at school level. The paucity of information on the influence of school governance on student learning was the driving force behind this study, one which saw me arrive at the over-riding question, **"do trustees perceive that they have an impact on student learning?"** Consequential questions are, if trustees perceive that they have an impact on student learning, how do they perceive that they impact and what do they believe they do that creates the impact?"

The focus is, what trustees believe that they are doing to make a difference to student learning. Is it the skill-sets they bring to the monthly board meeting, or the actions they take between meetings? Is it the connection they feel with their local school, or is trusteeship merely an obligation? Is it about supporting learning for all or about controlling it? What is it that trustees are not doing that they believe they should be, and what is it that is stopping them?

Senge (2006) reminds us that, for learning organisations "the first task of organization design concerns designing the governing ideas – the purpose, vision, and core values by which people will live" (p. 326). Where do trustees see themselves in the design of their learning organisation? Sergiovanni (1992) warns that, "for the most part low-leverage improvement strategies tend to change the way things look, but not the way they work" (p. xii). How can

trustees and system leaders ensure that they are not merely supporting low-leverage improvement strategies, and that what they are doing makes the greatest difference for learners? How can the system ensure that the 'best people for job' are elected as trustees?

The literature identified that previous studies have considered aspects such as the political ideologies underpinning the reforms (Clark, 2003; Codd, 2005; Court & O'Neill, 2011; Lauder, 1992), the governance structures within the reformed model (Alcorn, 1992; Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project, 1991), the value and role of decentralisation (Court & O'Neill, 2011; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Nash, 1989), the roles of trustees and principals within governance (Alcorn, 1990; Wylie, 1997), the increase in competition between schools (Codd, 1999; Gordon, 1992; Thrupp, 2004), and the role of the Education Review Office (Codd, 1999, Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Mahoney, 2004; Thrupp, 2004). It did not provide answers to questions like those listed above. Answers to such reflective questions are important. They provide opportunity to consider whether the original goals of the reforms have been met and whether the current governance model is the best way to support learners and learning now and in the future. Such understandings are necessary to ensure our education system continues to evolve. They can also contribute to the body of knowledge around trusteeship and student learning from a different perspective and support learners at all levels of the education system. This is the perceived value this study brings to the domain of knowledge on board governance. It asks questions of trustees that they may not have considered previously and their answers could offer insights into any connections or mismatches between the model-in-theory and the model-in-practice. These connections are important for future direction, and particularly important in the current climate that sees the New Zealand Teachers Council under review and the school governance model being considered for the same.

In an attempt to understand trustees' perceptions about their roles and the impact they have on student learning this thesis maintains a traditional structure, with a variation being evidenced in chapter two.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. The first presents an historic overview of New Zealand education to lay the context for the remainder of the study, while the second reviews the literature around boards of trustees and their roles.

Chapter 3 outlines the research method. It informs the reader of the research design and methods, outlines the focus question that guided the research, and discusses the reason for using a qualitative study that gathers data primarily through semi-structured interviews. It concludes by outlining the researcher's role in the study and the consideration given to ensuring validity and reliability.

Chapter 4 describes the findings from the interviews, in a structure that is aligned to the key questions asked of participants. These questions focused on trustees' definitions of governance and student learning, trustees perceptions of their impact on student learning in general and more specifically for groups of priority learners - Māori, Pasifika, children with special needs, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds, actions trustees believe they could or should undertake to increase their impact, and their reasons for standing for election to trusteeship.

Chapter 5 discusses these findings, focusing initially on trustees' belief that they do impact on student learning. It explores how they perceive that they have such an impact, how this impact may vary from trustee to trustee, and what factors influence their impact, with consideration given to internal governance and external review structures. The foundations for this exploration are the trustees' definitions of governance and of student learning.

Chapter 6 concludes by contextualising the study, noting its limitations, outlining possible implications for policy-makers, and suggesting a range of questions that may be used to guide future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Part One: An historical overview

2.1 Introduction

The 1989 changes to administration in education were significant for New Zealand education. Therefore this study must be read with some knowledge and understanding of the context in which they occurred. What follows is a brief historical overview of the New Zealand education system to both support that understanding and also to set the scene for those who have not lived through, or read in depth about the changes that the Education Act 1989 mandated.

Education reform is a topic familiar to New Zealand educators, with Webb (1937) decrying the move from local to centralised control over seventy years ago, noting:

in 1877 the New Zealand Parliament established what is believed, with some justification, to be the most decentralised system of education in the British Empire. We have shown how this system became, in less than sixty years, almost completely centralised" (p. 126).

However, the 1989 Education Act produced what has been heralded as one of the greatest reforms of education administration in New Zealand's history (Alcorn, 2011; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Levin, 2011; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993). It was one that the then Prime Minister, the Right Honourable David Lange, personally noted as deliberately designed as a radical departure from the preceding model (Lange, 1999). The reforms changed what had generally been in place since 1877 and gave effect to a range of reforms now generally referred to as *Tomorrow's Schools*. They saw the birth of boards of trustees for all state and integrated schools - boards whose role it was to govern their local schools (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

This literature review focusses on the impact of these reforms with specific reference to boards of trustees in the so-called 'mainstream' primary school sector and the relationship between their governance roles and student learning. For the purpose of this study, mainstream schools are defined as state and state integrated schools.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

A review of the system of education administration was announced in 1987, and since that time there has been debate around the ideology behind the reforms (Court & O'Neill, 2011; Lewis, 2003). This centred on the primary question of whether the reforms were in the best interests of students, schools and communities, or whether they were purely ideological and part of an unstated agenda which served the interests of government and business (Codd, 2005; Codd & Gordon, 1991; McKay, 1994; Nash, 1989; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Snook, 1990). Nash (1989) noted that, "under this new regime the responsibilities of local school boards are to be greatly strengthened, but so too are the powers of the state" (1989, p.116), while Lewis (2003) argued that the reforms saw "the development of new managerial technologies of remote control such as contract and audit constitute a spatial model of control" (p. 149) and that neo-liberalising processes "continue to reorganise social and economic spaces" (p. 149).

Traditional New Zealand Labour Party policy has been left-leaning, with the welfare of the state and its people being a central feature, as evidenced by Prime Minister Lange's speaking of "equality of opportunity" (Massey University, 1999). The 1984 general election saw the Labour Party take power and their term of office was to see changes to education and other areas of the public sector, primarily through the State Owned Enterprises Act 1986 (Whitcombe, 2008). Policies and practices, including financial and trade deregulation, made it evident that the political ideology of the 1984 Labour-led government had moved to the right (Humpage, 2008). This was a significant factor in the introduction of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms (Codd & Gordon, 1991; Nash, 1989; Openshaw, Lee

& Lee, 1993; Snook, 1990). During their first term in office Labour had initiated a number of public sector reforms and, after re-election in 1987, they signalled that this would continue at similar speed, including “giving priority to administrative reform in education” (Lange, 1988b, foreword).

Lange (1996), when reflecting upon this ideological shift, stated that it was a contributing factor for Labour’s successful re-election in 1987. Such a shift had been alluded to by Mulheron (1987) who wrote of the privatising impact and the threat to public education created by the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975. Treasury’s language in their 1987 Briefing for Incoming Government (New Zealand Treasury, 1987) reflected the ideological nature and neo-liberal intent in the shift by linking the public education system to economic objectives and speaking of measuring efficiency in terms of rates of return as opposed to education seen as a public good (Clark, 2003; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Gordon, 1993; Hawke, 2002). This underpinning market-focused ideology was, and continues to be, highlighted by a range of writers since; including Alcorn (2011), Codd (1999), Gordon (1993), Lauder (1992), McKay (1994), Nash (1989), Thrupp (2007) and Sahlberg (2011).

The neo-liberal traits of deregulation, privatisation and market-based competition became evident and were embraced and espoused (Robinson, Ward & Timperley, 2003; Sahlberg, 2011). Tooley (2004) summarises it thus: “the central issue of equality of educational opportunity, which had dominated educational debate leading up to the election of the fourth Labour Government in 1984, gave way to issues of efficiency, devolution, choice, competition and accountability” (pp. 422-423). Evidence of the shift was especially noticeable through the government’s rhetoric, which included such phrases as “the exercise of choice will be enhanced” (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xiv) and “there will be more flexibility in conditions of service” (Lange, 1988a, p.7). This was a clear departure from Labour’s traditional position, and it created ideological tensions within the party itself (Codd & Gordon, 1991; Lange, 1996). The embracing of a deregulated, market-driven economy was evidenced

earlier by the removal of farm subsidies, while a focus on privatisation was clearly visible in the corporatisation and sale of many state-owned assets (Clark, 2003; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Codd, 2005; Gordon, 1993; Lange, 1999; Martinez & Garcia, 2011; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Thrupp, 2007). The relationship between finance and education was clearly signalled through the involvement of Treasury, who advised on education policy throughout Labour's terms in office. This was further reinforced through Treasury's questioning of public schooling's status as a public good (Clark, 2003; Codd, 2005; Gordon, 1993). Treasury continues to influence education policy, evidenced by the following statements in a more recent briefing, "we must be confident that educational expenditure makes the most efficient and effective contribution possible" (MOE, 2011c, p. 12) and "every learner that is failed by the education system represents a missed opportunity for New Zealand and the cost of that missed opportunity, for everyone, is great" (ibid., p. 3).

The influence and power of the competitive market was further reinforced with the abolition of school zoning rules in 1990, theoretically allowing students to "have the freedom to attend the school of their choice" (Watson, Hughes, Lauder, Strathdee & Simiyu, 1997, p. 95). It was believed that the competition between schools would provide equal opportunities for all and would lead to improved school effectiveness (Lange, 1999; McKay 1994, Watson et al., 1997). The actual outcome was that it effectively allowed a number of schools to select their students, as opposed to students selecting their schools (Harker, 2000; Thrupp, 2007; Watson et al., 1997), leading to what Barry (2007) referred to as the ghettoization of schools.

2.2.1 Systemic change

The Education Act 1877 formalised New Zealand's public education system in a model that substantially mirrored the British system (Battersby & Coombe, 1990; Snook, 1990). There is international evidence that a number of school systems, including those in England, South Africa, The Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, the Australian state of Victoria, and the Canadian state of Ontario have included

similar features to New Zealand's reformed system (Maha, 1997; McKay, 1994; Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2009; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands, 2012). Proponents of these systems appear to be committed to neo-liberal ideologies for education, apportioning greater responsibility through decentralisation and devolution of power whilst retaining centralised control of strategic components, including resourcing and student standards of achievement (Battersby & Coombe, 1990; Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008; Sahlberg, 2011).

From 1877 onward, New Zealand's education system expanded substantially, with the establishment of intermediate schools and rural, district high schools, an increase in the number of secondary schools, the reclassification of district high schools to Form 1-7 schools which catered generally for students from 11 to 17 years of age, or area schools which catered for students from 5 to 17 years of age. The expansion also included the inception of Kōhanga Reo², with all of these new schooling models becoming part of the education landscape by the early 1980s (Cassie, 1999; Rata & Sullivan, 2009). Control over the burgeoning system was maintained through a centralised Department of Education which was supported by regional offices who had control and administrative responsibility over local education boards (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). One line of control held by these boards was over the school committees in state primary and intermediate schools (ibid., 1988). The lengthy and hierarchical chain of command meant that no major decisions (in fact few decisions at all) could be made directly by the school. Many noted that the system was burdensome (Barry, 2007; Court & O'Neill, 2011; Mahoney, 2004; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988; New Zealand Treasury, 1987).

In July 1987, the Right Honourable David Lange, who was the Prime Minister of the day and the Minister of Education, sought to address these issues. He appointed a taskforce, led by businessman Brian Picot, to review education

² Kōhanga Reo is a total immersion Māori language family programme for young children from birth to six years of age.

administration (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). They were tasked with developing a model for change by examining:

- The functions of the Head Office of the Department of Education with a view to focusing them more sharply and delegating more responsibilities as far as is practicable;
- The work of polytechnic and community college councils, teachers' college councils, secondary school boards and school communities with a view to increasing their powers and responsibilities;
- The Department's role in relation to other educational services;
- Changes in the territorial organisation of public education with reference to the future roles of education boards, other educational authorities, and the regional offices of the Department of Education, and
- Any other aspects that warrant review

(Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. ix).

The inclusion of the final term of reference is interesting. A review of similar government documents of the time, including the 1987 reviews of the Accident Compensation Corporation and Company Law, show that the inclusion of such a general clause was unusual and terms of reference were more definitive. The openness of the terms of reference allowed the taskforce an unrestricted review of all aspects of education administration which was to be noted by Lange as "a statement of the Government's intent" (1988b, p. 1).

The taskforce undertook public consultation and produced a final report within nine months of their formation. However the validity of their findings was brought into question due to the limited timeframe and the volume of reported 20,000 responses (Lange, 1988b). Openshaw notes that a 1988 report shows that "two samples had been taken of responses, each of approximately 1,000 returns" (2011, p. 67). The taskforce's report 'Administering for Excellence' was released in April 1988 and their analysis highlighted the broad themes of "over-

centralisation of decision making, complexity, lack of information and choice, lack of effective management practices, and feelings of powerlessness” (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p.22). They were clear in their belief that any modifications to the current system would not make the differences sought by their terms of reference, and therefore proposed a new administrative system based on “choice, an assumption of individual competence, cultural sensitivity [and] good management practices” (ibid., p. 3). They recommended that the system-wide changeover occur on 1st October 1989 – eighteen months later, to “make the changeover date as early as possible but to allow sufficient time for the planning, the legislative changes and the training that will be required” (ibid., p. 83).

The radically different system proposed a wide range of reforms including placing the school as the basic building block of school administration and the devolution of greater decision-making and accountability to site level (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). These decisions were to be based around a new key document, the school charter which was proposed as an agreement between the individual school’s board of trustees (another new concept), the community and the Minister of Education (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Other proposals saw the Department of Education being superseded by a smaller Ministry of Education (MOE) with a Ministerial policy advisory role through an Education Policy Council. They also held responsibility for managing the Ministry’s large education property portfolio (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). These changes ensured that schools were individually accountable through biennial audits from the new body, the Review and Audit Agency, later to be renamed the Education Review Office (ERO) (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

To support greater knowledge of how the system worked, to redress any possible imbalance felt by parents and to help them to promote their views, a Parent Advocacy Council (PAC) was recommended (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Butterworth & Butterworth (1998) note that

the PAC was “intended to have a particular mission to assist alienated Māori and Pacific Islands communities, other ethnic minorities, the disabled and rural people, all of whom might feel disadvantaged by the education system” (p. 132). And, to ensure school choice was possible for all students, school zoning rules were to be amended, “so that every child has the right to attend the nearest school” (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xiv).

By May 1989, the reforms had progressed through the legislative system to a point where the inaugural board of trustee elections were held nationally, preparing for the 1st October 1989 implementation date through the enactment of the Education Act 1989. The election saw over 17,000 trustees elected to new, local school boards, with one of their first tasks being that of developing their own locally-focused, school-based charter, noted by the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) as “the key guiding document for the board” (2010, p. 11). On reflection, NZSTA noted “in May 1989, boards of trustees were elected, charters written and approved, and a new era in education began – the self-governing/managing school was born” (2010, p. 10).

2.2.2 Foundations of Tomorrow’s Schools

The Education Act 1877 had formalised New Zealand’s education within a system that had a lot in common with other systems of the time (Gillard, 2009; McKay, 1994; Snook, 1990). Shuayb & O’Donnell’s (2008) survey of six countries found that their systems had also undergone similar phases of development from the 1960s onward. A further and more recent look shows evidence of the interchanging of ideologies and philosophies for education internationally (Gillard, 2009, 2011; McKay, 1994; Ryan, Duan, & Merry, 1998; Shuayb & O’Donnell, 2008; Taskin, 2012; Thrupp, 2007). The reform of education administration in New Zealand was part of the first wave of change located within ‘New Public Management’, a set of economically-based theories and market-based systems already evident in the United States and Britain (Whitcombe, 2008).

2.2.3 Promotion of the reforms

The international influence of neo-liberalism in education and the Labour government's political influence through the national media had created a climate for change (Battersby & Coombe, 1990; Gillard, 2009; Shuayb & O'Donnell, 2008; Thody, 1998). Supporting and, to some extent, underpinning the change were a number of historical reports which had made similar suggestions to those proposed in the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993; Sullivan, 1993). Barrington (1986) noted that there were five influential reports written between 1974 and 1983: the Nordmeyer Report, 1974; the Holmes Report, 1974; the McCombs Report, 1976; the Renwick Report, 1983; and the Curriculum Review Report, 1986. Butterworth & Butterworth note that "the release of the Probyne/Fargher Report in March 1987 set the stage for the Picot taskforce to begin its work four months later" (1998, p. 65). Suggestions from these reports that were evident in the *Tomorrow's Schools* recommendations included questioning the role and existence of the Department of Education, involving school committees in staff appointments, suggesting that school committee membership reflected their community's composition, and recommending that communities have greater say in curriculum and financial matters through increased autonomy (Barrington, 1986). Fancy, as cited in Townsend (2007), noted that the 1989 Hawke Report on the post compulsory sector reflected similar concerns.

The radical changes proposed by Picot's taskforce required a strong and focused media campaign to support it. Such a campaign had been proposed and initiated five months prior to the report's release by Prime Minister Lange's press secretary (Openshaw, 2011). In promoting the need for change to the public, the government had suggested that public education was in crisis and required radical change (Barry, 2007; Nash, 1989). The blame for the crisis was laid at the feet of the bureaucracy, which had come to be seen as being rigidly centralised, bureaucratic, unwieldy, and too slow in responding to local issues or needs (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Hawke noted that "the slogan of 'local autonomy within national guidelines' was even more successful

in defining the core policy issue [and] gave an anchor to public debate” (2002, p. 5). The release of the taskforce’s report set the scene for the government to intensify this media campaign, extolling the virtues that such reforms could bring for children and their communities, and portraying “the non-specialist nature of the trustee role” which implied that being a trustee would not be a daunting task, thereby encouraging parents to stand (Robinson et al., 2003, p. 266). This was reinforced by a further statement “if you can manage one of these (showing a child), you can manage one of these (showing a school)” (ibid., p. 266).

Such wide-ranging and significant change required support at the highest political level. Lange was the first Prime Minister to hold the education portfolio since William Hall-Jones in 1906, which indicated an increased importance in education, strengthened the political resolve behind the campaign. A further political shift to the right allayed the apprehension of many Labour Party activists (Lange, 1996). The media themes underlying the campaign focused on ensuring that the proposed systemic change would be seen positively and included parents having a greater say in their child’s education; the devolution of decision-making to school level, ensuring decisions would be quicker and suit individual school’s needs; schools being run by parents and not by a far-removed Department of Education; and a lessening of bureaucracy with the closure of the Department of Education (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). The messaging focused on the positive aspects of system flexibility, responsiveness, autonomy, and local democracy (Barry, 2007; Lange, 1999; Nash, 1989; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

Fiske and Ladd (2000) note that a wide range of educational bodies and individuals, including academics, teacher unions and the Department of Education were opposed to the need for such radical change, yet they were unable to influence the outcome, with Government and Treasury publically portraying their oppositional stance as one of purely self-interest (New Zealand Treasury, 1987). Prime Minister Lange’s dual ministership reinforced the

importance he placed on “the need for a wide corpus of public support for the reforms both within and outside the sector” (Openshaw, 2011, p. 64).

2.3 What is a Board of Trustees

2.3.1 Composition

The School Trustees Act 1989 s 5 (1) legislated how Boards of Trustees could be composed:

- Five parent representatives would be elected by the parent body,
- The principal would be a member as of right,
- One staff representative would be elected by the staff,
- Not more than four trustees would be appointed by the proprietor (in the case of integrated schools only),
- One student representative would be elected by the Form 1-7 student body (in the case of composite and secondary schools), and
- Up to four trustees, or two in the case of integrated schools, could be co-opted to ensure that the board was representative of its community and the gender balance nationally.

There was provision for the Minister of Education to dissolve a board and appoint a commissioner in the event of operational risk or concerns about the welfare or educational performance of students (New Zealand Parliament, 1989b). This allowed for some site-based flexibility in the composition of boards of trustees of different types of schools (i.e. integrated and state) and of different sized schools.

The original intention of having five elected parent representatives has changed and schools are now able to elect between three and seven trustees (NZSTA, 2010). Boards have been offered the option to hold mid-term elections, at which a specified number of members stand for re-election “to promote continuity and support” (NZSTA, 2008, p.10). While these variations could be seen to support meeting the needs of individual communities, it has been argued that an unexpected outcome was the limiting of a school’s ability to be self-managing

where a smaller number of board members translated to a lesser number of skill sets to utilise (NZSTA, 2008).

The 1989 Education and School Trustees Acts did not mandate a requirement for board members to possess any particular skills, knowledge or expertise. This is in contrast to a more recent MOE statement; “boards of trustees have a governance responsibility to support better student progress and to raise student achievement” (MOE, 2010a, foreword), which implies a need for such skills, knowledge and expertise.

The question of defining a board’s governance responsibilities was posed to the Secretary for Education. In reply, it was stated:

There is not a specific statutory definition of respective governance or management roles, and where governance ends and management begins. In general terms governance is used to refer to the Board’s role in setting and monitoring the direction of the school, ensuring it remains financially sound and ensuring legal compliance (December, 2012)³.

This highlights a lack of defined purpose which was acknowledged early by ERO: “the legislation is not specific about the powers and duties of Boards of Trustees. Neither does it provide much guidance about those powers and duties ascribed to the Board” (ERO, 1994, p. 4). Without such purpose, the ability of boards to support student learning must be questionable. While there are a range of reports on the impact and outcomes of *Tomorrow’s Schools*, there appears to be little written about the influence of boards on student learning.

There have been governance issues, with the mismatch between boards’ skill sets and the expectations of their roles, aligned with less than successful outcomes for schools (Department of Education, 1988). A number of these issues have progressed to the point where Ministerial intervention has been

³ J. Greening, the Acting Group Manager, Education, Curriculum and Performance, Regional Operations, MOE (personal communication, 11 December, 2012)

required. MOE statistics show that since 2005 approximately 1% of all schools have been managed by a commissioner⁴, not by their community-elected boards (MOE, 2012). With between 2000 - 2200 state and state integrated primary schools in the system, this equates to somewhere between 20 – 25 schools each year that appear to have boards that are either dysfunctional or are putting the welfare or achievement of students at risk.⁵

2.3.2 Membership processes and prerequisites

While there were no criteria around skills, knowledge or expertise, there were exclusionary criteria around trusteeship. Section 13 of the School Trustees Act 1989 ensured that those who were aged under 18 years, or were mentally disordered or bankrupt, or convicted of a crime punishable by imprisonment (and were yet to be pardoned or had not served the required sentence), or were disqualified by the Local Elections and Polls Act 1976 were ineligible to be elected, co-opted or appointed to any board. The age restriction, however, was not relevant to the election of the student representative.

In practice, the School Trustees Act created a new legislative structure which appeared to generate a range of anomalies. In the case of the elected parent representatives, all nominees could only be elected by the parent body, these being deemed to be those parents, guardians or caregivers of children enrolled full-time at the school in the year of the election. However for intermediate schools (Form 1-2 / Year 7-8 schools) this extended to include those “likely to be enrolled in form 1 at the school in the year after the election” (School Trustees Act, 1989, p. 4). This model generated a number of points of consideration including the number of votes generated by one student. For example, a Year 6 parent was able to vote in their own school’s election as well as in the election of

⁴ Commissioners are appointed by the Secretary for Education and have responsibility for leadership and decision-making on all issues related to the functions, duties and powers of the board.

⁵ A. Nairn, Information Officer, Education Information and Analysis, MOE (personal communication, 12 November 2012).

the intermediate schools in which their children were likely to enrol (MOE & NZSTA, 2013).

A further issue arose for staff members who were the parents, guardians or caregivers of children at the school at which they taught. They had to choose whether they would stand and vote in the parent election or in the staff election, as the legislation did not provide them with a right to vote in both. Permanently appointed staff members were not given the choice, and were limited to standing in the staff trustee election.

Principals, as well as being employees of the board, were to be members of their boards as of right. This role duality led to tensions and role confusion (Alcorn, 1990 & 2011; Lough, 1990; Whitaker, 2003). In a 2007 survey by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), trustees noted that a lot of their time was spent on financial management, then property and maintenance, followed by monitoring school progress (Wylie, 2007a). Alcorn (2011) noted that ERO audits were initially compliance focused. Recent informal discussions with mentors of First Time Principals have highlighted that such prioritising from a managerial and compliance-focused leadership role to a professional, student learning-focused leadership role is also common with newly appointed principals (personal communication).

A further tension was focused around the fact that principals were ineligible to vote in the election of the staff trustee. The inability to exercise a vote in this election as a staff member reinforced the principal's juxtaposed position and supported a shift in perception of the principal "from being a 'principal teacher' to being a 'school administrator' increasingly involved in management tasks and distanced from teachers and classrooms" (Court & O'Neill, 2011, p. 127).

The MOE has noted how the roles of boards have changed over time (MOE, 2010a). They have also noted that boards and principals are "inextricably linked" and require "clear role definitions and a good understanding of their

expectations of each other” (MOE, 2010a, p. 15). Yet the inevitable tensions of being both the employer and an employee, leader and manager, professional advisor and board member continue, with Bennett (1994) referring to these as the “conspicuous ambiguities [of] the principal’s role” (p. 39). The question could be asked as to how the principal’s professional leadership role supports boards to impact on student learning with such notably evident ambiguities. In her research, Alcorn (2011) summarises these tensions when she states that principals “are both responsible for implementing mandated government policies and accountable to local boards and groups of parents who may not understand or accept those policies. Thus, they operate in several contexts at the same time” (p. 134). NZSTA note that “this at times can be difficult as the principal is an employee, delegated employer and a member of the employing body” (NZSTA, 2010, p. 21). They go on to argue that there is no role contradiction and that board members are clearly aware that they are “first and foremost a trustee accountable for student achievement” (2010, p. 11). NZSTA believes that highly functioning boards are clear on their roles as trustees and on the distinction between governance and management (NZSTA, 2010).

2.3.3 Tenure

Role clarity aside, an on-going consideration for boards is the succession of trustees across elections (ERO, 1994). The initial reform recommended two-year tenures (Lange, 1988b; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988), but this was amended to three years and elections are now triennial. As previously noted, the ability to hold staggered elections introduced some flexibility from 2002 (NZSTA, 2008). While this does not exclude those standing down from seeking re-election, it does allow for the election of new trustees on a more frequent basis, while retaining a degree of experience at the same time. A recent letter shows that approximately 13% of primary schools conduct mid-term elections.⁶

⁶ M.Scott, Acting Group Manager, Education, Curriculum and Performance, MOE (personal communication, 14 December 2012)

With the above section briefly outlining the historical context for the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms, it is now appropriate to review the literature around boards of trustees more fully.

Part Two: A literature review of boards and their roles.

2.4 Introduction

This study's focus is the impact of a board of trustees on student learning. The two cornerstones that outline boards' responsibilities when focusing on student learning are the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) and the National Education Goals (NEGs). Each of the eight current NAGs cover an important area of board governance, but it is NAG 1 that focusses their work on student learning, and is therefore central to this study.

2.5 Board roles, responsibilities and functions

2.5.1 Legal mandate

While a range of acts and regulations now demand boards' compliance, the Education Act 1989 remains their 'guiding Act' and covers all educational sectors from early childhood to tertiary. For boards it outlines everything from election processes to statutory management, and from curriculum to the payment of teachers' salaries. While it provides a framework for boards to define their own roles, it does not specifically list the boards' powers and duties.

Boards also hold a moral mandate in that they have been elected by their community to represent that community. This moral position gives rise to a range of ethical issues which Codd (1999) noted as placing practitioners in a position where they had a "moral obligation to render an account to several different constituencies, which may have different, or even conflicting interests" (p. 51). Sergiovanni (1992) believes that "our actions and decisions are influenced by what we value and believe, as well as by self-interest [and] when the two are in conflict, values and beliefs usually take precedence" (p. 21). This tension had been brought about by introducing "into the school a set of managerial values which are in direct contrast to traditional democratic educational values" (Codd, 2005, p. 200).

2.5.2 National Education Guidelines (NEGs)

In 1988, the Department of Education's Board of Trustees Working Group were tasked with recommending "actions to be taken to achieve the structural and administrative changes outlined in the policy statement *Tomorrow's Schools* with due regard to Section 1.11 – 1.1.47" (1988, p. 2). The working group listed what they believed board's responsibilities were to be. They stated "the prime responsibility of Boards of Trustees is to govern" and in elaborating further, they noted that boards were to have responsibility for "understanding and following the National Guidelines" (p. 47). These national guidelines were defined in the Education Act 1989, Section 60A as the National Education Guidelines and comprised five components; the National Education Goals (commonly referred to as the NEGs); the foundation curriculum policy statements; the National Curriculum statements, National Standards; and the National Administration Guidelines (commonly referred to as the NAGs). This study focusses on two of these; the NEGs and the NAGs.

There are currently ten NEGs (see Appendix 1). They focus on standards of achievement; equality of opportunity; development of knowledge, skills and understanding; learning in the early years; implementing a balanced curriculum to support a broad education; monitoring and assessment; special needs learners; access to qualifications; increased participation by Māori; and respect for ethnic and cultural heritages.

The National Administration Guidelines have been reviewed over time, with some items added and others removed (MOE website, September 2012). There are currently eight NAGs (see Appendix 2). They focus on student achievement; strategic planning, self-review and reporting; employment and personnel; property and finance; health and safety; legislative compliance; the provision of an annual achievement and variance report to the Secretary of Education, and the development and maintenance of school charters (MOE website, September 2012).

2.5.2.1 School Charters

The Education Act 1989 mandated that boards were to develop and maintain a charter in partnership with their community. This document would outline the board's aims, objectives, aspirations and goals for both the short and long term as well as outlining how the school would give effect to the NAGs. Kirkpatrick, chair of the Board of Trustees Working Group noted that the charter was to be a "binding agreement between the institution and the Minister of Education [and] therefore each member must be conversant with and meet the requirements of the National Guidelines for education" (Department of Education, 1988, p. 9).

The 1990 charter had a different focus to that proposed in 1988. There was significant debate around the wording and its implications for the Minister of Education and schools as "it was feared that in their current state they would be too legally binding on the Crown" (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1988, p. 162). Schools which had been prompt in submitting their charters for processing and approval had them returned, as they required amendments (MOE, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c). This delayed the development of any school-based documents which were required to support governance structures and ran counter to the original intentions of Minister Lange and his taskforce (Butterworth and Butterworth, 1988).

Charters remain "the key guiding document for [the] boards" (NZSTA, 2010, p. 11). There was an expectation that a school's annual targets would be reported on in the boards' annual report (Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project, 1991; MOE, 1990a, 1990b & 1990c). In October, 2009, it was legislated that charters would include student achievement targets based on National Standards and that these would be reported to the community and MOE from 2012 (MOE, 2009a). Student achievement, the boards' responsibility, has become the primary focus within the NAGs (MOE, 2010a). The implication for boards is that all structures, processes and activity is underpinned by the overarching goal of improving student achievement (NZSTA, 2010). This has

served to redirect many boards attention away from the 'doing' to the 'strategic leadership', giving them a new lens through which to view their work (NZSTA, 2005). NAG 1 defines that lens.

2.5.2.2 National Administration Guideline 1 (NAG 1)

As noted earlier NAG 1 focusses a board's work on student learning. A full copy of NAG 1 is listed in Appendix 2. Its introductory paragraph reads, "each board of trustees is required to foster student achievement by providing teaching and learning programmes which incorporate The National Curriculum as expressed in The New Zealand Curriculum 2007 or Te Marautanga o Aotearoa".

NAG 1 links many areas of school-based practice to student achievement. It focusses boards on the two overarching curriculum documents, The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13, and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, the national curriculum for Maori-medium education. NAG 1 focusses specifically on teaching and learning programmes at various levels up to Year 10, as well as targeting cohorts of students requiring specific interventions. NAG 1 sets out to ensure that schools use assessment to identify groups at risk and use this evidence to develop strategies that address their needs. It also mandates a requirement that boards consult with their Māori community, as a strategy to support this group of priority learners. NAG 1 directs boards to have a stronger focus on the capacity of specific individual learners and groups of learners, so that "every decision is focused on making a difference for the students" (MOE, 2013c, p. 3).

It could be argued that the focus of NAG 1 supports the narrowing of the curriculum in schools with its primary focus on literacy and numeracy, and that this is in direct opposition to NEG 5 which focusses on "a broad education through a balanced curriculum covering essential learning areas [where] priority should be given to the development of high levels of competence (knowledge and skills) in literacy and numeracy, science and technology and physical activity".

The implication for this study is that boards have the mandated responsibility to ensure that student learning occurs for all students, as NZSTA note, “they [boards] are responsible for ensuring they focus their strategic planning on improving student achievement and teaching and learning programmes” (NZSTA, 2010, p. 11). Picot’s taskforce stated that “the board of trustees will be responsible to parents and the community for approving the programme of learning and teaching adopted for the school” (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1998, p. 110), a direction affirmed by the NZSTA who note that one of the key areas of board contribution is to “monitor and evaluate student learning outcomes” (2010, p. 15). They note that boards are accountable for student learning, however do not outline to whom they are accountable. As they are a legislated body, there is a line of accountability to the MOE, but there is also the moral accountability to the students, the staff and the school’s community. Trustees must consider what it is that they do that best makes differences to student learning within these accountabilities. The MOE suggest that these considerations should be based on the purposes, principles and practices within the board’s model of governance (MOE, 2010a, p.2). It was noted that trustees were now able to lead through policy development; “for the first time, parents acting as school trustees were able to take a leading role in establishing policies affecting both how their school was to be governed and the direction of its educational programme” (Monitoring Today’s Schools Research Project, 1991, p. 6).

2.5.2.3 Reporting

Accountability for student learning brings with it the need for board reporting. In addition to the external reporting provided by ERO, Education Act 1989 section 100 requires boards to provide an annual report to a range of groups. These reports include the annually updated section of the school charter, and data and commentary around progress towards the board’s annual goals, of which reporting on National Standards is compulsory (NZSTA, 2010). The reporting on student achievement, in an open and public document, has seen significant

opposition. There is concern about the known negative impact on learning and on students from programmes that appear to be driven by assessment (Gilmore, Crooks, Darr, Hattie, Smith, J., & Smith, L., 2009). Gilmore et al. (2009) also highlight the need for achievement standards to be evidence-based, an area of concern noted by opponents to this model. Further concern has been voiced around the possibility that data will be collated to form 'league tables' which have been shown internationally to be detrimental to some schools (Sahlberg, 2011). The debate is ideological and appears likely to continue and is an area in which boards are wide-ranging in their views.

2.5.2.4 Local Curriculum Development

The focus on improving student achievement is supported in the school's charter through the development of a local curriculum and school-based goals (Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project, 1991). This local curriculum was to include a strong local content and a more school-centred focus, thereby allowing boards to focus their resources and develop programmes that suited their students' particular needs (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). This curriculum was to be developed in partnership with the school's staff and with the expectation of local community input (ibid., 1988).

The purpose of this document was "to set the direction for student learning and to provide guidance for schools as they design[ed] and review[ed] their curriculum" (MOE, 2007, p. 6). The generic nature of the document allowed every school to develop a more locally-personalised document to link the New Zealand curriculum to the school curriculum (MOE, 2007).

2.5.2.5 Monitoring

Boards also hold responsibility for monitoring progress toward their charter goals, which are linked to both the government priorities and the school's curriculum (NZSTA, 2010). Despite the Ministry of Education stating that "the board cannot delegate its ultimate accountability for the school's performance" (2010, p. 5), in practice, the reporting of this has often become a responsibility

delegated to the school's principal as part of the day-to-day management responsibilities, a stance that is supported by NAG 2 which speaks of maintaining an on-going programme of self-review, including evaluation of student achievement information "with the principal and teaching staff" (Multiserve, 2003, p. 6).

External monitoring and accountability was the role of the Review and Audit Agency, later renamed as the Education Review Office, and now commonly known as ERO (Lange, 1998b; Lough, 1990; Nash, 1989; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). ERO's review foci have changed over time (Mahoney, 2004; Thrupp, 2004). Their initial focus on compliance has changed and their school-based review focus from 2011 has been "student learning and achievement, with the purpose of contributing to improved student achievement" (ERO, 2011a, p. foreword). This development interestingly parallels the change in focus on principal leadership, which Alcorn (2011) notes has assumed "unprecedented international importance over the past two decades" (p. 122). She goes on to note that there has been a shift from "managerial efficiency, underpinned by neo-liberal theories, to leadership of learning, measured by national reported testing" (p. 122). It could be argued that boards of trustees have evolved along a similar path, one from management and compliance to now focusing on learning and achievement outcomes, as noted previously by NZSTA (2005).

There has been on-going debate around the role of the Education Review Office with proponents of a market-based ideology seeing it as a method of ensuring tax-payers are getting value for money and that schools, staff and boards are being held accountable (Fiske & Ladd, 2001; New Zealand Treasury, 1990). Opponents see the concept of external review as not aligning with the self-managing philosophy, and as being another example of interference from the centre (Codd, 1999; Codd & Gordon, 1991). Lewis (2003) refers to the role of ERO as being a key part of "the new apparatus of control" (p. 149). It is clear from their website that ERO's focus has been more towards literacy and

mathematics, but there is also evidence an expanding focus to include Pasifika achievement, achievement and support of children with special needs, and the school's implementation and reporting on National Standards. The latter focus indicates a greater degree of board compliance at a national level (Education Review Office, 2011a) while the former point to an alignment with the MOE's focus on specific cohorts of priority learners - Māori, Pasifika, children with special needs, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

A further change in ERO process has been the change from a regular three-yearly review cycle for schools not deemed to be at risk, to one which now sees some schools being allocated a four-to-five year review cycle (ERO, 2011a). This option is only given to schools whose:

curriculum is consistently effective in promoting student learning
– engagement, progress and achievement [and] high quality performance in relation to *The Six Dimensions of a Successful School* [student learning – engagement, progress and achievement, teaching, leading and managing, governing, school culture and engaging families] will be evident [and where ERO will have] no material concerns about the education and safety of students (p. 11).

It is of interest that Gray et al. (1999, 2001) refer to a three-year cycle generally being “the appropriate period to identify consistent trends or patterns in school performance” (as cited in Campbell & Levin, 2009, p. 59). This implies that a four-to-five year review may not be the most appropriate time frame for external reviews when boards are analysing trends and patterns in student learning. This again highlights the tension between governance and management, and between self-management and external review and centralised control (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998; Lange, 1988b).

2.5.3 Governance v management

The literature clearly points to confusion over the roles of boards (Alcorn, 1990). Court & O'Neill (2011) perceive the role as an "oversight of all policy decisions" (p. 131) while the role is broadly defined in the Education Act 1989, Section 75 as including "complete discretion to control the management of the school as it thinks fit" (p. 46). Their position is further confused by the MOE (2013c, p. 5), who note that "while boards have considerable discretion, they are not autonomous" implying a tension between self-governance and external accountabilities. However Court & O'Neill's (2011) high-level understanding may not always be evident in the working model with boards having difficulty "shifting [their] focus from the 'doing' to a 'strategic leadership' perspective" (NZSTA, 2005, p.5). This role confusion has been somewhat reinforced by the myriad of terms used to outline the expected roles of boards, which include; 'governors', 'managers', '[people with] responsibility for student achievement', 'developers of policy' and 'ensurers of satisfactory educational outputs' (Lange, 1988b; Lough, 1990; NZSTA, 2010).

Boards have the mandated authority to manage their school within wide-ranging parameters but with little clarity around the definitions of such terms. Despite there being a degree of central control and accountability, the Education Act 1989, section 75, gave boards the "complete discretion to control the management of the school as [they thought] fit" (p. 145). It is noticeable that the legislation speaks more of management than governance. In fact the term governance is found only once in the legislation, in a reference to polytechnic councils. While this may be attributable to being the vocabulary of the era, the lack of use of the term governance forced schools to generate their own definition to guide them in their roles, leading to confusion within some boards (Lange, 1999). Many boards found, and continue to find that the first challenge they had as an entity was to clarify and define their roles, collectively and individually (NZSTA, 2010). It is still argued that these roles are often unclear and continue to be the basis of many tensions, issues and disputes within boards (Alcorn, 1990; Robinson et al., 2003; Thody, 1998).

This has led to a range of interpretations which have seen the clarity between the roles associated with the governance responsibilities of boards and the day to day management responsibilities of principals become clouded and confused (Alcorn, 1990; Court & O'Neill, 2011; Department of Education and Training, 2006; Lange, 1999; Lough, 1990; NZSTA, 2008). Lough (1990) noted that "strengthening the administrative/management framework **within** schools is the most effective mechanism for achieving improved educational outcomes" (p. 32), implying the need for greater clarity in boards' roles. The Education Act 1989 clearly outlined the governance and management responsibilities expected of boards through the inclusion of a set of National Education Guidelines. These guidelines outlined the need for a site-based curriculum through the implementation of the NAGs, particularly NAG 1.

2.5.4 Changing roles and functions over time

France, the ex-President of NZTSA notes that the governance for boards have "come a long way since the devolution of power in 1989" (NZSTA, 2005, p. 5). The original intention of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms was to devolve decision-making to school level through boards, with external agencies (such as ERO and the MOE) providing resourcing support and accountability through training and advice (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Initially a great deal of time was spent consulting with local communities around the production of a locally-focused charter and then on the development of policies, whereas it now appears that these processes are more embedded in board practice, occurring as a regular part of the review cycle (MOE, 2010a; NZSTA, 2010).

The board's focus is now student achievement and there is a heightened awareness of accountability through the demands of ERO audit visits and MOE documentation (NZSTA, 2005). Lange (1999) noted that "schools today are not the schools we planned in 1989" (n.p.) denoting that the proposed model was not implemented in its entirety and implying that the original intentions of the

Tomorrow's Schools reforms had changed even within the first ten years of the reforms. Boards have had to change to meet new demands and opportunities, one example of such being when school zoning rules were removed in 1990 (Watson, et al., 1997). Such changes further aligned the reforms with the neo-liberal, market-driven model by placing schools in direct competition with one another for pupils (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Gordon, 1993; Lange, 1999; Stoll & Fink, 1989; Sullivan, 1993). This competition for students has created an environment that has lessened collegiality across schools and impacted on boards through a need to shift their focus away from learning and towards school promotion in a competitive market (Court & O'Neill, 2011).

2.6 BOT support and guidance

2.6.1 Organisations

The move to the *Tomorrow's Schools* model saw an increase in workloads for principals and boards (Wylie, 2007b) primarily due to the administrative requirements. Wylie (2007b) also notes the need for further support for schools. This was specifically addressed in the Picot Report, with the intention to develop both a Parent Advocacy Council (PAC) and community education forums (Lange, 1999; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

The purpose of the PAC was to help parents to promote their views, support parents to become better informed about the system, and to provide an avenue for parents to gain access to programmes not currently being provided in their child's current school (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). This concept never really eventuated, with the legislative mandate being repealed in October 1991 (New Zealand Parliament, 1989b). This was an understandable outcome when the Lough Report (1990) stated that the agency was "to act as a last resort to help groups and individuals" (p. 51). Interestingly, Lange (1999) reflected that he felt that a significant opportunity was lost through this decision.

The role of the community education forums was to be somewhat less formal, with the intention being to assemble "so that the views of the whole community

[could] be brought together on matters of educational importance” (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 54). There is still provision for this in the current legislation, yet such forums have rarely been convened, with only one being on record (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988; Wylie, 2009). Support, advice and training are now primarily provided to boards by the MOE, ERO and NZSTA. As the changes became more and more embedded, the roles of these organisations also changed and while it is argued that they support boards in a range of areas, it is also argued that they are a mechanism for re-centralising control of key areas, e.g. curriculum (Lewis, 2003; Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993).

2.6.2 Training

One avenue of support that Wylie’s (2007a) survey highlighted was “[trustees’] knowledge and training” (p. 2). Bush (1998) concurs, “there has been a long-established awareness that training is required if school leaders are to operate effectively” (p. 331), and trustees have been elected by their communities as leaders. In an early newsletter to board chairs the MOE stated that “on-going training for trustees is just as important as professional development for teaching staff” (MOE, 1990b, p. 2). However there was no reference to supporting the board’s role in student learning. A range of training opportunities were offered to boards initially (Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Ministry of Education, 1990b). While many boards took up these offers, factors of distance and member availability were an issue for many, particularly rural boards and it was questionable whether the training was adequately resourced (Monitoring Today’s Schools Research Project, 1991).

Training for boards has changed over time and it is noticeable that there is a mixture of administrative and professional learning on offer. A review of websites shows that current training primarily comes in three styles: free webinars run by MOE, school-based assistance from MOE staff from a contestable pool, and specialised training through other commercial providers on a cost-recovery basis. Some specialised, contextualised, face-to-face training

is able to be provided through outside providers (Macpherson & McKillop, 2002), but again there appears to be little focus on the board's role in student achievement. NZSTA provides a trustee development programme which includes some free sessions to member boards and others on a cost recovery basis.

MOE training focuses on such areas as Ka Hikitia, the Māori Education Strategy; the e-asTTle on-line assessment tool; use of ENROL – the national student data base; NovoPay – the recently implemented sector payroll system; board succession and election planning, and *Tātaiako*: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners (MOE, 2011d).

As is the case with many other groups who volunteer their time to committees, a basic issue for boards is creating time to complete training (Alcorn, 1990). This may cause issues with the 'take up' rate of training, meaning that many boards may not be as well informed as is necessary, or that the training they receive is primarily from within school, often led by the principal (Robinson, et al., 2003). Thody (1998) highlights similar issues and concerns in her review of training for principals and school governors in England.

2.7 Effectiveness of the Tomorrow's Schools Model

Nash (1989) suggests the 'jury is still out' about the effectiveness of the *Tomorrow's School* reforms. There is little doubt that the pre-1989, bureaucratic Department of Education model saw primary schools frustrated by an unresponsive system in which they had little say in how they were governed or managed (Fiske & Ladd, 2000 & 2001). However, Wylie (2012) argues that schools did have a large degree of flexibility during that period, particularly in terms of curriculum content and curriculum delivery.

Ex-Secretary for Education Howard Fancy, as cited in Townsend (2007) noted his optimism in the way the system has developed since the 1989 reforms (Fancy, 2007). New Zealand School Trustees Association and the Ministry of Education, strong proponents of the reforms, believe that the current practice of school-

based decision-making improves the degree of local control and parental involvement (ERO, 2007; MOE, 2010a; NZSTA, 2010). This acceptance by boards can then be considered affirmation that the system is making a difference (Lauder, 1992; NZSTA, 2008; Pont et al., 2008). However, power and control appear to be being reclaimed by the state through such mechanisms as the mandating of National Standards target setting, public reporting, charter expectations and the quality assurances of ERO reviews, none of which align with the philosophy of self-management (Court & O'Neill, 2011; Mahoney, 2004). This tension within the 'centralised decentralisation' model appears likely to continue with the current Ministerial requests for reviews of the school governance model and the New Zealand Teachers' Council (Law, 2012). Lange summarised the mismatch between what was envisaged and what has eventuated when he stated that , "*Tomorrow's Schools* is not today's school system" and "schools today aren't the schools we planned in 1989" (Massey University, 1999, p. n.p.). Ramsay, a member of the Picot taskforce, stated "it is now history that the Picot Report was never fully implemented and that there has been a gradual withering away of its prime goals" (Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott & Poskitt, 1990, p. 2), while Fullan (2011) noted that the goal of improved student achievement outcomes has not materialised.

2.7.1 International replication

It is difficult to assume that any system has, or can be been replicated internationally in its entirety (Levin, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011). However, there is a wealth of evidence that the market ideologies evident in the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms are also evident in a range of countries (Zegarac, 2012; Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004; Gillard, 2009; Humpage, 2008; McKay, 1994; Pollard, 1989; Shuayb & O'Donnell, 2008).

In the Australian state of Victoria education administration was reviewed in 2005 after, in part, concerns were noted from stakeholders in relation to communication between the school councils and the Department of Education and Training. The review team's terms of reference were:

- Provide advice on the role, membership structure processes and support the needs of the schools councils
 - Provide advice on the legislative framework for governance of government schools
 - Propose a set of revised governance principles that meet contemporary standards of good governance [and]
 - Provide advice on the role of the local community in school governance and the contribution that school councils can make in building the capacity of their local community.
- (2006, p. 4)

The Ontario State Government declare that education is the responsibility of provincial government (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2009). There are explicit sets of responsibilities for boards, which control a number of schools, trustees, principals, teachers, students, parents and school councils. The school councils are similar to New Zealand's boards of trustees in that

Their membership reflects both the school and the community, and must include parents and guardians of students, the principal, a teacher, a student representative (secondary school councils), a non-teaching school staff member, as well as members from the community at large. Parents and guardians must make up the majority of council members (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, n.p.).

These councils provide advice on a range of areas, including "school board policies that will affect the school" and "programmes and strategies to improve school, performance on provincial and school boards tests" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, n.p.).

McKay (1994) noted that one target of the devolution within the English system was "increasing community participation in schools" (p. 31). He also noted that the 1977 Taylor Report recommended that "a single body should be responsible

for school operations and vested interests should not predominate. The organisation should comprise representation from the local council, staff, parents, the community and, where appropriate, students” (1994, p. 31). Ryan, Duan & Merry (1998) note that “the English system at primary school level is aimed at promoting the concept of self-managing schools, where responsibilities and budgeting responsibilities are devolved to individual schools” (p. 173) and while noting the influence of the competitive, market model in the English system also notes that “in many respects, English primary schools have the freedom to decide upon many aspects of their management” (ibid., p. 173).

The Dutch system sees schools run by ‘competent authorities’ also referred to as school boards. While their form is decided by a local municipal authority, they do receive a bulk financial allocation which “they are free to spend at their own discretion, giving them more scope to manage the school” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2012, p. n.p.). Similar to New Zealand, the competent authority has the right to delegate some of its powers “to the school head [principal], but responsibility continues to lie with the competent authority” (ibid., 2012, p. n.p.). There is evidence of centralised decentralisation in that schools are seen to be free to organise their teaching, yet, must include a core range of subjects and must also meet the Department’s quality standards (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012). Since 2007 all Dutch schools have had to have a participation council (UNESCO, 2012, p. n.p.). This group has “more far reaching powers and no important decisions can be taken without its assent or advice” (ibid., 2012, p. n.p.). The competent authority must seek prior consent of this group for decisions affecting many areas, including school mergers, changes to the school’s educational plan or the school’s aims.

The 1999 National Education Act paved the way for school-based management (SBM) change in Thailand, with many powers devolved to school boards “in the course of a reform aimed at overcoming a profound crisis in the education system” (Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004, p. 289).

Education administration in South Africa has a number of similarities to that in New Zealand. Primary schools are governed by school governing bodies (SGB) which comprise “representative educators, non-teaching staff and parents. The school principal is an ex-officio member and does not have voting rights” (Dossing, Mokeki & Weideman, 2011, p. 18). Also akin to New Zealand school boards, parent representatives must hold the majority on the SGB, the principal cannot hold the role of chair, the term of office is three years, and secondary school students elect a student representative (Karlsson, 2002). Their mandate is to “determine the admission policy, appoint staff and determine the school budget and fees” (Dossing, et al., 2011, p. 18). A further similarity is the outlining of governance and management responsibilities within legislation, the South African Schools Act 1996. Bisschoff (2000) noted similarities between the South African system and those of the Uganda and the United Kingdom, the latter of these already noted here as bearing similarities to the New Zealand system. Karlsson argues two other similarities; firstly that the original intentions of the reforms have not been achieved and secondly that there is evidence of centralised decentralisation where “while provinces may develop their own policies within that [nationally formulated] framework, they are mandated to implement all such [nationally formulated] policies in schools” (2002, p. 328).

One significant difference is what is seen as a two-tier system (Karlsson, 2002). While Section 20 of the South African Schools Act is mandated for all public schools, Section 21 allows a further range of functions to the school governing bodies through an application process. Successful applicant schools assume responsibility for “maintaining and improving the school’s property, buildings and grounds, determining the extra-mural curriculum and choice of subject options within the provincial curriculum policy, purchasing textbooks, learning materials or equipment and paying for services to the school” (Karlsson, 2002, p. 330). These responsibilities are already a part of the mandate for all New Zealand public schools.

Maha (1997) notes that the education system in Papua New Guinea also has similarities to New Zealand's devolved system in that their boards of governors are an "effort to allow local participation in educational decision-making" and that it be recommended "that consideration be given to delegating some curriculum powers to the Boards" (p. 179). He states that the rationale for decentralisation included concerns around the distance of decision making from the school and that local decision making would alleviate the suspicion between two key groups – the church and government.

All the systems referred to above include aspects of the neo-liberal market ideology similar to those that are encompassed within New Zealand's *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms.

2.7.2 Evidence of function or dysfunction

It could be argued that the neo-liberal ideological reforms evident in *Tomorrow's Schools* have created functional systems as they have been implemented internationally. Hawke (2002) notes that "there is little desire for any wholesale reversal and few would argue that the changes experienced have not included improvement" (p. 2). He also states that "much fine tuning is still occurring" implying that the current system may not be providing what is required, a point reinforced by Ostermann⁷ (2012) and Openshaw, Lee & Lee (1993) who noted that "we need to recognise that *Tomorrow's Schools* was reflecting widespread dissatisfaction from all sides of the political spectrum" (p. 273). None of these authors speak specifically of improvement in student learning.

There has been, and continues to be, concern about these educational reforms internationally (Heystek, 2006; Karlsson, 2002; Sahlberg, 2011) and within New Zealand (Alcorn, 1990; Openshaw, 2011). Robinson et al. (2003) noted governance difficulties at the time of their research into governance. Four years later Wylie (2007b) speaks of approximately 16 per cent of schools being at risk.

⁷ S. Ostermann (personal communication, 19 March, 2012)

2.7.3 Evidence of influence on student learning

While there are numerous surveys and reports on the impact and outcomes of *Tomorrow's Schools*, there appears to be little written about the influence of boards on student learning. This in itself is an interesting silence in the literature. It could imply that linking the role of the board and their influence on student learning may be difficult to quantify or that such a link has not been a primary focus. The MOE and NZSTA suggest that boards are influential (MOE, 2010a; NZSTA, 2008, 2010), however their areas of influence require clarification. Wylie's research reinforces this when she states that "strategic direction and support for school staff are the two key elements they [principals] see in board's work" (2007a, p. 8). This implies that these are areas of board influence. MOE consider that raising student achievement is (now) the board's core business and the charter is a key planning document for boards in driving this (MOE, 2011b, 2011c). An annual plan which includes National Standards-based student achievement targets is a part of the charter, creating indirect links between boards' actions and student learning (MOE, 2010b). These links are through the formal processes of adopting targets in the charter, as well as "showing the costs involved and [how they are] aligned to the school's annual budget" (MOE, 2010b, p. 5).

The monitoring and reporting of progress towards targets adds an accountability focus to boards' work (NZSTA, 2012). Fullan and Leithwood state that "when you leave your role as a teacher, most of what you're going to do will have an indirect effect on students and their learning" (Zegarac, 2012, p. 18). Trustees are in this removed role, as working directly with students is not part of their mandate. Hallinger & Heck (1998) note that "the general pattern of results drawn from this review supports the belief that principals exercise a measurable, though indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement" (p. 157). It would be appropriate to argue that, on these understandings, it is difficult to conclude that trustees have any direct influence on student learning.

2.7.4 What impacts have the reforms had on student learning and how do we know?

NZSTA (2008) state that, “robust enquiry into the contribution boards can make to student success has not yet been undertaken in New Zealand” (p. 18). The purpose of the reforms were outlined as being purely administrative, therefore implying that the primary focus was not student success or learning, but on how the system managed itself. However it was believed that, as a consequence of the reforms, better outcomes for students would be a result (Lough, 1990; McKay, 1994). What these outcomes were and how they were to be measured was not defined. Some argue that there have been improvements in outcomes since 1989 (NZSTA, 2010; Pont et al., 2008). Still others believe that the difference has been more around the centralising of control by the state (Alcorn, 1990; Court & O’Neill, 2011). What limits the debate, in some way, is that there is no single definition of learning, with the many different groups having as many different definitions for the same terms and phrases.

2.7.5 BOT terminology

It was noted in the initial reform documents and in many papers produced since, that a range of phrases have been used when speaking of indicators of success. Leane, when speaking of his experiences on a board, refers to the *Tomorrow’s Schools* framework using such terms as “managerialism and markets” (2000, p. n.p.), measurable outcomes and educational products and entitlements. Research uncovers that other terms have included; achievement outcomes, achievement targets, educational achievement, educational outcomes, educational success, learner progress, learning outcomes, standards, student achievement, student learning, student outcomes and student progress (ERO, 2011b; Lange, 1988b; MOE, 2007; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). These management-based terms are a product of their era, when many governments were moving along a neo-liberal journey that Fiske & Ladd (2001) noted as having two contextual sets of forces; “the democratic-populist and the managerial-business currents” (p. 538).

Robinson & Ward (2005) speak of the need for trustees to “learn a generic governance language” (p. 185), yet the apparent synonymous use of such terms promulgates inconsistency across the profession with each term or phrase having a distinct context-based meaning. If boards are confused around these phrases, this brings into question whether the meaning and understanding of the terms ‘student learning’ and ‘student achievement’ also hold a range of meanings for boards and individuals. Schwandt (2004) speaks of people bringing themselves to a conversation with a shared history and understanding based on “what we were able to understand about [this] situation” (p. 37). If board members come to a conversation with such a range of definitions around the vocabulary of governance and management, and possibly see them as synonymous, then “the need to educate trustees” (Bennett, 1994, p. 38) is of major importance.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted many of the tensions within the education sector created through the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms. The literature generates a number of questions, with the key question being “do trustees perceive that they have an impact on student learning?” Through investigating this question, it may be possible to ascertain the impact of a number of different aspects of governance aspects under the *Tomorrow's Schools* regime. Analysis of the responses may provide enlightenment on such wonderings as;

- What impact do board members have individually and collectively on student learning?
- Do board members’ impacts differ by role (i.e. is the impact of the principal different to that of the chair, to that of the staff representative, to that of the elected / co-opted members etc.)?
- Is the current system most suited to achieve the recommendations outlined in the taskforce’s original proposal? (Or, do boards have ideas on another, more suitable model?)
- Is the original proposal still the government focus?

- What is the collective understanding of the difference between student learning and student achievement?
- How effectively are boards meeting their bicultural requirements?

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

"People have long been concerned to come to grips with their environment and to understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 5). Individually and collectively we continually strive to make sense of the unknown and even greater sense of the known. Research is one means that people use in attempting to make sense and to understand; two other methods being experience and reasoning (Mouly, 1978).

Cohen et al. (2011) cite Borg's contention that research is "a combination of both experience and reasoning and must be regarded as the most successful approach to the discovery of truth" (p. 7), while Mutch (2005) notes that "many people turn to research as a recognised and credible process for establishing fact" (p. 15). Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewis & Lowden (2011) simply define it as "systematic enquiry, the outcomes of which are made available to others" (p. 3).

It is clear that research builds on both individual and collective knowledge. Crotty (1998) states that "when we first see the world in meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture" (p. 54). Any researcher's attempt to enhance this knowledge has at its foundation ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs. These are encompassed within an overarching theoretical framework which locates the research and the researcher within a particular view of the world, or paradigm (Mutch, 2005). Guba (1990) defines a paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (p. 17). Guba & Lincoln (1994) later refine this definition to:

a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimate or first principles. It presents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply

on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness (p. 107).

3.1.1 Ontology, epistemology and methodology

Johnson, R. (2011) speaks of paradigms as a research culture where “the beliefs include, but are not limited to ontological beliefs, epistemological beliefs, axiological beliefs, aesthetic beliefs, and methodological beliefs” (p. 33). It is agreed that such beliefs cannot be proven or disproven, but that “all such belief systems or paradigms are *human constructions*, and hence subject to all the errors and foibles that inevitably accompany human endeavours” (Guba, 1990, p. 19).

Researchers are located within particular paradigms, thereby viewing the world in a particular way, based upon their key beliefs and influences (Mutch, 2005). Neumann (as cited in Mutch, 2005) considered that there are three main paradigms in research: positivist, interpretivist, and critical. Each has its own distinct ontology, epistemology and methodology that influence the design of the research, its approach and the presentation of its data (Creswell, 2003; Mutch, 2005).

3.1.2 Research methodologies

The two primary methodological frameworks in research are quantitative and qualitative. However, a third methodology, commonly known as integrated or mixed methods, has emerged over recent decades. It is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodology and continues to gain an increasing degree of support (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori, 2009).

Mutch (2005) notes that “quantitative research design is more linear and sequential than qualitative” (p. 46), aiming to “numerically describe a phenomenon of interest (descriptive research), explore relationships between variables (correlational research) or manipulate the variables to measure effects

(experimental research)” (ibid., p. 40). Burns (2000) noted it as an approach that “fostered a naive faith in the substantiality and ultimacy of facts” (p. 10).

Qualitative designs focus more on inquiry, are more evolving and often circular, and are more inductive than deductive (Mutch, 2005). Burns (2000) states that this approach “places stress on the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis, as opposed to the criteria of reliability and statistical compartmentalisation of quantitative research” (p.11). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) state that “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1).

Academics support and challenge the mixed methods framework. Johnson, R. (2011) argues the relevance of the method as “there are sets of researchers from multiple epistemological and methodological backgrounds that care about similar broad issues” (p. 31) therefore the need to be seen to be in one camp or the other is unnecessary and that a “combined package of some of both” is preferable (ibid., p. 31). Supporters of this viewpoint include Briggs & Coleman (2007), Cohen et al. (2011), Coles & McGrath (2010), Creswell (2003, 2009), Menter et al. (2011), and Mutch (2005).

Others, including Denzin, Lincoln & Giardina (2006), Howe, (2004), and Scott & Morrison (2006) challenge the method. They believe that such a ‘cook book’ approach has taken qualitative research out of its home in the critical, interpretive framework and ignores the ontological and epistemological differences between the two, thereby lessening the rigour of the research.

Despite the range of views from those within the mixed methods community, a shared or bridged definition has been proffered by Tashakkori & Creswell (2007) who broadly define mixed methods studies as those “in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using

both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry” (p. 4).

This researcher aligns with those who believe that the ‘best of both worlds’ is possible through the use of a mixed methods approach, but only when this is the most appropriate way to answer the question under research. This, however, is not the case for this research study, as the qualitative method is the most appropriate method in this instance.

3.2 Conceptions of social reality

Denzin & Lincoln (2003) note that “three interconnected, generic activities define the qualitative research process” (p. 29). These are commonly known as ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Ontology refers to the nature of social reality, about what is known, about what exists and what does not, and the nature of interactions. Researchers’ claims and assumptions vary widely and are even diametrically opposed (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin et al., 2006; Krauss, 2005; Patterson & Williams, 1998). Cohen et al. (2011) note that these ontological stances impact on the “very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated” (p. 7). From the physical scientists in the 19th century, to the social scientists and post-positivists of today, each group interprets and justifies truth from a personalised world-view or paradigm.

Epistemology is defined in Suchting (2006) as “that branch of philosophy [which] answers the general question ‘what is knowledge?’” and as “the theory of knowledge” (p. 331), while O’Leary (2007) defines it as “how we come to have legitimate knowledge of the world; rules for knowing” (n.p.). Cohen et al. (2011) note that research involves epistemological assumptions, concerning “the very bases of knowledge – its natures and forms, how it can be acquired and how communicated to other human beings” (p. 7). Differing cultural and ideological

beliefs lead to a range of competing epistemologies which include empiricism, realism, rationalism and positivism.

All research is encompassed within particular methodologies. Mutch (2005) defines methodology as “link[ing] theoretical frameworks to methods [which] usually comprise a selection of related methods and strategies” (p. 108).

Such links ensure that the strategies and processes used are supportive of both answering the research question and maintaining the paradigm within which the researcher is working.

Paradigms can be viewed as being located on a continuum, based upon differing ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. At one end of that continuum are the positivists (objectivists). Positivism has been influenced by the work of Comte, Durkheim, and Newton & Locke. It is linked to scientific methods and descriptions (Beck, 1979; Creswell, 2003). Positivists view knowledge as measurable facts, generalised in a value-free manner by an objective, totally independent, expert researcher. According to Krauss (2005), reality is an absolute, and “science is seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that it might be predicted and controlled” (p. 760). The research methods supporting positivism are generally deductive, focusing on theories that can be tested and justified. The research is most often reported in a quantitative form, involving numbers, percentages and effect size. There is belief that any research study in this paradigm can be replicated, denoting a mechanistic use of science (Cohen et al., 2011; Krauss, 2005; Lather, 1992).

At the other end of the continuum are the interpretivists (constructivists), who hold a fundamentally different worldview to the positivists. Burns (2000) notes that interpretivists argue that, “since human judgement is so profoundly a part of every human act, the supposed objectivity of science, is in fact a delusion” (p. 10). Interpretivists aim not to define the world, but to “interpret the complexity of their world, [and] to understand events from the viewpoints of the

participants” (p. 11). Interpretivism has been influenced by the work of such constructivists as Piaget, Weber, Kant, Mannheim, and Vygotsky who saw learning as social advancement and saw the learner as central in the learning process. Their belief was in a naturalistic approach, defined by Kent (1998) as an approach “that assumes that there are multiple views of reality influenced by the social context and environment in which a situation is viewed” (n.p.).

Interpretivists believe knowledge to be subjective, highly contextualised and value-laden (Creswell, 2003). The researcher is often seen as a participant, more subjective than objective. Reality is socially constructed, accepting of multiple realities and recognises that people’s lived realities may differ. Krauss (2005) notes that interpretation is a crucial element in the meaning making process. The research methods supporting the interpretivist approach are generally inductive, moving from the particular to the general with a focus on creating theories. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) note that there are often spirals backwards and forwards between stages throughout the process. The reporting of the research is most likely to be in a qualitative or narrative form, providing a range of possible reasons for the noted outcomes. Due to the value-laden contextuality of the research, there is no belief that research studies in this paradigm can be explicitly replicated (Cohen et al., 2011; Krauss, 2005; Lather, 1992).

Located between these ideological extremes are the critical theorists. They focus on critiquing society and culture with an emancipatory aim. Critical theory has been influenced by the work of Freire, Habermas, Lukács, and Foucault. Bohman (2013) notes that this once narrow focus by a group of social theorists from the Frankfurt School’s Institute for Social Research has become a far more wide-ranging and encompassing set of theories that continue to “provide the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms” (n.p.). Handel, (as cited in Wright, 2006) speaks of “discrimination by socio-cultural difference” (p. 84), of research work being “epistemologically coloured” (ibid., p. 84) and the need to

construct “alternative epistemologies [through] approaching knowledge from other perspectives” (ibid., p. 84).

Critical theorists challenge the belief that research is about knowledge, arguing that power is the underlying motive. They see knowledge as subjective, contextualised and value-dependent, and impacted upon by power relationships. They believe that research is political and that power dynamics impact on societal groups inequitably. They are conscious in their effort to unpack these impacts. They see truth as determined by the power holders and history written by the victors (Gordon, 1999).

Critical theorists aim to be influential by giving voice to the powerless or previously silenced. Critical theorists view research and researchers as being influenced by gender, race, class, life style and disability (Creswell, 2003). Indigenous critical theorists (including Bishop, Durie, Glynn, and Smith) challenge the scientific methods of the interpretivists, arguing that they maintain the dominant colonialist discourse, that they are often culturally insensitive and do not respond to cultural pedagogies (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Durie, 1998; Mahuika, 2011; Smith, 1999). Feminist researchers hold similar views of hegemony in research noting its exclusionary intentions and implications (Dillard, 2006; Lather, 1992).

Critical theorists see the researcher as being embedded within the research group to such an extent that the impact is reciprocal - the researcher on the group and the group on the researcher, and that the researcher may become indistinguishable from the group. Reality, according to Smith (1999) is not an absolute, but is contextually constructed and there are differences between the “lived reality and [the] imposed ideals about the others” (p. 165). Research methods supporting critical theory are aimed at challenging the impact of these power relationships. Action research is often used as it supports an openly political stance for challenging effects on groups who have been discriminated against by ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or social class through the power

dominance of positivism and interpretivism (Dillard, 2006; Lather, 1992; Wright, 2006). Smith (1999) noted the influence of such research, “the critique of positivist research by feminist and critical theorists created a set of conditions from which culturally sensitive approaches to research were developed” (p. 163).

3.3 Research paradigm

An investigation into how trustees impact on student learning aligns most closely within a naturalist, interpretivist paradigm. Locating the study within this paradigm depicts that it will be viewed through a qualitative lens, allowing for both biographical data collection and narrative data collection through semi-structured interviews (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Coles & McGrath, 2010; Creswell, 1994).

3.4 Research design

Research design is governed by fitness for purpose (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). It establishes the practicalities of the research and links them to the researcher’s chosen paradigm and methodology. This research design sits inside a qualitative framework, using the data produced by a number of individual case studies to make a range of observations. Bassey (1999) notes that “case studies are, of course, studies in singularities and so the suggestion that findings from them may be applied more widely may seem somewhat contradictory, if not invalid” (p. xi). The implication for this study is that, while there may be no definitive findings that can be made through such a design, “fuzzy generalisations” (p. xi), or observations may eventuate.

Birley & Moreland (1998) acknowledge the singular nature of case studies, and note the aim of case studies as being “to describe and understand the phenomenon “in depth [and] in the round”” (p. 36). Yin (1989) notes that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 13).

Case studies are categorised into three areas – explanatory, exploratory and descriptive. These categories assist in focusing on the research question being asked. The researcher is guided by three conditions when making a decision on which category to use – the type of question posed, the extent of control the researcher has over behavioural events, and the balance in focus between contemporary and historical events (Yin, 1989).

The consideration of the singular nature of case studies and the contemporary nature of the question reinforced this researcher's intention to not use the case studies within a comparative study. Such a method focusses on the individual within the unique nature of their local context while allowing for generalised analysis across all participants (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gillham, 2000).

3.4.1 Research question

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) define research questions as “the researcher's conceptual and theoretical questions regarding the theme being investigated” (p. 327). The ability to develop and frame these is argued by Anderson (1998) as being “probably one of the most important skills you can develop as a researcher” (p. 43), highlighting the influence of the research question over all other aspects of the research design.

Mutch (2005) argues that the aim of qualitative research is to “uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants” (p. 43). The research question used in this paradigm must be planned from the theoretical to the operational, and must account for any constraints that may limit the scope of the research (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mutch, 2005).

One such constraint is the inexperience of the researcher (Gillham, 2000; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Yin, 1989). In an attempt to minimise the effect of this inexperience in this study, value was seen in conducting a small number of pre-study interviews. These pilot interviews allowed the researcher to refine the

questions to be used, as well as develop questioning techniques and interview-based data recording strategies.

Taking the above guidance into consideration, this study asks the primary question “What impact do elected board members perceive they have on student learning?” This question is broad in its intent, yet specific in its sampling. It implies that the sample group has an understanding of board’s governance and management roles as well as having clarity around a definition of student learning.

Subsequent to this question is a focus on student cohorts the Ministry of Education (MOE) identify as priority learners - Māori, Pasifika and children with special education needs.

3.4.2 Research methods

It is crucial that the research question aligns with the method that will be used for data gathering and analysis. Qualitative research looks to collect data in natural settings, acknowledging the significance of context on the research. The data often takes the form of narratives, stories, perceptions and descriptions (Burns, 2000; Coles & McGrath, 2010; Mutch, 2005). Such data does not easily lend itself to being replicable by others, but it does allow broad claims to be made.

A range of methods for creating a participant group were considered. Non-probability sampling methods rather than probability sampling methods are more supportive of this form of data collection. Non-probability sampling falls into three primary categories: purposive, theoretical and quota-based sampling (Burns, 2000). Purposive sampling is a common method used in qualitative research, and is based on identifying cases that fit within the research outline. This method of sampling will be used in this study, as it allows the researcher to select cases that “serve the real purpose and objectives of the researcher of

discovering, gaining insight and understanding into a particularly chosen phenomenon” (Burns, 2000, p. 465). In this case the phenomenon are trustees.

This study will draw on a range of strategies. These will include a review of the New Zealand and international literature surrounding the ideological and practical implementation of decentralised education systems, which was exemplified by the New Zealand’s 1989 experience, commonly known as *Tomorrow’s Schools*. Semi-structured interviews of elected trustees and the analysis of school-based documents and records (boards of trustees meeting minutes and strategic plans being a secondary source of valuable information) will also be used to support and validate data (Gillham, 2000).

The selection of the above methods were influenced by a variety of constraints. Consideration was given to other methods, including random sampling, snowball sampling, theoretical sampling and quota sampling. Due consideration saw that these were constrained by the beliefs that a purposive sample was required, that participants would be forthcoming, that the research question did not hold to any one particular theory, and that the sample was too small to consider quotas respectively.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) view the qualitative research interview as a “specific form of conversation” (p. 21). This conversational data collection method is most suited to the case study approach.

3.4.2.i Semi-structured interviews

Interviews where control is shared and direction is generally co-constructed are categorised as semi-structured, a method that includes many features of non-directive interviews which are common in psychiatric and therapeutic disciplines (Cohen et al., 2011). Semi-structured interviews are a major tool in a qualitative researcher’s toolkit. Burns (2000) sees them as allowing the researcher to start with a broad but flexible outline while focusing on the participant’s “perceptions of themselves, of their environment and of their experiences” (p. 425), whereas

Briggs & Coleman (2007) refer to them as “conversations with a research purpose” (p. 209). Schwandt (2004) speaks of conversations where the self is brought to the table and “each party to the conversation must deal with his or her own way of understanding” (p. 36).

The conversational nature of semi-structured interviews facilitates the establishment of rapport between the researcher and the participant and allows for flexibility in the question order. This flexibility provides opportunity for the researcher to investigate areas of interest as they arise, with the goal of gaining insights that may not otherwise have been possible (Asher, 1976; Cohen et al., 2011; Menter et al., 2011). These attributes also provide participants with a degree of control over the interview and the ability to shape its direction through their responses. Such co-construction allows both the researcher and the participant to clarify aspects of which they are unsure, be they questions or responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews are not without limitation (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Schwandt (2004) speaks of personal vulnerability in any conversation. The conversational nature of interviews generates a degree of variability of understandings. These are caused by the social dynamics generated not only by the roles of the researcher and the participants, but also by their cultural norms. The variables include, but are not limited to, literacy levels, ethnicity, gender, age, personality, status, and real or perceived positional power (Birley & Moreland, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Mahuika, 2011; Menter et al., 2011). Such limitations need to be considered throughout the course of the research, particularly during interviewing and data analysis.

The social situatedness of an interview, with the belief that intelligence is a shared development within a social setting, raises the issue of researcher bias. This is a factor that needs to be acknowledged and managed, it cannot be eliminated. Birley & Moreland (1998), Briggs & Coleman (2007), Cohen et al. (2011), and Lindblom & Ziemke (2003) all highlight that the outcomes of

interviews can be inhibited by issues such as time expensiveness, interviewee fatigue and the possible lack of anonymity for the participants. Consideration of such issues throughout the course of the research will support the researcher in limiting such constraints.

The flexibility offered through this method can impact on the quality of the data gathered, particularly when the interviewer is inexperienced. The loose nature of the interview may see pertinent questions or themes omitted and thereby lessening the quality of the research (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011; Menter et al., 2011). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argue that research interviewing is a craft, supported through experience in the act of interviewing and being a part of the research community. They note that there has however been “an emphasis on interviewing as a method” (p. 82). This researcher’s inexperience has been highlighted, hence pilot interviews were undertaken in an attempt to provide a small degree of experience and practise. The predominance of method over craft is also seen as a support for this inexperience. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that while the co-constructed nature of interviews provide for a wider gathering of data, this lack of structure can provide for a range of questions being asked and themes followed through where “important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted” (p. 353). The researcher’s awareness that the themes which underpin the questions must be covered assist in addressing this possibility. Provision will also be made for follow up, or secondary, interviews, to further explore themes and responses.

3.4.2.ii Document analysis

While triangulation is probably not possible within the constructivist approach used in this study, it is intended that analysis of the minutes of Board of Trustees meetings will provide another dimension that assists in the interpretive process as well as a means of validating the interview data. Any other documentation that trustees use in their context-based governance role other than the generic public documents, as outlined in the literature review will also be considered in this context. These documents are obtainable from the New Zealand Ministry of

Education (MOE), the Education Review Office (ERO) and New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA).

Should school-based public documents such as charters and strategic plans be offered by trustees, or considered deemed to be useful by the researcher, they may be used to support the triangulation of data and deepening understandings of each school's context.

3.4.3 Field access

At this point in the design process, the researcher proceeds to select possible participants. Having made the decision to work within a qualitative approach, to use case studies and semi-structured interviews, a sample was required.

After consideration had been given to the time-consuming nature of semi-structured interviews, the amount of available time and to the researcher's inexperience, it was decided for ethical reasons that the sample could not be drawn from the researcher's own 'back yard' cluster of schools (Creswell, 1994), but could also not be nationally drawn. These considerations suggested that purposive sampling was required as this was most suited to a small scale study. Burns (2000) notes that purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling "based on defining the criteria or standards necessary for a unit to be chosen as the case" (p. 465). This narrowed the range of the sample without increasing the required number of cases studies, through using prior information and knowledge of the characteristics of the wider possible sample population (Burns, 2000).

A list of schools was compiled from the MOE website, with the parameters being set to maximise the contextual knowledge of the researcher. This included factoring in the differing positions and roles held by trustees (e.g. principal, chair, staff representative and parent representative). It was decided that these were variables that could not be catered for in a tightly limited sample, nor within the

timeframe. Also considered was the method in which members came to be on the board, i.e. whether they were co-opted or elected.

It was decided that elected parent representatives from five full primary schools would be invited to participate, as this was seen as being a manageable number whilst still providing a significant amount of data for analysis.

Hence, this study's aim is to include two elected representatives from each of five full primary schools in the MOE Central North region. The use of such purposive sampling was to provide a small group of trustees who had attained trusteeship through the election process with the focus on achieving depth of information, rather than breadth (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

3.4.4 Researcher-participant relationship

The researcher is pre-eminently the research tool, they are neither independent nor objective (Borman, LeCompte & Goetz, 1986). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) note that the "importance of the researcher's integrity is magnified because the interviewer him- or herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge" (p. 74). The relationship between the researcher and the participant must be considered and respected. Denzin et al. (2006) state that the researcher "builds a collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, mutually accountable relationship with those studied" (p. 776). They highlight the need for the researcher to be sensitive to how their personal biography impacts on the relationship. This sensitivity must be supported by a strong ethical stance throughout the study (Creswell, 2003). The impact of the relationship between the researcher and participants has been initially addressed through the sampling process, with selected schools sharing many characteristics similar to that of researcher's context. This is supported by the researcher's awareness of possible concerns and conflicts within the roles and will be addressed throughout the process of gaining informed consent.

3.4.4.i Research ethics

Creswell (2009) notes that “researchers need to protect their research participants” (p. 87). Therefore an awareness that the likelihood of ethical challenges arising at any stage of the research process is implicitly recognised. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that as many challenges as possible have been identified and remedial or eliminatory actions considered (Cohen et al., 2011).

Many authors note the importance of ethics in research (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2009; Denzin et al., 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Hennink, et al., 2011; Menter et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). The researcher’s actions to addressing ethical issues uses Asher’s (1976) classification into the three categories of “consent, confidentiality and acceptable research procedures” (p. 267).

Consent:

Participants have self-nominated, thereby ensuring that initial consent has been obtained based on their reading of the letter of invitation and accompanying brochure. Further discussion prior to interviewing will see the process outlined to the participants, including recording and note-taking protocols, clarifying the right to decline answering particular questions throughout the interview, the right to read and amend their transcript, and the right to withdraw at any point prior to accepting the accuracy of their transcripts. Participants will then sign an informed consent document confirming their involvement in the study, or they may choose to withdraw at this point.

Confidentiality

The parameters used in the purposive sampling both enhance and inhibit confidentiality for the researcher and the participants. By removing ‘back yard’ schools (Creswell, 1994), the researcher has limited the possibility of vested interest or localised conflict issues. Confidentiality may be compromised by

drawing the sample from a neighbouring region in which the researcher works regularly and is widely known.

Participants will be informed that the analysis and interpretation of the data will be shared only as they have agreed to and that their 'raw' data, i.e. interviews and transcriptions, will be held securely. They will also be informed that female pseudonyms⁸ will be used to support the anonymity of data, ensuring that personal identities will not be able to be ascertained by others.

Potential harm and Possible Conflicts

A stringent application and ethical approval process has ensured the researcher is aware of the required procedures, however issues of potential harm and possible conflict were considered. The issue of potential harm is addressable through maintaining acceptable procedures. It is likely that the research will generate discussion within boards, and the researcher must remain sensitive to their contexts. Questions asked of participants will not require comment or judgement of others. The only personal information collected will be biographical and is unlikely to be controversial.

The researcher must also consider potential harm to themselves. The conflicts between the roles of researcher and principal have been considered. By maintaining an ethical approach throughout the research, it is expected that any such harm will be avoided. Potential conflicts of interest include the researcher's professional roles as a New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI) National Executive member and membership of New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF). These were declared to participants through the initial invitation to participate and were restated as part of the informed consent acceptance process.

⁸ The pseudonyms used were all female; Anna, Bev, Carla, Denise, Erin, Frances, Gaye, Holly and Irene

3.4.5 Data analysis strategies

Cohen et al. (2011) note that data analysis strategies must be ‘fit for purpose’, as there is no single, correct strategy. They note that the purpose of data analysis is to make “sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (p. 461). This alludes to two interwoven strands – the data itself and the context within which it was collected. Qualitative data is generally collected via socially constructed methods, of which interviewing is a dominant strategy. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) see research interviewing as a social practice in which the data and the context impact upon each other, implying that the context and the data cannot be compartmentalised and treated in isolation. Cohen et al. (2011) note that the world is “subjectively structured, possessing particular meaning for its inhabitants” (p. 260). Briggs & Coleman (2007) portray this relationship as a mixture of science and art, indicating that a range of strategies may be required.

Briggs & Coleman (2007) also note that “data analysis is not ... something that can only be considered at the end [of a study]”, but something that “is an iterative and persistent part of the research project” (p. 350). This suggests the need for planning, preparation and structures to deal with the large amounts of rich, deep data that qualitative methods produce.

There are numerous models and guides to support the thematic analysis of data. LeCompte & Preissle (1993) suggest a 7-step model, Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) model has 4 steps, while the models suggested by both Briggs & Coleman (2007), and Creswell (2003) use 6 steps. A striking similarity among the models is the understanding of the recursive nature of the process, which ensures that questions are raised and ideas clarified and modified throughout the study (Borman et al., 1986; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010).

Creswell (2003) states that case study research involves a “detailed description of the setting and the individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or

issues” (p. 191). He also suggests that, ideally, such analysis is incorporated into a six-step process:

- i. organising and preparing the data for analysis,
- ii. reading through the data (to gain a general sense of the information it contains),
- iii. detailing the analysis with a coding process,
- iv. generating a description of the setting or people as well as categories of themes for analysis
- v. advancing how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and
- vi. making an interpretation, meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003).

This aligns with the grounded theory model developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). It encourages what Parlett & Hamilton (1976) refer to in Cohen et al. (2011) as progressive focusing, where the researcher starts with a wide view of the data and uses data analysis strategies to allow salient themes to emerge through funnelling and sifting (Cohen et al., 2011).

This study adopts Creswell’s (2003) model to guide the analysis process as the structure it provides supports the needs of an inexperienced researcher. The six-step process is divided into two 3-step subsections with the transition between the two being related to the coding of data. Data are coded to initially identify ‘chunks’ as an organising tool. The next phase is to bring meaning to the ‘chunks’ to generate themes (Birley & Moreland, 1998; Creswell, 2003).

The final stage of data analysis is to answer the question, what were the lessons learned? This phase is one of interpretation, distilling the ‘new learning’ from the raw data (Creswell, 2003).

3.4.6 Representation and reflexivity

The researcher’s interaction with the participants affect the data collected and can often lead to role conflict (Borman et al., 1986; Burns, 2000; Gillham, 2000;

LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). How the researcher both describes and positions themselves in relation to the research is important as this impacts upon the research outcomes (Creswell, 2003; Mutch, 2005). Burns (2000) reinforces that when he notes that the accuracy of data and its analysis must “bear the weight of any interpretation” (p. 415).

The involvement of participants in data analysis is a suggested strategy to support this, however it is not a strategy used in this study. Interview data will be professionally transcribed. Participants will be able to comment upon the accuracy of their transcripts, but not the analysis.

To ensure the participant’s voice is authentic, researchers must engage in on-going personal reflection, known as reflexivity. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that the “participants-as-practitioners-and-researchers need to apply to themselves the same critical scrutiny that they are applying to others and to the research” (p. 310). The introspective process of reflexivity supports the researcher to understand how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are producing through acknowledging their biases, values and interests (Burns, 2000). Briggs & Coleman (2007) argue that the researcher becomes “empowered to produce insightful, critical, systematic and skilful accounts” (p. 32) and allows them to celebrate their key roles without promoting their supremacy.

Reflexive practices permeate the entire research process and culminate upon publication, at which point the researcher loses a degree of control over the study. The researcher cannot assume responsibility for the way the work is interpreted by readers. Any interpretation is the prerogative of the reader.

3.5 Issues of quality

A common argument made against qualitative research is that it is too subjective due to the researcher’s role as a participant and that it is invalid, unreliable and untrustworthy (Borman et al., 1986). This can lead to similar statements to that

noted in Briggs & Coleman (2007) – the concept of ‘researcher supremacy’, and supports the challenge from those in the critical paradigm who seek to address any imbalance of power for the disenfranchised groups in society (Dillard, 2006).

This reinforces the need for on-going scrutiny of the entire research process, so that it is found to be of such a quality that no part of the process can be refuted (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) believe that the counter to these arguments is by retaining the terms validity and reliability, but reconceptualising them in forms relevant to qualitative research.

Reliability and validity take many forms. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that the arguments that threaten them cannot be eliminated while Birley & Moreland (1998) believe that these are possibly the most important techniques used to support research. Creswell (1994) however challenges this, stating “reliability play[s] a minor role in qualitative inquiry” (p.195).

While noting that there are challengers to the use of the term ‘reliability’ in qualitative research, Cohen et al. (2011) state that for research to be reliable “it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found” (p. 146). Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that the issue is more with the term than the concept and that replacing the term ‘reliability’ with ‘dependability’ would be a “better fit” (p. 219). Birley & Moreland (1998) believe that “reliability is the second feature [after validity] that any data collecting instrument must possess,” but that “one should not expect an exact replication of results” (p. 43).

Validity is a noted strength of qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). There is general acknowledgement that it is found in various forms (Birley & Moreland, 1998; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 1994). Birley & Moreland (1998) note it as a technique that “ensures that data sets collected or items used are pertinent or

relevant to the research” (p. 41). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) define it as “whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate” (p. 327).

Burns (2000, p. 419) notes that the technique of triangulation, “the use of two or more methods of data collection” is often used to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. The researcher intends to use this technique within the course of this study to ensure that that initial impressions are not accepted too willingly, but are verified and validated through the use of other data sources.

Trustworthiness is related to the analysis and collection of data. Gillham (2000) notes that trustworthiness is key to ensuring the integrity of the research. Briggs & Coleman (2007) note it as an ethical issue that “a research project needs to be designed to create trustworthy [valid] outcomes if it is to be believed to be pursuing truth” (p. 114).

To ensure that the researcher’s interpretations can be justified, clear and precise processes must be maintained throughout. These can be supported by the researcher’s adherence to a code of conduct, primarily outlined in the ethics committee approval process earlier in the research (Menter et al., 2011).

Irrespective of the language used across the paradigms, validity, reliability and trustworthiness are supported in the research through the researcher’s process, their reflexivity and through conversations with others about their findings.

This study is based on a small sample and does not set out to make assumptions of the wider board of trustee population. This study sets out to offer an observational analysis of a small group, with the understanding that further research in the same domain may either challenge or confirm the researcher’s observations. It is through the processes of validity and reliability that the researcher will be able to answer questions of authenticity and “respond with confidence when explaining the methodology” to others (Briggs & Coleman, 2007, p. 91).

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate trustees' perceptions of their impact on student learning. The research questions initially focused on gaining understandings of trustees' definitions of governance and student learning. The questions then sought to support gaining insights into how trustees perceived that they, individually and collectively, had an impact on student learning through their governance roles, which led to a more specific focus on the Ministry of Education's (MOE) identified priority learner groups - Māori, Pasifika, children with special needs, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

While the original sampling sought to have two elected parent representatives from each of five boards of trustees, this did not prove possible. Gaining participants proved to be extremely difficult and time consuming. Initial scoping saw a total of fifteen boards approached. For a variety of reasons, ten of these declined to participate. Three of the five boards that agreed to participate were within the decile⁹ 1 – 3 bands, falling within the MOE's fourth priority group of catering for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. The decision as to which members were to be involved was a decision for the boards themselves. This led to two board chairs being included in the study, which fell outside of the initial methodology. It also led to a move away from the initial target of two trustees per board, with one board supplying three participants and another board one. A further impact on the planned sampling was the withdrawal of consent by one participant after their interview had been transcribed, this participant having relocated overseas. This left the data analysis being based on nine participants, not ten. It is also noted that one elected trustee moved into the role of chair between the time of the initial interviews and the secondary interviews.

⁹ A decile is a 10% grouping. A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

An initial analysis of participants' responses around governance and management, student learning and trustees' impact on these saw a range of themes emerge. These included the power held by trustees, the dominance of the property and finance NAGs in comparison to any other National Administration Guidelines (NAG), the importance of the roles principals hold within management and governance, the need for succession planning as a measure to support continuity of practice, and the need for professional learning and development for staff and trustees to strengthen their roles in supporting student learning. These themes are interwoven throughout the chapter.

A range of other factors that impacted on student learning became evident, including the impact of mid-term elections on governance processes, the impact of external review - particularly that by the Education Review Office (ERO), and supporting student learning for priority groups through the use of programme-based interventions (i.e. Tape Assisted Reading Programme – TARP, Toe By Toe, Reading Recovery). These factors are outlined later in the chapter.

The key questions asked of participants define the structure of this chapter. The questions focused on:

- Trustees' definitions of governance and student learning,
- The impact trustees perceived they had on student learning,
- The impact trustees perceived they had on priority learners,
- Actions trustees felt that they could or should be taking to further impact on student learning, and
- Their reasons for standing for election to trusteeship.

4.2 Definitions of governance

Participants were reasonably clear on their understandings of governance, with just over half responding immediately and the remainder pausing briefly prior responding. They generally defined their role in terms of being an over-arching one. Anna spoke of "setting the general direction and tone". Bev noted that she

“probably should know more about it”, but defined governance as “having the big picture together”. Irene considered her role as one of guidance with a focus on “planning, management and decision-making” and Denise outlined it as “setting the agenda [and] setting it all up so that the kids get a good all-round education”. Holly spoke of “getting everything right” and “making good decisions” that are information-based and achieved by consensus.

Erin was very clear that it was not the day-to-day running of the school, noting, “there is a clear division between those sorts of things [day-to-day running of the school and governance]”. Gaye spoke on similar lines, noting the importance of the efficient running of the school to meet compliance requirements within fiscal limits. She also noted that it was important that the “needs of the personnel and the parents and the students” were being met.

Carla spoke of governance as “not [being about] having power and control” but being about the smooth running of things. She had the expectation that trustees worked together and “were aware of what was going on”, and also spoke of how their internal hierarchical structure supported governance roles by clarifying them at different levels.

The majority of participants did not specifically link their definition of governance to student learning, but a relationship between the two was clearly implied through their references to their trusteeship roles in general, and within strategic planning in particular. This supports the Education Review Office (2011b) findings that these aspects of governance supported student learning. Participants spoke openly of their involvement with strategic and annual planning. Anna spoke of budgeting and of the 10-year property plan, Bev of planning and direction, and Frances of “developing an annual plan based on objectives from the 5-year plan [to] allow the school to do what it needs to do”. Frances initially found being asked to define governance as “quite freaky” and required prompts to outline how governance looked to her. She noted that the board’s role was a formal one that was structured in its format and focused on

policy setting and resource allocation. Questioning in a secondary interview saw Frances clarify her position and note that her board's governance was very strategic, "[being] about direction and strategically making those decisions to form a plan of where you are directing yourself towards". She noted that her board had asked themselves "a few questions about where we need to be heading and what is important". Frances also spoke of the school's charter and of policy setting, as did Denise and Erin.

4.3 Definitions of student learning

When challenged with defining student learning, participants' definitions were wide-ranging and many had difficulty stating what they believed student learning to be, including one who had never heard the term before but believed it to be "a no brainer". Rather than offer a definition, many spoke of student learning holistically. They included such aspects of learning as building students' content knowledge, individualising learning programmes, having expectations of on-going progress and high levels of student engagement, working towards aspirational levels from a range of starting points, developing individual student's potential and supporting their future progress through the education system. They also frequently spoke of the methods they used to resource student learning, primarily through budget allocations. This aspect will be covered later in the chapter.

When considering individual responses, Anna's view was holistic. She believed student learning to be:

not just reading and writing and maths, it's all those other, I'm not sure that you call them life skills - being human, being a member of society sort of thing. And exposing them to what's out there [and] exposing children to the wonderful stuff that's in the world.

Anna also referred to the term 'student achievement' as opposed to student learning, implying that she saw the two terms as synonymous. Carla noted that student learning was "making something better for that individual" that was

supported by people “work[ing] alongside these children and seeing the goals that children achieve every day”. Frances believed it to be “[to support children] to be the best that they can be [through] being able to learn to their own individual ability”. Frances also spoke of student learning in terms of achieving predetermined, cohort-based targets or standards. Bev spoke of “students [being] engaged in their education”.

Irene and others linked student learning even more closely to progress and achievement than Frances. Irene believed that students needed to learn “everything they can” while Bev felt it was “students achieving, knowing where they are, what they need [to do] to progress”. Erin saw it as being “students moving up” and “being on a rising plane all the way through”.

Other participants looked at it from a more practical level. Anna, despite her holistic view noted above, also saw student learning to be “first and foremost [about] the real two basics of being able to read and write”. Irene agreed, noting that “reading and maths [are] the main thing”.

Gaye used the analogy of a toolkit. She saw that the board had a responsibility to ensure, “that all our students have the tools and have the knowledge that they [need to] carry on their education”. She stated that “learning is about bettering yourself, it’s about increasing your knowledge, and it’s about making the right choices” and that the board’s role was “providing the resources for the teachers to deliver the programmes that they need to actually get the results”. This implied an achievement focus, but also highlights board’s collective responsibilities.

4.4 Trustees impact on student learning

Participants were next asked if they believed that they personally had an impact on student learning as a trustee, and if so, in what ways. The majority of participants’ responses were in the affirmative and fell into the two areas of variability of their personal impact and their individual impact through the

board's governance processes. There was some confusion as to whether their impact was in the role as a trustee or as a parent-volunteer. This is commented on later.

4.4.1 Variability of impact

Individual responses spanned the entire breadth of a continuum. At one extreme was the participant who initially stated that they had no impact at all. Located somewhere along the continuum was the trustee who felt their impact was indirect, and further along still was the participant who believed that they had a direct impact. The remaining participants were located along the continuum, believing that they had an impact on student learning, but not qualifying or quantifying their impact as being either direct or indirect.

Irene initially stated that she had no impact on student learning at all but, after further questioning, she felt that the impact she had was indirect. Her evidence to support this belief was based on her in-school volunteer role with literacy and horticulture programmes. Irene's responses highlighted the confusion around the principle of governance that some trustees experience in separating parental and voluntary roles from trusteeship (MOE, 2010a, NZSTA, 2008). While Irene's experiences in the school may well have deepened her knowledge of the school's activities, processes and programmes, the personal and more direct impact she had in her familial role through such involvement has very different expectations to that of her role as a trustee. Carla's response also indicated some confusion in the understanding of her roles when she spoke of "us going to school every day and seeing those children at school [and] working alongside these children". NZSTA (2005) acknowledged this confusion, noting that boards have had difficulty "shifting [their] focus from the 'doing' to a 'strategic leadership' perspective" (p. 5).

Gaye believed that she had a direct impact on learning through her input into board decisions. She stated, "it's about responsible decision making [and] ensuring that I, along with the rest of the board, make the right decisions to get

the result for the learning”. This indicates a belief that the resourcing decisions made at board level impact on student outcomes and student learning. It was significant that Gaye chaired the board at her school, as her position may well have influenced her thinking. When asked about this, she was definite in her belief that this was the case, noting that she seemed to “take more ownership than the board, not intentionally, but it seems to just come with the territory of being the chair”. She also noted that she had more information and that her weekly briefings, informal chats and email communication with the principal saw her being better informed. It was through these communications that decisions were made about what information went to all board members and what was kept between her and the principal, “I make a point of keeping the board informed as much as I can, but there are some things that [the principal] and I discuss that just don’t need to go out to the board”. The heightened knowledge and decision-making roles spoken of by Gaye in her role as chair were reinforced by Carla who noted that she was more involved in discussions with the Principal and other trustees since assuming the role of board chair.

Resourcing, in all its forms, was a focus in many trustee responses, including the resources around staffing. Anna believed that the most important role that a board member had was the selection of the principal. She also believed that providing extra teacher aide hours supported student learning, as did the employment of a Kaiawhina i te reo¹⁰ to support tikanga¹¹ Māori throughout the school. Anna also believed that supporting staff through resourcing their professional learning opportunities was an important way in which she had an impact on student learning.

Along with staffing, resourcing of class-based or withdrawal support programmes (i.e. the TARP programme and Reading Recovery) were also believed to have an impact on student learning. Gaye spoke of putting “the money into the

¹⁰ A Kaiawhina i te reo is an employee who is fluent in Māori language and has an in-depth knowledge of Māori traditions and beliefs and works alongside a teacher supporting Māori language.

¹¹ Tikanga are the Māori customs and traditions that have been handed down through the passages of time.

programmes to achieve those results” while Irene spoke of people working one-on-one with the children, and Frances was more general in noting that the board’s role was “being able to allow the teachers [and principal] to do their job [and] us, as a board, being able to allow them the facilities”.

On a less concrete level, many board members spoke of having an impact through formalised opportunities to question or challenge the principal. Bev noted an occasion when staffing placement had been challenged at board level, based on trends noted in student achievement data, while Holly commented that the expectation at her board meetings was to ask questions with the aim of growing knowledge and understanding.

Other participants spoke of impacting through their input to property developments, i.e. Anna’s comment of “you’re always asking yourself how is this creating a good environment for children to learn in”, policy setting (Frances’ comment encapsulating this – “every board member has a say [as] to what the policy is”), deciding on targets, reviewing progress data and, as Holly noted “making decisions”.

Participants were also asked to consider whether some trustees had a greater or lesser impact on student learning than others. The responses varied widely, with just over half of the respondents believing that the individual impact on student learning did vary by trustee. There was significant comment around board members “just being there and not having an opinion” or “not being on board”. There was, however, no correlation with length of service, as some participants noted that they knew of long serving trustees who, in their opinion, often offered little in terms of decision-making around student learning. Their input was more evident in practical, ‘doing’ areas.

There was also comment on trustees coming to the table with a particular focus, two examples being property developments and outcomes for Māori students. Gaye noted, “you [need to] have board members that are actually working there

for everyone and not for themselves or pushing any one agenda". This was reinforced by Denise's awareness of some trustees creating power plays when standing for the board and by Erin who noted her awareness of one board member who "had a bit of a personal agenda for his own children".

Carla, in particular, perceived that personal impact was lessened when you did not have children at the school, stating that "it's easier for them to understand the processes" when they are parents with children currently at the school, and reinforcing her perception by stating "they're amongst it". Holly reinforced this, "they lack the input for not being there". Irene held similar beliefs believing that her work in school, while wearing a familial hat brought to the board "that I do get involved with the children too".

Carla believed that personal impact was increased if you worked in the school with the children, noting "because I'm already in the school, quite often I know how things work". She reinforced by adding, "that just being amongst the children in general keeps me up to date". Gaye agreed, noting that "the ones who actually go into the classrooms and help with the reading and things like that" would have a greater impact.

It was also a perception that your personal experiences, i.e. what you brought to the table, had a bearing on the impact you had as a trustee, with the belief that being from a non-educational background limited your impact. Anna noted that "if you have a background as a teacher you are going to just have a better understanding of what is happening and what might be required". Erin alluded to this when she spoke of board of trustee election processes, noting that when a trustee resigned, "we've got to find somebody that's prepared to do that part of it".

4.4.2 Impact through governance processes

When asked about their personal impact on the governance processes, i.e. what the board actually did, trustees were challenged and a range of responses were

noted. The general belief was that their board's governance processes did have an impact on student learning, as can be seen from the responses above, but it appeared participants had not considered their own role or responsibilities in the processes of governance. Responses fell into four broad categories; strategic direction, policy development, monitoring and review, and questioning, challenging and advocacy.

When speaking of strategic planning, Irene noted that she had seen the strategic plan "but didn't really need to put any input in". Holly also mentioned strategic planning, and also noted an involvement with the budget and the 10-year property plan, which were discussed at board meetings. Both respondents felt that their input in these areas had an impact on student learning, Holly noting that they "make the decisions" and Irene believing she had an indirect impact. The language used by these two respondents (for example "seen" as opposed to developed, and "shown it" as opposed to designed or drafted) indicated that that they had been involved in reviews of this work as opposed to any original development, with this appearing to have been undertaken by principals or previous boards,. This distancing may be seen as limiting the possibility of these trustees' impact on student learning.

Policy was another area of governance mentioned by respondents with Bev, Carla, Erin and Frances all noting that they had 'had a say'. Erin spoke of "making sure that the policies are in place" while Carla noted her role in the policy review process occurred when "we will all sit and we will decide whether those things need to be addressed". Frances succinctly summed up her impact, stating "we all have an equal say over it [and] we form a combined decision". Bev noted that she focused on equity when considering board policies and processes, looking out for the "most at risk students and their families [to] clearly see whether this way of doing something is going to work for them or is going to actually marginalise them even further". Bev believed that her advocacy had an impact on student learning. Again, it appears from respondents' comments that they did not initiate or develop policy, but that they were involved in its review.

Both Anna and Erin noted their impact on student learning occurred through the processes of monitoring and reviewing. Anna spoke of listening to staff and prioritising and balancing needs, an item that aligned strongly with her financial portfolio. Erin spoke of analysis and “[making] sure the curriculum is being adhered to”. The inference here is that these trustees hold a more holistic view of their influence on governance processes. There is no doubt that this is impacted upon by the portfolios these two particular respondents held, one being a treasurer and the other a board chair.

Questioning and challenging of decisions and plans was seen as another way that respondents impacted on governance processes and student learning. Bev noted that, “as a board, we’ve had to challenge the principal” and that she was a “strong voice in that space”. Irene spoke of questioning annual planning, “we have a look through it and make sure it’s all right and if there’s something wrong, then we can say”. Denise was more philosophical, “we debate it amongst ourselves, you’re not always going to agree with everything that gets said and what you end up with, but at least you’ve had your chance to have a say against it”.

4.4.3 Subcommittees and portfolios

Despite Carla noting her disappointment that her board no longer used a portfolio-based governance model, and Gaye also stating that her board governed without allocated portfolios, other participants noted that their boards supported their governance work through the use of subcommittees, portfolios or long-standing committee structures, the latter evidenced by Frances’ role as secretary and Erin’s as board chair. They saw this model as enabling board members with specific skills or interests to work in a particular area (i.e. property) or on a particular project (i.e. fund raising). Bev noted that she was involved in portfolio-based groups including Māori, social and community. Two participants noted that their role was that of board chair.

A traditional governance model has seen portfolios assigned based on the NAGs of student achievement and curriculum, reporting and self-review, personnel, property, finance, health and safety, and legislative compliance (NZSTA, 2010). Erin noted that her board used this model. Anna and Denise, who both spoke of their leadership roles in finance, further evidenced this. Anna also held the property portfolio.

Participants were directly asked if their boards had a portfolio or subcommittee that focused on student learning or achievement. The overall response indicated that they did not, and that it was generally felt that this was part of the principal's role.

4.5 Trustees impact on priority learners

In their *Statement of Intent 2012 – 2017* the MOE state,

we have two key priorities that will enable us to meet our outcomes: improving education outcomes for Māori learners, Pasifika learners, learners with special needs and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, [and] maximising the contribution of education to the economy (MOE, 2012d, p. 13).

When asked of their impact on the learning of these priority groups, some participants spoke of their support as a strategic, overarching one. Denise linked it to the school's strategic plan when she noted, "basically it is part of our objectives or goals to help these kids". Irene was even more general, "we like to focus on everybody. Everybody is just as important. Whoever needs help, needs help". Bev said, "whatever vision we have, it's about bringing those [at risk] people with us and if it works for them, it is going to work for everybody else".

4.5.1 Māori learners

There were a number of responses on this priority group. Participants identified strategic support, focusing both on a school-wide responsibility for this group of learners and more specific actions, interventions and support.

Gaye, Holly and Irene all commented on their school's ability to provide a bilingual option for students. As noted above, Denise, Irene and Bev spoke inclusively in their responses. Bev acknowledged that the board and school were on the same pathway and had made progress, but also voiced a degree of frustration. Progress was noted in the domains of consultation with the Māori community, property developments that acknowledged and recognised the school's cultural significance to its community, and in the development of programmes that supported Māori learners. Bev's frustration was evident in her comment "everybody has a responsibility ... [yet] some want to play, some don't want to play and it [playing] is not an option. We have to make sure that that's actually a core requirement of all our teachers".

Anna reinforced this when she spoke of property developments that acknowledged local Māori gift of the land for the school. She was aware of the importance of local history in locating Māori within the school, "[students are] learning more local history and that sort of thing. The local history is, for some people, the most important. To know the local history, which is fascinating, is important". She also spoke of supporting Māori learners through the employment of a fluent Māori speaker as a Kaiawhina i te reo. This person supported learning at all levels across the school, as well as modelling tikanga for staff and students alike.

There were also comments around the support for, and mana¹² of, kapa haka groups. Gaye summing it up by stating, "they are sort of our focal point for the school". She also spoke of the bilingual classes being physically relocated to a more central part of the school, as the feeling was that they were not seen as being as important as the rest of the school because of their location.

¹² *Mana* is defined in English as authority, control, influence, prestige or power. It is also honour.

4.5.2 Pasifika learners

Participants mentioned Pasifika learners far less, possibly because of the numbers of students of these ethnicities at the schools. Analysis of the schools' most recent ERO reviews shows that the number of Pasifika students ranged from 0% through to 13%. Participants may also have felt that they responded to this group as they did for Māori, when speaking of the strategic, big picture items noted above.

Irene spoke of “trying to get them [Pasifika community] involved” and that “[the principal] wanted to start a Pacific Island group like kapa haka,” highlighting a board that is in the initial stages of support for Pasifika students. Holly reinforced this, noting, “I think that is basically new to us, and [the principal] worked on that. So we’ve got a programme for them in place, but it’s new”. Bev reflected upon the work of her board by noting “we’ve run ESOL¹³ [programmes] for parents of Pasifika students but we haven’t done that recently, but we do have a Pacific population here that we need to focus on”.

While some participants spoke of the work they are doing to support student learning for this group, it was significant that no trustee spoke of the Pasifika Education Plan.

4.5.3 Learners with Special Education needs

The discussion around learners with special needs was strengthened by one trustee whose child had been designated as being within this group through the MOE Special Education identification process. Participants saw that they supported learners with special needs primarily through the provision of extra staffing time, specifically teacher aide hours. While both Carla and Anna generalised about supporting all learners with special needs through the provision of teachers' aides, Holly was more specific. She mentioned teacher aide support, but also spoke of a school-initiated, timetable change “we moved the lunchtime from 12:30 to one o’clock. So when they come back from lunch,

¹³ ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

it's basically only an hour and a bit to home time [time her child is without teacher aide support]". She also noted that the school used teacher aide time in a flexible way to support learners as well as acknowledging the generosity of some teacher aides who work beyond their paid hours to support the learning of students with special educational needs.

It was interesting to note that while one participant's school hosted a satellite class from a local Special School¹⁴, there was no mention of this being a component of how that board, directly or indirectly, supported the learning of students with special educational needs.

4.6 Further action

Despite trustees being elected into their positions, it must be acknowledged that the role is a voluntary one, with all the associated issues of time and commitment that have been noted with this in Chapter 2. Due to these constraints, trustees were asked if there were areas that they felt they should be contributing more to in terms of supporting student learning. They were also asked to describe any areas they would like to be more involved with, time and resourcing permitting. Again, the responses were wide-ranging.

4.6.1 Action that trustees should be undertaking to support student learning

The key area that participants felt they needed a greater focus on was their own level of knowledge, indicating a need for trustees to be involved in on-going professional learning and development. Frances noted that she should "attend more training" while Erin stated that she needed to "read more so that she [would] actually understand". Bev pointed to a lack of clarity in her understanding between governance and management, and also believed she needed to be a voice for her board in the community. Holly was more specific, noting that her learning needed to be in the area of finance. Only Anna noted any action that focused directly on student learning, when she stated that she

¹⁴ Twenty-eight special schools provide support to high needs students in New Zealand as day pupils, as well as there being eight residential special schools located throughout New Zealand.

needed to “get [her] head around the educational achievement statistics and really drill down”.

4.6.2 Action that trustees could be undertaking to support student learning

Participants were also asked to consider any areas they would like to be able to commit to, should time and circumstance permit. The focus remained on impacting on student learning. Their wide range of responses reinforced the debate around the need for on-going professional learning and development, but also highlights the individuality of what each trustee brings to the table.

There was some similarity to the above section with Irene and Gaye both noting that they would like to spend more time on understanding the financial side of governance and understanding the achievement data. Erin felt that she would like to spend more time “checking about being on track with the curriculum”.

Frances commented that she would “like to be more involved with the students” again indicating a blurring between her governance-management roles. Bev, linking to the advocacy role noted earlier, was keen to “work to get more people involved in their student’s learning” while Carla would like to consider training as a teacher.

4.7 Why become a trustee?

In an effort to gauge some understanding as to whether board members stood to improve the learning outcomes for all students, each participant was asked as to their reasons for seeking nomination. The responses generally fell into two camps, the first being those who had been ‘shoulder-tapped’ to stand, and secondly those that felt they had something to offer and could make a difference.

Carla noted that she had been shoulder-tapped by the principal who told her “that she needed to come to a meeting” and finding out later that a neighbour

had recommended her to the principal. Frances stated simply that she had “been cajoled into it” indicating that she had been approached more than once.

Erin noted that she “always wanted to come on because [she] wanted to become part of the thing with the school”. She also pointed to a long family history of such involvement with her parents and grandparents having been involved at different levels when their children were at the school. Denise spoke of feeling obliged to be involved, and that she should “contribute to [her] child’s education” as well as the role being something that she always wanted to do. She was quite forceful in her approach, noting, “someone resigned, so I rang the board chair”.

Some participants were in both camps, highlighted by Holly’s comments of having declined when asked before, but changing her mind because “they needed someone, so I thought I would give it a go”. Bev reinforced this, stating that “we seem to get recruited for these sorts of things” while at the same time being of the belief that she “could make a difference [as] there was no connection between what we [the whanau group] were doing and what the board were doing”. She also spoke of wanting the school support group that she was also involved with to be “heading, tracking in the direction and the vision of the school”, and not being sure that they were. Erin was also in both camps. She noted that “someone asked me, someone had resigned and I got a phone call” but also pointing out that she thought that she “could actually do something to help [because] she felt she had something to offer, coming from a slightly different perspective”. She saw this difference being based on having been raised and educated in another country.

4.8 Conclusion

While participants’ responses were wide and varied, there were significant themes, as noted above. An analysis of the participant schools’ most recent Education Review Office reports shows a range of areas noted for further development. Those with a governance focus include; formalising self-review

processes, implementing strategies and initiatives to improve attendance, strengthening the documentation and interpretation of achievement data, and strengthening strategic planning to provide a basis for on-going school development and sustainability. These are significant areas that all align with the strategic focus areas in *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success* (Ministry of Education, 2009c). The focus on presence, engagement and achievement and the use of the term ‘managing’ signifies a shared responsibility between the board, as governors, and the principal, as day-to-day manager and professional leader.

The next chapter discusses these research findings and links them to the literature, to discern the level of impact participants believed they had on student learning.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The concept of voluntary trustees governing their local school has been part of the New Zealand education system for nearly a quarter of a century. Arguably, the last government-focused inspection of the model was undertaken by the Education Review Office (ERO) and reported in their National Education Evaluation Report, *School Governance: An Overview* (ERO, 2007). ERO had produced findings thirteen years previously in a report titled *Effective Governance: School Boards of Trustees* (ERO, 1994). NZSTA completed their own review in the form of a stocktake in 2008 (NZSTA, 2008).

This chapter incorporates the themes noted in the data analysis and links them back to the literature. It starts by revisiting the original research question, do elected trustees perceive that they have an impact on student learning. It then moves on to consider participants' impact, initially as to whether all trustees impact to the same degree and then how they perceive that they impact on priority groups of students. It then relates these perceptions to the trustees' personal definitions of governance and student learning. These definitions provide an important focus for this study. This focus is emphasised by the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) who state "boards of trustees are instrumental in the on-going improvement in student progress and achievement in our schools" (2012, p. 1). To be 'instrumental', trustees need to have shared understandings of governance and student learning. This is followed by a discussion of the actions trustees believe they could or should be taking to further develop their capacity, including a discussion on one area for addressing their needs, before concluding with a discussion on the reasons people stand for election.

5.2 Impact on student learning

When considering the question as to whether they had an impact on student learning, participants perceived, quite simply, that they did. Gaye believed that

she had a direct impact on student learning, while Anna and Irene perceived their impact to be indirect. All other participants believed that they had an impact on student learning, but did not categorize it as either direct or indirect, possibly indicating that having an impact on student learning may well be something that they had not considered to a great degree. The discussion later about 'taking your turn' and 'doing your bit' reinforces this as a possibility. Participants also felt that, as well as their individual impact, the board as a collective had an impact on student learning. They perceived that their impact was through being involved in decision-making and in other processes associated with the board's governance role. The data noted in chapter 4 clearly demonstrates the variability of this impact.

Codd & Gordon (1991) refer to trustees as "voluntary agents" (p. 30) while Thody (1998), when speaking of a similar overseas model, refers to them as "a body of external, largely non-educationalist, school governors" (n.p.). While the participants were aware of their responsibilities, I am not sure that they were fully aware of the magnitude of the time they were required to commit as volunteers to support the student learning in their schools, post-election. Gordon (1993) noted "school trustees recognise with increasing clarity that it is their voluntary commitment which now underpins the education system" (p. 34). Trustees' lack of awareness of this was highlighted by Erin and Denise who spoke of taking their turn and "having their time on the board" which implied that trusteeship was simply a task that all had to undertake at some point in their child's education, as opposed to a role that they undertook to support student learning because of the skill sets they had.

Trustees often referred to boards' work around policy and financial management as governance processes that supported student learning with Gaye of the belief that she directly impacted on student learning through her role as a decision-maker at the board table and Anna believing that her input into policy was an avenue of impact. The Ministry of Education (MOE) concur when they note that their "policy and funding levers directly influence and guide how education is

provided in New Zealand” (MOE, 2012d, p.5), linking policy and funding to influence education. The MOE state that the development of a policy framework is one facet of “robust governance structures and processes [that] will support the board in its primary focus” (MOE, 2013c, p. 6). When this is considered in the light of NZSTA’s understanding that “research both here and internationally has begun to establish that effective governance is associated with measurable improvements in student achievement” (NZSTA, 2008, p. 16), then it can be argued that being involved with policy is a way that trustees impact on student learning, supporting the beliefs earlier outlined by Gaye and Anna.

This position is immediately challengeable through the proximal concept (Rice, Delagardelle, Buckon, Joyce, Wolf, Weathersby, 2001, p. 57). This concept can be summarised to note that “the proximal will usually have a bigger effect on one’s development, although the distal can have considerable effect in some circumstances (ibid., p. 57). In the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES) on school leadership, Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd state that “the big message from this BES is that the closer the educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students” (2009, p. 47). Robinson (2007) reframed this slightly in an earlier conference address, “the more leaders focus their professional relationships, their work and their learning, on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes” (p. 12). This research was referring primarily to school principals, whose roles place them far closer to daily practice than that of elected trustees. Fullan notes that “when you leave your role as a teacher, most of what you’re going to do will have an indirect effect on students and their learning” (Zegarac, 2012, p. 18), identifying that increased distance from teaching and learning programmes decreases impact. With trustees not having the regularity of contact that teachers do, and often being removed both professionally and academically from the core business of teaching and learning simply by the very nature of their role, it is debatable that any trustee’s influence is as direct as Gaye believed or that the MOE outline for themselves, although other participants may have held a more realistic assessment of their influence.

This is reinforced by Smelt (1998) who indicated what he saw as limitations of the 1989 reforms as including, “the board’s complete discretion is, in practice, limited” (p. 38), and “changing organizational structures without changing the DNA of the system will disappoint” (p. 1). The implication here is that, without such complete discretion and a change in the system’s ‘DNA’, it can be argued that any direct impact by trustees on student learning is limited, let alone a current reality. This range of research clearly challenges the beliefs of Gaye, Anna and other participants who believe that their governance structures and processes support their impact on student learning, directly or indirectly

Anna and Irene believed that their impact was indirect and was facilitated through their involvement in decision-making and in other governance processes and board structures. The remaining participants did not qualify their impact, but noted that it occurred through setting targets, resourcing the school (in particular through staffing and the funding of programme-based interventions), overseeing property development, reviewing and challenging of student data and the provision of professional learning and development (PLD) for staff. Leithwood states “we know that both school and system leaders are doing a lot of other things that are indirectly – but importantly – linked to the improvement of student achievement and well-being” (Zegarac, 2012, p. 6) and that “a cohesive sense of direction” has an impact on student achievement (ibid., p. 7). This level of trustee input is alluded to by the MOE who explain to boards that “apart from separate planning and self-review sessions, most of the board’s work is carried out at board meetings” (MOE, 2013c, p. 5). This immediately distances trustees from the day-to-day matters of the school. While there may be a direct link between their governance role and the policies enacted within the school, this distance means that any impact on student learning is likely to be indirect. The MOE clarify this further, asking the question of boards “do we understand the difference between governance and management roles in our school?” (ibid., p. 5). This belief is noted internationally with Heystek (2006) noting that, in South Africa, provincial policies and regulations “provide an apparently clear demarcation between what the SGB [similar to New Zealand’s boards of

trustees] can do and what is the responsibility of the principal” (p. 474).

ERO also imply that trustees have an impact on student learning, stating “boards are required to monitor progress against their strategic and annual plans so that appropriate improvements may be made to teaching and learning programmes within the school” (ERO, 2011b, p. 35), illustrating a link between board planning and decision-making, and learning outcomes for students.

Again, there are challengers to these views. In her review of the role of local boards across a range of districts in the United States, Land (2002) noted that “several reviews of studies of site-based management have been conducted, and a compelling link between site-based management and students’ academic achievement has not been found” (p. 241). One contributing area identified was the variation in site-based management. Another, at board/district level, was the lack of clarity board members had around the distinction between their policy role and their roles as school-based administrators, noting that “role-confusion and micro-management were two elements of low-quality governance that characterized districts with low student achievement” (pp. 251-252). While this research centred on boards in the United States, i.e. it was not specifically site-based, similar areas of confusion were noted in participants’ responses. Heystek also noted the possibility for confusion in that, despite the intention to clarify roles for boards, “the delineation of the management and governance functions and duties is not as clear as intended” (2006, p. 474).

Role confusion was identified by many trustees. Carla and Irene highlighted the confusion between familial roles and trusteeship with their respective comments of “working alongside the children” and “I do HPP¹⁵ and things like that at school” indicated a blurring of the governance role that NZSTA has previously acknowledged, stating that boards have had difficulty “shifting focus from the ‘doing’ to a ‘strategic leadership’ perspective” (2005, p. 5). Denise spoke of the

¹⁵ Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka (HPP) means “supporting children’s oral language development within English-medium storybook reading contexts”. HPP is a tutoring programme in which schools enlist the help of parent tutors, who are then trained to enrich students’ oral language.

line “being blurry at some times” and Bev noted that she should develop her understanding of governance and management. When Frances was asked about something she could support or impact upon through her board governance role, she commented that she could “be more involved in the school with the students,” clarifying that this was specialist support from community members in the school in curriculum areas of The Arts and Technology.

Data indicated that all participants were supportive of their school and realised that they had a role to play. Holly believed that part of her role was to “stick up for our school and the management and the staff”. However Carla looked at this differently and when asked whether she was re-standing for election, she stated “no, I can still do the same things but without the governance involved”. This is a clear indication that, while trustees are supportive of their school, there is often a degree of misunderstanding between the roles of trustee and that of a family member. It is interesting to follow Carla’s line of thinking further. It appears that Carla believes that she can be equally successful in impacting on student learning for all students outside of the governance roles held by the board. This then challenges the role of boards and questions the need for them at all. This confusion and lack of clarity mirrors the international concerns previously noted as well as highlighting a possible training need. This will be addressed later.

5.2.1 Impact through the governance processes and structures

Whether trustees considered that their impact was direct or indirect, they all alluded to their board’s governance structures and processes providing avenues for them to impact on student learning. These structures included the use (or not) of subcommittees and/or portfolios, policy review, the monitoring and review of student achievement data, setting strategic direction and having the ability to question, challenge and advocate for others. Each of these are discussed separately.

5.2.1.1 Processes and structures

The Education Amendment Act (1989) allowed for a range of governance structures and models, including variations in election cycles and flexibility in how people came in to trusteeship. Four of the five participating schools utilised the triennial election model. Recent research showed that eighty-seven per cent of schools used the triennial model, leaving thirteen per cent who used the mid-term, staggered model.¹⁶ Both 'mid-term' participants were very much in favour of their model, with Denise noting that "it does stop you coming every three years and perhaps having four or five new board members coming on" and "it gives the new people who come on a chance to up-skill and learn what's going on". Erin reinforced these sentiments, concerned that after "three years and then the whole lot drop out all at once [and] it takes you a while to get up to speed". Denise and Erin refer here to the issues of continuity, succession planning and sustaining practices over time. Robinson et al. (2003) investigated school governance and found that "key governance tasks pose substantial difficulties for school governors [predominantly through the] mismatch between the requirements of the task and the knowledge and skills of governors" (2003, p. 276). Denise and Erin saw the mid-term election model as a way of overcoming the latter of those issues. NZSTA note that the cost and frequency of such elections, and the fact that no formal training opportunities are available at this juncture have seen some boards withdraw from the mid-term cycle (NZSTA, 2008). They also note that some boards have co-opted experienced trustees and have had "informal agreements to overlap incoming and outgoing terms of office" (2008, p. 10) to retain the institutional knowledge and sustain the governance practices to which Erin was referring. Leane reinforced the issue of continuity from his own trusteeship experience, noting "all but one of the elected board members were new. Lack of continuity and experience were immediate problems" (2000, n.p.).

Irrespective of which model was used, all participants were elected parent representatives. What was different was how they managed themselves as a

¹⁶ M. Scott, Acting Group Manager, Education, Curriculum and Performance, MOE (personal communication, 14, December, 2012)

board. Four of the five boards allocated tasks and responsibility via individual portfolios or subcommittees. The remaining school had previously used the portfolio model and was now working as a full board across all areas of governance. Participants did not offer a reason for the move away from it. Carla noted that she would prefer her board to go back to the portfolio model. In most cases the portfolios aligned with the National Administration Guidelines, with the role of chairperson being an additional portfolio. Portfolios common to most boards were what Wylie labelled as “the demanding twins” (2012, p. 103) – property and finance, as well as staffing or personnel, and health and safety. No mention was made of a portfolio that focused solely on student achievement, student outcomes, or student learning. The OECD note that it is the role of the New Zealand boards to report annually against the school charter. They also note that “the Board of Trustees depend on the principal, as chief executive of the school, to provide much of the information they require to be fully informed of all important matters relevant to the management of the school” (2012, p. 34). The implication here is that, to a degree, the student-learning portfolio, as such, is, or is perceived to be solely the responsibility of the principal. While this may appear a logical placement, it does provide an opportunity for principals to act as gatekeepers of knowledge. Erin summed this up as “the principal could actually lead you the way she wants to go”. ERO identified early that the poor provision of quality information to boards was a barrier to effective governance (ERO, 1994).

The above traditional portfolio allocation is certainly misaligned with the direction espoused by the MOE:

The focus has moved from a preoccupation with non-educational matters, such as property and finance, to a more specific focus on the primary purpose of a school – the improvement of student progress and achievement. All other tasks and activities exist to support improved student progress and achievement. This shift in thinking has impacted on the way school boards approach their role, and reflects modern thinking

about the purpose and implementation of governance responsibilities" (MOE, 2010a, p. 3)

This highlights how an intended direction may be unintentionally undermined. It can be argued that four participating boards have not shifted in their thinking and, by not doing so, have allowed their structures to be a barrier to improved student learning, progress and achievement.

When considering portfolios and models of governance, participants often spoke of the importance principal's role. This was a significant and much discussed feature of the reforms (Alcorn, 1990; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Lough, 1990, MOE, 1990a; NZSTA, 2008). It is also one part of boards' structures that requires elaboration.

The *Tomorrow's Schools* model placed the principal in the dichotomous position of being both board member and day-to-day school leader:

day-to-day control of the institution and the implementation of the policy will be the responsibility of the principal [and] the principal will be the professional leader of the school and will be responsible to the board (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 45).

It was argued that being a full member of the board and also being an employee of that board could be an untenable position due to the lack of separation between the roles and between the responsibilities and expectations of the board (Alcorn, 1990; MOE, 1990a). Despite this, participants had very definite understandings of what they believed the principal's role was to be. Carla, Erin and Denise all referred to this encompassing day-to-day management. Anna believed that "*Tomorrow's Schools* had given principals more power". Frances and Irene noted that student learning was the responsibility of the principal, yet acknowledged that the board also played a supporting role through control of resourcing. That the participant's responses reinforce the range of roles seen to

fit within the principal's role indicates a degree of mismatch between Ministry of Education theory and school-based practise.

Erin, despite being from a school that used the mid-term, staggered election model, noted trustees' reliance on the principal, particularly in the period immediately after an election. Gaye, Carla and Erin spoke of the meetings they held with the principal in their roles as board chairs. These meetings were general in nature, but also to decide what was tabled at the board meeting. This aligns with a recent MOE statement "in a practical sense the board and the principal lead the school together" (2010a, p. 10). They speak of the board as external leaders and the principal (and other staff) as internal leaders. This can create a tension where there are ideological or philosophical differences between the two, a recent example being the introduction of National Standards reporting. These are seen as a "critical component of the Government's drive to improve educational outcomes" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012, p. 26), yet are also seen by their opponents as a way to narrow the curriculum to those areas being reported. A number of boards and principals were ideologically conflicted over this issue.

5.2.1.2 Policy development and review

Participants often mentioned policies when they spoke of impacting on student learning. Policy writing was noted as a challenge for schools in the initial stages of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms, with many boards concerned about their workload and the short time frames. The MOE acknowledged this, stating "some boards of trustees have expressed concern about the time limit detailed in the charter for policy development" (MOE, 1990b, p. 1). Wylie (2007b) noted this still being of concern seventeen years later. NZSTA noted 22% of survey respondents saw having help to write policies as a useful strategy "for improving board effectiveness" (NZSTA, 2008, p. 24), showing that policy writing was still causing issues for boards, despite it now being a regular part of the workload of boards. Denise noted that, "you have your say," Frances also noted that she had "a say in policies" and Bev spoke of her input to policies. While they all spoke of

reviewing current policy, there was no mention of developing new policy. This appeared to have been the task of previous boards, which is understandable. The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) set early in the reforms laid the platform for this, expecting boards to “develop a strategic plan which documents how they are giving effect to the NAGs through their policies, plans and programmes” as well as expecting boards to “maintain an ongoing programme of self-review in relation to the above policies” (Gerritsen, 1999). This implies that once policies are in place, as they have been for the participant boards since their election, the only action required of current trustees is review. The exception to the participants’ data is that policy development will be required when they become aware of an aspect of governance that requires new policy, or if new policy is mandated by an external source, possibly through a legislative change.

5.2.1.3 Monitoring and review of student achievement data

Erin saw data review as a way that she impacted on student learning, by “review[ing] things agreed by the board”. Anna was more specific, noting that some of her impact was through the monitoring of data. This aligns with the mandate in the Education Standards Act 2001, which required boards to include their “aims, objectives, directions, priorities and targets [for] student achievement” (p. 18) in their charters. This position has been strengthened through subsequent legislation, an example being the inclusion of National Standards in school charters under the Education (National Standards) Amendment Act 2008. Boards now have a range of supporting resources focusing on student achievement, further strengthening their role around this requirement. For boards to be able to comply, there needs to be the discussion and analysis of student achievement data that the participants identified. Data located through an investigation of the meeting minutes from participating boards showed that student achievement data was being presented and discussed at varying intervals.

5.2.1.4 Setting strategic direction

Holly and Irene noted that they had input into the school's annual and strategic planning while Anna and Frances spoke of how they resourced decisions that supported student learning. These all indicate an understanding that board's must work within a longer-term strategy. Court & O'Neill saw such involvement in strategic planning as one aspect that supported the government being able to "steer at a distance" (2011, p. 121), yet strategic planning is now an expected activity in schools. Unsurprisingly the points noted by Holly, Irene, Anna and Frances align strongly with the positions held by the MOE, ERO and NZSTA, as all three use the notion of self-review and strategic planning for their own activities. This was recently evidenced in the MOE 2013-2107 Pasifika Education plan that lists NZSTA and ERO as partner agencies (MOE, 2012c). The link between student learning and strategic planning was clearly outlined by the MOE in two recent statements. In the first they note that NAG 2 requires the board to "maintain an ongoing programme of self-review focused on continually raising student achievement" (MOE, 2013c, p. 15) and in the second they state that "self-review must be meaningful, real and strategic" (ibid., p. 15). The links between Denise having her say, Anna's monitoring of data and Carla's review of things that are working all align strongly with this position.

5.2.1.5 Ability to question, challenge and advocate

Bev spoke strongly of challenging decisions at board level. She believed that she had a personal impact on student learning on governance processes through her advocacy. She spoke of having a "focus on the most at-risk students, families [and] members of our community" and being "a strong voice in that space". It was apparent that she felt that her community employment role and her links to another support group within the school supported her in an advocacy role at the board table. The MOE mention "reciprocal relationships" in the document *Ka Hikitia: managing for success* (2009c, p. 21) and it can be argued that Bev was advocating under this premise. Similar advocacy was expressed by the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment in the foreword to the Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017 when he noted that the plan placed "Pasifika learners,

their parents and communities [in a place] where they can demand better outcomes” (MOE 2012c, p. foreword).

This advocacy was spoken of by participants in terms of being able to challenge decisions made by the school’s principal and centred around the allocation of staffing resources and financial expectations of parents. Such challenges again bring to the fore the dichotomous position held by principals who have complete delegated authority for day-to-day management, yet are answerable to the collective board if it is believed by any one member that their management decision did not match their model of governance. The lack of distinction between school leadership and school governance was clearly emphasised by these responses. It was interesting to note that a review of participant boards’ meeting minutes over their term of office showed little record of such challenges. This could indicate many things; that the discussions were rare across the boards, that the minute-takers did not record the challenges, that the discussions were seen to be ‘off the record’ or that the discussion was relevant to only one board or trustee. Data provided no evidence to advance any of these suppositions.

5.2.2 External Review

Underpinning all these themes was the trustees’ understanding that boards must comply with legislation when reviewed. Participants spoke of the Education Review Office more often than any other agency when discussing compliance and review. ERO clearly believe that boards have a responsibility for student learning as “boards are coming to understand that **everything** is the Board’s business because it is the Board which is accountable in law” (ERO, 1994. p. 14). ERO recently clarified board accountability even more when they outlined their review methodology, “ERO’s education reviews focus on student learning and the ways in which school policies, programmes, processes and practices contribute to student engagement, progress and achievement” (ERO, 2011b, p. 2). When Carla commented on having had “a kick up the bum,” she was referring to the school’s last ERO report, highlighting how prominent ERO’s

external reviews can be in trustees' minds. It appeared that rather than student learning driving the schools' practice, external review was the driver, aligning with LeBoeuf's words "people do what gets measured" (1985, p. 114).

External reviews such as those undertaken by ERO provide an avenue not only for identifying compliance requirements but also for supporting professional learning needs. It is seen by some outside the profession as having credibility in that it eliminates provider capture, an aspect of market accountability that Lubienski (2006) believes educational institutions are shielded from due to them being public institutions. Trustees linked issues noted by ERO to actions and therefore a way to further develop in their roles. Bev spoke of ERO returning to look at the changes her board had made in governance and in training, as they had been concerns in a previous review, while Erin referred to ERO being mentioned when she attended a board chairs' training session. The majority of participant comment on ERO was in relation to Māori student achievement, highlighting a possible weakness across a group of boards.

For a principal such accountability is often highlighted in an annual appraisal with an external consultant or 'critical friend'. For the board as an entity, the most regular external review is that provided by the ERO. The Chief Review Officer of ERO states "the focus of ERO's reviews in schools is student learning and achievement, with the purpose of contributing to improved student achievement" and "this [review methodology] aligns with the government's new directions for the future" (ERO, 2011a, p. foreword). This leaves trustees in no doubt that the review's findings will focus on learning and achievement, already noted as being their core role. It also reinforces the point mentioned above, that any ERO recommendations or areas suggested for improvement are areas for training at trustee level. Data drawn from a review of the participant schools most recent ERO reports show a range of suggested areas for improvement, those with a governance focus included formalising self-review processes, implementing strategies and initiatives to improve attendance, strengthening the documentation and interpretation of achievement data, and strengthening

strategic planning to provide a basis for on-going school development and sustainability. These are significant areas of governance with which ERO has highlighted a degree of under-performance for particular boards. The highlighted areas align well with the strategic focus areas in *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success* and with supporting learners with special education needs. The focus on presence, engagement and achievement and the use of the term ‘managing’ signifies a shared responsibility between the board, as governors, and the principal, as day-to-day manager and professional leader (MOE, 2009c, 2012f).

These suggested ‘training’ areas are also significant in their scope and highlight implementation barriers for trustees. The support for such work generally requires external input, and this is often via a cost-recovery model. The allocation of financial resources for training can be an issue for trustees, a topic which is discussed later. A further issue in this area was highlighted by Gaye who noted that “I find that the younger ones or the newer ones and that they’re a bit iffy about that training and they’ll say we’re not available”. This is understandable when each is a volunteer and has other commitments outside of their voluntary trustee role, yet it is particularly of concern that new trustees are not willing to grow their knowledge. Wylie’s (2012) suggestion about linking boards in networks could provide some support and a possible training solution. Such networks could prove beneficial, but obviously generate a further time commitment and possible cost for trustees. As previously noted, trustees often find that allocating time to their role is an issue. Frances highlighted a sense of frustration and captured the issue of time commitment succinctly when she spoke of training, “I would like to have more training, but personally I am and I know that the other board members are very busy. We’re all full time workers, so that has been a personal issue for me”. Financial recognition of trustees’ time commitment may both support them as well as giving greater credibility to the importance of professional learning.

5.2.3 Variation of individual trustee impact

The participants believed that individual trustees' impact on student learning varied greatly. Carla saw this being due to trustee's personal skill sets, while also noting that having children at the school made a difference. Irene's responses implied that impact differed depending on the amount of time board members spent in classrooms working with the students, while Bev and Erin alluded to this being influenced by what (if any) personal agenda trustees carried with them. Bev also noted that she believed some trustees "were just there" and did not offer an opinion on anything, thereby diminishing their impact and arguably their sense of responsibility around trusteeship of student learning. Carla had similar feelings, "someone that sits the whole meeting and never says anything quite often".

The variability of personal impact is interesting, both individually and collectively as it raises the question of what a 'board member who impacts on student learning' could look like. It also prompts a further possible assumption; that the current system may be perceived by these participants as not electing, selecting or co-opting the most suitable people to trusteeship. Should any such investigation result in a positive finding, i.e. the most suitable people are not becoming trustees, then Carla's concept of working as well outside of the formalised governance role is reinforced once again.

5.3 Impact on Priority Learners

MOE define particular groups of learners as priority learners. Participants were asked to comment on their impact on student learning for Māori, Pasifika and learners with special education needs, these cohorts having been identified by the MOE as "those young people least well-served by the current system" (MOE, 2012d, p. 4).

5.3.1 Māori

When asked of how they supported Māori learners, Gaye, Holly and Irene all commented on their school's ability to provide a bilingual learning option for

students. They also saw this as part of their process for meeting the National Education Goals 9 and 10 requirements, which are to “increase participation and success by Māori [and the] acknowledgment of the unique place of Māori” (see Appendix 1). Comment was also made on school marae visits, property developments, food festivals and focused teaching of te reo Māori as being ways in which trustees believed that their schools had additional impact for Māori learners. These link well to *Ka Hikitia*’s goal of “Māori enjoying education success as Māori” (MOE, 2009c, p. 18).

There was a range of comment on this aspect of the study and it appeared to relate to the size of the Māori student cohort at the school, with more examples and comment coming from the trustees whose schools had a higher percentage of Māori learners.

5.3.2 Pasifika

In comparison to the Māori student cohort, the number of Pasifika students was smaller across the participating schools. Equally, the number of responses around actions taken to promote Pasifika student learning were also less. Irene’s response failed to differentiate for Pasifika students, as they “focus on everybody, everybody is just as important”, while Holly was aware of a booklet being developed for Pasifika families. Like Holly, Frances did not differentiate between Māori and Pasifika when she responded, but spoke of actions to support both groups together, giving rise to the possibility that these trustees had not considered Pasifika as a priority group of learners at all.

Whether the number of responses relates to a greater understanding by trustees or whether it relates to the higher profile of Māori education is unclear, yet Ministers Tolley and Te Heu Heu have left trustees in no doubt that they are part of the shared responsibility for Pasifika student learning, irrespective of their percentage of Pasifika students:

We all have a responsibility to ensure successful outcomes [for Pasifika learners]. Students, families, communities, early

childhood centres, teachers, principals, schools, board of trustees, tertiary education organisations, the education sector agencies and Government, must all contribute to ensure success. Pasifika education is a shared responsibility. (MOE, 2008, foreword)

It is both interesting and of concern that not a single participant referred to the Pasifika Education Plan as a resource to support Pasifika learners. It is one of the supporting resource documents mentioned earlier and the fact that there was silence around it certainly highlights a training need, but may also be indicative of a lack of awareness by trustees.

5.3.3 Children with Special Education needs

Responses in this area were dominated by a small number of trustees as one trustee had a child in this cohort and two other trustees were from the same school. These participants spoke of changing timetables to suit the learners' needs, of relocating classes to promote inclusion and of employing additional staff to support learning. This domination again highlighted a general trend appearing throughout the data. It appears that, unless you have a specific student or group of students from a particular cohort, trustee's knowledge around their governance roles to support 'designated' cohorts of students is very limited. This again raises the issue of whether trustees without the self-interest that is apparent here, have considered priority groups of learners at all.

Some participants spoke of using outside agencies to support learners, with special mention of the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) and Speech Language Therapists (SLT), which again indicates a confusion in trustees' understanding of the governance-management distinction. Arranging this type of support for students is within the role of the professional leadership of the school, as clearly outlined on the MOE website (www.minedu.govt.nz) where the first three suggested points of contact are within the day-to-day management of the school. There is no mention of boards of trustees at all.

There are many resources available to develop understanding of priority students, but they are primarily targeted at learners and teachers. The number of such resources that directly target the groups charged with their governance is far less. For trustees to have a workable knowledge of the resources supporting their governance roles and those which impact particularly on improving student outcomes, progress and achievement may be an unrealistic expectation.

5.4 Definitions

As previously noted, participants were definite in the belief that they impacted on student learning in a range of ways and for a variety of students through their governance roles. On that premise, it is important to investigate what they based their thinking on, particularly around definitions of governance and student learning.

5.4.1 Governance definitions

“Effective schools will have a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governance and management” (ERO, 2011b, p. 34). When asked what their definition of governance was, many participants spoke in broad, over-arching terms; Bev speaking of a “big picture” role and Anna of “setting the general direction and tone”. They were also clear in their thinking about the structures and processes within their roles which impacted on student learning.

“Boards of trustees have a governance responsibility to support better student progress and to raise student achievement” (MOE, 2010a, foreword) and also note that boards’ governance roles are about designing the future, being accountable for school performance, acting on behalf of the board’s stakeholders, and being a good employer (MOE, 2013c). This highlights the boards’ responsibility to govern, however they are still bound by external evaluation and considered to be accountable by the Education Review Office based on the impact of their governance (ERO, 2011a & 2011b). Within this framework, it is of interest to note that there is no statutory definition of

governance, nor a clarification of where governance ends and management begins.¹⁷ ERO themselves acknowledged this lack of clarity, “the legislation is not specific about the powers and duties of Boards of Trustees” ERO, (1994, p. 4). Therefore every board must develop their own definition of governance. All participating boards did this differently, all unique to their context. There were similarities in their responses around governance as an holistic notion, setting direction, meeting compliance requirements and meeting the needs of staff and students. There was also similarity in that participants saw governance realised through strategic and long term planning, more explicitly through policy setting and good decision-making, particularly in the areas of fiscal management, and property use and development.

This goes some way to allay the ideological disconnection between a unilaterally prescribed definition for all schools and the concept of a fully self-managing model, yet it does highlight that the understandings around governance in the compulsory schooling sector are wide open to interpretation, a point endorsed by NZSTA’s research, “it was also evident that boards interpret their governance role in different ways” (NZSTA, 2008, p. 16). They noted that school context and school type were significant factors in the way governance was interpreted.

The holistic focus of governance encapsulated in Anna’s comments around “setting the tone” and having “oversight” is supported by Butterworth & Butterworth (1998) who state that the boards’ primary role is to “be the architect and guardian of the organisation’s purposes and basic values” (p. 201). Being the architect infers an initial position of power through creating or designing a structure from the outset, based on a client’s perceived model. The Education Act (1989) clearly mandates this power to the school-based architects, “except to the extent that any enactment of general law of New Zealand provides otherwise, a school’s board has complete discretion to control the management of the school as it thinks fit” (p. 46). While the statement focuses on management, it is more applicable to the governance roles boards hold and

¹⁷ J. Greening, Acting Manager, Education, Curriculum and Performance Regional Operations, MOE (personal communication, 11, December, 2012)

reinforces the issue that such a flexible model requires each board to set its own parameters and boundaries. Holly saw this as “making sure everything was under control” while Frances appeared more liberal, “allow[ing] the school to do what it needs to do”.

The data showed evidence of trustees being unclear about the parameters of their governance roles. Therefore this approach, without the “clearer definition of the responsibilities of boards of trustees” recommended by Treasury (MOE, 1997, p. 133), supports the context-based nature of the roles previously noted. It also indicates the possibility of role confusion, similar to that noted in *The Lighthouse Inquiry* (Rice, et al., 2001). This Iowa-based research centred on school districts and boards and reported that there was some “confusion between the ‘site-based’ policy and the role of [district] policymakers and officials” (p. 39). This resonates with the New Zealand experience, with Lough (1990) noting the “uncertainty of appropriate roles for boards of trustees and principals within schools” (p. 14) in a review of the education reform implementation process less than one year into the reforms. A decade later Fiske & Ladd (2001) noted that the “tight-loose-tight” (p. 539) nature of the governance structures that were needed to support the system had not been achieved. Carla spoke initially of governance not being “about power and control” but later noted that some degree of both was needed. This indicates another of the challenges involved in governance within our current model.

Participant’s spoke of the need to be compliant with legislation, summed up by Gaye who noted that governance was “ensuring the school is running efficiently, is fiscally responsible and complies with legislation”. Compliance implies hefty accountability, which the MOE clearly outlines for boards, “these entities, empowered by government, control the management of their local school within a national accountability framework” (MOE, 2010a, p. 3). ERO identified that “the key compliance issues for schools in this study related to personnel management, health and safety and consultation with the school’s Māori community” (ERO, 2007, p. 15). In the same report ERO specifically mentioned

the impact of positive relationships on school governance. Participants who were also board chairs referred to their relationship with the principal, while others implied a need for strong relationships when they spoke of the ability to meet staff and student's needs as being a feature of their governance role, yet there was no specific mention of the need for positive relationships between trustees and staff, or trustees and learners. While the initial implication is that strong relationships are evident across all groups in the school's community, this cannot be proven from the data. This does not align with the goals of the reform "[that] the running of learning institutions should be a partnership between the teaching staff (the professionals) and the community" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi). NZSTA (2008) acknowledge and ERO (2008) support that "in well-governed schools, trustees regularly sought the views of the community about a range of school operations" (p. 10). To be able to meet the needs of students and staff, an understanding of the differences between the roles of governance and of management must be clear to all parties. Sullivan highlighted a possible issue around board-staff-community relationships when he noted:

the reforms threaten this professional status by appointing non-professionals to govern them. However personable, helpful and well-intentioned individual members of Boards of Trustees may be, the structure of management that the Boards impose and all the paraphernalia of educational accountability, management and review, do alter teachers' roles (1993, p. 157).

It was unclear that there was such strength in board-staff-community relationships, but it is clear that when roles are changed, relationships also change. When outlining the components of the reforms, Hawke notes that "the likelihood of different levels of understanding between major participants and the 'coalface' is characteristic of education reforms" (2002, p. 7), implying that it is unrealistic to expect trustees and a school staff to have the same understandings. Participants spoke of these roles and relationships within the school, Carla implying a need for equality in relationships when she spoke of governance "not being about power and control [and that] we should all be

working together”. Bev highlighted the need for collegiality in her definition of governance, “seeing it as having that big picture together [and] making decisions that support direction”.

Alcorn (1990) reinforced these views when she spoke of the importance of such collective decision making. Holly spoke of “[making] sure everything is under control” and making “good decisions”, while Anna also spoke of informed decision making. This implied an understanding of the links between strategic planning and the subsequent action plans required to support student learning. There was also a link to self-review in Anna’s comment, “ensuring targets are set, met and if not, why not and how do [we] fix it”. Carla noted similarly that “at the end of it all you have to evaluate whether what you spent and what you did, and was it really worth it”. These views were outlined to boards, where it stated “boards aim to reach a consensus when making decisions” and “once the board has made a decision, it is able to ‘speak with one voice’” (MOE, 2010a, p. 9). The MOE reinforced this even more recently, “it is the board that makes the final governance decisions” (MOE, 2013c, p. 8).

Many participants saw these decisions focusing on strategic planning to support school direction with Bev noting the importance of this at governance level by “making the decisions that are supporting that direction without meddling in the detail about how that work is going to be done”. ERO (2007) noted that one of the common features of well-governed schools was that the “strategic and annual planning had a strong focus on improving student achievement” (p. 1). In a later report ERO linked this planning to “professional development opportunities for teachers” (ERO, 2010, p. 27), another area identified by participants as being important to their role, and one which proves equally important for trustees, as is discussed later.

There is a link here to the participants’ desire to be compliant, allowing for not ‘the’ way, but to ‘a’ way, as argued by Bell (2002). He challenges whether the current structured planning model is restrictive “and has significant inherent weaknesses that undermine the extent to which school improvement [strategic]

planning can contribute to the effective management of school” (p. 407). He believes that strategic planning has been “reduced to the identification, by a small group of senior managers, of long-term goals and the one way to achieve them, the implementation of which rests with the majority who had no part in its formulation” (p. 418). His belief was that such planning inhibited school progress and that strategic planning, and in the unpredictable environment of education, should be “derived from shared and common values” (p. 419).

Policy development and review were seen by participants to support good decision-making processes, with Denise, Erin and Frances all referring to the need for these to be in place. Johnson, P. (2011) reinforces this, “effective school boards focus on policy issues that impact on student achievement and instruction” (p. 98).

Participants noted that many decisions in their governance role were focused around property and finance, with the vocabulary of finance being used often. Erin spoke of “staying within budget” and Gaye of being “fiscally responsible”. The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) confirm this, “all public entities [schools being one] are accountable for their use of public resources and powers” (OAG, 2013, p. 13) and reinforced in the Financial Information for Schools Handbook, “the school board of trustees retains a financial governance role” (MOE, 2009b, p4).

5.4.2 Student learning definitions

Participants believed that they had an impact on student learning, therefore it was critical to understand what they determined student learning to be. Researching a definition for the term ‘learning’ produced a range of options, as evidenced below. Washburne (1936), Reeves (2011), Moss & Brookhart (2012), Richardson (2012) and Taskin all offer definitions of learning. While there are similarities in their definitions, there are also noticeable variations, indicating the complexity of defining ‘learning’.

This complexity and variation is reflected in participants' responses as they offer a range of descriptions of their understanding of student learning. Anna spoke holistically of "not just reading and writing and maths [but] exposing them to what's out there [and] exposing children to the wonderful stuff that's in the world". Frances reinforced this when wanting children to "learn everything they can". Some participants were more specific, with Irene and Anna referring to academic progress and achievement.

While, for ethical reasons, the participants were unable to meet as a group, it is possible to speculate on a description of learning that their responses may generate. By amalgamating all participants' data, an inclusive definition of student learning could read; 'student learning is developing students' potential to support their progress through the education system with expectations of on-going achievement at all levels, by developing their content knowledge, and their involvement in individualised learning programmes. Monitoring of student achievement gives the evidence of this by showing on-going progress and achievement and high levels of student engagement, the latter may include progress toward aspirational goals'.

Holly saw the role of learning as to "make it easier for them as they got older" and Anna spoke of learners being "involved in society". This alludes to on-going nature of learning and its relationship to life after schooling, which is supported by Davies, "the development of a philosophy of lifetime learning is, I believe, most important" (1993, p. n.p.) and Richardson, "the function of each of our schools is to prepare children as best we can for the lives they are going to lead" (2012, p. 90).

The definition also implies a sense of on-going responsibility for trustees, which the MOE clearly support, "reporting student progress and achievement across a range of curriculum areas in your annual report is an essential of part your school's cycle of self-review and continuous improvement" (MOE, 2011a, p. 4). This statement reinforces the need to monitor progress and achievement, as

without such monitoring, shifts and trends cannot be identified, nor interventions to support student learning supported. Secondly, the MOE state, “your annual report [shows] how successful these actions have been for improving student achievement” (ibid., p. 4). This highlights for boards their role in supporting and resourcing programmes to improve student achievement, and therefore supporting student learning. Frances, Denise, Irene, Carla and Gaye all offered a range of resourcing and support examples.

While many participants shared common beliefs around learning, the variety within their responses highlights the individualism of trustees, as well as signalling a possible difficulty in gaining a board-wide agreement on the definition of student learning when a board of trustees develops or reviews their strategic plan. Such a definition, or description, is complicated further by the inclusion of staff, student and community voice. It is interesting to note that students or the wider community, of whom we often speak, are not specifically mentioned in the mandate legislated through the Education Act 1989, section 61(3), “the board shall consult parents of students; and board staff employed at the school; and any other people it thinks fit [when preparing or amending its charter]”.

Senge (2006) speaks of the concept of organisational culture, particularly of building a shared vision and holding “a shared picture of the future we seek to create” (p. 9). This concept is entwined in participants’ responses. Trustees need to be asked if they are able to build a shared picture that defines learning. It could be argued that if they are unable to generate a school-wide, that may indicate a difficulty with both their direction and their role. If this is the case, then any impact trustees have on student learning may well be restricted.

5.5 Professional learning and development (PLD)

An analysis of participants’ responses shows clearly a desire for doing the best they possibly can do, within the time they have available and the skills they bring to the table. When asked what they could or should do to support student

learning in their role as a trustee, a range of responses were forthcoming, some overlapping across both 'could' and 'should'. Those actions at a governance level included Gaye and Anna both wanting to understand the data, Erin keen to monitor the delivery of the curriculum, Holly wanting to develop her financial knowledge, and Bev looking to clarify the differences between governance and management. These are all significant areas of governance and it appeared that the key to progressing this was to provide professional learning and development (PLD) or training opportunities for individual trustees or boards as a whole. There is little doubt that trustees must continue to up-skill, as is the case for all involved with supporting student learning.

It appears that there are many barriers to effective governance, and that avenues of support are required to minimise the risks around each. Two key avenues appear to be PLD, and support through external reviews, with the latter having already been discussed.

Many writers supported the participants' discussion around the need for greater professional learning (Kelly, 1998; Smelt, 1998; Levin, 2010). Butterworth & Butterworth (1998), allude to the need for training when they speak of the turnover of trustees, "the greatest weakness of the system at present is that only a minority of trustees serve more than one term. This means that every election brings in new boards, who then face a steep learning curve" (p. 235). Carla noted that her board "haven't done any in quite a few years [and] we asked if somebody could come and do in-house training with us, and that didn't happen".

The requirement for on-going learning requires in itself, professional learning providers and this has become an issue for boards. Participants spoke of a range of training options that have been available to them which included MOE webinars, the NZSTA annual conference as well as smaller, more local sessions run by either NZSTA or the MOE. These sessions appeared to be generic in their nature, with Holly noting "I went to one when I first got on the board with all the other board members and that was just about management".

Participants often noted a lack of equity within boards in terms of accessing PLD. Irene noted that “there have been a few conferences, other people have gone to them” and “there are a few of us, so [we] take turns”. The implication here is that training is not personalised and that messages can be brought back for full board consumption when needs may differ. This type of model may not meet the needs of all trustees.

Erin noted her attendance at specific board chairs’ networking meetings and the value she found in the sessions. This personalised model appeared to meet particular role-based needs and could overcome the barrier that generalised training encounters.

Participants noted that the voluntary nature of their role meant that time was a barrier to PLD, with the need for adjusting family arrangements to suit the sessions on offer. To overcome this there are webinars, also seen as a solution to personalising training. They are, however, focused primarily on Ministry of Education priorities so may not meet the immediate needs of the trustees. There were also technical issues as noted by Gaye “the webinar broke down”. Holly noted a different issue with webinars “I don’t understand [them], because I’m not computer minded, so I don’t know what to do”.

As a school-based solution to PLD needs, Gaye noted that the principal provided training at board meetings. While this may provide a more personalised, needs-based solution, it reinforces the tension inherent in the principal’s role on the board. It places significant responsibility on the principal to be able to meet the training needs of their board, which in turn places similar responsibility on boards to ensure they support their principal in their own personal PLD. It can also place an unfair expectation on a newly appointed principal.

Principals’ PLD is often delivered through a cost-recovery or contestable funding model. This in itself can be a barrier, as the way boards prioritise funds during

the budget-setting cycle influences what the principal can attend. The MOE *Statement of Intent 2012 – 2017* refers to centrally funded PLD, but signal that its focus very clearly, “we will invest in centrally funded teacher professional learning and development focused on priority areas” (MOE, 2012d, p. 20). Anecdotal evidence from discussions with principals indicates that the contestable funding model currently in place often excludes areas that principals see as important.

Wylie (2012), when speaking of PLD for teachers states, “online resources and stories are not enough on their own” (p. 194) and “if we want our teachers to be more effective, we need to locate them in on-going networks” (ibid., p. 194). It could be argued that such a model would support boards of trustees equally well, as it appears that the current resourcing models do not support appropriate professional learning and development for trustees in general and for principals as trustees in particular.

5.6 Conclusion

Wylie (2007b) suggested that the current system of elected boards of trustees required strengthening and greater support and some reframing if it was to make a difference to student learning outcomes. This research indicates that, a further 5 years on, this is still the case.

It would appear that this research indicates that trustees do think that they make an impact on student learning, mostly indirectly, but that there is confusion and a lack of knowledge around their roles. It clearly outlines that they require on-going training and support, and that the current model may not necessarily be seeing the best people sitting on boards.

It is clear that further research is required to determine the extent to which trustees can be supported and the system reframed to ensure trustees not only perceive that they have an impact on student learning, but that it can be proven that they have the capacity to make a positive difference for all learners.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate boards of trustees' perceptions of whether they had an impact on student learning, with an emphasis on how trustees believed that their governance roles supported learning for all learners. There was an emphasis on the Ministry of Education's priority groups. This chapter provides an overview of the study design, methodology and limitations to the research. It concludes with implications for policy-makers and possible avenues for future research.

6.2 The study

This study asked participants seven key questions;

- What does the term "student learning" mean for you?
- What does the term "governance" mean for you?
- Do you believe that, as a trustee, you have an impact on student learning? If you believe that you do impact on student learning, what impact do you have on groups the Ministry of Education identify as priority learners?
- If you believe that you have an impact, tell me about the way this happens through the governance processes.
- Tell me of other ways you have impact on student learning.
- Do you think some trustees have a greater impact on student learning than others?
- Do you think you could, or should, impact on student learning in other ways?

The study sought to understand the perceptions of a small group of nine elected trustees in relation to the above questions, particularly around the concept of student learning. The Ministry of Education's position of "the key focus of their [trustees] role is the improvement of student progress and achievement" (2013,

p. 3) was a significant consideration throughout the discussions.

There has been much written about school trusteeship and the self-managing model since the 1989 introduction of *Tomorrow's Schools*, but little appears to have considered the perception of trustees. This study is a beginning for this discussion and an opportunity to provide a possible catalyst for similar studies in the future.

6.3 Limitations

I acknowledge that this study was undertaken with a range of limitations, all of which require consideration. However that should not be seen as reason for discrediting the observations drawn or conclusions made, nor do they preclude the reader from drawing their own conclusions and transferring the findings to other contexts.

The number of cases studies, the narrow geographic area and the time constraints on the researcher are acknowledged as limitations to this research. By identifying these limitations prior to undertaking the interviews, the researcher was aware of the need to remain within the prescribed methodology.

6.4 Implications for policy-makers and future research

This study produces a number of areas that have implications for policy makers, with two being specifically noted here. The first is that the current process of becoming a trustee may not be supporting student learning as well as it could do. It could be considered a barrier to the most suitable people being involved in school governance.

The second is that trustees may be being asked to undertake a role for which they are at best underprepared, if not totally unprepared. The implication here is also two-fold. The first implication is that training before and during their governance terms would build trustees' capacity both individually and collectively. Bush (1998), asserts that "there has been a long established

awareness that ongoing training is required if school leaders are to operate effectively” (p. 178). It is my contention that such a level of training is required of trustees if the expectation is that they will be equally effective and impact positively on student learning. A second implication is implicit on the failure of the first. If the current model continues, then Ostermann’s proposal around a professional trustee-chair may be a useful variation to support elected trustees in their governance roles (Ostermann, 2012)¹⁸. This is an area for further research.

It is evident from the questions posed throughout this thesis that there is much more to investigate in this area, and that the perception of trustees deserves greater research attention. This small scale research project has raised a series of researchable questions.

- Does the lack of a definition of governance support or inhibit trustees in their roles?
- Does the current model of trusteeship support trustees in their role of improving student learning, or is a different model required to achieve this goal?
- Is the current system ensuring the election, selection and co-option of the most suitable people to trusteeship?
- Does the current resourcing model support appropriate PLD for trustees to make the changes that align with the more specific focus on student outcomes and achievement that the Ministry of Education espouses?

Educators are passionate about making a difference for students, and that learning is a significant part of that. There is also little doubt that the current system is not supporting student learning as well as it possibly could, barriers and inconsistencies abound. With this in mind, I believe that the challenges ahead are two-fold;

1. Reassess the self-managing model with a view to modification or abandonment, and

¹⁸ S. Ostermann (personal communication, 19 March, 2012, cf. p. 39)

2. If the self-managing model is retained and revised, then reassess the role of boards of trustees and support them to be proficient in this role, or cease to have them at all.

The *Tomorrow's Schools* self-managing model legislated in 1989 not only failed to provide clarity around the trustees' role, but it also allowed a range of governance models. This has contributed to the dissonance between centralised control and a fully self-managing model. While one model is not fit for all schools, I would argue that there are some facets that can be supported centrally without a negative impact on schools' independence. There is a lack of clarity and role confusion. The question is, does the lack of a precise and/or prescriptive definition support or inhibit trustees in their roles?

Hargreaves (2012), when speaking of the improved performance of the Alberta education system, states that it can be difficult "convincing policy-makers and system leaders to take new approaches" (p. 5). This will be a challenge, in New Zealand, particularly in the current political climate of distrust and exclusion.

Maybe Arthur's summation is more apt, "It's a good question [trustees impact on learning]. What the hell are we doing? And does it, does what we do matter?".

The biggest challenge will be finding ways to gain the co-ordinated and systematic effort Levin (2011) mentioned earlier. We have a responsibility to our students, our whanau, our system and ourselves to do so.

Appendix 1: National Education Goals (NEGs)

The National Education Goals (NEGs) were amended in December 2004 to include the reference to physical activity in clause 5. The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) were also amended.

The National Education Goals are also available in te reo.

Education is at the core of our nation's effort to achieve economic and social progress. In recognition of the fundamental importance of education, the Government sets the following goals for the education system of New Zealand.

NEG 1: The highest standards of achievement, through programmes which enable all students to realise their full potential as individuals, and to develop the values needed to become full members of New Zealand's society.

NEG 2: Equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders, by identifying and removing barriers to achievement.

NEG 3: Development of the knowledge, understanding and skills needed by New Zealanders to compete successfully in the modern, ever-changing world.

NEG 4: A sound foundation in the early years for future learning and achievement through programmes which include support for parents in their vital role as their children's first teachers.

NEG 5: A broad education through a balanced curriculum covering essential learning areas. Priority should be given to the development of high levels of competence (knowledge and skills) in literacy and numeracy, science and technology and physical activity.

NEG 6: Excellence achieved through the establishment of clear learning objectives, monitoring student performance against those objectives, and programmes to meet individual need.

NEG 7: Success in their learning for those with special needs by ensuring that they are identified and receive appropriate support.

NEG 8: Access for students to a nationally and internationally recognised qualifications system to encourage a high level of participation in post-school education in New Zealand.

NEG 9: Increased participation and success by Māori through the advancement of Māori education initiatives, including education in Te Reo Māori, consistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

NEG 10: Respect for the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of New Zealand people, with acknowledgment of the unique place of Māori, and New Zealand's role in the Pacific and as a member of the international community of nations.

Appendix 2: National Administration Guidelines (NAGs)

The National Administration Guidelines for school administration set out statements of desirable principles of conduct or administration for specified personnel or bodies.

National Administration Guideline 1

Each board of trustees is required to foster student achievement by providing teaching and learning programmes which incorporate The National Curriculum as expressed in *The New Zealand Curriculum 2007* or *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*.

Each board, through the principal and staff, is required to:

(a) develop and implement teaching and learning programmes:

- to provide all students in years 1-10 with opportunities to achieve for success in all areas of the National Curriculum;
- giving priority to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-8;
- giving priority to regular quality physical activity that develops movement skills for all students, especially in years 1-6.

(b) through a range of assessment practices, gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of students to be evaluated; giving priority first to:

- student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-8; and then to
- breadth and depth of learning related to the needs, abilities and interests of students, the nature of the school's curriculum, and the scope of The National Curriculum as expressed in *The New Zealand Curriculum* or *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*;

(c) on the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students:

- who are not achieving;
- who are at risk of not achieving;
- who have special needs (including gifted and talented students); and

- aspects of the curriculum which require particular attention;
- (d) develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of students and aspects of the curriculum identified in (c) above;
- (e) in consultation with the school's Māori community, develop and make known to the school's community policies, plans and targets for improving the achievement of Māori students; and
- (f) provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who have been identified by the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training.

National Administration Guideline 2

Each board of trustees, with the principal and teaching staff, is required to:

- (a) develop a strategic plan which documents how they are giving effect to the National Education Guidelines through their policies, plans and programmes, including those for curriculum, National Standards, assessment and staff professional development;
- (b) maintain an on-going programme of self-review in relation to the above policies, plans and programmes, including evaluation of information on student achievement; and
- (c) report to students and their parents on the achievement of individual students, and to the school's community on the achievement of students as a whole and of groups (identified through NAG 1(c) above) including the achievement of Māori students against the plans and targets referred to in 1(e) above.

National Administration Guideline 2A

Where a school has students enrolled in years 1-8, the board of trustees, with the principal and teaching staff, is required to use National Standards to:

- (a) report to students and their parents on the student's progress and achievement in relation to National Standards. Reporting to parents in plain language in writing must occur at least twice a year;

- (b) report school-level data on National Standards in the board's annual report under three headings:
- i. school strengths and identified areas for improvement
 - ii. the basis for identifying areas for improvement; and
 - iii. planned actions for lifting achievement. In addition to its inclusion in the board's annual report, the NAG 2A (b) information is required to be provided to the Secretary for Education at the same time as the updated school charter under NAG 7.
- (c) report in the board's annual report on:
- i. the numbers and proportions of students at, above, below or well below National Standards, including by Māori, Pasifika, gender, and by year level (where this does not breach an individual's privacy); and
 - ii. how students are progressing against National Standards as well as how they are achieving. In addition to its inclusion in the board's annual report, the NAG 2A (c) information is required to be provided to the Secretary for Education at the same time as the updated school charter under NAG 7.
- (d) report the NAG 2A (c) information in the format prescribed by the Secretary for Education from time to time.

National Administration Guideline 3

According to the legislation on employment and personnel matters, each board of trustees is required in particular to:

- (a) develop and implement personnel and industrial policies, within policy and procedural frameworks set by the Government from time to time, which promote high levels of staff performance, use educational resources effectively and recognise the needs of students; and
- (b) be a good employer as defined in the State Sector Act 1988 and comply with the conditions contained in employment contracts applying to teaching and non-teaching staff.

National Administration Guideline 4

According to legislation on financial and property matters, each board of trustees is also required in particular to:

- (a) allocate funds to reflect the school's priorities as stated in the charter;
- (b) monitor and control school expenditure, and ensure that annual accounts are prepared and audited as required by the Public Finance Act 1989 and the Education Act 1989; and
- (c) comply with the negotiated conditions of any current asset management agreement, and implement a maintenance programme to ensure that the school's buildings and facilities provide a safe, healthy learning environment for students.

National Administration Guideline 5

Each board of trustees is also required to:

- (a) provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students;
- (b) promote healthy food and nutrition for all students; and
- (c) comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.

National Administration Guideline 6

Each board of trustees is also expected to comply with all general legislation concerning requirements such as attendance, the length of the school day, and the length of the school year.

National Administration Guideline 7

Each board of trustees is required to complete an annual update of the school charter for each school it administers, and provide the Secretary for Education with a copy of the updated school charter before 1 March of the relevant year.

National Administration Guideline 8

Each board of trustees is required to provide a statement providing an analysis of any variance between the school's performance and the relevant aims, objectives, directions, priorities, or targets set out in the school charter at the same time as the updated school charter provided to the Secretary for Education under NAG 7.

NAG 8 applies in relation to schools with students enrolled in years 1-8 from the 2013 school year, and all schools from the 2014 school year.

Recent amendments

September 2012: Under section 60A of the Education Act 1989 the National Administration Guidelines Notice ('the principal notice') published in the New Zealand Gazette No. 157 on 29 October 2009 at page 3810 is amended as follows:

1. NAG 2A of the principal notice is deleted and replaced with the following guideline:
2. The principal notice is further amended by adding after NAG 6, the following guidelines

October 2009: In October 2009 changes to NAG 1 and NAG 2 were published in the New Zealand Gazette. A separate NAG (NAG 2A) has been inserted to cover the reporting requirements that relate specifically to National Standards.

NAG 1 has been amended in the following way:

- It refers to the National Curriculum and its two strands – *The New Zealand Curriculum 2007* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*.
- It removes and replaces references to wording from the previous curriculum such as reference to the essential learning and skill areas. It expands the requirement to give priority to literacy in years 1 – 4 to years 1 – 8 to reflect the requirements of the National Standards.

NAG 2 has been amended to include reference to National Standards in the requirement to develop strategic plans that document how boards of trustees

are giving effect to the National Education Guidelines. These are:

- the requirement to report to parents in plain language at least twice a year
- the requirement to include school-level data in the board's annual report
- the requirement to include in the school's annual report the numbers and proportions of students achieving at, above, below and well below the standard, including Māori, Pasifika and gender (where this does not breach an individual's privacy).

In February 2009 the requirement to sell only healthy food and beverages on school premises was removed from NAG 5. The requirement to promote healthy food and nutrition for all students remains.

¹ Including National Standards for schools with students in Years 1-8 that use The New Zealand Curriculum and Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori for schools with students in Years 1-8 that use Te Marautanga o Aotearoa

Appendix 3: Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Full Text | First use |
|--------------|--|-----------|
| BOT | Board of Trustees | Chapter 1 |
| ERO | Education Review Office | Chapter 2 |
| ESOL | English for Speakers of Other Languages | Chapter 4 |
| HPP | Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki | |
| | ki te Panui Pukapuka | Chapter 5 |
| MOE | Ministry of Education | Chapter 2 |
| NAGs | National Administration Guidelines | Chapter 2 |
| NEGs | National Education Goals | Chapter 2 |
| NZCER | New Zealand Council for Educational Research | Chapter 2 |
| NZEI | New Zealand Education Institute | |
| | Te Riu Roa | Chapter 3 |
| NZPF | New Zealand Principals' Federation | Chapter 3 |
| NZSTA | New Zealand School Trustees Association | Chapter 2 |
| OAG | Office of the Auditor General | Chapter 5 |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development | Chapter 5 |
| PAC | Parent Advocacy Council | Chapter 2 |
| PLD | professional learning and development | Chapter 5 |
| TARP | Tape Assisted Reading Programme | Chapter 4 |

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