Parental engagement in primary schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand: A policy enactment case study

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Megan Smith

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Abstract

Parental engagement in education is a deceptively simple idea. Supported by theory and empirical evidence, it is promoted in educational policy in many countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand. Nevertheless, research demonstrates a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of parental engagement practice. The critiques of factors and barriers influencing the gap in practice do not adequately address how schools, as sites of policy enactment, deal with the multifaceted dimensions of parental engagement.

This study aims to increase the knowledge and understanding of the reality of parental engagement, especially as it is enacted and experienced in an Aotearoa New Zealand school setting. It focuses on two less considered material contexts, built and digital space. The research involved a single bounded case in an English-medium (state-not integrated) primary school. It is possible to apply multiple methods within a policy enactment case study, making it ideal for examining parental engagement's contextual, creative, and negotiated enactment process.

The study's findings identified several limiting factors in the enactment of parental engagement. Dominant neoliberal and other, more traditional subjectivities constrained parental engagement by restricting the type of opportunities offered and which parents were able to take them up. Built space was underestimated as a source of both constraint and possible support for parental engagement, whilst digital space has transformative potential.

The study concludes that greater clarity and a shared purpose would support the improved positioning of parents, the evaluation and alignment of built space to enhance parental engagement, maximise the potential of digital technologies, and help guide teachers and schools in their enactment. The findings have implications for government, teacher education, and teacher professional development to help realise these benefits for parental engagement.

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A good thesis is a finished thesis.

A great thesis is a published thesis.

A perfect thesis is neither.

Hugh Kearns (@ithinkwellHugh on Twitter)

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Acronyms

AoNZ   Aotearoa New Zealand

BOT   Board of Trustees

ITE   Initial teacher education

MoE   Ministry of Education

NS   National Standards

NZEI   New Zealand Educational Institute Te Rui Roa

NZC   New Zealand Curriculum

PTA   Parent teacher association

1 The Challenge of Parental Engagement

"To ask the proper question is half of knowing."

Roger Bacon (c. 1214-1294)

The relationship between parents and teachers and their engagement in children's education has, over recent decades, been an increasing focus in education research. This research has spanned many countries (e.g., Israel, Addi-Raccah et al., 2018; Belgium, Dom & Verhoeven, 2006; China, Huang & Lin, 2019; Canada, Lasky, 2000; Ireland, Lysaght, 1993; the US, Siegel et al., 2018; and Australia, Sisson et al., 2021), and all levels of education (e.g., secondary, Hornby & Witte, 2010b; primary, John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014; higher education, Marquez Kiyama et al., 2015; and early childhood, Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Parental engagement is broadly and variously defined (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1996; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Jeynes, 2005) which can create uncertainty as to what it requires. My interest in the topic stems from this uncertainty, as a parent and former primary school teacher; in neither role was I entirely sure what parental engagement required of me—I elaborate on this further in chapter four (4 Situating the Researcher: Theoretical Underpinnings).

Parental engagement in education is also an important feature of Aotearoa New Zealand's (AoNZ) school system, as expressed in the 2014 Select Committee *Inquiry into Engaging Parents in the Education of their Children* (Education and Science Committee, 2014), the Education Review Office (ERO) report *Educationally Powerful Connections with Parents and Whānau* (2015) and research (Brooking, 2007; Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Hornby & Witte, 2010a; New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2015; Ramsay et al., 1992; Ranson et al., 2003). *The New Zealand Curriculum* articulates a commitment to parental engagement in education through the principle of Community Engagement, whereby "the curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau[1], and communities" (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007, p. 9). What this engagement

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[1] Whānau, is a Māori word which translates to English as 'extended family'. In education it has also been used when referring to just parents and/or immediate family.

might entail is expanded on elsewhere (e.g., MoE, 2015a), but the broadly articulated policy goal still relies on schools and teachers to interpret and enact as they see fit.

This study examines the enactment of policy goals of parental engagement in compulsory education in AoNZ. The literature (e.g., Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) identifies much of what schools do in this realm as parental involvement rather than parental engagement, this distinction distinguishing more carefully between actions that support the school and schooling from actions that support student learning and educational achievement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). There are, as Hornby and Lafaele (2011) note, "clear gaps between the rhetoric on [parental involvement] found in the literature and typical [parental involvement] practices found in schools" (p. 38). Effective parental involvement and engagement has been examined in many studies (Groundwater-Smith & Forster, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Landeros, 2007; Vincent & Martin, 2002), as have barriers to effective involvement (e.g., see Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), but these studies do not comprehensively address how schools, as sites of policy enactment deal with the complex and multiple dimensions of parental engagement.

This thesis seeks to make a contribution in this area by reporting on a case study of the enactment of parental engagement within a school, focusing on two material contexts, built and digital space, which are rarely considered in research related to parental engagement. The focus on policy enactment allows for a comprehensive multi-method approach that examines both the rhetoric and reality of parental engagement policy. The policy enactment model acknowledges how, for example, education policy enters diverse environments, as each school has its "…different histories, buildings and infrastructures, staffing profiles and teaching and learning challenges" (Maguire et al., 2010, p. 157). This approach allows examination of parental engagement and the impact of policy through the contextual, creative, and negotiated process within schools in AoNZ.

The policy enactment model provides for the scrutiny of how the concept of parent engagement is expressed (in policy and discourse), enacted (interpretation and translation of policy), and experienced (in practice) by various policy actors. The case study approach offers policy makers, schools, teachers, and parents, vicarious experience in parental engagement, from enactment to experience, which is "…an

important basis for refining action options and expectations" (Stake, 2005, p. 460). Additionally, while being unable to generalise from a single case, there is the opportunity to identify principles of parental engagement that have the potential to inform policy and practice elsewhere. Therefore, the study aims to increase the knowledge and understanding of parental engagement as it is actually enacted and experienced in an AoNZ school setting.

Research aims and questions

The thesis began with the overarching aim to develop a deeper understanding of the engagement of parents in primary school education in AoNZ. The questions generated early in the research project were 'provisional' (Maxwell, 2005, p. 65) and 'generative' (Agee, 2009, p. 433), and as the research progressed, developed into the final iterations below. In response to early observations at the case school and data generated from initial interviews, more specific aims of understanding the enactment of parental engagement emerged. The new aims focused on the discourses that shape current understandings of parental engagement and the policy activity undertaken in schools to enact parental engagement. In addition, two particular contextual factors affecting parental engagement became a focus: the school's built environment and its use of digital space. To this end, the study examined how policy goals of parental engagement in the provision of compulsory primary education in AoNZ were enacted and experienced, with a particular focus on the impact of contextual dimensions at schools as sites of enactment. The research context focused on a single bounded case in an English-medium (state-not integrated) primary school. Ultimately, the following questions guided the research:

Overarching

- How do we understand parental engagement and its enactment in primary school education in AoNZ?

Specific

- What discourses and implicit ideas, concepts, and categories have shaped our understanding of parental engagement over time?
- What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?

- How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?
- What potential do emerging digital spaces and technologies offer for the enactment of parental engagement?

Significance of the research

Parental engagement is a deceptively simple concept, one that is promoted in policy (e.g., MoE, 2007) as well as being of interest to educational researchers (e.g., Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1996; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hornby, 2011; Jeynes, 2005; Pushor, 2012). A key insight from researchers is that the reality of parental engagement is dynamic, nuanced, and contextualised. Schools and teachers do not readily realise the well-researched advantages of parental engagement as parent/school interactions are often still focused on more traditional (and visible) forms, such as involving parents in schools and schooling rather than engaging with their child's learning (Goodall, 2018; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2018).

The enactment of parental engagement policies are one aspect of school practice that has had less research (for two rare examples, see Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Saltmarsh, 2014). Moreover, policy relating to parental engagement tends to be framed in broad and general terms and schools and teachers have much flexibility to apply it in diverse ways (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012). While a lack of specificity allows schools to be flexible in their enactment, it can also contribute to uncertainty about the purpose and outcomes sought. What are the assumptions that form policies promoting parental engagement? How do schools and teachers make sense of and enact parental engagement policies? Further, given the broadly generalised policy statements promoting parental engagement, what impact does context have in enactment, particularly built and digital space? These are the areas in which my research aims to make a contribution.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is presented in 10 chapters. Five of these chapters are written as articles that have been published or are in the publication process (publication status is noted with each article), with the remaining chapters contributing necessary additional

information for a coherent thesis. The published articles are presented to match the referencing and formatting of the thesis but are otherwise reproduced as they were published. All articles have an introduction that locates them within the flow of the thesis.

A thesis with publication has particular guidelines to attend to, and these include attesting to authorship and managing co-authored papers. All the ideas presented within the thesis are my own. Within the bounds of the supervisory relationship, Professor Martin Thrupp and Dr Patrick Barrett have supported me with conversations and resources that have allowed me to articulate my arguments better. They are named as co-authors on one publication (

6 Research in Practice), and the signed statement of contribution is included as Appendix A: Co-authorship form.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of parental engagement discussed in academic literature. This is extended by Chapter 3 which presents a genealogical analysis of parental engagement in AoNZ from 1988-2017. This chapter was published as a paper in the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical perspective and framework that ground my research and is followed by my research design in Chapter 5. Chapter 6, published as an article in the *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice,* reflects on the process and practice of conducting field research in schools and the setting for policy enactment.

Chapter 7, draws on a policy enactment framework to explore the policy work for parental engagement undertaken in the case study school. It was published in the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. Chapter 8 is in revision following reviewers' comments. It presents a spatial analysis of the impacts of built space on parental engagement within the case school. Chapter 9, shifts to a spatial analysis of the digital space and the potential of an online platform as a medium of parental engagement practice at the case school. After a final edit to reduce word count this chapter will be submitted for consideration for publication.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 10, draws the threads of the research project together. Key findings are restated and evaluated, and implications for practice arising from the findings are suggested.

Figure 1 shows how the chapters address the research aim and questions.

Figure 1

Chapters and questions

Chapter 1 The Challenge of Parental Engagement	
Chapter 2 Contextualising the Research Topic	
Chapter 3 Genealogy of Parental Engagement	*What discourses and implicit ideas, concepts, and categories have shaped our understanding of parental engagement over time?*
Chapter 4 Situating the Researcher: Theoretical Underpinnings	**Chapter 5** Research Design
Chapter 6 Research in practice	*What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?*
Chapter 7 Policy Enactment of Parental Engagement	
Chapter 8 Built Space and the Policy Enactment of Parental Engagement	*How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?*
Chapter 9 Exploring parental engagement in digital spaces	*What potential do emerging digital spaces and technologies offer for the enactment of parental engagement?*
Chapter 10 Conclusion	

2 An introduction to scholarship on parental engagement

Ka mua, ka muri—to walk backwards into the future
Māori whakatauki (proverb)

"We have convictions only if we have studied nothing thoroughly."
Emil M. Cioran (1911-1995)

The breadth of relevant research allows for a broad range of material to be considered in framing this thesis. As well as parental engagement, concepts such as 'parental involvement' and 'partnerships' are also relevant. A point of departure is to review scholarship on various ways of understanding parents and their contribution in education settings.

This chapter begins by reviewing some definitions and purposes for parental engagement. The review illustrates how the simple idea of engaging parents in their child's education is defined in broad and diverse ways, offering challenges for practice. The following section then turns to scholarship on the roles and activities of parental engagement in practice. While expectations for parents are refined by a distinguishing between involvement and engagement, the research indicates the practice is frequently focused on in-school and visible activities. The third section introduces contextual factors that influence and impact the practice of parental engagement. In addition to illustrating a raft of factors that influence the enactment of parental engagement, this section reveals areas of potential influence not extensively examined, these being the built and digital spaces. I then consider the gap between rhetoric and reality and find that the relationship between theory, policy, and practice is not well resolved, thus presenting opportunities for further research. Finally, some of the tensions and challenges of parental engagement are considered. The concept of governmentality used in the studies examined here reveals the power of parental engagement as a technology for (re)producing certain behaviours and creating self-regulating individuals.

Defining parental engagement and its purpose

The participation of parents in education is defined in a variety of ways and in varying detail, but it has been well-established that the engagement of parents in their children's education favourably impacts children's learning and educational experiences and outcomes (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1989, 1996; Fan & Chen, 2001; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Huat See & Gorard, 2015; Jeynes, 2012). Joyce Epstein's seminal work in this area provided a framework for six types of parental involvement, discussed shortly, that have influenced research agendas, policy, and practice for many years (Epstein, 1996). Her framework provided schools with ways to work with parents (families and communities) to create partnerships "*to develop and conduct better communications with families across the grades in order to assist students to succeed in school*" (Epstein, 1996, p. 213, emphasis in the original)*.* This definition articulates both the purpose (students succeeding at school) and how it will be achieved (partnerships with better communication with families).

A variety of other definitions have been used, frequently shaped by the setting in which they are employed. For example, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011), in their *Review of best practice in parental engagement,* adopted a definition focused on a range of parental engagement practices, including "learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in-school activities, decision-making (e.g. being a parent governor) and collaborating with the community" (p. 4). This definition indicates *how* parental engagement might occur, and the review elaborates on the purpose by stating, "parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning" (p. 3). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) define parental involvement as an all-round term for a range of activities that include "'at home' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance' (p. 12). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) also took care to distinguish between activities that take place spontaneously, typically parent-led, "self motivated and self sustained," and those that occur, "at least initially," as the result of an intervention (p. 84). Their review focused on identifying parental involvement, in whatever form it took, to help children make educational gains (p. 88).

For their examination of *Parental involvement in selected PISA countries and economies*, Borgonovi and Montt (2012) defined parental involvement as "parents' active commitment to spend time to assist in the academic and general development of their children" (p. 13). This definition also omits the purpose; however, a latter statement indicates that parental engagement is for the benefits of "improving students' cognitive and non-cognitive skills and motivational development" (p. 13). Finally, Goodall (2013; 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) frequently uses a broadly articulated definition that draws on the work of Kim (2009), saying "parental engagement may be defined as, 'parents' engagement in their children's lives to influence the children's overall actions'" (Goodall, 2013). This definition highlights that parental engagement goes beyond schooling and education but recognises that "much of parents' interaction with their children probably results in learning, even if learning was not the aim of any given parental action" (Goodall, 2017, p. 56).

As shown by the number and range of definitions, the concept of parental engagement is broadly interpreted. The challenge that this provides parents and practitioners is the lack of clarity for its practice, the result of which is the array of associated roles and activities. The following section examines these and the move to distinguish between parental involvement and engagement.

Roles and activities in practice: Distinguishing between involvement and engagement

The range of roles for parents and activities they undertake under parental participation is extensive, and not all have the same benefits. Epstein's (1996) work provides a good overview and categorisation of parental engagement activities. (Note that Epstein (1996) presents these as areas for *schools* to focus on supporting parents and communities with).

Type 1—Parenting: Assist families with parenting and childrearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level.

Type 2—Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

Type 3—Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs the school and students.

Type 4—Learning at Home: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions.

Type 5—Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through PTA, committees, councils, and other parent organizations.

Type 6—Collaborating With Community: Coordinate the work and resources of community businesses, agencies, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (Epstein, 1996, pp. 215-216)

Despite these activities being driven by schools, in this instance, they are located not just in the school but in homes and the community beyond. However, research identifies that schools have frequently remained focussed on the more visible activities of parental involvement that are connected with schooling and take place within schools (Goodall, 2013), representing a narrow view that Epstein et al. (2002, p. 13) described as a "bodies in the building" notion of involvement.

Responding to this tendency in practice to concentrate on the visible activities in school and for schooling, researchers examined more closely the purpose and benefit of different activities of parental participation. As a result, researchers now typically identify parental involvement and parental engagement as two distinct categories (e.g., Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014), for example, conceive of parental involvement and engagement as a continuum that progresses from activities initiated by the school and typically located there too (parental involvement with schools); activities with greater parent consultation and planning, still typically school-based (parental involvement with schooling); to activities led by parents (and their child) located at home or elsewhere from school (parental engagement with children's learning) (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 403).

Researchers and policy-makers are particularly interested in the aspects that fall at the parental engagement end of the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) continuum (e.g., see Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2005, 2010). In contrast to the more overt and visible aspects of parental involvement (e.g., volunteering at school, parent-teacher interviews, sports day audience), many of the parental engagement aspects are "subtle" (Jeynes, 2010) (e.g., parental style/'at home' parenting, high expectations, parent-child discussion, educational values). But these subtle aspects have been identified as having the most potential to enhance student achievement (e.g., Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2005, 2010).

Another way of categorising how parents participate is by the roles in which they are positioned. Many researchers have outlined roles parents may take up or be positioned in concerning schools and their child's education (Crozier, 1997; Gofen & Blomqvist, 2014; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017; Vincent, 1996; Vincent & Martin, 2002, 2005). For example, Vincent (1996) suggests a range of subject positions, parent as supporter/learner (supporting professionals and adopting their concerns and approaches), the parent as consumer (encouraging school accountability and high standards), the independent parent (maintaining minimal contact with the school), the parent as participant (being involved in school governance as well as the education of their own child) (p. 44). Olmedo and Wilkins (2017), with a focus on the neoliberal education "state/market entanglement," suggest three roles into which policy technologies 'make and remake' parents (p. 574). They identify parent as consumer (governing through choice and competition) (p. 576); parent as governor (governing through regulated participation) (p. 579); and parent as producer (governing through autonomy and responsibility)" (p. 581). These roles (no matter the label) position parents in particular ways, within certain dichotomies (e.g., active/passive, skilled/unskilled, supportive/problematic), or with a specific intent, parents are "bearers of certain rights, obligations and entitlements" (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017, p. 574).

The literature reviewed here suggests that how parents are positioned concerning education, schooling, and their child's learning is varied, and a wide range of aspects and activities accompany those roles. Further, focus in practice is frequently

given to visible and 'involvement' type of participation activities. However, parents are not homogenous, and communities, teachers, and schools are situated differently. These factors influence the practice of parental engagement, and the literature addressing these factors is explored next.

The contextual factors: Influence and impact

While all parents tend to care about their children—whether they demonstrate this care to schools or not (Ramsay et al., 1992, p. 172) or in a way recognised by the school (e.g., Crozier's (2005) discussion on parental involvement as emotional work)—they do not share the same resources (material, social, cultural). Nevertheless, research has found that expectations and judgements about parents and their engagement frequently reproduce the same (typically) white, middle-class beliefs and values that dominate education systems in developed countries (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Crozier & Reay, 2005; Kainz & Aikens, 2007; Lareau, 1987). These types of judgements are found to perpetuate myths like, for example, of (economically) poor parents being (deficient) poor parents (Goodall, 2019, p. 7) and that some parents are "hard to reach" (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

As such, parent-school interactions are found to be influenced by a variety of factors—such as socio-economic group (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Groundwater-Smith & Forster, 1994; Vincent & Martin, 2002), and characterised by a variety of beliefs—including parental deference to the professional expertise of the school and the teachers (Vincent & Martin, 2002). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argue that successful engagement of parents may be contingent on parents identifying with a personal role that calls for their active involvement with children's education and a sense of efficacy in their belief of being able to assist in their child's education successfully.

A strong relationship between parent and school is identified as core support of parental engagement (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Fostering that link requires recognition of the diversity of parents and the relative advantages and disadvantages of their differing resources, as well as acknowledgement of, and attention to, the system that frequently replicates them (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall, 2019; Kim, 2009; Marschall & Shah, 2020; McKay & Garratt, 2013). Kim (2009) proposes dealing with the barriers to parental engagement found within

schools to be a more sensible (and easier) proposition than the barriers of individual parents—to do so, Moles (1993) argues that schools are resourced with greater capacity, through funds, staff, and processes of professional development (Kim, 2009, p. 81).

Scholars identified communication as critical for positive parent-school relationships and supporting learning conversations between parent and child (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Bull et al., 2008; Higgins & Cherrington, 2017; Lewin & Luckin, 2010). Barriers to beneficial communication include low literacy (Harris & Goodall, 2008); cultural and social foundations that differ from the school system (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Marschall & Shah, 2020); and a lack of spontaneous, informal communication opportunities—which lessen as children age and parents stop coming into schools (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Research on educational technologies (EdTech) is starting to show potential to overcome some of these barriers, offering 'real-time,' personalised communication, sometimes with language translation (Gustafson, 2018; Kraft, 2017), although barriers also exist in digital spaces (Hébert et al., 2020; Mariën & Prodnik, 2014; Ragnedda et al., 2019).

Scholarship that considers the spaces (for example, built environment and digital space) within which parental engagement occurs is limited despite presenting both barriers and opportunities for practice. Research on digital spaces specifically for parental engagement is emerging but limited (e.g., Baxter & Toe, 2021; Lewin & Luckin, 2010). Research covers a variety of related aspects, including communication (Goodall, 2016; Gustafson, 2018), e-portfolios (Besse, 2017), and behaviour management (Manolev et al., 2018). The need to isolate for personal and public health reasons during the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted learning out of schools and into homes. This situation prioritises a research agenda for virtual spaces for learning, home-school communication, and parental engagement (Breslin, 2021).

The built environment of schools as it relates to parents is an area somewhat neglected by research. Oblique references have been given to built space, for example, for the potential to create "a sense of 'belonging'" (Martin & Vincent, 1999, p. 144) or welcoming for parents as a motivator for parental involvement (Martin & Vincent, 1999; Willis et al., 2018). Pushor's (2007) work has given closer attention to the impact of schools' built environments, expanding on the idea of creating a welcoming space

for parents by conceptualising school staff as 'guest hosts.' This reframing opens up 'ground' for parents to take a position where they are "standing alongside" staff and valued for their perspectives and contributions (p. 10). Pushor and Amendt (2018) propose staff undertake a built environment scan to expose "them to the messages [conveyed] to parents and community members, consciously and unconsciously, through the many aspects of the school environment, both what is present and what is absent" (p. 213).

The scholarship on the factors influencing parental engagement is vast in potential and contribution. Two factors that stand out as warranting closer attention are the digital and built spaces. The first is an emerging space brought into greater focus through the global pandemic, and the second is a factor that is barely considered despite its consistent presence in the parent-school relationship. The range of variables that influence parental engagement contributes to the gap between the rhetoric found in the scholarship and practice, which is examined next.

The gap between rhetoric and reality

The literature acknowledges gaps between what is recognised in theory and practised in schools as desirable parental engagement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lysaght, 1993). Jeynes (2010, 2018) suggests that one reason for this is that teachers are frequently not aware of the research on developments in the area of parental engagement that would support a change in practice. Educational policy does not always reflect advances in research and may find it easier to retain focus on traditional overt signs of involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2014). Jeynes (2014) argues this is particularly problematic for secondary schooling when many of the overt aspects of parental engagement have receded due to the child's age.

Scholars propose there are several ways that normative understandings of parental engagement persist, creating the gap between rhetoric and reality. They include threats to the professional identity of teachers and a lack of practical assistance (Lysaght, 1993); dominant, 'common-sense' discourses that support the status quo (Kainz & Aikens, 2007); different expectations for parental engagement lead to distrust between parents and teachers (Harris & Goodall, 2008); and schools

tending to define parental engagement in terms of what they can see happening at school (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) present a model that considers four categories of factors acting as barriers to parental engagement: individual parent and family factors, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. A more recent update (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018) suggests that the practices in schools remain "much the same" (p. 118). However, while still relevant, the factors are being tempered by declining external support for parents, meaning schools "now see PI [parental involvement] as being of central importance to their job of educating children and are therefore developing broader roles in supporting parents" (p. 118).

Research suggests consideration should also be given to policy design and the ramifications for practice (Viennet & Pont, 2017). In AoNZ, for example, the *NZC* is a foundational policy concerning parental engagement, and globally it is considered one of the curricula most open to interpretation (Sinnema, 2016; Wood, 2021; Wood & Sheehan, 2021). Wood (2021, p. 56) notes concerns are growing that the openness of the curriculum design has resulted in a lack of curriculum coherency, illustrating a potential factor in the type of policy and practice disconnect seen for parental engagement.

It is evident from the review that the relationship between theory, policy and practice is not fully resolved and, as such, provides opportunities for further research.

Further considerations for parental engagement

As already noted, there is evidence from several reviews and meta-analyses that parental engagement contributes to improved educational outcomes for students (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2012). However, researchers drawing on Foucault's (2007) concept of governmentality have also demonstrated parental engagement can be a technology for governing parents, students, and families (Forsberg, 2007; Fretwell et al., 2018; Geinger et al., 2014; Kainz & Aikens, 2007; Keogh, 1996; McKay & Garratt, 2013). Governmentality is where the state (via its policies and agencies) deploys technologies (e.g., discourses about behaviour to be overseen) not as a "form" of domination but "that may lead to a state of domination" (Ball, 2013, p. 121). Parents can be both agents and subjects of

governance, as well as self-regulating in their behaviour against the discursive rationalities of "dominant ideals, norms and standards" (Geinger et al., 2014, p. 496).

The self-regulating behaviour noted above is the desired response to the contemporary responsibilisation technologies of governmentality whereby citizens are required to make appropriate choices to actualise their (or their child's) potential (Rose, 1999). Parenting becomes a question of competence and accountability, with education a sphere of scrutiny for evidence of the 'right choices' being made (Gillies, 2011; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017). The responsibilisation of parents aligns with the pervasive neoliberal ideology informing the educational policy and norms of many Western democracies.

Research has shown how some interventions to enhance parental engagement are technologies of governmentality, with a "role in (re)producing the ideal, neoliberal parent" (Fretwell et al., 2018, p. 1048). One study demonstrated how parent-teacher communication could be understood as practices of governmentality, whereby "parents, teachers and students… actively regulate themselves and each other" (Keogh, 1996, p. 119). For example, instructions to parents have been found to position them as "adjunct teachers" to control or discipline students in line with the "moral order of the school" (p. 130). The practice of homework was also found to regulate both parents and students. Although Forsberg's (2007) study focuses on how parents govern children via homework and parental involvement discourses, it also highlights how parents simultaneously struggle to take up a subject position outside of the 'responsible parent' (p. 220). This role adherence demonstrates how parents are also regulated—or are self-regulating—by the same discourses.

The scholarship also presents ways in which parents are agents (as noted above), contesting and (re)shaping discursive practices through what can be seen as 'proactive' and 'entrepreneurial' actions (Gofen & Blomqvist, 2014). Gofen and Blomqvist (2014) challenge the limits of the roles typically identified in parental engagement, arguing that even partnership roles are in response to government initiatives. Instead, they present parental entrepreneurship as a form of "policy noncompliance," a way of (some) parents 'taking charge' not 'taking part' in formal education (p. 563). They conclude that this form of parental engagement represents the same tension that exists "between order and freedom in a democracy" and

consequently may be categorised as a "social force or… policy problem" (p. 563). However, the ability of parents to exercise agency or respond to technologies in ways that differ from the norm are varied (McKay & Garratt, 2013). As noted previously in this chapter, there are numerous socio-cultural and material influencing factors behind parental responses, and white, middle-class parents are typically advantaged (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Crozier & Reay, 2005; Kainz & Aikens, 2007; Lareau, 1987).

Conclusion

While the scholarship presents high levels of agreement on the benefit of parental participation, particularly of the kind identified as engagement, the reality is challenged as all parents do not realise these benefits. Several factors were revealed as influencing how parental engagement might be practised and by whom. These factors contribute to the gap identified between theory, policy, and practice. Further, the literature identifies ways in which parental engagement might act as a technology of governance, which locates its practice within wider political and ideological considerations. The Thesis with Publication approach provides more specific reviews within each article.

From this literature review, I have identified areas where I can add to the conversation on parental engagement. A policy enactment study has the potential to contribute to the scholarship on the gap between rhetoric and reality, and the built and digital spaces are contextual factors with more to examine where they concern parental engagement. There is a need to be clear about the phenomenon that is the focus of my research, so, having revised various definitions of parental engagement, I have chosen to adopt a relatively broad definition, but one that stays more clearly connected to a purpose in education. Parental engagement, as defined by Jeynes (2005), is "…parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (p. 245). This definition broadly encapsulates how parents are involved in their children's education in overt and subtle ways and in schools and homes. This definition allows me to consider a wide range of beliefs and activities in response to my overarching aim of examining how we understand parental engagement and its enactment in AoNZ.

This chapter has provided an overview of the scholarship on parental engagement in which to locate the overall research topic. The enactment of parental

engagement takes a particular form in AoNZ, and the following chapter presents a genealogical study examining the concept of parental engagement as it is known in this country.

3 Genealogy of Parental Engagement

*"Since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long
as we know how it was that they were made."*

Foucault (1926-1984)

*"What we refer to as policy is most usually what is most recent
and most immediate but there is a history of other policies,
other languages and other subjectivities, a discursive archive on
which, at least sometimes, teachers can draw,
over and against contemporary policy."*

Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012, p. 6)

This first article was written to expand understanding of the concept of parental engagement as it has become known today. As a review of the scholarship was conducted, it became clear that the educational reforms of the 1980s are influential on how we conceive of the role of parents in education in AoNZ, yet parents have had a relationship with teachers and schools since formal schooling began here in 1877. A traditional literature review does not provide the necessary framework to examine the origins of the parent-teacher relationship and what has emerged as the concept of parental engagement within a specific environment (AoNZ in this instance). There was a need to go beyond the review of the preceding chapter and consider the emergence of parental engagement as a concept and practice to identify the "processes, procedures and apparatuses" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 202) from which the current model of parental engagement emerged. Are there other ways of thinking about and doing parental engagement? Foucault's method of genealogy (Ball, 2013; Mills, 2003; Tamboukou, 1999) can be applied here to work at the nexus of policy and the parent-school relationship. It allows us to consider how people *do* parental engagement (an analysis of *descent*) and the strategies and forces (*emergence*) that are applied to advance a particular frame or knowledge (Tamboukou, 1999). These processes position parents as subjects, and this article identifies those subjectivities. In doing this type of analysis, our understanding of parental engagement is disrupted, and alternative ways of thinking and doing are opened up.

Genealogy requires a "vast accumulation of source material" (Foucault, 1984/1991, pp. 76-77), as the analysis of *descent* and *emergence* is not revealed in official texts alone. Therefore a wide range of government documents, policy, organisational reports, media reports, school documents, websites, school histories, and legislation were drawn on in the analysis. The following research question informed the article:

- What discourses and implicit ideas, concepts, and categories have shaped our understanding of parental engagement over time?

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Parent participation practices and subjectivities: New Zealand primary education 1988–2017

Abstract

Parent participation with learning, defined here as parental engagement, has been a particular educational policy focus in many countries in recent decades. Grounded in neoliberal education sector reforms, the relationship between parents, learning, and schools has been reframed over this period. Using a genealogical approach, this article analyses parental engagement policies and practices, and the subjectivities these have engendered, in relation to New Zealand primary education 1988–2017. An overview of contemporary policies and practices, is followed by a commentary on what is found to be the two emergent, and dominant, parent subjectivities: parents as consumers, and as governors. These are considered alongside other longer-standing parent participation subjectivities. The article concludes by arguing that parental engagement is dominated by emergent subjectivities, and that these are contributing to inequalities and constraining engagement. The findings call for greater consideration of the diverse set of potential subject positions in both policy and practice.

Introduction

A feature of the neo-liberal educational reforms of recent decades in many countries has been a reframing of the relationship between parents, learning and schools and of the activities that manifest that relationship. The activities identified in policy include, participation in curriculum decision-making (for example, the development of programmes of study relevant to the school community), school governance, communication, and reporting.

Examples of this type of reframing activity are found in the United Kingdom (e.g., Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Department of Education and

Science, 1991; Education (No. 2) Act 1986), the United States (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) and elsewhere. In New Zealand, evidence of this reframing can be found in a number of key policy documents produced by central government and various agencies (e.g., Education Act 1989; Education and Science Committee, 2014; Education Review Office, 2015). Parent participation, along with the parent-teacher relationship, is also of interest to the media (e.g., Johnston, 2015), and academia (e.g., Averill et al., 2016; Clinton & Hattie, 2013; Hornby, 2012). Of particular concern has been how student achievement might be improved through school engagement with parents and vice-versa (e.g., Clinton et al., 2007). The focus of this relationship is also evident in the recent review of school governance and the relationship between communities, parents, and schools (Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce, 2018).

The parent-school relationship can be examined using different knowledge frame- works, including ideological (e.g., equality, parent choice, efficiency), pedagogical (e.g., whole child, student achievement), and, institutional and legislative (e.g., school administration through boards of trustees, national standards requirements for reporting to parents). Our understanding of the parent-school relationship has also emerged through the historically and culturally contextualised traditions and 'truths' of the New Zealand education setting. These knowledge frameworks, along with the context in which they occur, influence the types of activities that develop within the parent-school relationship. More recently, closer attention has been given to the overall purpose of these activities, relationships, and the terms typically used to describe them, parental involvement and parental engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p. 403) have suggested it is useful to consider the terms on a continuum moving through three points: (1) parental involvement with schools, (2) parental involvement with schooling, and (3) parental engagement with children's learning. The continuum represents a shift in emphasis in the parent-school relationship whereby school agency in support of children's learning gives way to parent agency. Opportunities for parental participation of any type occurs in response to the organic needs, structured opportunities, and particular expectations of the context.

This article focuses on parental participation practices and subjectivities in relation to New Zealand primary education 1988–2017 in order to help us be more precise about our understanding, and enactment, of contemporary policy. Firstly, I review contemporary policy and practices by providing an overview of the socio-political and policy context of the 1988–2017 era. Secondly, I provide a commentary on what I argue have emerged as the two most widely recognised and dominant parent subjectivities: parents as consumers, and as governors. Thirdly, other parent subjectivities that are perhaps less often considered, including parents as supporters, as problems, as co-operative receivers, as partners, and as whānau, are examined. Whānau is the indigenous Māori term for extended family, and in this context represents efforts used to increase participation of parents that are grounded in a Māori world-view. Using genealogical analysis of many and varied archives, including various government or parent group reports, media articles and school histories, the historical legacy of the parent subject positions are documented. Finally, the article concludes by arguing that the participation of parents in the education of their child, and in the compulsory school system, is more complex than the emergent, and currently dominant, subjectivities suggest and warrants greater consideration in both policy and practice.

Foucault's method of genealogy (as described by Ball, 2013; Mills, 2003; Tamboukou, 1999) is drawn on in this article to work at the nexus of the parent-school relationship and policy, and the emergence of what is understood as parental engagement. Foucault's approach enables the documentation of events or practices of the past, describing the "history of the present" "without making explicit causal connections … [but considering] the condition under which we, as individuals, exist and what causes us to exist in the way that we do" (Mills, 2003, p. 25). It is used in this article to guide the analysis of the following questions: Is the need for parental participation (through existing subjectivities) self-evident or necessary? How *have* parents participated in schooling and education? Through Foucault's genealogy approach, forms of parental participation from the period are examined, making it is possible to trace ways for parents to think and act differently. Analysis of what Foucault terms *descent* and *emergence* are at the core of genealogy. *Descent*, as conceived of in genealogical terms, is the analysis of what people *do* with the aim of revealing "people's practices, by simply showing how they are, and where they come

from … [and the] countless historical transformations" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 209). The analysis of *emergence* is the "entry of forces," the "strategies [and] plays of domination" that surround a particular situation or understanding (Tamboukou, 1999, pp. 209-210). Therefore, genealogy works at the interface of where "the history of practices" and "the history of knowledges" interweave, coalescing into the particular hybrid that Foucault termed, power/knowledge (Ball, 2013, pp. 13-14). Power/knowledge can be characterised as a force or process of exclusion (power—practices of power, institutions) that determines what is a 'fact or truth' (knowledge—of the subject, human sciences) (Ball, 2013, p. 13; Mills, 2003, p. 70). The construction of power/knowledge produces types of subjects (e.g., active or passive parents), and the relative practices or interventions that are required for their differing characteristics (Ball, 2013). Foucault (1982/2016) identifies two definitions of *subject*: "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [or her] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (p. 212). Through this Foucault highlights how individuals can be positioned by neoliberal subjectivity, for example, as a parent consumer, and self-govern their behaviour accordingly (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017). By disrupting the past and challenging our understandings "… Genealogy as effective history opens up paths for its subjects to set out for new, improbable identities" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 210). What Foucault (1984/1991, p. 76) terms the "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary process of genealogy" then, is to document the range of *what has happened*. In 'patiently documenting' the practices of parent participation, genealogy uncovers the everyday evidence of what parents *do*; the subject positions that are evident. Thus, genealogy is useful for exposing the variety of ways in which parents *have* participated in schooling and education, and in doing so, stimulate ways of thinking and acting that may differ from current dominant subjectivities.

The 1988–2017 era in New Zealand

The 1980s saw extensive social and economic policy reform under the fourth Labour Government (1984–1990). In a shift from the welfare state ideals of inclusivity, the public good and state provision, the reforms followed the ideological aims of neoliberalism. The tenets of neoliberalism include minimal government, laissez faire

economics, the private pro- vision of public services, and the supremacy of the individual (Larner, 2000). Neoliberalism helped to reprioritise the aims of education, positioning economic benefit to the forefront. The government prioritisation of education as a means of future economic benefit was expressed in the Treasury (1987) brief on education and elsewhere (e.g., Smith, 1991), and is an expression of the concept of human capital where education is an 'investment' helping to develop children into the productive economic citizens of tomorrow (O'Neill, 2015).

The Labour government of 1999–2008 saw a softening of some aspects of the neoliberal approach, although critics suggest that their approach (identified as Third Way) was a "'softer' version of neoliberalism" emphasising "… the renewal of civil society, inclusiveness and social responsibility, [while also embracing] individualism, economic freedom and globalization" (Codd, 2005, p. 9). In education, this meant an emphasis on the development of the skills and knowledge required for citizens of a 'knowledge society' and for strengthening New Zealand's position in the global marketplace (Hope & Stephenson, 2005). The re-election of the National party (2008–2017) saw a return to more fundamentally neoliberal policy. The global financial crisis (2008–2009) added economic and labour market pressures.

Education formed a critical part of the 1980s reforms. The reforms in education, known as *Tomorrow's Schools*, saw a move to local education administration and a regime of cost efficiency drivers that considerably changed the manner by which schools were structured and resourced. A major review of the New Zealand curriculum also commenced in the 1980s seeking increased involvement from parents in education. Discussions of accountability and standards in education were evident throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, culminated in the mandating of national standards in 2008 (Education (National Standards) Amendment Act 2008). This period also saw the government make some specific policy and strategic efforts concerning parental engagement.

Tomorrow's Schools

The review of education administration was one of the most significant policy reviews in the history of the New Zealand education system. In under a year the review taskforce had conducted its review and published its report: *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education* (The Picot Report) ((Taskforce to

Review Education Administration, 1988). Within the report parents are positioned as *consumers* of education, using improved information to 'check' on those with "power and responsibility within the system," while holding rights of choice (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 43). The taskforce demonstrated a clear intention for consumers to hold the system (essentially teachers and schools) to account. In addition, there were three key proposals that facilitated the active involvement of parents and community in education administration: (1) the Parent Advocacy Council, for the dissemination of relevant information and "to represent and promote the interests of parents within the system" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 62); (2) the formation of Community Education Forums to give voice to the wider school community; (3) the role of parents as primary members, and electors, of the board of trustees (BOTs) taking responsibility for administration within every learning institution.

The government policy statement *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1988) largely accepted *The Picot Report*, and it was enacted into legislation (Education Act 1989). BOTs had, as a key role, the task of monitoring for 'satisfactory educational outputs' from the teachers and school (Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team, 1990, p. 22). The National Administration Guidelines and the National Education Goals outlined further responsibilities, including reporting on student progress (Minister of Education, 1993). As recommended, the Parent Advocacy Council and Community Education Forums were also established, but were subsequently reviewed and abolished for cost savings in 1991 (NZPTA, 1991a; Parent Advocacy Council Review Team, 1991).

Along with the parent teacher associations (PTAs), BOTs are a key organisation for parent participation in education, and together, they illustrate the impact of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms. The education reforms featured the active involvement of the PTA, although not always in the way they might choose or was expected. For example, the organisation for New Zealand PTAs [NZPTA] was not consulted in key reviews (Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team, 1990; Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988) nor did they appear to make a national submission directly to those reviews. This era can be described as a time of significant change for the PTA. There were a number of internal issues and the very purpose of

the PTA was questioned (NZPTA, 2001, p. 52) when the proposed Community Education Forums were expected to largely replace the functions of the association.

PTAs continued to operate in many schools following the reforms despite reports of negative sentiment and the discouragement of membership in PTA (NZPTA, 1998, p. 15), and the "frequent relegation to just fundraising tasks" (Polly, 2001, p. 19). Continued dropping membership demonstrated that parents were opting out of participation in structured school-based activities such as PTAs. Although fundraising activity persisted, many parents preferred to be involved in the background, and in an ad hoc manner (Garner, 2003). In a series of surveys on the impact of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Wylie, 1990, 1991, 1992), the findings demonstrated parents generally believed they had opportunities for participation. Participation particularly referred to activities that are at the 'parental involvement in schools' end of the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) continuum, such as, library and clerical tasks, classroom help, and school trips. How parents participated varied according to interest and a range of variables, including work and family commitments. Participation which required the parent to come to school, however, was particularly difficult for solo-parents (Ramsay et al., 1992, p. 172).

In contrast to waning PTAs, BOTs held a mandated position with responsibility for the running of the school. Requirements for BOTs (primary and secondary), resulted in some 21,000 voluntary serving members (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1993b, p. 5). The first elections in 1989 drew high numbers of candidates, and there was some enthusiasm expressed for undertaking this new role in education governance (Wylie, 1990). But, "the prevailing feeling about … [BOTs] was more one of doing a job that needs to be done rather than any great enthusiasm" (Wylie, 1990, p. 2). Inaugural elections were well subscribed, but obtaining sufficient nominations has been a concern for many schools at some point (Wylie, 1990), especially where negatively impacted by, for example, diminished school rolls resulting from policies encouraging parental choice of schools.

School choice is one way in which the parent as consumer subject manifests most clearly, and throughout this period where parental participation and choice were positioned at the forefront of reform, the information and advice to parents increased in tandem. Information and advice was frequently from existing sector actors seeking

to help activate parental agency within the new Tomorrow's Schools system by outlining the changes and the opportunities for parental influence and choice. For example, educationists Shaw and Millar (1991), saw teachers and parents as "partners in educating children" (p. 25), and parents with certain rights in decision-making and information. The beliefs espoused by Shaw and Millar (1991) aligned with the partnership views expressed at the time (Lange, 1988; Minister of Education, 1989; Ramsay et al., 1990). Teachers were more wary and their anxiety is identified in the phrase 'Parents In Charge Of Teachers,' a mock acronym for the Picot report which was the precursor to the *Tomorrow's Schools* legislation (see Ramsay et al., 1990, p. 240).

The Act (Education Act 1989), and the curriculum framework (MoE, 1993a) formalised the relationship between schools and parents through reporting, administration and governance; despite other ways of existing, these aspects have often become the default setting for the parent-teacher relationship. Parents and schools were ushered into an era focused on collaboration through increased parental 'involvement' and 'partnership' (Lange, 1988), where 'consultation' (MoE, 1993a) was a requirement of school decision making. In addition, parents were assigned monitoring and accountability tasks in their status as consumers of education services (Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team, 1990). The formal governance role of parents in primary schooling created by 'self-managing' schools and BOTs has placed parents squarely in that role of consumer.

Curriculum review and the New Zealand Curriculum

The review of the curriculum took almost a decade, starting in 1984. Parent groups were not invited to sit as representatives on any of the early curriculum review groups, however, parent groups (boards, PTAs and committees) did make approximately a third of all submissions received (Department of Education, 1984). A position paper on parental involvement coming from the New Zealand School Committees' Federation (NZSCF, 1984) (prepared with the support of the NZPTA), indicates there was no interest by parents in demanding parental participation in curriculum decision-making within schools through compulsion. Rather, they proposed it be seen as a "… right that can be exercised if the demand is there" (p. 32); also citing the need to parent consultation and choice around more sensitive areas of the curriculum (p. 14). Their submissions were influential; a subsequent requirement

under the Education Amendment Act 1985 is consultation with parents on the development of a health education programme for the school (Shaw & Millar, 1991). This early curriculum review finally culminated with the publication of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (MoE, 1993a). This policy statement determined that the school community was to be consulted on the design of the school curriculum, which establishes how the school will put into practice the national curriculum. As consultation and collaboration had been a theme throughout the curriculum review, guidance on how this might best occur was also sought.

A wealth of guidance material came from the Curriculum Review Research in Schools Project (CRRISP) (Ramsay et al., 1992). The CRRISP findings produced a number of publications including two "consultation" guidance booklets for the government to help schools develop and foster "strong, supportive partnerships" through "ongoing dialogue" developed using consultation (Department of Education, 1989, p. 3). The project also found there was no truth in what they termed the "myth" that non-involved "parents did not care about their children's education" (Ramsay et al., 1992, p. 174).

The current *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) (MoE, 2007) was published following a curriculum stocktake report and further consultation with stakeholders (including parents) (Colmar Brunton, 2007). Also drawing on a best evidence synthesis report on family and community influence on student achievement (Biddulph et al., 2003), the NZC was explicit in the requirement for schools to engage with parents and community through the principle of 'Community Engagement' (MoE, 2007). The current definition offered is that community engagement is a "meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities … focused on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child" (ERO 2008 as cited in Ministry of Education, 2015b).

A number of studies have directly examined the community engagement principle and the home-school partnerships sought (Bull et al., 2008; ERO, 2008c), or have addressed it within broader curriculum studies (e.g., Cowie et al., 2009). The studies found a variety of beliefs expressed by parents and teachers about the community engagement principle. At one school with a high socio-economic community, parents felt included and valued for whatever help they were able to

contribute and indicated some ability to determine their level of involvement (Bull et al., 2008). Schools from higher socio-economic areas were shown to have higher levels of parental involvement in a range of school activities including fundraising, attending sports and classroom help (Bonne & Stevens, 2017). Socio-economic status was also a factor in the potential engagement of parents where digital technology is used as a communication tool for both school newsletters and as a link to classroom happenings, with Bonne and Stevens (2017) finding an income-based social digital divide.

In a small scale study covering a range of socio-economic schools, parents reported "they were not currently very involved in school, and nor did they want to be" (Bull, 2009, p. 2). Outside of this shared viewpoint, the parents held a wide range of views about the role of parents in a child's education. Covering both ends of the spectrum, some parents believed they had primary responsibility for their child's education, while others believed it was the sole responsibility of the teacher and school (Bull, 2009, p. 3). Role definition between the state and its agents, and parents is often unclear and sometimes contentious. One parent recently expressed the extreme frustration she experienced in being held accountable for the education of her child with special needs even though the Ministry are legally responsible and were failing to provide the necessary resources within the system to provide that education (Breitnauer, 2019). Her account outlines the significant financial and emotional costs parents have faced in meeting the Ministry's ever-changing 'goal posts,' an experience which vividly demonstrates a further class divide: parents from higher income brackets are able to take many more steps to enhance their child's education if they should choose to. Social barriers such as these have been termed "the elephant in the room" where parental engagement is concerned (NZSTA, 2013, p. 9).

National Standards (NS)

Government assessment policy, National Standards (Education (National Standards) Amendment Act 2008), was also influential on parent participation. The policy introduced standardised testing of numeracy and literacy in years 1-8. Where it concerned parents, the intent of NS was to improve the information being reported to parents about their child's achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. The reporting was to provide easily understood information and evidence that could be used by parents to make decisions about their child's learning goals, and to encourage

parental support and engagement in that learning (Dixon et al., 2015). Written reporting to parents was specified at a rate of twice yearly (Minister of Education, 2009, NAG 2A), but schools were free to report more broadly (e.g., against other NZC areas) and in other ways (e.g., face-to-face interviews) in addition.

The Minister claimed "Consultation feedback shows strong support from parents for National Standards" (Tolley, 2009), where in fact, fewer parent submissions made positive comments than those with concerns (Wylie et al., 2009). Parents as a group, and what they purported to believe, became a lever to be used on both sides of the argument by the principal "combatants," the government (e.g., Tolley, 2009), and the New Zealand Educational Institute (e.g., NZEI, 2010a), the union representing primary school teachers and principals. As a cohort, however, parents do not always organise themselves into formal groups to voice their opinions, therefore capturing their voice is challenging and not always successfully achieved (Courtney, 2010). There did not appear to be widespread agreement from parents about NS either way, but action did mobilise around two particular concerns, the narrow measures the standards were based on (Watson, 2010), and the labelling of students that would occur under NS (Courtney, 2010). Where support was shown by parents for NS, it was frequently around what was perceived to be the improved clarity of information they would receive, which would enable them to make better decisions about how they could support their child's learning (Binning, 2010; Courtney, 2010). A small number of, particularly middle-class (Thrupp & Easter, 2012, p. 135) parents, also saw value in knowing how their child compared to others (Wylie et al., 2009).

How parents found the first year and reporting under NS varied considerably as each school had the ability to report in the way that suited them best. Feedback from parents ranged from the positive, to the confused, to the negative (Wylie & Hodgen, 2010). A later study found that NS reporting did not necessarily facilitate the development of a "learning relationship between home and school" which encourages parental engagement (Dixon et al., 2015, p. 54). Parents wanted relevant information reported in a format and language that helped them clearly understand where their child was at, and then how they could best support their future learning at home— something that many schools failed to adequately provide.

The Ministry produces an annual *Statement of Intent* (starting in 2003) which outlines how it intends to deliver its goals. Parents were clearly highlighted in initial statements and their (and community) engagement in education formed one of three key outcomes sought (MoE, 2004). The definition of family engagement from 2004 stated that families would have "high expectations" of and support their children's learning, that they would have "informed, positive relationships" with educators as part of that support (MoE, 2004, p. 33). Furthermore, educators needed to build "purposeful" collaborative relationships with the learner's parents, family and community, allowing better linkage to the context and experiences of the learner (MoE, 2004, p. 24). This was to be supported by the Ministry through programmes that support parents and communities, quality teacher training and education, supportive work environments, and the provision of relevant information (MoE, 2004, pp. 35-38). The focus on parental engagement in the Statement of Intent was carried into other key policy documents including the *Schooling Strategy 2005–2010* (MoE, 2005b) and the aforementioned NZC. The 2017 statement (now called a 4-year plan) stated a priority that had shifted the focus for parents from supporting learning, to "… influenc[ing] the quality and relevance of teaching and learning and lift achievement" (MoE, 2016b, p. 3).

The government via its agencies and contracted research, have examined parental engagement in many ways over the past ten years. There has been an inquiry into "engaging parents in the education of their children" (Education and Science Committee, 2014). All 18 of the report's recommendations to government were accepted, the majority of which were considered to be addressed in current or planned programmes of work (Office of the Clerk, 2015, p. 5). An Education Review Office report examined parents and families with "educationally powerful" relationships (learning-focused, and supportive of a two-way sharing of knowledge between parent and teacher) with schools, and the impact on students at risk of underachievement (ERO, 2015). Educationally powerful relationships are also one of the six domains in the School Evaluation Indicators of effective schools which are designed to be used by both schools (internal evaluations) and the Education Review Office (ERO) (external evaluations) (ERO, 2016b). These examples clearly indicate a

desire by government for parental engagement in learning in Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) terms.

Finally, the role of parents in the accountability of teachers was developed through the mechanism of BOTs, but is also evident in other ways. The reports from ERO school evaluations are made public, and in addition to providing transparency around the process, this publicity "invites parents to take an interest and ask questions" (ERO, 2016a, para.5). These reports are also utilised in the ultimate of teacher accountability measures—school choice by parents (MoE, 2020b). Teacher registration and more recent teaching standards policy, have also recognised accountability to parents through "parent satisfaction" (Teacher Registration Board, 1991, p. 44) and professional relationships (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017b).

Emergent parent subjectivities

The dominant parent subject of the 1988–2017 era emerges clearly as consumer and to some extent as governor. Policy discourses position parents in these ways and practice supports this.

Parents as consumers

Although there are earlier accounts of parents being identified as consumers (e.g., Hill, 1968; Shallcrass, 1970), the economic and social reforms of the 1980s 'institutionalised' the parent as consumer through policy documentation such as *The Picot Report* (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Parents are consumer subjects within the neo- liberal processes of this era by having, and being responsible for, choices to do with their child's education, from the school they choose to how they are involved or engaged with that school. As Ball (2013, p. 130) states, neoliberalism involves "a redistribution of responsibilities and the emergence of new forms of government – self-government." The parent as consumer is exhorted to make the 'right choices' in order to gain the best education for their child (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017; Shaw & Millar, 1991). This responsibility is accepted by some parents (Bull, 2009) and resisted by others (Breitnauer, 2019). Breitnauer's (2019) account of the financial and personal contribution she is making for her child's education, illustrates the notion of educational parentocracy. The practice and progression of the consumer subject, sees a rise in what Brown (1990) describes as educational parentocracy: "where a

child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils" (p. 66). Here, Breitnauer's efforts weren't through her own desires, they were necessary through the failings of the state—but they also highlight the persistent advantage of the middle-class (Thrupp, 2007).

Secondly, in addition to actions taken for the betterment of their child's education, parents as consumers provide *consumer accountability*, by holding schools to account through school choice in quasi-markets (Ranson, 2003)—effectively providing market indicators as to the quality and value of individual schools. *Performative accountability* (teachers meeting standards) through mechanisms like the national standards policy, is "mutually reinforcing" with consumer accountability by providing the data to inform market choices (Ranson, 2003, p. 466). Crozier (1997) found that this type of 'holding to account' has been more likely to be taken up by middle-class parents. Parents themselves have repeatedly indicated they need clear information about their child's learning progress (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987; Wylie & Bonne, 2014; Wylie et al., 2009), and are motivated by a desire to see their child progress. For some that means having clear ways of dealing with "unsuitable teachers" that they see as "causing concern" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, pp. 102-103). Despite the potential or intent, one study showed instead that "accountability [of teachers] through reporting to parents was symbolic rather than substantive" (Robinson & Timperley, 2000, p. 86).

Parents as governors

The parent subject as governor is associated with accountability in education and, in primary school education, is most closely aligned with the significant governance role for parents in this era with *Tomorrow's Schools* and boards of trustees. BOTs provide 'formal'—but still voluntary—opportunities for parental involvement as governors of education, far beyond what was offered through school committee membership. The model of BOTs is consistent with the neoliberal devolution of responsibility, but not necessarily control, away from government. The role of the BOT is to "develop policy guidelines and to ensure that satisfactory educational outputs are achieved" (Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team, 1990, p. 22). In doing so, the BOT creates a skilled- unskilled dynamic in which parents with particular skills (e.g. finance, business, risk management and data-

analysis) are privileged over others (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017), and create issues for schools with small parent communities to draw on (*Twenty thousand: A summary of responses to the report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration*, 1988). There have been mixed feelings about BOTs, one parent summed it up "I think giving parents more say is good, but at the same time I think the Government is opting out of a lot that is really its responsibility" (Wylie, 1991, p. 100). Many parents have taken up the challenge of being a trustee, with 61 percent of BOT members being parent representatives in December 2017 (MoE, 2020a). Parents and BOT members can have slightly different expectations of the role. Many parents (62 percent, Bonne & Stevens, 2017, p. 33), and others (see Minister comments, NZSTA, 2015, p. 1) expect representation of the parent voice via BOT parent representatives (and this may be expected to apply also to their School Trustees Association, NZSTA). However, the School Trustees Association consider that they do "not directly represent parents," and have focused for some years on *governing* rather than *representing* (NZSTA, 2015, p. 1).

Trustee functions are very specific, with statutory obligations to fulfil, meaning they are not necessarily able to be as responsive to the parent community as they, and others, may like. In fact, Deem et al. (quoted in Vincent & Martin, 2005, p. 121) questioned whether school governance roles of parents may be more closely described as that of "state volunteers" rather than "empowered citizens." Nevertheless, in NZ, parent representatives offer 'a' parent perspective and influence in school decision-making, and a degree of parent representation, with very few seeing themselves as "an agent of government or [to] represent government interest" (Stevens & Wylie, 2017, p. 30).

Long-standing parent subjectivities

Parents are not a homogeneous group. Nor are schools and their teachers, or the communities to which they belong. Thus, while home and school have always had some kind of relationship, the manner by which this has occurred has varied considerably (McDonald, 1983). These variations in the everyday practices of parents are exposed by the documentary process of genealogy revealing some longer-standing subject positions.

Parents as supporters

Perhaps the foremost role taken by, and expected of, parents is that of the supporter. Parental support for their child, and by extension their school, is a typically expected and generally forthcoming behaviour. This remains a core aspect of what many parents, and others, believe 'parental engagement' to be and the level at which many schools operate (Bonne & Stevens, 2017; NZSTA, 2013). Fundraising is one of the principal ways parental support for schools has been demonstrated, so much so that it has often been seen as the only function of the PTA (Polly, 2001, p. 19). Other practices include being an audience at performances and sports events, assisting with working bees, class and library support, grounds maintenance and projects, and belonging to Parent and Teacher associations (Campbells Bay School, 2020; NZPTA, 2001; Paremata School, 2020; Polly, 2001). The parent as supporter subject has grown since schooling became more formalised and teachers were promoted as professionals (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This subject position has been observed in practices throughout New Zealand compulsory education history. Practices which are much the same as those today including, social fundraising events ("Letters from little folks," 1893), participating in Home and School Associations ("Island Bay School," 1927), and assisting with maintaining the grounds and equipment within the school (NZPTA, 2001; Ward, 1973). The activities that form this type of 'active volunteerism' are frequently defined by schools and typically undertaken by those with the personal capital—social, economic, and cultural, to maintain it (Martin & Vincent, 1999, p. 144). Ongoing New Zealand surveys have shown that many parents participate in this type of school support, however, ethnicity and socio-economic status indicated some variation in the activities undertaken (Wylie & Bonne, 2014) or the number undertaken (Bonne & Stevens, 2017).

Parents as co-operative receivers

As interest in encouraging parental engagement increased, parents became targets for, and users of, 'parent education' information and opportunities. The nature of parent education varies immensely from school to school. From opportunities offered by BOTs and PTAs for parent communities, including through web and print resources, to more formal offerings supported by the MoE, such as the Incredible Years Parent programme (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2020).

This process created parents as co-operative receivers—recipients of generally unidirectional expectations, communication and information generally for the support of their child's learning, and for the purpose of supporting the efforts of teachers and classroom programmes (e.g., see Reading Together®, Biddulph Group, 2016). Martin and Vincent (1999, p. 136) describe this as "tutelage' which encourages "appropriate parental behaviour in support of the school." Tutelage or parent education in this way is based in a deficit model of thinking that assumes parents need to be 'trained' in how to support their child's education (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This can create a situation where parents perceive they have little of value to offer without such training. Interest in receiving training and information in order to know *how* to participate in certain school activities, is sought by many parents, and most often by parents with no educational qualifications and by Pasifika and Māori parents (Wylie, 1992), those for whom systemic inequities were most prevalent (Hēnare, 2014).

The co-operative receivers subject position was, in many ways, kick-started by the New Education Fellowship conference of 1937 (e.g., "Parent education: Addresses in Auckland," 1937). This subject position was particularly strong by the middle of the twentieth century with a strong parenting movement established via the pre-school services of Plunket and Playcentre and popular author on parenting, Benjamin Spock. Via short courses, talks, seminars, and information booklets, a range of topics including child development, educational theory and teaching approaches were addressed (Kings, 1970).

Parents receive information or training, which may inform their actions or advance their understanding, but doesn't necessarily facilitate parental engagement in learning, nor raise educational achievement. Nevertheless, there is *opportunity* through parent education for parent agency to be increased and for heightened involvement in schooling and learning. As suggested by Goodall and Montgomery (2014), parental involvement in schools and schooling (through the type of activities captured by the co-operative receivers subject position), can contribute to achieving the goal of parental engagement in children's learning, particularly where they help build positive relationships between teachers and parents.

Parents as problems

This term encompasses the number of ways in which parents are seen as 'problematic'—with little to contribute, as apathetic and uncaring, lacking in visible involvement, being overly involved, and in need of discipline. Some of these attitudes towards parents are based on stereotypes, particularly of parent groups that are less familiar to teachers and policy makers. Gorski (2012, p. 313) warns that stereotypes can misdirect efforts to address inequalities in the education system through the development of a "deficit ideology," whereby the "symptoms of systemic inequities" are focused on without addressing the inequities themselves.

This subject position is contradictory to the emergent neoliberal subjectivities, through which policy in particular, has responsibilised parents as fully capable, self-determining actors in their child's education. This same ideology is, however, ready to critique parents who don't meet policy expectations. A lack of visible involvement in the ways that are expected is frequently the catalyst for 'parents as problems', and is exemplified by the following statement: "… teachers held very strong views about parents lack of involvement in school matters. A number felt that some parents were apathetic about their child's schooling, and were using the school as a cheap baby-sitting agency" (Ramsay et al., 1992, p. 172). This belief doesn't recognise the impact of working parents on their ability to take up opportunities to be involved (Ramsay et al., 1992; Renwick, 1987; Wylie, 1992). Ironically, there is a fine line for parents to walk here as schools don't want over-involved or 'helicopter' parents either (Boland, 2008). Some teachers' fears for *Tomorrow's Schools* was that parents would try to take over and impinge on their areas of expertise (Wylie, 1992). A similar fear was expressed by teachers through the curriculum review (Ramsay et al., 1992).

Parents are disciplined by schools and the system through the expectations held of them. Parents are responsible for making the 'right' choices for their child's education, encompassing school choice, extra-curricular support and enrichment, ultimately producing a 'quality child' for the teacher's class (Fisher, 1989). Tools and practices in schools discipline parents by expecting, and instructing, them to behave in particular ways (Keogh, 1996), for example, in response to homework and communication via platforms such as Seesaw.

This subject position was also evident in 1877 at the start of the compulsory system with an 'instrumental' view of parents, whereby parents were seen as having little to contribute to their child's education other than ensuring they attend school. The Education Act 1914, for example, refers to parents largely in relation to their obligations to the state in ensuring their child attends school, and in the election of members of school committees and boards of governors. As with parents as co-operative receivers, this subject position has been expressed through assumptions that parents need to be trained to help (McKenna & Millen, 2013). According to Pihama's (1996) critique, this type of deficit view was evident in the model used in the Parents As First Teachers programme.

Throughout history there has been no hesitation in naming parents as apathetic, uninterested or uncaring (e.g., "The entire absence of interest manifested by parents," 1877; Kings, 1970; McKenzie, 1982; Ramsay et al., 1992; Spence, 1958; Stern, 1960). This is a rhetoric that some parents have also used against their peers (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 103). A lack of attendance and participation in consultation may also bring forth this charge of the uninterested parent (NZPTA, 1991b, p. 7).

Parents as partners

The subject position of parents as partners has been highly visible since the 1980s. Lange (1988) established BOTs as the partnership mechanism (between schools and the community) for *Tomorrow's Schools*. The curriculum review used terms connected to partnership throughout the review documents and consultation guidance booklet (e.g., Department of Education, 1989; Ramsay et al., 1990). As Ramsay et al. (1990) found, educational partnership themes varied "… as parent consultation, as school community relations, as the participation of parents and teachers in school decision making, as a collaboration of parents and teachers, and … as a requirement for enlightened educational leadership" (p. 2). Partnership is typically at the higher end of participation ladders, indicating high levels of participation and shared ownership (NZSTA, 2013, p. 7). Where a sense of ownership and interest have occurred parents have responded and rallied on issues such as, open-air classrooms in the 1910s (Carryer, 1991), the four-term year (Welsh, 1988, p. 13), and national standards (Courtney, 2010; Watson, 2010). While these examples represent parent

involvement in the process of schooling, rather than what might be considered engagement in education, they do illustrate parent agency, independent or in partnership with the school.

NZ research shows a willingness by both teachers and parents to participate in learning-focused partnerships (ERO, 2008c; McDowall & Boyd, 2005). This type of partnership is more likely to operate as parental engagement within the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) framework, meaning parents recognise the importance of their input into the education of their child, and have the agency to act upon it. The actions parents take relate to the home environment (organisation of home and family life) or enrichment activities outside the school (formal or informal). Activities may, for example, include facilitating membership in service or religious groups, informal family outings and home-based activities such as cooking, or formal extra-curricular programmes and activities (for examples of formal extra-curricular activities and costs see, Jackman, 2016). Access to some enrichment activities is mediated by location and cost, further exposing a middle-class advantage. Ensuring your child participates in a range of enrichment activities is becoming a way of understanding what 'good' parenting looks like to the middle-class, further, caution Vincent and Maxwell (2016), there is movement towards this as a norm for all.

According to Jeynes (2010), parental engagement in learning, such as that aimed for by the parent as partner subject position, is actually most effective through subtle means, such as, "maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children, and parental style" (p. 748). The evaluations of projects and programmes are often best placed to capture this type of parent practice. One such evaluation documented examples which demonstrated parent agency and illustrated some of the more subtle examples of parent engagement: "We take turns in reading. She is excited about reading now. I like the idea of a family reading time. We go to the library more" and "It's my job to help them build a love for reading" (Madden & Madden, 2015, pp. 9, 25). As demonstrated by these examples, partnership can be in relation to schooling, or education.

Parents as whānau

Although not the particular focus of this article, it is important to note here that the reforms of the 1980s also repositioned the relationship of indigenous Māori with

schools. Policy discourses expanded to acknowledge parents within the wider whānau (parents and extended family) group, and sought to engage with Māori in ways that returned a sense of ownership and contribution (MoE, 2007; MoE, 2009a). Parent subjectivities will differ within kura kaupapa Māori schools (state Māori language schools operating within a whānau-based Māori philosophy), however, within mainstream New Zealand schools, the parents as whānau subject position complements both the emergent subjectivities and parents as partners subject positions by acknowledging the right of Māori to choose how their child is schooled and to participate as governors or directors of that process. It also represents, in a school setting, the principles of partnership, participation, and protection underpinning Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi—founding document of New Zealand which defines the basis of the relationship between Māori and the government). This subject position, aligns strongly with the parents as partners subject position, and would be described as parental engagement (per Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), where parents and whānau have agency in their child's education. It identifies parents through the lens of partnership, participation, and protection and meeting the commitments of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as they are represented in the curriculum (MoE, 2007), other education policy (MoE, n.d.), and practice (Sylvia Park School, 2019). This subject position, and the participation of whānau, is vulnerable to tokenism and the development of ineffective partnerships, particularly where control and agency are held by the state or school (Graham, 2003).

Discussion and conclusion

Genealogy exposes the subjectivities and uncriticised assumptions that are at times drawn on in practice and shows that, in reality, the participation of parents in the education of their child and in the compulsory school system is complex and warrants greater consideration in both policy and practice. According to Ball (2013) genealogical analysis "… draws our attention to the 'costs' of the limits of possibility – what is lost, obscured, sacrificed in the present" (p. 146). Specifically, what have the subjectivities cost 'parental engagement'? How have they constrained the way in which parents might participate in their child's education—for the benefit of that child's education? But, importantly, do they facilitate other ways of parents engaging in their child's education?

Parents have been involved in the education of their child throughout the history of the compulsory education system in New Zealand. The subject positions most clearly observed have been 'parents as supporters' and 'parents as problems', although, other subjectivities were also in play. With the realisation of the 'whole child' within education following WWII, terms like 'parental engagement' and 'parental involvement' emerged in policy and research. The focus on parent participation heightened the subject position of 'co-operative receivers.' While what is meant by parental involvement and parental engagement frequently appears to be interchangeable in practice, models of participation, and others, tend to recognise them at different points on a spectrum or continuum (see Introduction section for example from Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Reference, in text and intent, to the participation of parents in the era under examination has focussed mainly on engagement (Education and Science Committee, 2014; ERO, 2008c; Lange, 1988; MoE, 2004; 2007). The more frequent use of engagement over involvement might reflect a shift to a more active intent in that area by the government and schools.

As policy creates subjects, the reforms of 1988, grounded as they were in neoliberal ideology, have played an important role in constructing the parent subjectivities of consumer and governor. The 'parents as consumer' subject, in particular, has dominated many policy calls for parental engagement, positioning parents as both agents and subjects of governmentality. Governmentality, which, as Ball (2013, p. 121) defines "… *refers not to forms of dominations but technologies of government that may lead to a state of domination*." For example, as agents, parents govern teachers and schools through their involvement in schools, classrooms, and on BOTs; through their 'holding to account' via reporting and monitoring of standards. As subjects, parents are held to account for the educational choices they make for their children, how they are involved in their child's education, and how they respond to communication and reporting. This is an illustration of what (Foucault, 1984/1991) referred to as the "paradox of liberalism," whereby "individual liberty and freedom exists always in tension with … ever greater regulation and control, giving rise to the government of conduct" (as cited in McKay & Garratt, 2013, p. 746). Parents are not passive 'subjects' unable, or unwilling, to struggle against "power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault, 1982/2016, p. 212). These subjectivities are about what parents *do*, not who parents *are*, and as such can form part of a "*process of*

becoming" (Ball, 2013, p. 125) forming the site where parents establish their own manner of being within the education of their child.

McKay and Garratt (2013) argue, however, that governmentality does not deploy power evenly and not all parents have the cultural capital to respond to it as easily as others. Thus, governmentality, through dominant subjectivities, can extend the inequalities between parents, allowing the existing middle-class advantage to persist. The parents as consumer subject position is adopted most often by the middle-class, and 'good' home-school relations are middle-class—that is, they follow middle-class norms of communication and parent-teacher relationships (Kainz & Aikens, 2007). However, despite the constraints and dominance of the consumer subject position, parents as a whole are interested in and supportive of their child's education (Ramsay et al., 1992), but their engagement will vary dependent on their own, and the school's, context. The multiple subject positions that both subjugate, and are subject to, parents, along with consideration of the necessary con- textual matters of parent and school, indicate the complexity of parental engagement. As such, policy, and teachers in practice, must better consider and value the diverse subject positions of parental engagement in education, whilst facilitating more freedom of choice for *all* parents in these.

Policy has framed parents and the way in which they should be engaged with the education of their children in a variety of ways. As stated, there is no homogeneous community nor parent when it comes engagement in education. A genealogical approach allows us to identify that many subject positions have been a feature of the New Zealand education system since its inception. It also allows us to trace possible ways of thinking and acting differently. Rather than narrowing what parental engagement means, policy, schools and teachers should facilitate opportunities for parental engagement in the wide variety of ways that parents are interested in and able to adopt. For parents, discussion on the roles parents *could have* in education (contextualised for their child and school) can challenge the more limited decontextualised norms and subjectivities that construct what parents *should be* (Geinger et al., 2014), thus opening up the variety of roles they might perform.

There is, therefore, a need for future research into the gap between policy, teacher expectations for parental engagement, and how parents view and experience parental engagement.

4 Situating the Researcher: Theoretical Underpinnings

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC)

"Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in
webs of significance he himself has spun, I take . . . the analysis of
[those webs] to be therefore not an experimental science in search
of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."

Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 5)

Context is a central focus of my research; I am particularly interested in the influence of context on the interpretation of policy and the implications for practice. It is, therefore, appropriate to also consider the setting within which this research is conducted. I see that as being both a consideration of what brought me to this topic and the theoretical approach I have adopted.

When I began post-graduate study, I was a parent on a school BOT. This board comprised a group of competent, intelligent, and diligent parent members. The group possessed extensive experience in various forms of community, business, and BOT service. We faced significant challenges during that term associated with the process of recruiting and appointing a principal, leading us to seek support from the MoE. However, the lack of available support, combined with frustration at the systemic nature of the situation itself, led to questions about government expectations of parents in the education sector. What role do parents have in the compulsory school system? What role do parents have in the education of our children?

I have many of what has been identified in the scholarship as middle-class advantages (e.g., Thrupp, 2007). Although I did not attend any 'elite' schools, my parents valued education, I had excellent early childhood education, and my mother was engaged in my learning. I have several tertiary qualifications and, for as long as I can remember, have been interested in questions that ask why and how. Initially, I trained as a primary school teacher, working for several years in low to mid-decile schools in the northern-most regions of AoNZ. Following teaching, I worked primarily in the public sector. This work-life has often prompted questions about how we (as

front-line staff) ended up doing the things we did and why policy seemed to be disconnected with those activities.

Combined, these factors ensured I was a parent actively interested in my son's education; however, I was never on a PTA, nor was I a 'teacher's helper' in class. But I was engaged and active in his learning at home, supportive of what he was learning at school, supportive of the school in that I backed the teacher, their methods, and their requests. Time and energy mediated my efforts. My hierarchy of interest was my son and then the school and education at large.

I was elected to my son's middle school BOT after feeling that I could and should do more as a parent to be engaged in education. As a (by then—former) teacher, I knew that policy required parental engagement in AoNZ schools, but what exactly did that mean? It was not a topic that had been explicitly covered in either my training or professional development. My term on the BOT highlighted that other parents and teachers were not sure either. As my professional interests had shifted towards public policy, I was interested in examining what the government was asking of schools and teachers in this regard. I wanted to know how the policy goals of the government were practised in schools, what impact context had, and what parents experienced.

Theoretical perspective

This section presents the epistemological and theoretical paradigms that inform my approach as a researcher. I draw on Crotty's (1998, p. 3) definition of *theoretical perspective* as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding logic and criteria." Following Maynard (1994, p.10), my *epistemological* position informs decisions about what constitutes knowledge, what is possible, adequate, and legitimate (cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Texts on research methods present and categorise epistemological positions inconsistently; for example, Matthews and Ross (2010) introduce positivism, interpretivism, and realism, while O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) present positivist, critical realist, action research, and interpretivist. For my purposes, I have followed Gray (2018, drawing on Crotty (1998)) who categorises the epistemological positions of objectivism, subjectivism, and constructivism.

My research, concerned with understanding how the concept and expectation of parental engagement are expressed, enacted, and experienced within the material context of a school, is informed by a *constructivist epistemology*. Stake (1995) defines constructivism as the "belief that knowledge is made up largely of social interpretations rather than awareness of an external reality" (p. 170). In this way, "truth and meaning [knowledge]…are created by the subject's interactions with the world" (Gray, 2018, p. 22). As subjects construct understanding of phenomena in their own contextualised ways—a multiplicity of meanings exist. Research inquiry, from this epistemological position, therefore, is concerned with gaining "understanding by interpreting subject perceptions" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 102). Constructivism has implications for the theoretical paradigm, methodology, and methods chosen. Constructivism is closely linked to *interpretivism*, the *theoretical perspective* I draw on for my research.

The interpretivist paradigm, as one of the major theoretical perspectives in the social sciences, is often contrasted with positivism (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2018; O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). Positivism was dominant for much of the 19th and 20th centuries and is commonly associated with the natural sciences. The positivist paradigm focuses on an objective search for facts and causality, collecting large amounts of data/samples, and developing and testing hypotheses, which can be measured (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014, p. 60). However, there has been rising interest in approaches of a 'value-free' positivist nature within social science research (e.g., scientific research in education (Lather, 2006b)). This interest seems to have created a preoccupation with "science-based educational research, and its close cousin, evidence-based practice" (Schwandt, 2005).

In contrast, the interpretivist paradigm focuses on meaning(s) through an in-depth look at a small sample of participants, using a multi-method approach to establish different views of the situation, and understand what is happening (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014, p. 60). Context forms a critical aspect of this understanding, for the meaning-making of the situation by participants and my subsequent interpretation. In the social world, context is "culturally derived and historically situated" (Crotty, 1998), and interpretivism is concerned with that "context [of] the phenomenon under investigation, [and] the contextual understanding and

interpretation of the collected data" (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014, p. 65). As a result of the situated importance of the interpretivist approach, analysis via detailed observation occurs in the 'natural setting' (Neuman, 2011) of the subject and the phenomenon (such as the physical school campus or the digital spaces used by subjects).

While all research involves interpretations (Stake, 2010, p. 36) in some way, interpretivism is grounded in the interpretations made by the researcher of the meanings made by others. Engaging with research settings, with participants, and interpreting participant meaning-making means researchers are instrumental in interpretivist approaches. As described by Yanow (2014), the "effort to understand what it [the phenomena] means to another entails a projective imagining that draws on the researcher's own experience" (p. 371).

Research of an interpretive nature requires a degree of flexibility on the researcher's part. Flexibility is necessary to respond to the "abductive [or inductive] logic of inquiry" of starting a project with a puzzle or tension between, for example, policy rhetoric and prior observations of actual practice (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xviii). Also, given the centrality of context, research design may need to be adapted in the face of context-specific realities (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). As a result, theories, concepts, and understandings develop as the project progresses (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xix). Rather than seeing these results as simply the traditional truth of which analysis is to speak to power [state actors], Wagenaar (2015) perceives the critical potential of interpretive research (policy analysis in this instance) for more deliberative and democratic policymaking.

Wagenaar (2015) considers the critical functions of interpretive policy analysis (IPA) to be

(1) understanding actors from their own point of view,

(2) uncovering the taken-for-granted frameworks of thinking, feeling and acting over which actors have little control but which influence their behaviour,

(3) to explore and transform our practical and cognitive horizons by engaging with our adversaries. (p. 437)

Thus, careful research of an interpretive nature has the potential to give voice to various actors and their lived experiences, open up dialogue between actors, and

enhance collaborative and inclusive forms of grass-roots policy-making (Wagenaar, 2015). This is particularly relevant in the type of decentralised, self-managing setting within the AoNZ education system.

Theoretical framework

Researchers draw on frameworks that allow them to apply a theoretical lens to their research. Creswell (2013) described these as 'interpretive frameworks' drawing on relevant theories particular to a discipline. In determining the appropriate framework for this study, it was important to identify the central concern of the research. The concern at the heart of this research is policy, with several research questions directly related to it:

- What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?
- How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?
- What potential do emerging digital spaces and technologies offer for the enactment of parental engagement?

On the face of it, 'implementation research' appears to be an appropriate framework through which to answer these questions. Yanow (1990) describes this approach as following an essentially interpretive logic of inquiry, where "implementation [is] a set of activities in which multiple meanings are expected" (p. 221). However, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) describe how they found the 'normative' policy analysis of existing implementation research within schools limited and neglectful of the "jumbled, messy, contested creative and mundane social interactions" that are part of the process of linking policy texts to practice (p. 2). In response, they developed a 'theory of policy enactment,' that seeks to "over-write" implementation analysis, "give it greater texture, fuller scope and more theoretical sophistication" (p. 2).

The work of Ball et al. (2012) conceptualises policy enactment as "…interweaving three constituent facets of policy work and the policy process – *the material, the interpretive and the discursive*" (p. 15, emphasis in original). Together, these aspects tell stories about how policy is 'done' in schools.

The *material* aspect gives attention to the "material contexts of interpretation [which] create different practical possibilities and constraints for policy enactment … and frameworks of expectation within which responses to policy are constructed" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 10). This aspect recognises how, for example, education policy enters diverse environments; each school has unique contextual dimensions. The enactment approach brings a lens to those influencing contexts, identifying the following interrelated, and at times overlapping, dimensions:

- Situated contexts (e.g. locale, school histories and intakes)
- Professional cultures (e.g. values, teacher commitments and experiences, and 'policy management' in schools)
- Material contexts (e.g. staffing, budgets, buildings, technology and infrastructure)
- External contexts (e.g. degree and quality of … [MoE] support; pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as … [ERO reviews, National Standards], legal requirements and responsibilities) (Ball et al., 2012, p. 21)

The *interpretive* aspect of policy enactment focuses on the hermeneutics, or meaning, of policy, which research tackles through:

- Considering 'interpretation' and 'translation' within the policy process
- A typology of 'policy actors' and their respective 'policy work' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 43)

Here the framework is concerned with how policy is understood from first reading (interpretation), through the process of 'enacting' in the school (translation), which includes "talk, meetings, plans, … and producing artefacts" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 45), by the variety of policy actors (acknowledging that teachers are not one homogeneous group), as it 'progresses through' the school, and how that influences the ultimate practice of policy by staff.

When considering the *discursive* aspect of policy enactment, Ball et al. (2012) are referring to the "discursive artefacts and activities that reflect, and 'carry' within them, the key policy discourses … and thereby do policy work" (p. 122). Here the authors refer to Foucault's work on governmentality, in that they propose "that, to some extent … artefacts and materials become part of the tools and techniques of governmentality in the policy work of the school (Foucault 1991)" (Ball et al., 2012, p.

122). The aspect speaks to the power relations within a school and the construction of 'truth' regarding the policy subject.

There are important differences between the setting of Ball et al.'s (2012) cases, being sited in England and in the secondary school sector, and my setting in AoNZ and primary schooling. Education policy in AoNZ is written for and enters a system of self-managing schools, whereby schools and teachers have significantly more freedom in decision-making and practice than their counterparts in England. While extending Ball and colleagues' policy enactment framework into this different setting, my work is still grounded in their 'toolbox' approach, where they draw on a range of concepts and theoretical tools to give an account of 'how schools do policy' (Braun, Ball, & Maguire, 2011). As a result, the framework supports my choice to use a range of theoretical resources suitable for revealing the complex and dynamic context of the case school.

Another reason the policy enactment framework suited this study is that the authors were clear that their thinking on policy enactment theory was incomplete (Ball et al., 2012, p. 146). They discussed ways in which they had to make choices about what to focus on and noted areas they would like to pursue, such as "the 'relations' of policy to material context – [for example] space…the condition of buildings" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 147). This developmental phase offered me the flexibility and freedom to extend their work in ways as yet unexplored.

Choosing policy enactment as the theoretical framework for this study allows for a multi-method way of examining the rhetoric and reality of parental engagement policy; equally, Ball et al. (2012) utilise a range of 'theoretical resources' in working with their data. This approach facilitates capturing a rich description of parental engagement within an AoNZ school, which reveals how the concept is expressed, enacted, and experienced by the various policy actors and stakeholders.

The theoretical perspective of the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, combined with the theoretical framework of policy enactment, support my overarching aim of *understanding* the enactment of parental engagement within primary school education in AoNZ, with particular concern for *context*. Constructivism, interpretivism and policy enactment contribute the first of five interrelated elements

that form a researcher's approach; the following chapter outlines the remaining two elements, the methodology and methods.

5 Research Design

The methodology and methods employed in a research project flow from, and need to be congruent with, the researcher's epistemological and theoretical perspective (Flick, 2018a). The methodology and methods employed in this research project follow qualitative approaches. Qualitative approaches collect data directly from participants themselves and typically flow from an interpretivist theoretical perspective (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Further, Stake (2010) asserts that a qualitative approach to understanding a phenomenon requires consideration of multiple contexts, from the "temporal and spatial, [to the] historical… cultural, social, [and] personal" (p. 31). This focus on situated meaning and interpretation aligns with the theoretical perspective outlined in the previous chapter (4 Situating the Researcher: Theoretical Underpinnings).

If, as Stake (2010) declares, "the main machine in all research is a human researcher" (p. 36), then that must be doubly so in qualitative research approaches. The researcher brings their experiences and philosophical positions into the field and their interpretations and, critically, their research relationships; so much so that according to Bosk (1979, p. ix), fieldwork is a "body-contact" sport, contact which is facilitated through the research relationships developed by the researcher, and continually (re)shaped by the research process (Maxwell, 2005). Reflections on their fieldwork become part of the researcher's data, and form "part of the interpretation" (Flick, 2018b, p. 8). Reflexivity is a term used to describe this reflective practice. Although its usage and meaning may vary, two forms of reflexivity include epistemological—"reflection on … assumptions about the world and about the nature of knowledge," and personal—reflection on how "personal values, attitudes beliefs

and aims have served to shape the research … and how the research process impacted and changed the stance taken by the researcher" (Gray, 2018, p. 690).

While a feature of many qualitative approaches, criticism of reflexivity has also been presented, for example, that it offers nothing to increase validity, and implies researchers "can somehow rise above the reflexively constituted world of which both they and what they are studying are necessarily part" (Hammersley, 2004, para. 5). As my theoretical position suggests, I believe it is valuable and necessary for the researcher to reflect on their position, process, and interpretations. For myself, a personal reflexive stance includes Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notion of *theoretical sensibility* whereby the researcher is

> insightful, demonstrating the capacity to understand and the ability to differentiate between what is important and what is not. They must be able to perceive of situations holistically and be responsive to environmental cues in the field. For example, they need to be sensitive to situations where they risk biasing the responses of people they are interviewing. (Gray, 2018, p. 175)

Table 1

Theoretical position: methodology and methods

Epistemology	Theoretical Perspective	Theoretical Framework	Methodology	Methods
Constructivism	Interpretivism	Policy enactment	Case study	Observation
				Focus group
				Semi-structured interview
				Mental mapping
				Discourse/artefact analysis
				Genealogy
				Spatial analysis

Note. Adapted from (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2018)

Methodology

Methodology refers to "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). This research sought to increase the knowledge and understanding of the situated reality of parental engagement as it was enacted and experienced in an AoNZ primary school setting. I chose *case study* methodology to inform the methods used to seek answers to the research questions. The following section outlines my understanding and use of this methodology.

Case study

The case study approach is particularly useful in addressing 'how' and 'why' research questions and providing a rich description of a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The ability of this approach to allow for "a holistic understanding of a phenomenon within real-life contexts from the perspective of those involved" (Boblin et al., 2013, p. 1268) makes it an appropriate methodology for policy enactment focussing as it does on the influence of contextual dimensions.

Flyvbjerg, known for his seminal case study of the Aalborg Project (1998), argues strongly that case study is well placed to produce "concrete, context-dependent knowledge" (2006, p. 223). He identifies the close proximity of the researcher to the finer points of reality, through case study, as necessary in developing the nuanced viewpoint critical to this knowledge production (p. 223), critical because attempting a "context-free definition of human action" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 42) fails to recognise the complexities of reality (much as implementation research does for Ball et al. (2012)) and the "pragmatic way an action is defined by the actors in a concrete social situation" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 42). There is power in a good example, which is underestimated as a contribution to scientific development (p. 77).

Following Stake (2005), this case has been designed as an *instrumental* case study as the "particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into the issue" (p. 445), whereby the issue is the enactment of parental engagement policy, and the case is an AoNZ primary school. Case studies also offer others (e.g., policymakers, schools, teachers, and parents) vicarious experience in parental engagement, from enactment to experience, which is "an important basis for refining action options and

expectations" (Stake, 2005, p. 460). For that reason, the selection of the case school was *purposive* in that it suited the purpose of providing insight into the phenomenon of parental engagement policy enactment within a 'typical' AoNZ primary school (Mutch, 2013). The sample criteria encompassed a range of factors within the MoE categorisations that are most common (presented below, see The case: Korimako School). The more 'typical' the case, the more easily readers will be able to identify with the experiences and enhance their understanding of their own situations or apply the knowledge to policy development.

Methods

The *methods* represent the various "techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to [the] research questions" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Given the centrality of context in interpretive research, researchers may need to adapt their design in the face of context-specific realities (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). In addition, theories, concepts, and understandings develop as the project progresses (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xix). I anticipated the best methods to answer the original research questions in the study's proposal and research design phase. As the research progressed, my understanding of the topic, my questions, and the context developed, suggesting that some alternative methods were needed.

The variety of methods ultimately utilised explored the concept of parental engagement, the impact of context on policy enactment, and the experiences of policy actors and stakeholders. The range of methods used reflects the need to consider a range of contexts and sources, as per a constructivist/interpretivist policy enactment approach. The use of several methods also allows for *triangulation* of findings, a well-established technique to "…substantiate an interpretation or to clarify its different meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 173), which contributes to the credibility of the research (Ary et al., 2014, p. 532).

Observation

Field notes were the main output of my observation at Korimako School. "Field notes are texts that are produced (crafted) by the researcher as author, and in that, they can only ever be a textual representation of the field" (Coffey, 2018, p. 49). What the researcher captures in their notes will vary depending on the nature of the study and the researcher's theoretical position; there are no rules (Coffey, 2018). However,

what is important is that the notes "are produced in close proximity to the field" (Gray, 2018, p. 441). Temporal closeness to the field is even more critical than physical proximity, with field notes ideally recorded contemporaneously to the experience or event depicted (Emerson et al., 2001; Gray, 2018).

I wrote field notes about the material setting at Korimako; of events that took place; descriptions of people, interactions, and actions; and finally, my impressions, feelings, and ideas. My field notes also included photos, a form of visual data which, as Wagner (2010) states, can contribute by "extending and enriching observations of natural phenomena that are difficult to document, analyze, and represent with textual and numerical data alone" (p. 501). These photos were not for me to use later for photo elicitation during interviews (for example), but 'field photos' that could inform questions and interpretation (for example, see the work of Loughlin, 2013). In ethnography, the types of observations I was making were very typical of what is categorised as the *observer as participant,* "where the researcher is identified within the setting and relates to people in the setting, but very clearly only as a researcher" (Coffey, 2018, p. 65). These notes contributed most significantly to my analysis of how the school-specific material context impacted parental engagement policy enactment.

I initially separated my observations in the field from my personal reflections by recording them in different books; indeed, the inclusion of a researcher's feelings within their field notes is a contested subject (Gray, 2018, p. 441). Ultimately, all of my notes were amalgamated in my Livescribe notebooks. The Livescribe (https://us.livescribe.com/) system consists of a smart pen (with a digital audio recorder and embedded computer), notebooks (with Anoto digital paper[2]) (see ***Figure 2***), and software for synchronising and storing data (see ***Figure 3***). The Echo pen can record audio and synchronise the audio with the written notes. This system was very useful for taking field notes (172 pages in total) and it allowed me to convert my written notes to digital documents which I could then analyse using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo.

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[2] A patented type of dot-pattern technology that can translate analogue input to digital data.

Figure 2

Livescribe Echo pen and fieldwork notebooks

Figure 3

Screenshot of Echo desktop and imported field notes from Livescribe Echo pen
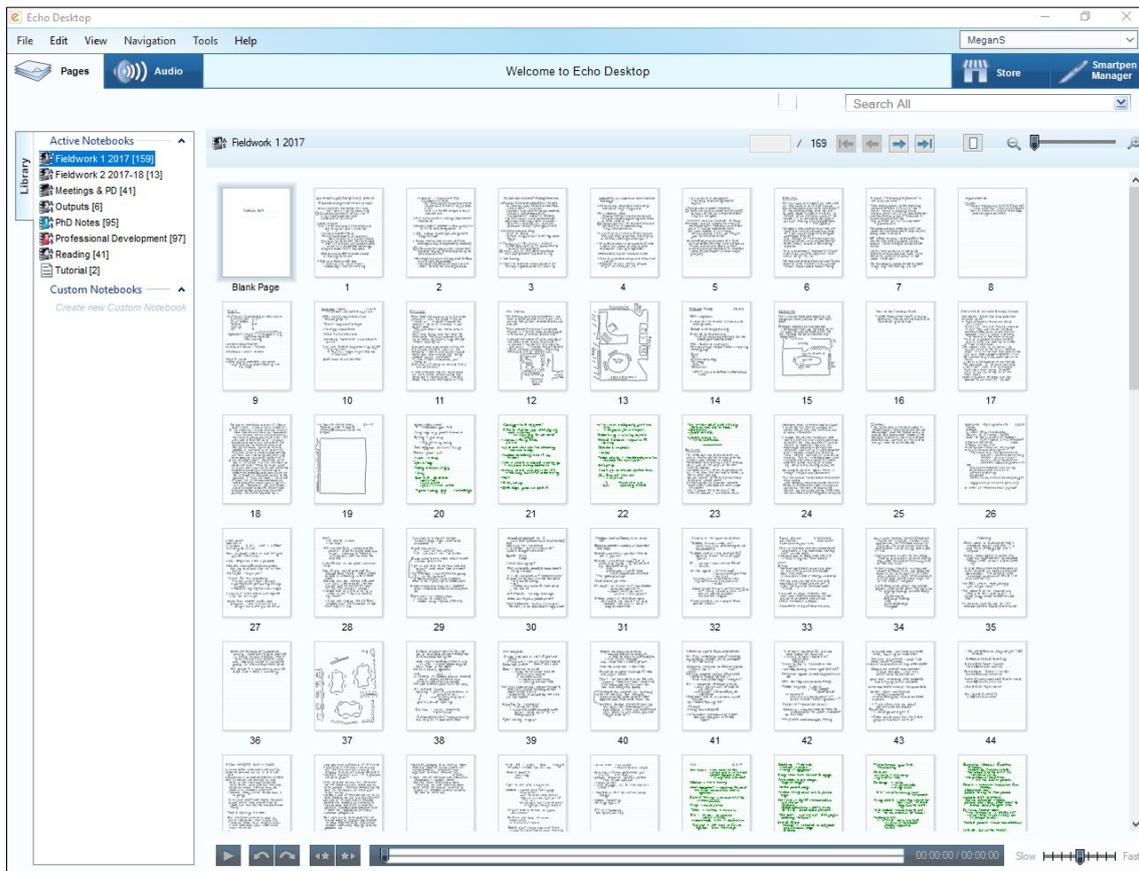
Focus group

Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) suggest that "any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction" (p. 20). In practice, a focus group is often centred on generating discussion and interactions (focus group discussion) or asking a series of questions (focus group interview) (Barbour, 2018). My intentions for using the focus group method of collecting data were

- To explore the concept of parent engagement and community with parents.
- To gain themes and perspectives to pursue in the individual interviews.
- To facilitate a mental mapping activity.

See Appendix J: Parent participant information sheet for the information sheet used when recruiting parents for the two scheduled focus groups.

Visual materials can be used in focus groups to help generate data, with various mapping exercises an option for prompting reflection and discussion (Banks, 2018). For

my research, mental mapping (see more below at Mental mapping) formed a critical aspect of discussion generation within the focus group and provided data in and of themselves. This type of 'task-based activity' provided a way for participant parents to start engaging with, and thinking about, the topic of parental engagement before contributing to the discussion (Punch, 2002).

The success of a focus group can depend on the ability of the facilitator to guide discussion while encouraging spontaneity, maintaining an ethical practice, managing practicalities (including activities), and keeping track of participants and their responses (Barbour, 2018; Gray, 2018; Matthews & Ross, 2010). One aspect of focus groups to be mindful of is that participants may change their minds about the topic during discussion or following the focus group. This shift in thinking can occur "particularly where focus groups address a topic to which they had not previously paid a great deal of attention" (Barbour, 2007, p. 31). This was potentially the case for parent participants on the topic of parental engagement. Therefore, my research design allowed for the focus group results to be further explored and triangulated via the other methods of the project (including the planned subsequent individual semi-structured interview).

My initial planning had included video recording the focus group; however, when only one participant attended the first group, and only two the second, the video did not add anything more than an additional audio recording. I used the Livescribe notebook and Echo pen to audio record the groups and take notes. In addition, I used the recording app Voice Record Pro (*Figure 4*) as my main form of audio capture for transcription. The focus group recording was transcribed (see more transcription details in the following section Semi-structured interviews), and the mental maps were scanned, with both uploaded into NVivo for analysis.

Figure 4

Voice Record Pro app used for recording interviews and focus groups

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews in my research project provided critical data whilst also offering context to the texts analysed in genealogical and policy analysis. Although no particular epistemological paradigm brought forth the interview as a method of research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 22), Wagenaar (2011) states that for many engaged in "qualitative/interpretivist research, interviews are the main source of data" and give context to the texts for those following "genealogical, critical discourse, or poststructural analysis" (p. 251). In providing an avenue for exploring how participants "experience and understand" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 10) the phenomenon under study, Sennett (2004) suggests that researchers need to "give something" of themselves for participants not to "feel like an insect under the microscope" (pp. 37-38). In 'giving of oneself,' researchers work to develop an appropriate working relationship with participants; Wagenaar (2011) views this as one of three key tasks for

researchers. The remaining two are helping participants develop interview material and monitoring its quality (p. 252).

Interviews in qualitative research are designed with open-ended questions to reveal the lived experiences of the interviewee of the phenomenon under study (Ary et al., 2014; Gray, 2018). Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) describe this approach as a "semi-structured life-world interview" that, importantly, allows the participant to reveal their experiences "from their own perspective and in their own words" (p. 14). In policy analysis, Wagenaar (2015) presents this as one possible value of the qualitative interview, seeing its potential in restoring the target audience's voice through "articulat[ing] its experiences, needs, concerns, feelings, practices and aspirations" (p. 425).

The interviewer has a question schedule (see Appendix G: Principal and staff interview questions, Appendix L: Parent & BOT parent member interview starter questions, and Appendix S: Seesaw interview discussion guide) for a semi-structured interview but can respond to answers by probing or asking other questions (Gray, 2018). Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, pp. 67-68) detail nine types of possible questions or responses for interviewers, introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, silence, and interpreting questions. The questions that form the initial schedule and any that follow need to align with the purpose of the research, as does the reasoning for using interviews. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to:

- Uncover the understanding and experience different policy actors and stakeholders had of parental engagement at the case school.
- Provide a source of data with which to triangulate with data gathered by the different methods to confirm interpretations or uncover additional meanings (Stake, 2010), and to explore more deeply ideas and themes discovered by the other methods.

As for the focus groups, the semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded using the Voice Record Pro app (*Figure 4*) and transcribed by myself or a professional service. Transcription in itself can be viewed as an initial form of analysis (Kvale, 2007, p. 94); however, complete transcription is time-consuming, with estimates of up to 7-10 hours required for each hour of live interview (Gray, 2018). Some advise against

transcribing the whole interview, as often parts are irrelevant (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 123), or transcribing a recording only when it is clear it will be vital to the project (Stake, 2010, p. 152). In this instance, the interviews were an integral part of the project (for the purposes outlined above) and were fully transcribed by myself or a transcriber.

After evaluating a number of transcription tools powered by speech-to-text artificial intelligence (e.g., Go Transcribe, go-transcribe.com) or overseas-based transcription services (e.g., Transcription Puppy, transcriptionpuppy.com), I determined a local service would be best because of the challenges of interpreting the AoNZ accent. The need to maintain confidentiality was discussed with the transcriber directly and covered by the agreement found in Appendix T: Transcription confidentiality agreement. Completed transcripts were sent to participants for member checking, where the participant is asked if the researcher has accurately captured their experience or meaning (Ary et al., 2014). While demonstrating a courtesy to participants, member checking is also a technique of triangulation (Stake, 1995) and credibility (Mutch, 2013).

Mental mapping

How parents experience the school's built environment and its community is a contextual factor that has seldom been explored. The built environment is a material context in policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012, pp. 29-36); therefore, understanding how parents experience it is part of the lived experience of parental engagement. Mental mapping is a visual method that allowed parent participants to capture their stories and experiences in multi-dimensional ways, using the "…lens of space and place" (Gieseking, 2013, p. 723), and provided a type of data not able to be gained through methods such as interview alone (Gieseking, 2013; Krueger, 2010). The data collected through mental mapping can be triangulated against data collected from other methods to increase confidence in the findings.

The twenty-first century has seen an increased interest in using visual methods in qualitative research. Flick (2018a, pp. 119-120) categorises four varieties of visual data: that produced by the researcher (e.g., photos), those produced by participants (e.g., photos, maps), material from the internet (e.g., web pages), and other visual

recordings (e.g., film, television). As participants create their mental maps by hand, they have the flexibility to represent the material *and* the cognitive (Banks, 2018).

Cognitive mapping has its origins in psychology: Edward Tolman (1886-1959) used 'cognitive map' to describe the mental process of constructing a map-like series of images and understandings of an environment that inform our everyday behaviours (1948, as cited by Kitchin, 1994). Since this time, cognitive mapping has featured across several disciplines, but most notably in geography, where the widely accepted definition from Downs and Stea (2005a) states:

> Cognitive mapping is a process composed of a series of psychological transformations by which an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in his everyday spatial environment. (p. 9)

Mental mapping—also termed mental sketch mapping—is a hands-on method that with potential to elicit, in a multi-dimensional manner, the experience of parents in the school's built environment. In other words, mental mapping could help draw out, give substance to, and represent parents' cognitive maps of the school environment. Following Gieseking (2013), I carefully considered the practical aspects of the method. I tested different types of paper (six) and pencils (a variety of HB and coloured) to determine which materials worked best for the task while also communicating to participants that their work was valued and important. I eventually selected two varieties of high-quality A3 paper (different for the school and community maps), a mix of coloured and HB lead pencils, and erasers.

Very few methods for obtaining mental maps are described in the literature. The most commonly used is from Lynch (1960, Appendix B). Gieseking (2013) drew on Lynch (1960) but expanded the process and shifted the focus from the spatial design to the "relationship between people and their spaces" (p. 715). It was Gieseking's (2013) method that I drew on for my work with parents so their experiences of, and relationship to, the two spaces (community and school) would be the focus. The 'community' mental mapping exercise explored aspects of the 'school community,' as experienced and constructed by the parent participants. The second mapping exercise was concerned with the built environment of the school campus, and the views and experiences the parents had of it.

The two mapping exercises drew on different techniques. While both were two-dimensional graphic mapping tasks (Kitchin, 2000, p. 11), for the school mapping task, I also provided participants with a simple map of the school campus which was placed beneath their paper (which was opaque). This map was for reference: it facilitated a greater level of detail and discussion during the mapping process and enabled easy comparison of the participant maps (at the same scale) during analysis. The processes used for the mapping exercises are broadly outlined in Appendix M: Parent interview school mapping guide and Appendix N: Parent focus group discussion and community mapping guide.

Concerning the analysis of mental maps, scholars (see for example, Downs & Stea, 2005b; Gieseking, 2013; Lynch, 1960; Powell, 2010) have utilised a range of analytic techniques and components. These techniques encompass a variety of aspects which may be grouped according to, for example, mechanics of method, drawing elements, narratives of place, and personalisation (Gieseking, 2013, p. 716). What is clear is that there is no one way to approach the analysis, it is a matter of 'grouping analytics' to support the research questions. The categories or themes identified in the discourse and artefact (particularly built space) analysis formed the analytics used to interpret the school maps. The community maps were ultimately not utilised in the research and did not contribute to the findings.

Discourse/artefact analysis

Summarising Foucault's conception of 'discourse', Hall (1996, p. 201) writes that "discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But it is itself produced by a practice: 'discursive practice' - the practice of producing meaning. Since all social practices entail meaning, all practices have a discursive aspect." For that reason, there are many variations of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Within this policy enactment study, discourse analysis refers to a range of approaches for analysing how parents, and parental engagement, are constructed in policy and other documents, and how other artefacts (for example, buildings and posters) not only influence their interpretation and enactment, but help construct their meaning (Ball et al., 2012). So, for example, policy 'stories' can be 'read' from buildings, and other artefacts, as much as from policy text (Yanow, 1995).

Discourse/artefact analysis complements, and provides an opportunity for triangulation against, the mental mapping method, where the 'lived' experience parents had of the school environment was sought. However, discourse analysis was undertaken throughout the study and contributed to all articles in some form. Overall, in the course of this policy enactment study I have collated and analysed an extensive archive of material:

- From the MoE and relevant government agencies. Key documents included, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007), and the *Partners in Learning* series (ERO, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Other relevant material included policies, press releases, communications to schools, teacher unions, and boards of trustees and their association.
- From the case school. Participant interview recordings and transcripts. Key documents included policy and procedures relating to parents and school communication such as newsletters and achievement reports. Other physical and digital artefacts included the school website, Facebook page, Seesaw posts, posters and displays, buildings, and signs.
- From other sources. A wide range of material included newspaper articles and letters to the editor, historical accounts, various teacher union and school association material, academic documents, and books.

Ball et al. (2012) describe their policy enactment approach as *inductive* qualitative research, meaning that data collection and analysis take place at the same time, moving through a process of "reflecting on the meaning [of data]…, developing hunches [about meaning]…, and seeking to confirm or disconfirm those hunches" (Ary et al., 2014, p. 453). This approach suits a form of data-driven coding called "open coding", whereby codes are developed from the data as read while trying to minimise presuppositions (Gibbs, 2018, p. 61). It is impossible to be entirely without pre-existing ideas (e.g., drawn from theory or the literature), nor does that always suit the application (for example, when an analytic framework is being used). Therefore, I have also used "concept driven coding", where codes are drawn from the literature or a specific framework.

The steps of analysis (***Table 2***) then are not fixed or linear. Instead, they inform each other in a somewhat "circular process" (Dey, 1993, as cited in Gray, 2018, p. 691)

and frequently occur simultaneously (e.g., 3a and 3b) (Yanow, 2000, p. 22). Finally, they are also informed by the purpose of the analysis and frameworks employed.

Table 2

Steps in analysis

1	Identify the artefacts (language, objects, acts) that are the significant carriers of meaning relative to parental engagement for the policy actor/stakeholder
2	Identify interpretive communities (policy actors and stakeholders) that create and interpret these artefacts
3a	Identify the discourses: the specific meanings (values, beliefs, feelings) being communicated through specific artefacts about parental engagement
3b	Interpretation—relating to the analytic frame

- Creating codes—identifying codes from the literature, theory, or analytic framework

- Coding—classifying into existing codes or into new themes or categories as they emerge from the data

- Direct interpretation—immediate interpretations of an instance

- Categorical aggregation—what groupings are evident in the instances coded to support an interpretation

- Searching for patterns—how one category relates to another, how they correspond or contrast

Note. Adapted from Yanow (2000, p. 22), and Stake (1995, pp. 74-85)

As an illustration of the steps in **Table 2**, I outline below my analysis for the article presented in chapter

1. Artefact: Seesaw e-portfolio app. The Seesaw platform was identified during my interviews with teachers as an artefact of interest. Several teachers referred to it as a medium through which their communication and engagement with parents was increasing. The use of the platform was in a trial year at the school, but two teachers were among several championing for it to become a permanent tool used at the school.

2. Interpretive communities: Teachers, as the primary users (or facilitators of its use by students and parents) of the Seesaw app and the primary creators of posts made via the app (or facilitators of post creation by students), and parents as main recipients of the posts made via the app.

3. a) Identification of discourses communicated, and b) Interpretation. The creation of the codebook for the Seesaw article utilised primarily "concept driven" code creation (Gibbs, 2018, p. 61) that aligned with the analytic framework of Harrison (2018). *Table 3* displays a sample of the codes created, and *Table 4* displays an excerpt of text coded under a code determined by the framework.

Table 3

NVivo codebook for Seesaw article

Name	Description
Ordinary routines	These are the 'ordinary routines' (from Harrison, 2018) or ways in which these types of digital interactions took place pre-Seesaw or are the alternatives to Seesaw e.g., learning journals.
Organisation - design	The way in which Seesaw has been designed or organised to transform an 'ordinary routine' (from Harrison, 2018).
Parent - post comment	Parent made comment on a Seesaw post.
Parent - post like	Parent 'like' of a Seesaw post.
PE - Learning conversation	PE = parental engagement. The learning conversations that represent high quality parental engagement in learning in the way of successful home-school partnerships according to Bull et al (2008).
TGC - Barriers - parents	Tensions, gaps, contradictions (TGC - from Harrison, 2018). Perceived barriers to parents using Seesaw or gaining the benefits attributed to its use.

Table 4

NVivo coding example

Code	Text excerpt from interview transcript

As already stated, buildings are artefacts whose meanings can be "read as if they were texts, invoking similar critical processes" (Yanow, 1995, p. 408). Therefore, in this section I include Yanow's (2014) interpretive approach to the analysis of *How built spaces mean*. Within the policy enactment framework proposed by Ball et al. (2012), the material context of a school includes the physical environment, and as such will influence the enactment of parental engagement. Yanow's (2014) approach draws attention to the lack of consideration that space—as a mechanism for communicating meaning—has received outside of place-orientated social sciences (such as, anthropology and human (social) geography). The method Yanow (2014) outlines, draws on a critical phenomenology oriented toward our embodied experiences, the material aspects of human relationships, and the possibility of enacting power relationships through the ability of space to shape behaviour. The method is also grounded in hermeneutics, in that it seeks to reveal and understand the relationship between the spatial elements which comprise built space, and the meaning making of users and creators (p. 370).

The method requires the researcher/analyst to physically experience the built space and draw upon that experience in an "intentional effort to understand what [the space] …means to another" (Yanow, 2014, p. 371). Field notes capturing my observations and experiences of using the built space (on a range of occasions, visiting with and interviewing both teachers and parents, and attending both formal and social events) of the case school formed one part of the data generated. Yanow (2014, p. 372) describes the inquiry process of built space analysis as needing to look for the who, what, where, how, and why of the space. These can be expressed, for example, in the architect's (or commissioning agent, etc.) intent, the spatial elements, and the users' interpretations. For this purpose, I sought data through participant interviews and mental maps, observation and photographs, and research relevant documents (e.g., MoE property guidelines and policies, and historical material from the school describing its foundation and development).

Yanow (2014) suggests four possible analytic categories as a means of establishing the contextually specific meanings communicated by spatial elements. They are:

1. the "vocabulary" of design elements and construction materials and the ambient environment these create …;

2. design "gestures" that use design vocabularies to communicate relationships, such as affect and status displays …;

3. proxemics, the uses of spatial proximity and distance;

4. "decor" itself. (Yanow, 2014, p. 377)

It is necessary to consider the "intertextuality" in spatial meanings, as these elements interact and overlap in the development of meaning (Yanow, 2014, p. 380).

Finally, a key understanding of this analysis is that the reader/user of the built space has agency to "[act] on built spaces, modifying them, rejecting their intended uses" (p. 373). This extends to being attentive to the multiplicity of meanings and possible tensions between them, as well as the differences in power or authority between the designers (or design commissioners) and the intended users (p. 381).

Genealogy

Foucault's work is known for both its insightfulness and the challenges faced in applying his methods (Mills, 2003); Tamboukou (1999) describes his genealogies as having a "methodological rhythm of their own" (p. 215). To help chart a course through potential challenges for my own genealogical analysis, I have drawn on interpretations of Foucault's work offered by Ball (2013) and, particularly, Mills (2003) and Tamboukou (1999). Drawing on these three scholars, and Foucault himself, my genealogy was grounded in the following understandings.

Foucault was concerned with the production of power/knowledge, the subjectivities we experience, and how these might be different. The exploration of this is based around a set of questions: "What is happening now? What is this present of ours? How have we become what we are and what are the possibilities of becoming 'other'?" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 215). These questions lead an historical analysis concerning an "ontology of ourselves" (Foucault, 1988, p. 95), whereby we turn our "analytic gaze to the condition under which we, as individuals, exist and what causes us to exist in the way that we do" (Mills, 2003, p. 25). How, for example, do we understand the practice of parental engagement, what forces, under what conditions, brought those understandings into being? What alternatives might exist?

Foucault did not articulate a 'method' of conducting genealogies, but described it as "gray, meticulous and patiently documentary" (Foucault, 1984/1991, p. 76), which is to say, that in order to consider alternative 'knowledges' and ways of being, one must explore a vast archive of source material (pp. 76-77), and attend to the type of details that may have gone unnoticed in normative histories. This requires the analyst to closely examine *what people do*, with the aim being "to strip away the veils that cover people's practices, by simply showing how they are, and where they come from, describing its complicated forms and exploring its countless historical transformations" (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 207)—the analysis of *descent*. The archive also provides the source material for an analysis of *emergence*, which focuses on the play of forces and strategies of domination (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2016, p. 109).

My genealogical analysis also steps beyond Foucault's intention to simply provide "documentation" (Donnelly, 1986, as cited in Mills, 2003, p. 25), as Foucauldian analysis is not "in essence" interpretive—although, it must be noted that Foucault's work supported resistance to power by charting that very resistance where there are "inequalities in access to resources" (Mills, 2003, p. 41). As suggested by Mills (2003), analysts need to determine for themselves whether this "Foucauldian strategy par excellence" (p. 114) is adequate for their own purposes. I have extended my genealogical analysis with interpretive analysis.

Spatial analysis

I utilised spatial analysis, drawing on the framework of Harrison (2018), to examine what a digital space has to offer parental engagement practices. Digital technologies have opened up new spaces in education that can potentially overcome constraints that occur in, for example, built spaces. However, virtual—like other—space is not neutral, and there is a need to be wary of using "overly simplistic spatial metaphors" (e.g., virtual space is open) (Harrison, 2018, p. 22). Consideration of the dynamic relationship between the virtual space and the activities undertaken allows greater deliberation of the boundaries to that which is desired (such as parental engagement) and how they can become more "permeable" (Oliver, 2015, p. 373).

Harrison's (2018) framework (***Figure 5***) sets out three categories through which to apply a spatial lens to digital education platforms. Her categories are adapted from Boys (2011), who conceived a simplified framework (for learning) based on Lefebvre's

(1991) spatial triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Harrison (2018) considers three categories which researchers can utilise to analyse "[firstly] how learners and instructors negotiate and enact their spaces (representational spaces), [secondly] by exploring the inherent gaps and contradictory tensions that arise between design space (representations of space), and [thirdly] the ordinary routines of learning (spatial practices)" (p. 24). Each category is interconnected, and can feature "tensions, gaps, and contradictions" running both within and across.

Figure 5

Boys (2011) framework of learning encounters, adapted for a spatial analysis of learning spaces by Harrison (2018)
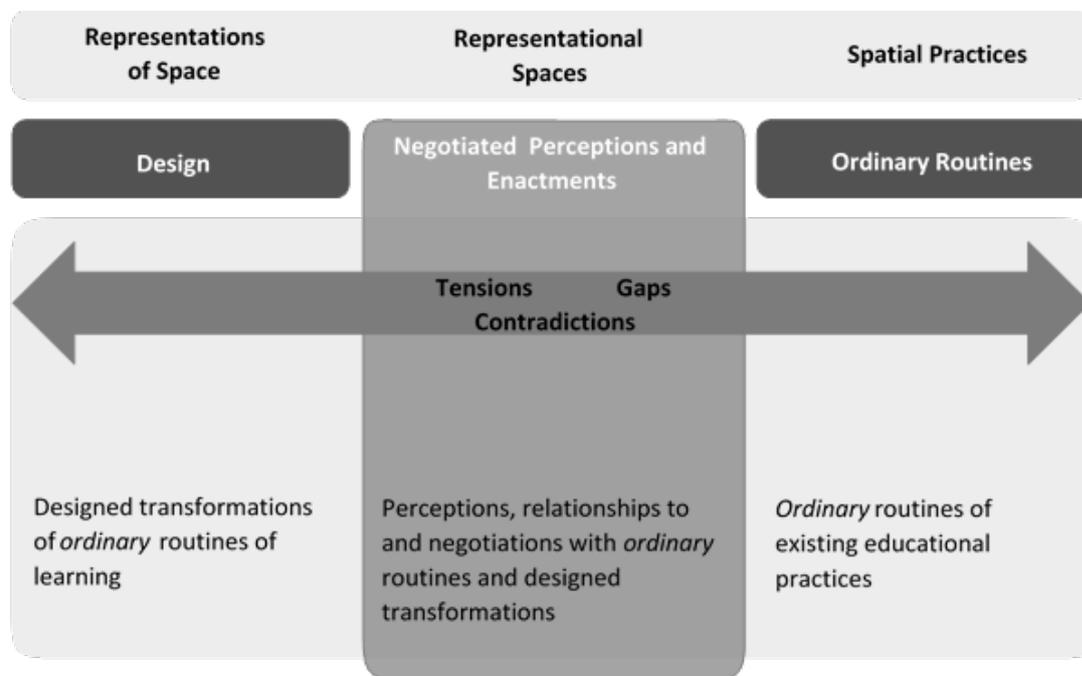
Note. Re-printed from Harrison (2018, p. 24)

I further adapted Harrison's (2018) framework to focus specifically on parental engagement and the Seesaw e-portfolio app (***Figure 6***) (this structured my analysis of Seesaw in the article featured in chapter

9). The first category (spatial practices) examines the *ordinary routines* of existing parental engagement practices. These are the "daily routines" of teachers and parents concerning parental engagement that are "perceived as natural" (Sheehy, 2009, p. 145). The second category (representations of space) focuses on analysing the *design* of the Seesaw e-portfolio app. It is here that the aspects of parental engagement (e.g., learning portfolios and home-school communication) organised and 'made sense' of through the design of the Seesaw space are examined. The third and final category (representational spaces) represents how the designed space of Seesaw is perceived and enacted by the various users (focusing on teachers and parents) in parental engagement practices, processes through which users "inscribe different meanings" (Harrison, 2018, p. 24) to the Seesaw space.

Figure 6

Framework for spatial analysis of Seesaw as a digital space used for parental engagement

1	2	3
Spatial Practices	*Representations of Space*	*Representational Spaces*
Ordinary Routines: The ordinary routines of existing parental engagement practices	**Design:** How Seesaw has designed and organised the processes and functions of parental engagement practices	**Negotiated Perceptions and Enactments:** How teachers, parents, and students perceive and enact ordinary and transformed routines of parental engagement

Tensions, Gaps, Contradictions

Note. Adapted from Harrison (2018)

The primary data for the spatial analysis were the transcripts of the Seesaw-specific interviews (of three teachers and three parents), the three e-portfolios shared by the parents, and the Seesaw website and app. The general 'parental engagement' focused transcripts from other teachers and parents formed a supplementary data set.

The case: Korimako School

For me as a researcher holding an interpretive theoretical perspective, reflection on process, practice, and results was a part of my fieldwork. An article on school-based research (see 6 Research in Practice) examines in more detail some of what I cover in the following Korimako School sections.

Sampling

This research involved one school site, and the participants for particular activities within the study were drawn from this school. Selection of a case site, and the individual participants within, was based on several initial considerations but was guided by non-probability sampling whereby "the sample is chosen … to expand our understanding of the phenomena" (Mutch, 2013, p. 50) and not to generalise or extrapolate from the findings.

The selection of the case school was *purposeful* in that it was to suit the purpose of the case study to provide an "information rich case" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The strategy for selecting the site for my case is an example of "typical case sampling" (p. 236). I chose the case to be relatively typical in the representation of an AoNZ primary school, and in that, it is "illustrative not definitive" (p. 236) or generalisable. In AoNZ, the majority of schools are within the primary education sector (encompassing schooling years 1-8); it is also the area I am most familiar with from the perspective of my teaching, BOT, and parent involvement experience. I identified the case school as 'typical' from a sample possessing the 'average' characteristics of schools in the *Directory: New Zealand Schools* (as at 1 July 2016, MoE, 2016c). The characteristics of a typical AoNZ school are:

- Authority—State: Not integrated. This is the most common authority categorisation within primary level schools.
- Gender of Students—Co-Educational. This is the most common gender categorisation within primary level schools.

- Decile[3]—within the range of 4-7. Primary level schools are distributed relatively evenly across the socio-economic decile range (of 1-10, with 1 being low), so the range of 4-7 encompasses the middle four decile categorisations.

- Urban Area—located in an 'urban' area (this encompasses the subcategories of Main Urban Area, Minor Urban Area and Secondary Urban Area). This factor captures the most common urban area categorisations within primary level schools.

- Community of Learning—a member of a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoL). The inclusion of this criteria reflects the CoL as a growing and potentially significant contextual aspect of AoNZ schools. The first communities were established in late 2014 and, as of May 2016, included "over 40% of all eligible schools" (MoE, 2016a). The Ministry's *Community of Learning: Guide for schools and kura* publication indicates that the involvement of parents and communities is important:

  o "Communities of Learning are groups of kura/schools that come together, *along with their communities* [emphasis added], to raise achievement for all tamariki [children] and young people by sharing expertise in teaching and learning (ako), and supporting each other" (MoE, 2016a, p. 3).

  o "A Community of Learning will work with the students, *parents, families, whānau, iwi and other communities within its catchment, as the support and involvement of these groups is essential* [emphasis added] for the Community of Learning to progress towards its goals" (MoE, 2016a, p. 3).

There were several potential case schools, so further consideration was given to the school, which more closely represented the ethnic proportions of the AoNZ primary sector school population at large, particularly for Pākehā and Māori. I

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[3] A schools decile indicated the extent to which the school draws its students from the low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from the low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. A schools decile does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school.

calculated school-level ethnic demographics from the indicative student roll information in the *Directory: New Zealand Schools* (MoE, 2016c).

The criteria outlined above yielded 14 potential schools, so the final factor was the pragmatic evaluation of ease of access to the school for myself as the researcher. This evaluation was informed by factors such as distance from my home and the university, potential fieldwork accommodation requirements, and the relationship-building aspects of the research. From this pragmatic consideration, two schools emerged. I determined to approach one, and if that school were unable to proceed, I would approach the second. Ultimately, the case school was the first, and only school approached.

The approach

According to my research proposal, initial contact with the case school was to be via letter/email to the principal and BOT chairperson. This communication would outline the research and anticipated commitment for the school should they choose to participate. I would then follow up with a phone call to the principal to gauge interest and answer any questions or concerns about the school or individual participants taking part in this research project. Seeking 'organizational consent' from the appropriate personnel is the first stage of the informed consent process (Gray, 2018, p. 76).

In practice, I emailed a brief overview of the research project to the principal of Korimako School (I did not have an email address for the BOT chairperson to make a joint approach) in November 2016 and followed up with the telephone call in early December. The principal expressed interest, but due to end of year demands, asked if we could discuss it further in the New Year. After making contact again in January 2017, our first meeting to discuss the project and confirm the participation of Korimako School was in early February. I took an overview of the research project (Appendix D: Overview of research project, Appendix E: Principal information sheet) to the meeting, and we were able to confirm the school's involvement and discuss the next steps.

It took ten weeks from the first contact to confirm participation. The main factor in the length of time it took for this process to be completed was its timing in relation to the school year. The end-of-year calendar is hectic for schools, and it was

for this reason the principal preferred to postpone any meeting until after the school holidays.

Korimako School

Here I describe Korimako School (a pseudonym), as it was in the period of first contact in 2016 to the end of fieldwork in 2018, to locate it within its contexts. Korimako School is a mid-decile (4-7), full primary state school, offering classes from new entrant (year 0) to intermediate (year 8). The school is mid to large compared to other AoNZ primary schools, with a roll greater than 500 students. It has a campus with more than 20 classrooms and teachers. Instruction is in English, and it is co-educational.

A management team consisting of the principal and two deputy principals led the school. These three roles were without direct classroom responsibilities, and all were experienced leaders with many years of service at Korimako School. Across the school, the teaching staff were organised into four year level groups, junior, middle, senior, and intermediate, with a team leader heading each group. Fifteen percent of the classroom teaching staff were male, just below the national average of eighteen percent (MoE, 2005a). Four support teachers covered teacher release and targeted English programmes for speakers of other languages (ESOL), reading recovery, and in support of learning and behaviour. Other support staff included teacher aides (including for ESOL and the library) and a support worker. Finally, the school had a small administration team and a caretaker.

The Korimako School Board of Trustees consisted of five parent representatives, including an experienced chairperson. In addition, there was an elected staff representative, the principal, and secretarial support provided by one of the school administrators. There was an active parent-teacher association, and some parents were also involved in an informal Whānau Group and an Indian Parent Support Group. Most communication with the parent community occurred through the school newsletter, website, and Facebook page. The school was also trialling a new platform for creating e-portfolios, Seesaw. This platform was generating a lot of interest amongst many parents and teachers, and its communication possibilities were being explored.

At the time of the study, 'NZ European' students (also known as Pākehā[4]) comprised roughly half of the total roll at Korimako School. One-quarter of the students identified as Māori, with a combination of ethnicities (particularly Asian) making up the remaining quarter. Native speakers of languages made up more than ten percent of students. The community Korimako School drew from covered a breadth of socio-economic backgrounds, with parents employed in a wide range of occupational classes. Local housing reflected this socio-economic diversity and contained a mix of modern high density (e.g., townhouses), older high density (e.g., blocks of flats), and more substantial suburban homes. Its proximity to nearby business/industry, which attracts employees from overseas, contributed to this diverse community.

The school had a reasonably large campus with a school field, hall, playground equipment, and a swimming pool. Like many other AoNZ schools, the buildings included an eclectic range of designs that revealed their growth and development history. Although established much earlier, Korimako School came to its current site in the 1940s, when a significant open-air style linear building was built. Buildings added in the latter half of the twentieth century and early part of this century included the hall and several classrooms. The classrooms were of a single-cell design rather than the more open-plan spaces (modern learning environments) that have become a focus of recent education property development. Murals, artworks, small gardens, and some mature trees enhanced the school campus.

Students and the school community could access the Korimako School campus from more than one street. Multiple access points also made utilising local amenities easy for school programmes.

The school belonged to a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako when I approached them to participate in my research but had withdrawn by the time I completed the fieldwork.

Recruitment and selection

What I achieved in the recruitment of participants differed from my intentions. I have indicated the aim and the actual result as (n = [aim] / [actual]) in the following

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[4] Pākehā are Aotearoa New Zealand citizens of European descent.

outline of the participant mix. To capture a diversity of views, I aimed to recruit a wide range of individual participants (n = 40 / 21) from the case school. I sought the following mix of participants:

- Principal (*n* = 1 / 1), BOT chairperson (*n* = 1 / 1). The principal and BOT chairperson are the two primary actors charged by the MoE with the implementation of policy in the school, and as such, are critical voices regarding parental engagement in the school.

- BOT representatives, including staff representative (*n* = 2 / 2). The BOT is a formal form of parental involvement; therefore, the experience of this by both parent and staff representatives is important.

- Representatives of the senior leadership or teaching team leaders (*n* = 2-3 / 2). Senior staff leaders form part of policy movement within the school, interpreting policy to fit within their individual areas of responsibility. They contribute an important perspective on the different factors that influence parental engagement within their particular context.

- Representatives of the teaching team (*n* = 6-8 / 8). Teachers have the most direct contact with parents and are directly involved with implementing parental engagement policy, and present another perspective on the realities of this.

- Parent representatives (*n* = 28-30 / 7). Gathering a range of parents' voices on their experiences of parental engagement contributed to a rich description of the reality of parental engagement in the school.

- Seesaw teachers (*n* = 3). These teachers were recruited following interviews with three-parent participants to discuss their use of the e-portfolio platform Seesaw. These teachers each taught one of the children of the parent participants. These participants gave a different perspective on the use of the Seesaw platform.

I assigned all participants pseudonyms. These were arrived at by taking the estimated birth decade of each participant and selecting one of the most popular names in the Department of Internal Affairs database (*Top baby names by year (table)*, 2018), and names of an Indian origin from https://www.babycenter.in/a25010191/100-traditional-indian-baby-names#section2.

Recruitment of staff and BOT participants was initially via purposive (non-probability) sampling (Gray, 2018, p. 215); for example, participants representing a particular category of staff member (or parent, in the case of the BOT). The sampling frame consisted of the whole staff and BOT at Korimako School. I intended to recruit participants for the categories and numbers identified (see above).

I had hoped to recruit teachers by either speaking briefly at a staff meeting about the research or via blanket email with information and an invitation to participate. I discussed this with the principal (Peter) and the BOT chairperson (Catherine). While the BOT chairperson thought email would work best, the principal decided to manage the initial recruitment himself by contacting staff who he thought might work within my criteria. Unfortunately, Peter misunderstood my intention to have one-on-one interviews with staff (not focus groups as was planned with parents), so only one staff interview occurred due to his efforts (early April). However, after I attended two planned 'reporting to parents' discussion groups (facilitated by an external consultant for the school, mid-April), I met several parents and staff members, including one of the deputy principals (David), who became my key 'facilitator' within the school. Through David, I was connected with eight staff members, of whom six became participants. I made direct email contact with the remaining five staff participants. The recruitment of the three additional teacher participants for examining the use of the Seesaw e-portfolio platform is an example of 'opportunistic or emergent sampling' "to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities *after* fieldwork has begun" (Patton, 2002, p. 240).

I had aimed to strategically and purposefully recruit a diverse range of participants (e.g., teaching experience, gender), but given the numbers I was successfully recruiting, I needed all of them irrespective of their demographic profile. Because several participants were referred to me by senior leaders (the principal and deputy principal), I was particularly diligent with the informed consent process (Appendix I: Staff & BOT participant consent & release form). Along with showing me that participants knew what they were to be involved in, the informed consent process allowed me to check they understood that "participation is completely voluntary" (Flynn & Goldsmith, 2013, p. 10). Despite the recruitment challenges, my original aim

for diversity was achieved regarding experience, gender, and year level taught (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Staff participant details

Name[a]	F/M	Teaching experience – years	Role(s)
Joanne	F	13	Yr. 7 & 8 teacher
Ashleigh	F	4	Yr. 5 teacher
Ben	M	n/a	Support worker
David	M	10+	Deputy Principal
Peter	M	15+	Principal
Sarah	F	13	Team leader, Y.6 teacher
Greg	M	8	Yr. 6 teacher
Bridget	F	15+	Yr. 0 & 1
Jessica	F	5	Yr. 5 & 6 teacher
Sam	M	12	Yr. 3 & 4 teacher
Jessica[b]	F	10	Yr. 3 & 4 teacher
Christine[b]	F	*	Yr. 2 teacher
Kyle[b]	M	2	Yr. 7 & 8 teacher

Note. [a] All names are pseudonyms [b] Participants in Seesaw specific interview *Not disclosed

Parents

The principal and I discussed several ways to manage parent recruitment and maintain confidentiality (as the school newsletter was published on the school website and would reveal my research project at the school). Ultimately, the preferred option was the notice in the newsletter (this was also my original intention), which was sent out in September 2017. Unfortunately, the notice placement and resolution weren't optimal; however, I had four expressions of interest (unfortunately, these parents didn't end up participating due to timing and other commitments). I had a version of the notice printed and placed in the locked parent noticeboard at the school (this did not gain any participants). Initially, if the newsletter and notice approach failed to generate sufficient participants, I had determined to approach any parent groups

within the school directly. I actioned this with the PTA, the Whānau Group, and the Indian Parent Support Group and generated several interested parents. I also asked my teacher participants to forward the parent recruitment notice to their parent communities. I recruited two parents directly after discussing the research at school events (the 'reporting to parents' discussion group and the school production). Finally, 'snowball sampling' whereby existing participants are asked to recommend another parent as a potential participant (Patton, 2002, p. 237) secured one additional participant. As with the staff, the participation of parents was voluntary, and their informed consent was sought (Appendix K: Parent participant consent & release form).

Table 6

Parent participant details

Name[a]	F/M	Child(ren) at school - years	Role(s)
Michelle	F	3	PTA, parent
Samuel	M	7	PTA, parent
Tania	F	9	Parent
Chhavi	F	2	Parent
Sanjana	F	5	parent
Paula	F	4	parent
Oliver	M	5	BOT, parent
Catherine	F	10	BOT chair, parent

Note. [a] All names are pseudonyms

Participant procedures

As intended, the principal, Peter, participated in one 60-minute semi-structured interview at the beginning of the fieldwork and a second towards the end of the data gathering timeframe to clarify any comments or questions left unanswered. To validate his responses, the transcripts of these interviews were returned for him to check and amend as required. I knew that besides acting as a gatekeeper to the school and participants (which might require us to have brief meetings on process and progress), the principal was also likely to serve as the research facilitator (e.g., facilitating access to relevant documents). We negotiated these tasks directly, and I sought to establish protocols to minimise disruption and imposition on his time. Peter was active in the facilitator role during the initial stage of my fieldwork (for

approximately five months) until the Deputy Principal, David, assumed that role. See Appendix E: Principal information sheet, Appendix F: Principal consent and release form, and Appendix G: Principal and staff interview questions for the ethical documents used to seek the principal's informed consent.

The staff and BOT chairperson participants took part in one individual 60-minute semi-structured interview (Appendix H: Staff & BOT participant information sheet). Participants also checked (and amended if necessary) their interview transcripts to validate their answers. As the BOT chairperson, Catherine had a strong employer and governor perspective, for which the question prompts for staff were more appropriate (Appendix G: Principal and staff interview questions). Catherine's interview with these prompts demonstrated they would also be preferable for the other BOT parent, Oliver. As a result, the same questions and documentation were used with Oliver.

My intention was for all other parents to participate in a focus group of 90 minutes and an individual semi-structured interview of 60 minutes. Mental mapping was to form part of both of these events, with a community map at the focus group and a school map at the interview. I scheduled two focus groups in September 2017. The first had four confirmed participants, of which one lone parent attended. Fortunately, both parents confirmed for the second focus group attended, ending up the only two parents who experienced the focus group setting. All other parent participants ended up having one-on-one interviews, either two 60-minute sessions or one 90-minute session. All these parent participants completed the two mental maps as planned.

Ethical considerations

As noted above, the nature of interpretive research is such that methods can change as understandings evolve (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014), potentially requiring more than one phase for ethical approval, and this was the case for my research. Ethics approval from the University of Waikato occurred in two phases, with the main application in phase one and a supplemental application concerning the Seesaw and virtual space line of inquiry.

Table 7

Ethics approval timeline

Phase	Timing	Documentation
Overall ethics approval	Approved 7 October, 2016 Appendix C: Ethics approval	Ethics application form, data collecting tools (relating to interviews, focus groups, and mapping) and associated consent material (see appendices D-N and Appendix T).
Seesaw case study approval	Approved 14 August 2017 Appendix O: Ethics approval – Seesaw	Ethics application form, data collecting tools (for interviews) and associated consent material (see appendices P-S)

Understanding what they agree to participate in is a central concern in gaining the informed consent of participants in ethical research (Matthews & Ross, 2010). As part of this process, I identified any potential harm that might come to participants, including through feeling coerced to participate. The risk of coercion through a sense of vulnerability within existing power relationships was a key consideration for me. My concern resulted from some initial invitations to participate being made by senior leaders to teaching staff. I took time to explain the right to decline to participate and looked for indications of unease or reluctance in addition to taking verbal and written consent. I also made it clear (both verbally and in written documentation) that participants could withdraw from the study at any point up until data analysis commenced. None chose to do so.

I addressed other aspects of participant vulnerability (or avoiding harm) by considering participant confidentiality. Anonymity for participants was not possible as all participants were identifiable to me as the researcher and, at times, other participants (such as within the focus group or with snowball referral). As the researcher, I understood that confidentiality allowed me to identify participant responses or information but I took all steps practicable not to make those connections public (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). These steps can include participant checking of transcripts, writing about findings in general ways, reminding participants

of commitments to confidentiality in the focus group setting, and requiring the transcriptionist to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix T: Transcription confidentiality agreement). As discussed earlier (Recruitment and selection), the school and participants were all assigned pseudonyms for use when talking about (or publishing) information gained from them.

There were many more considerations when it came to maintaining confidentiality. Internal confidentiality (within the case school and participant networks) is distinct from external confidentiality (where protection is against those outside the environment, or who were not participants, from knowing) (Tolich, 2004). Conducting research in AoNZ presents some challenges due to the smallness of the country and the population (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 77). Shrink that size again when you are talking about primary schools in the education sector, and it becomes challenging to explore the unique characteristics of the context in a meaningful way without revealing the school and certain participants (particularly the principal). The AONZ education sector effectively becomes a consideration of internal confidentiality. One step I took to minimise a breach of confidentiality included using opaque paper over the school map for the school mapping exercise undertaken with parent participants. Doing this allowed me to publish and discuss the maps without having a visible, recognisable school map.

Shared offices and the storage of data are further aspects of maintaining confidentiality. Common in ethics applications are commitments to protect data using password-protected files or screen savers and locking storage units, and to destroy data once the research is completed (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 79). Working from a shared office presented a further challenge for maintaining confidentiality. My computer screen and desk materials were visible to three other doctoral researchers, and we shared the locking filing cabinet. Interestingly, I found nothing to guide me within the University ethics guidelines concerning this, and the chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee had not had it raised or addressed during their time on the committee. Ultimately, there appeared to be an assumption of tacit agreement to maintaining confidentiality amongst doctoral researchers. I instigated a discussion with my office colleagues about our respective ethical commitments, and we all made verbal commitments to maintain confidentiality.

Having previously worked extensively in developing and monitoring a code of ethics for a professional body, my interest in the question of ethics within educational research was piqued. This interest led to me spending a year as the inaugural Faculty of Education Ethics Student Intern (2018-2019).

6 Research in Practice

"We do not learn from experience …

we learn from reflecting on experience."

Paraphrase attributed to John Dewey (1859 – 1952)

(Lagueux, 2021)

Thomson and Hall (2017) suggest that the language often used in research (e.g., site, sample) objectifies schools, reducing them to instruments of research without acknowledging their "people, social relations, history/ies and stories" (p. 39). In many ways, schools are intersections of community, policy and practice, buildings and people, teaching and learning, play and work, rhetoric and reality. The process of intersecting with these aspects of schools led to this article.

I noted in the previous chapter that reflection on fieldwork is a common aspect of a qualitative research process. Flick (2018b, p. 8) suggests that reflections form part of the research data and the interpretations made. As my research design intersected with the dynamic and layered life of Korimako School, I was brought face-to-face with the challenges of conducting school-based research. I reflected on the parallels of my efforts to come into the school to undertake research with policy enactment processes. Firstly, there is the need to make a case against other (new and existing) demands. Then, you come up against processes and structures that constrain and restrict, even when intentions differ. These observations support what Ball et al. (2012, p. 68) found: teachers "are coping with both what they see as meaningful and what seems meaningless, often self-mobilised around patterns of focus and neglect and jostling uneasily between discomfort and pragmatism."

Consequently, the exercise in reflection contributed to my understanding of the pressures that exist within schools and on teachers and formed "part of the interpretation" Flick (2018b, p. 8) as the research progressed.

The source material for the article included teacher interview transcripts, school documents, and a variety of policy documents. I also had many productive conversations with researchers within the education sector in AoNZ. During the writing and publication of the article the following questions were developed and refined:

what are the contemporary challenges in conducting research in New Zealand schools, and how do they affect the capacity for educational research to take place? Through these questions the article contributes to answering the research question:

- How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?

Status: The chapter is published as (see Appendix A: Co-authorship form)

Smith, M., Thrupp, M., & Barrett, P. (2019). Contemporary pressures on school-based research: A cautionary tale for school leaders. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice, 34*, 45-64. https://doi.org/10.21307/jelpp-2020-001

Contemporary pressures on school-based research: A cautionary tale for school leaders

Abstract

School-based research has historically played an important role within the education system contributing to our understanding of the organisation and practice of formal education. Supported by relevant literature, this article reports on current challenges in conducting school-based research in Aotearoa New Zealand as experienced by one researcher. It suggests that conducting school-based research is becoming increasingly difficult, with possible explanations for this being the divergent workflows of researcher and school-based participant(s), the volume of demands on teachers and schools, and restricted roles for teachers and parents, which increase the risk of research fatigue. The article argues that although school-based research is rarely an immediate priority for school leaders, it is imperative that they support it if they want to be informed by its insights for policy and practice.

Keywords: School-based research; research fatigue; field-based research; Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

School-based studies are critical to educational research where the goal is to gain new insights based on the examination of education within real-world school environments. Gaining access to schools, however, presents challenges to both the schools and to researchers, given the different imperatives driving each. It is incumbent on external researchers *and* principals and other school leaders—as participants, researchers or gate-keepers—to have an understanding of the current status of school-based research. Signs are emerging that it is becoming harder to conduct research in New Zealand schools (Read, 2016); this article offers further account of those research challenges while considering the school context and school-based research activity in greater detail. The main questions it addresses are what are

the contemporary challenges in conducting research in New Zealand schools, and how do they affect the capacity for educational research to take place?

The article focuses mainly on identifying practical challenges in carrying out school-based research in New Zealand today, and on providing insight into the practice of research in schools. It draws on review and analysis of researcher observation notes, participant emails, and semi-structured interviews, supplemented with a review of scholarship and other relevant reports. The analysis concludes that the conditions for school-based research are undergoing a sea change, whereby the ability and willingness to participate is swamped by new or heightened realities, resulting in a situation where, increasingly, school-based research is less feasible. The article also argues that although school-based research is rarely an immediate priority for school leaders, it is imperative that they support it if they want to be informed by its insights for policy and practice.

Background

Principals act as gate-keepers (Wanat, 2008) in various ways. Their role requires them to evaluate and balance demands originating from inside and outside of the school—they are on the threshold between the two (Kelchtermans et al., 2011). Some of the demands relate to research as principals are integral in fostering what Elliott (2009) describes as, research *on education* (typically external researcher driven and from outside the school) and *educational research* (practitioner based from inside the school) (as cited in Wilson, 2017, p. 101). Understanding the purpose, nature and realities of school-based research, greatly assists the evaluation and facilitation of research enquiries and activities. Participation in external research also helps locate the school within the broader context of the sector and society, emphasising that responsibility for education extends beyond the walls of a particular classroom or school gate—it is a responsibility shared.

School-based research fits within wider educational research by bringing research into the context of practice, and there are potential benefits for any school and individual who chooses to participate in research. At a collective level, participating in research allows staff, board members and parents to contribute to the ongoing development of policy and practice in education, a motivation Clark (2010, p. 413) categorises as "informing 'change.'" This type of research contributes to the

sector at large, for example, through local schools-based research the New Zealand education community is offered cases situated in more relevant socio-cultural environments than the US or UK. There may also be more specific reasons relevant to the school and the nature of the research being undertaken. For teachers, participating in research can present opportunities to reflect on their practice and connect to personal or school-wide critical inquiry (this also connects with the 'Practising teacher criteria': Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016). The Board of Trustees or principal may be interested in what the research outcomes reveal about their school, and what implications there are for future decision-making. Parents and staff may also be motivated to participate for a range of individual reasons including: "subjective interest, enjoyment, curiosity, introspective interest, social comparison, therapeutic interest, material interest and economic interest" (Clark, 2010, p. 404). Without reducing research to a purely transactional frame, researchers typically wish to ensure participants are acknowledged for the commitment they make in participating. Here they are guided by the notion of reciprocity. Reciprocity is 'giving back' and may be expressed in different ways as relevant to the situation but regularly includes sharing of the outcomes of the research through means such as, reports and presentations (Ary et al., 2006).

Yet there are typically many more immediate benefits to be gained for the researcher than the participant. This initial 'imbalance' colours motivations around research in schools from the outset. Schools are sites of much activity; in addition to the day-to-day business of teaching and learning, they are community hubs, enactors of policy, facilitators to numerous clubs and extracurricular activities, and responders to a wide range of social issues. Consideration to be involved in research must be made in light of these existing obligations—there simply may be too much going on for teachers, principals and the school community to take on being a research partner (Thomson & Hall, 2017). Perhaps it is also that research-related opportunities, particularly teacher-led, appear to be increasing in number, leading to reduced interest and capacity to participate in external research. Nevertheless, it seems to be getting harder to find room within the school 'space' for research activities. Another New Zealand researcher, Read (2016), experienced challenges in conducting school-based research, identifying timing conflicts, and gaining access and buy-in from staff, among the issues she encountered.

It is widely recognised that gaining access and carrying out research in a school is more easily described in a research proposal than undertaken in the field. Despite the existing literature to guide qualitative researchers (or example, Thomson & Hall, 2017; Tolich & Davidson, 1999), the realities of undertaking fieldwork in schools is not often written-up or visible. What tends to be presented is a limited account of the school-based research experience leading to unrealistic expectations for researchers new to fieldwork in this environment. The process of writing up a research proposal is, by its nature, focussed on what the researcher seeks to achieve and is ideally grounded in the theoretical and methodological considerations required for a robust and worthwhile research project. It is difficult at this point to anticipate the challenges that may be experienced and, with the scarcity of personal accounts to refer to, there is little awareness or understanding of the potential "traps, delays, and frustrations which inevitably accompany fieldwork" (Lareau, 1989, p. 187).

This article draws on the first author's doctoral research (throughout the article where the first person is used, it refers to the first author) into how policy goals of parental engagement in compulsory education in New Zealand are enacted and experienced, with a particular interest in the contextual dimensions of schools as sites of enactment. The following overarching questions guided the research: How, and to what extent, do schools and parents engage? How does policy define parents and 'parental engagement' in the New Zealand compulsory education sector? How do contextual factors affect the way policies of parental engagement get enacted by schools and experienced by parents? The research focus on policy enactment facilitates capturing a rich description of how parental engagement policy is expressed, enacted and experienced by various actors in a primary school. A single bounded case in the English-medium (state-not integrated) part of the primary sector provided the context, and a range of methods were used to gather data on parental engagement, including discourse and artefact analysis, semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and cognitive mapping. Nothing described here is out of the ordinary in terms of educational research design. A school is a critical element of our education system—and for research purposes it is also a collection of discourses, artefacts, structures and people which provide a context through which to examine phenomena important to that system.

A case school: Finding time and space for research

Converging workflows: One researcher's experience in a case school

My challenges concerning school-based research began immediately and centred on the time of year the research began. In the southern hemisphere, the end of the school and university academic year converges with warmer weather, the end of the calendar year and the traditional Christmas and New Year holidays. This seasonal convergence means schools are frequently so encumbered with activities and other demands on their time that communicating with, and gaining access to, staff and parents is difficult. Timing for my research meant I was seeking to end the academic year with a case school in place in order to begin fieldwork from the start of the following school year. At the time, I felt this was critical but looking back it was probably more 'the ideal'. Nevertheless, this meant my first approach to the principal occurred in November—unfortunately adding to the seasonal 'tsunami' of demands. Having been involved in schools as a parent, teacher and board of trustee member, I was aware of the unfortunate timing and took time to discuss with others in the sector the best way to make an approach. After some debate, I determined to send an initial email and follow-up with a phone call to make an appointment to visit. After a number of emails and phone calls but no meeting, the principal agreed in principle to the research and we arranged to meet in the New Year to make further arrangements (in the end we didn't meet in person until the new school year had started). Having become interested in the 'doing' of school-based research over the course of my fieldwork I took the opportunity towards the end to ask the principal about the various approaches he received; he responded:

> …you look around and your Inbox has suddenly got 50 emails in there. … And you know, the research one's just one of them. …So don't do it through email. Go and see people. … Emails are more than likely just going to get… 'Pfft – I don't have to respond to that one right now, I'll leave it.'

Fortunately, in this instance, the research I was proposing aligned with a current internal interest on how they reported to parents for the school. Nevertheless, it ultimately it took until March for the arrangements to come together and fieldwork to begin.

That time leading up to fieldwork was one of the most frustrating for me as a researcher, as the pressure for progress at my end didn't stop and I felt between a rock and a hard place, not wanting to pressure the principal but very much feeling the need to 'get started'. I had endless debates with myself and others about appropriate forms of engagement—how long should I leave a communication before making contact again, where was the line between persistence and annoyance? This tension between school and university workflows was a persistent element of my fieldwork, the two never seemed to align. When I wanted to move fast for university, there were delays at the school end; when I wanted to move fast for the school or participants, I had university demands. This tension was difficult to reconcile.

In addition to the tensions created by the more regular and everyday type of demands of the two contexts I was working within, the overall timeframes differ significantly between a major research project like a doctorate and those typical of a school. Where I was working on a three to four-year project timeline, for the school, things are moving and changing much more rapidly. The principal agreed that this was one of the challenges of a research partnership. It was particularly relevant in the case of my study as I was intent on revealing the complexities of schools as a site of policy enactment. The depth of understanding I sought required rich data gained from a slow year-long process of observation and data gathering, the analysis of which would also take time. One of the more challenging ways in which this timeframe tension manifests, is through the opportunities for sharing the research—that is, enacting reciprocity or 'giving back' to the school.

How reciprocity is expressed can depend on the research approach, or the individual researcher, and depends to an extent on how the research relationship develops. Along with offers to speak about the research to staff and BOT (which weren't taken up), I indicated I was keen to 'make' the research relevant in whatever way I could for the school. Perhaps I didn't go far enough to explain the potential ways my research might be made relevant to them, but beyond the principal's comment that they were interested in my research topic, I wasn't connected in any way to their inquiry on reporting to parents (which was already arranged with a consultant). Indeed, I only initiated attendance at a focus group when I saw the invitation to parents in the school newsletter and I made my own connections with the consultant.

Reciprocity is frequently expressed through the simple sharing of outcomes and this may ultimately be sufficient and most appropriate for the school. However, I feel the gap between fieldwork and the outcomes for the school is less than ideal given the difference between their timeframes and those of the research project.

It is evident time is a factor of influence in conducting school-based research, but it extends beyond the differing timeframes explored above. The activities making up the school year bring their own pressures to participants and the research relationship, and while this is to be expected, the nature and priority of these has shifted.

Workload / workplace

Staff participant recruitment ultimately took twice as long as planned for, after allowing one term, it took me a bit more than two. Much of the delay came from the lack of opportunity to connect with staff in person and introduce them to the aims of the research project. Being unable to secure an opportunity to speak at a staff meeting, the main participant recruitment attempts were via 'cold-contact' email—which would have been low priority in a crowded inbox—or following a chance meeting at a school event. While the required sample of staff participants was largely secured, the deputy principal directly facilitated acquiring half of these participants after the previous approaches failed. Seeking agreement to participate was only the first step; finding time to meet was challenging. Emails could pass to-and-fro for weeks, seeking a window of time that was not already committed to meeting other demands.

There is little detailed data available on the nature of the workload for primary school teachers, but what there is shows there have been increasing demands on staff time (Bonne & Wylie, 2017). My case study examining parental engagement indicates both tasks and workplace expectations contribute to the demands teachers' experience. There are tensions between what aspects of the teaching role are prioritised or valued, and by whom. One of my teacher participants commented on the increasing expectation she felt to be available:

> I've found that parents want you accessible 24/7 ...I have just really been so stressed around that where I'm getting emails 9, 10 o'clock at night, and I've actually just taken to switching them off, and ...they've said "oh you didn't reply

to me last night" ...I guess it's just today's day and age, isn't it? Everything's now and it's instant, everything's "I need this now", very demanding...

It is clear there are multiple genuine demands on teachers, but at the same time, another staff member commented on the impact of the 'busy culture' in the interaction between teachers and parents:

> ...if we let ourselves get into that, "I'm so busy I don't have time for this. I've got to rush, and rush to the next thing. I have reports to write". Yeah you do have reports to write because that's your job, but you also have parents to communicate with because that's your job.

A consistent theme in media reports and teacher surveys is that workload demands are affecting teacher retention within the sector, including those just entering the profession. A survey of beginning educators found 43 per cent of those planning to leave teaching found the workload too high, with 30 per cent indicating they would be more likely to stay if there was less paperwork and administration (NZEI, 2018a). One media report revealed an emerging trend for teachers to choose relief teaching over permanent positions in an effort to avoid the most time-sapping of tasks (Dooney, 2017). Aside from the obvious impact on quality of education, many forms of educational research just wouldn't be viable without permanent staff. My research required teaching participants to know or have a parent community 'attached to them' for a period of time in the capacity of classroom teacher. They had to be the main teacher connected to a class of students, because that is the foremost school / parent relationship and one of the main influencers of parental engagement.

As critical influencers of the relationship between school and parents, my research participants included school leaders. There is more workload data on the principal and the senior leadership team, who are the focus of annual surveys conducted by the education union representing many primary school teachers and principals (NZEI) and Australian Catholic University (ACU). The 2017 survey showed in just one year school leaders had an average weekly increase in hours worked of three hours, amounting to a working week of between 53 and 58 hours, with the "sheer quantity of work" their "greatest source of stress" (NZEI & Australian Catholic University, 2018, pp. 6, 13). According to the NZEI, the experience of school leaders in the primary education sector is a concern as they "...suffer 1.7 times the rate of

burnout, 1.8 times the rate of stress and have trouble sleeping at rates 2.4 times higher that of the general population" (NZEI, 2018b, para. 7).

New Zealand primary school teachers are reported as working 922 hours of actual teaching per year (data from 2013-15) against an OECD average of 794 (OECD, 2017). Couple these workload demands with survey results indicating high workload stress and it is clear activities, such as research participation, that are not 'must do' are more likely to be brushed aside.

The 'must do': Compliance and accountability

As identified above, principals and school leadership staff find the 'sheer quantity of work' they are tasked with their most significant stressor. Listed along with this stressor are two of its potential sources, 'government initiatives' and 'resourcing needs' (NZEI & Australian Catholic University, 2018, p. 11). Together with a 'lack of time to focus on teaching and learning', the report identifies these stressors as part of an increasing "accountability environment" occurring throughout the western world and becoming more pronounced in New Zealand with the introduction of National Standards which took effect in 2010 (NZEI & Australian Catholic University, 2018, p. 11) (as of 2018 the National Standards programme has been scrapped and schools are no longer required to report on them to parents). The principal of my case school raised the time-consuming nature of national standards. Reflecting on the government policy change whereby schools are no longer required to report on national standards, he said "…just think of the huge amount of work and expense… The most annoying thing about that is the cost, and the time, and the effort".

The accountability environment is further evident in compliance tasks that have been generated through the increased formalising and documenting of existing activities such as 'teaching as inquiry'. Some have found activities like these have moved from a process of reflection designed to improve practice, to being accountable to school leadership, the Education Council and so on. Other areas have also become more regulated, with the 2016 Health and Safety changes being a good example. The teachers at my case school are now all first aid qualified in order to be able to take students for trips outside the school grounds. The Vulnerable Children's Act 2014 requires 'children's workers' to be police vetted, which many schools have additionally

taken on for parent volunteers on school camps and the like, increasing the volume of administration around certain activities.

Several of my teacher participants juggled demands relating to New Zealand's inclusive education system. Inclusion is one of the eight principles of the New Zealand Curriculum, and states the need for a non-discriminatory curriculum that "…ensures that students' identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed" (MoE, 2007, p. 9). In enacting this principle, staff can be faced with a wide variety of demands including, funding applications (e.g. ORS—Ongoing Resourcing Scheme), planning individual-level programmes (e.g. IEP—individual education plan), seeking training and information about relevant conditions (e.g. nut allergies, epilepsy), specialised behaviour management, sourcing appropriate resources (e.g. ESOL material for English speakers of other languages), and greater liaison with parents and other health or education experts connected to the student. Within my case study, all of the examples given above were evident in teacher workload. My opportunity to meet with one teacher participant was considerably limited by the volume of meetings she had to have concerning IEP, ORS and ESOL matters for students within her class. This is becoming an increasingly demanding and stressful part of teaching (Conchie & Yeoman, 2018).

Overall, research has found increasing accountability and expectations have contributed to the "considerable demands on teachers' formally allocated noncontact time"; this allocated time is very limited, if not declining (Bonne & Wylie, 2017, p. 40). The associated paperwork is a well-established burden for teachers. 'Reduce administration / paperwork' has been the top ranked item (at 71 per cent in 2016) teachers would most like to change about their jobs for the past three national surveys of primary and intermediate schools (Bonne & Wylie, 2017, p. 44). As one teacher noted, "I've got spreadsheets for Africa on my computer! But it's a complex issue— some paperwork relates to Ministry of Education requirements; some is for ERO and some is classroom and school-based" (Wastney, 2018).

Many 'must do' demands on teachers contribute to a sense of overwhelming paperwork and excessive workload. Despite this, many other demands are presented to schools and teachers—these are the 'could do' and are examined next.

The 'could do': Implicit and 'other' demands

Educational research is something which may hold a degree of value to school-based participants as an activity that can contribute directly to the sector, and therefore be approached with a sense of 'professional duty', however, it is also 'just another request' which competes with the many other demands in the school. The principal of my case school outlined his experience of the issue:

> I probably get five emails a week from someone wanting to do something. So it [research] competes with… You know, like that Richie McCaw thing [a corporate responsibility / marketing activity for Fonterra]. … and some people want to use schools as fundraisers. You know, can you save the children in such-and-such. Or can you raise money for this? And all those sorts of things that pile through your inbox, and you try and make sense of it. So it competes with all the… things that pile through. …it's just another thing. I've just said no to the NMSSA [National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement] coming in and doing some [work]… 'Cause it's just another thing that we have to organise kids [for]…

In the instance of research involving students or parents, schools are mindful of the potential it has to overload. There was an awareness expressed by both the principal and board chairperson of my case school of 'engagement fatigue' with parents in particular. The school recognises how often parents are asked to contribute time and effort, and are consequently protective of the individual and educational priorities of parent and school.

All the teacher and school leader participants of my case school were meeting 'could do' demands that varied from the truly discretionary, to those more implicit—as opposed to the aforementioned more explicit, 'must do'. They may form, for example, part of professional obligations although not be explicit in job specifications. These activities come with varying degrees of pressure for involvement and reasons for taking part, both direct and indirect to the life and purpose of the school. One such example are the Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (CoLs). Introduced by the National-led government in 2014, CoLs have provided funding to improve educational achievement through collaborative inquiry and knowledge sharing (MoE, 2018). While not compulsory, many principals feared missing out on professional learning, or access

to funds, or felt pressure (from the MoE and colleagues) to support the initiative (Wylie, 2016). The Wylie (2016) report also found a level of concern expressed about the workload and resources belonging to one would take. This is also evident in the case school, where the principal summed up the problems he perceived of the CoLs: "The structure of them. The rigidity of them. The workload. My workload went down by leaving [the CoL]."

Demands that are more broadly connected to being a professional include the commitment to the support and development of the 'next generation' of teachers. Taking on the role of tutor teacher to a beginning teacher, or associate teacher is an optional undertaking attracting a small allowance. This allowance is considered inadequate for time spent on the task. One teacher participant noted the time demand for being a tutor teacher varied, but was highest at the start of the school year, a time traditionally busy for all teachers. This theme was also found to be a factor in research on associate teachers and their practice, "They felt that lack of time to concentrate precluded them from doing all that they felt needed to be done as good associate teachers" (Trevethan, 2013, p. 89). The tutor and associate teacher roles both contribute to the education sector and sit alongside other 'could do' opportunities from within the sector, such as the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement—NMSSA. These activities are more directly linked to educational outcomes and the work undertaken in schools by teachers.

In contrast to the opportunities described above, the majority of opportunities coming into the school are from 'external to the sector' sources. The external opportunities vary immensely; they may have links to the school curriculum aims (Weet-Bix Tryathlon), or the activity may be connected to social issues such as nutrition (Fonterra Milk for Schools), or mental health & well-being (Pink Shirt Day— bullying), or to services like banking (school banking). Even where opportunities are specifically for children, the involvement of the teacher is required for planning and sometimes adapting or integrating the activity in to their programme. In addition, there are the extra opportunities for students facilitated through lunch-time and after-school clubs (such as waiata, team sports etc.) and these are frequently the responsibility of teaching staff. The latest national survey revealed 63 per cent of teachers had more than one role in their school (Bonne & Wylie, 2017). That finding

was echoed in my case school with teachers taking on extra duties, including: Lego club, school website administrator, hockey co-ordinator, PTA representative, soccer co-ordinator and so on.

Schools are busy places and that, in itself, is not new. Yet it is not often recognised that schools—from the principal trying to weigh up the relative worth and demands brought by each new activity, to the teacher trying to manage the work they 'must do'—have restricted capacity to choose to engage in research.

Defining teacher and parent roles

As is the case for many school-based research projects, teachers were not the only participants I sought. The purpose of my case study was to examine the nature of parental engagement, so to this end I recruited both teacher and parent participants. The ways they, and others, perceive their respective roles was at times reflected in their participation in my research, and may have been influential in their choice to participate. How teaching is understood as an endeavour, its purpose and organisation, goes beyond the demands addressed so far, and is impactful on the capacity to engage in research and its value to teachers. This was expressed in my case school in the way teachers and teaching are constructed as professionals, and in the way teacher and parent roles find expression.

The roles parents and teachers play in education are reconstructed within the neoliberal context. The changes in the labour market and welfare system during the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s altered the availability of parent labour in classrooms and schools, which has long been a feature of primary schooling. This increases the demands on teachers, adding to workload and jeopardising capacity for activities such as research participation. Further, the neoliberal reframing of parents as consumers can be seen to be expressed through notions of choice and accountability (Locke et al., 2005). One teacher participant revealed she believed parents were positioned quite clearly as consumers, saying:

> We've expressly …heard that 'I think of the school as a business, and our business is to educate children in reading, writing and maths' …and that 'it is our job to ensure that our customers, or our clients, are happy, and that they get what they're coming here for'.

The teacher went on to articulate the tension she saw with the 'parent as consumer' and the development of parent voice—potentially representing more of a 'parents as partners' type role:

> I think the pretence is that it's not the consumer, I think the pretence is that it's for the betterment and …progressive state that education is working towards, but I feel like it can go down that consumer track and … without realising it becomes a [demand]. Those two [parent roles] are not always distinct … separating them is, I think, quite hard.

Advances in communication technology has facilitated the 'holding of teachers to account' by the parent consumer. The ability for communication to occur directly between teachers and parents has developed through various modern communication tools, and this adds to the demands placed on teachers as described in the workload / workplace section.

Being 'held to account' is an extrinsic motivator for teachers under the concept of 'managerial professionalism'; there is an understanding there will be 'checking up', by the Education Review Office (ERO), students, parents, community, school leadership and so on (Locke et al., 2005). According to Locke et al. (2005) the reconstituting of teachers under neoliberalism shifted from the reflective practitioner (activist professionalism) to the efficient and effective professional (managerial professionalism) meeting the assessment and accountability demands made of them. A level of resignation for those demands, was expressed by one teacher participant thus

> there's just so much these days on the Health & Safety that it's just kind of – what?! Like just *trust*, trust, I feel like [trust has] kind of gone down …teachers… being checked up on all the time, it's just trust. I do have a degree! …but, I guess we've got to do what we've got to do.

The space for, and inclination to see value in, research participation is much easier to recognise within the 'activist' version of teacher professional, than that of the managerial professional.

This 'low-trust' requirement (Codd, 2008) of being held to account on many fronts contributes to a wariness of being criticised. This has the potential for some

teachers to view research as exposing them to that risk; some individuals "…do not care about the findings [of research] except so far as these findings might provide evidence for someone to criticize them" (Neuman, 2011, p. 430). It is inevitable a low trust environment will have implications for the type of research schools and teachers see as viable; exposing oneself to critical research, for example, is likely to be a greater challenge in the current context of being 'held to account'. The greater focus on accountability reduces the space and inclination to be involved in research.

The participation of parents in school-based research is likely impacted by the same demands influencing parental engagement in the classroom and at school, including the reduced availability of parents through changing labour demands. Only third of the parent participants I originally sought were secured, and subsequently almost half of those withdrew due to other demands on their time. The challenges faced in accessing parents were significant. A notice in the school newsletter (disseminated via email as well as through Facebook and the school website) was the initial form of recruitment. Through a series of technology and formatting compromises, the notice in the newsletter was difficult to read and required immediate supplementation with posters in the school grounds. Clearer digital copies were also sent to teacher participants to distribute via their classroom lists. Parents could make contact via QR (quick response) code, text and email. Other parents were sought via emailing members of existing parent groups (e.g. Parent Teacher Association, PTA), and by face-to-face recruitment at school events.

Under neoliberalism, parenting is individualised and decontextualised (Geinger et al., 2014), with parents bearing the responsibility of making the 'right' decisions and being actively involved in the education of their children thereby impacting their child's ultimate educational success or failure (Brown, 1990; Furedi, 2008). Within the case study, some parents expressed an uncertainty about their role and in what they have to offer, both as a parent in the class and school community, and as a participant in the research. One parent articulated a fear of being judged (as she had experienced elsewhere) and several were unsure of what value they offered. Parents see themselves as not conforming to prevailing norms and 'confess' their failures, the confessions being, "…illustrations of governmentality and therefore constitute ways in which parents concur with the dominant ideals, norms and standards" (Geinger et al.,

2014, p. 496). This scrutiny of the parent and the increased responsibility for successful educational outcomes can threaten research participation motivators, such as individual empowerment or social comparison (Clark, 2010).

Research fatigue?

Evaluating the challenges I faced conducting school-based research, I needed to consider whether they were case specific or were indicative of a broader issue, that of research fatigue. Key precursors to research fatigue include a "…lack of perceptible change attributable to engagement, increasing apathy and indifference toward engagement, and practical barriers such as cost, time, and organization" (Clark, 2008, p. 967). Briefly considering these precursors within both the New Zealand education environment, and the case school, it is clear conditions supporting research fatigue exist. Identifying the opportunity for change coming from research is limited and most likely to be concerned with impact on policy and practice (Lingard, 2013). Not all educational research explicitly sets out to this end, nor is it always possible to identify the direct pathway from research to policy or practice. Educational research can instead be focussed on enhancing understanding, critical reflexivity, opening up dialogue, revealing complexities, and examining issues of justice and power (for example, Flyvbjerg, 2001; Lather, 2006a; Ramaekers, 2014). This may mean individual researchers need to better identify where their research sits in a wider educational context and what its purpose is, but if researchers are not even getting in the school gate to make proposals, then it also requires the sector to better educate on the value and purpose of the variety of research undertaken.

An increasing apathy and indifference toward engagement can be driven by increased exposure to, and participation in, research, effectively removing the 'novelty' motivator (Clark, 2008). Research occurring in schools is not limited to educational research, it is an environment providing ready access to a range of potential participants particularly for other social science disciplines, and for example, health, linguistics and psychology. Certain schools (and their communities) are in demand for reasons of proximity to research institutions, size and demographic make-up of the school (ethnic and/or socio-economic profile), or experience of particular problems or topics of research interest (such as the Canterbury earthquakes). Developing a more nuanced picture of the New Zealand education research

environment is an area warranting further attention, however, there is a current focus on the use of evidence to improve educational outcomes (Alton-Lee, 2014; Hattie et al., 2014), and growing use of methods such as participatory action research. Combined with a wide range of teacher-led 'inquiries' (including school-based, professional practice driven, and MoE-funded), there is increased exposure to research activities involving active participation from schools and teachers. The principal of the case school, for example, described the scale and nature of the CoL Achievement Challenges as 'dreadful', noting some were taking two to three years of commitment to complete. This may be a similar length of time to external research programmes, including some doctoral studies.

The practical barriers to research participation, such as cost, time, and organisation, may result in variations in how research fatigue is expressed. Previous sections have discussed workload pressures and overwhelming demands made on the time and resources of schools and teachers, generally identifying research as 'could do'. How research fatigue is expressed may vary from outright refusal to participate, to limited or constrained participation. For example, approval may be given to engage in research within a school, but may be constrained by time, organisation, and motivation. As explored by Wanat (2008), there is a difference between access and cooperation in school-based research; the first does not guarantee the second. The role of the principal as mediator has been acknowledged in respect to policy and accountability measures (Locke et al., 2005), and this mediating role is also adopted during education research. In practice, this can mean the principal takes on a gatekeeping role managing aspects of the research process, such as initiating contact with potential participants rather than allowing the researcher to approach them directly. This happened with some of my participants, illustrating tensions between respecting the role of the principal and several aspects of my research process, namely, my intent to minimise research-related workload demands on the principal, the need for participants to be voluntary and not feel pressured to participate, and progressing the research in a timely manner. Principals are wary of contributing to the demands made on staff (and parent) time and energy in an already crowded space. Thomson and Hall (2017, p. 53) remind researchers of the complexity of schools and point out "it may simply be that making your research happen is not the first priority".

This echoes the point made locally by an educator to a researcher bemoaning challenges of school-based research, "you're not top of their list".

As already discussed, policies in this era of neoliberalism "...have eroded the fundamental democratic values of collective responsibility, cooperation, social justice and trust" within education (Codd, 2008, p. 22). Previous sections have outlined the demands made on teachers and parents and the increasing workload faced by school staff, effectively reducing the time available for research. The current education environment has also increased levels of research-related activities, particularly teacher-led. Combined, it is clear these factors have created an environment in schools "...where the mechanisms that challenge research engagement... have increased [and] ...the supporting mechanisms decreased" (Clark, 2008, p. 966). This can result in a lack of interest or ability to readily engage in research and can be described as research fatigue.

Discussion and conclusion

This article reveals some of the challenges experienced in conducting empirically-grounded research in the modern school environment. It is proposed conditions for school-based research are undergoing a sea-change, where the desire to participate in research is swamped by new or heightened realities creating an environment where school-based research is no longer as feasible. We have proposed the reason for the sea-change lies in the socio-political context of education and the priorities and demands it brings to the school space. The preliminary analysis suggests in New Zealand school-based research is negatively impacted by: the divergent workflows of researcher and school-based participant(s), the volume of demands on teachers and schools, the restricted roles for teachers and parents, and the volume of research-related opportunities, which create conditions conducive to research fatigue. Discussion on how these barriers might be overcome is initiated below.

The divergent workflows of researcher and school-based participants aren't easily resolved, particularly where it concerns the necessary scale of a doctoral study (which have criteria around the scale of the research undertaken and a lengthy minimum timeframe). Having greater understanding of the impact of school-based research at an institutional level might reveal opportunities within research governance processes that can minimise workflow tensions and potentially ease the

risk of research fatigue on participant(s). Similarly, having a clearer understanding within all parts of the sector of what school-based research and the various research approaches contribute, could reduce apathy or indifference and motivate participation. The need for a strategic overview for educational research providing clear priorities and purpose for the range of research undertaken appears strong. There is considerable scope for further research in this area.

The New Zealand of today is not the same as the one of two or three decades ago, but the influence of neoliberal ideology is still very prominent with the structure of education, and society itself, shaped by it. The reconstituted roles for teachers and parents, as technicians under a notion of managerial professionalism and consumers within a quasi-market of education respectively, continue to operate in an environment of heightened demand and 'holding to account'. Are these roles changing? Recently published work on the highly contested New Zealand national standards, provided an illustration of some of the ways in which teachers have found their voice, contesting that which they perceive as contrary to the purpose of education (Thrupp, 2018a). This suggests that even within the, at times overwhelming, demands of workload and accountability the 'activist professional' remains. Likewise, for parents, discussion on the contextualised roles parents *could have* in education can challenge the decontextualised norms that constructed what parents *should be* under neoliberalism (Geinger et al., 2014) opening up the variety of roles they might perform depending on their circumstances.

The sheer volume of 'must do' accountability and assessment related activities teachers and schools are required to undertake has been captured in surveys (Bonne & Wylie, 2017; NZEI & Australian Catholic University, 2018) and diminishes the space available for 'could do' activities, including research participation. There is scope to extend the work referenced above to examine the finer detail and purpose of these activities and how they relate to what we want from education. Do they form 'administrivia' and, if so, are they actually necessary? Nevertheless, the currently high workloads of teacher and principal workloads create practical barriers to research participation, particularly through available time and ability to organise necessary aspects of research.

Addressing research fatigue and the precursor of research being perceived to have no impact (Clark, 2008), suggests the response of more collaborative research (e.g. participatory action research) to gain better buy-in and understanding of the research process. Taking time to build trust through a participatory process can be successful and was effectively demonstrated in the project undertaken by Mutch et al. (2015) following the Canterbury earthquakes. Despite the participants experiencing many of the precursors linked to research fatigue, the participatory process ultimately facilitated engagement by several schools and their communities. It is also possible for this approach to create a tension between the respective institutional timeframes of teachers and researchers—a reminder that the "culturally and socially situated, subjective, messy contingent reality of the educational context" (Ramaekers, 2014, p. 54) frames our research and, as such, no single approach suits all.

There are opportunities for the various professional organisations that exist within the education sector to engage with these issues and advocate the value of school-based research. The sector is well-represented at all levels by a variety of organisations, including the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society (NZEALS), the New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF), the Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand (SPANZ), the already mentioned NZEI—representing 50,000 teachers, principals and support staff, and the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA)—representing a further 17,000 secondary education teachers and principals. Along with encouraging members to support such research, they are also able to promote or campaign for conditions that better enable it. If we recognise that learning is contextually based (Alcorn, 2008), we must then recognise the need for research grounded in the diversity of school contexts that exist. The Ministry also needs to actively recognise and promote the value of school-based research from a diversity of sources, and address workplace conditions that impact on the ability for school leaders and teachers to participate in research.

Ultimately, there are many more questions than answers raised here about the potential impact of research fatigue on school-based research in New Zealand. There is substantial scope for future research to investigate more closely the volume and nature of school-based research being undertaken, to investigate the phenomenon of research fatigue and its influence on the educational research environment. The sector

might initiate a conversation about what role MoE, New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE), and the various research institutions each have to play in producing and using educational research. Part of this conversation should be about how we improve our understanding of what is currently happening and how it can be best shared among interested parties for the benefit of the sector at large. We must examine the status of the educational research environment and consider what implication it has on the New Zealand research–policy–practice nexus. As this article proposes, the very feasibility of school-based research is at risk.

7 Policy Enactment of Parental Engagement

"I don't even know exactly what they're [MoE] even looking for,

because we've never ever really been told."

Ashley, teacher participant

"Enactments are collective, creative and constrained and are made

up of unstable juggling between irreconcilable priorities, impossible

workloads, satisficing moves and personal enthusiasms."

Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012, p. 71)

Understanding how parental engagement is enacted within a primary school setting is the overarching aim of my research. This aim originates in the gap observed between the rhetoric (theory and/or policy) and reality (practice) of parental engagement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lysaght, 1993). This chapter was conceived to examine how the process of enactment or implementation might contribute to such a gap. From an interpretive standpoint, Yanow (1990) suggests one possible consideration, that the translation of policy into practice may diverge when 'implementers' "do not share the same meanings of symbols, metaphors, and other cultural artifacts of a policy issue" (p. 221). Ball et al. (2012) propose that typical implementation research in schools does not always pick up on these types of diversions or many other moments of 'policy activity' (Colebatch, 2002) that occur when policy becomes policy practice. Enactment research offers insight into the policy activity of specific policies, helping to identify where critical work occurs and by whom. Therefore, this type of analysis can also reveal the particular actors and policy work instrumental in achieving policy goals (Sullivan & Morrison, 2014).

In order to examine this more layered and nuanced type of 'policy work' at Korimako School, the article draws on the typology of Ball et al. (2012, p. 49). The typology focuses on the policy work undertaken by teachers (and others) as policy actors. A variety of sources were drawn on for the analysis, including teacher and parent participant interview transcripts, school documents, and various policy documents. The following research question directed the article:

- What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?

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Enacting parental engagement: Policy work in a primary school setting

Abstract

Parental engagement is a common theme of education policy in most countries. In Aotearoa New Zealand, policies frame parental engagement in broad terms giving schools flexibility in enacting them. However, the generality assumes the complex and differentiated activities associated with parental engagement are well understood, leaving schools with little guidance for this work. This article examines the enactment of parental engagement in one New Zealand primary school to understand these activities better and provide a basis for improved policy. It partly draws on Ball, Maguire and Braun's (2012) policy enactment framework identifying several enactment roles associated with parental engagement, particularly in-school 'narrators' who are pivotal actors in articulating a rationale for engagement. Key findings were that teachers interpreted parental engagement differently, leading to differentiated practice, and parents are identified as important policy actors. The article concludes that there is a strong case for greater clarity in policy on parental engagement.

It is a central belief in the education systems of many countries that teachers will engage with parents. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the role of parents in the education of their children into a sharper focus (OECD, 2020; Winthrop, 2020). The pandemic has revealed vastly different realities for parents supporting learning in the home, making parental engagement a pivotal policy concern for student achievement in our times. Yet what parental engagement policy and practice seeks and how it is enacted is by no means obvious, nor has it been widely-researched; for two rare examples, see Epstein and Sheldon (2016); and Saltmarsh (2014). These articles examine policy enactment and parental engagement in the United States and

Australia using alternative analytical approaches. Other related studies variously examine context, aspects of parental engagement, and policy implementation in different ways, including Haworth et al. (2015) on pedagogical dispersal, and in this journal, contextualised policy implementation by Gordon (1994). This article extends the scholarship on the policy enactment of parental engagement by applying the framework of Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further, it provides insights into the role parents might play in this enactment process.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the expectation of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) published by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2007) is that teachers will work closely with the parents and whānau (extended family) of their students. It states that the principle of parent, whānau, and community support of students must be considered in the planning, prioritising, and review of the curriculum as it is applied within a school (MoE, 2007, p. 9). The commitment to engagement is also specified in the recently revised professional code and standards for teachers (ECANZ (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand), 2017b). Meanwhile, researchers have concluded that as parents are all different, the policies guiding parent engagement must be broad enough to accommodate various forms of engagement (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012).

Having generalised policy statements allows for more responsiveness at an individual school level, but lack of specificity means a lack of clarity about what is expected of schools and teachers. The process of policy enactment is rarely as straightforward as implied in government rhetoric or policy statements either. There is, therefore, a need to examine more critically the way schools and teachers enact parental engagement policy. Doing so can provide a better understanding of how the goals of parental engagement might be achieved, thus assisting future policy development and practice. Ball and colleagues' (2012) framework on policy enactment, discussed later, provides a way to examine how policy work is undertaken and by whom, and this article adds a further nuance to the policy enactment framework.

This article draws on a New Zealand policy enactment case study which asks: What does policy expect of schools in relation to parental and community engagement, and how is that understood by schools, teachers, and parents? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff (*n = 13*) of a single bounded English-

medium state primary school, identified here as Korimako School. Selection of the case school was purposive and chosen to be relatively typical in representation of a New Zealand primary school by nature of: authority (state-not integrated), gender (co-educational), decile (within 4-7), and location (urban). The interview transcripts and collected artefacts have been analysed against the policy work typologies identified by Ball et al. (2012, p. 49). The research at Korimako School reveals the translation of parental engagement policy is not only undertaken by teachers and leaders within schools, but that parents are also policy actors contributing to that work. Indeed parents and governors can be seen not only as 'outsider' actors in the way that Ball et al. (2012) saw them in the English context, but as policy actors operating from 'within' the school space, as 'insiders' (in a similar way to which staff might be considered). Further, I argue that disparity of practice and outcomes results from broad and often disparate policy wording, and the collective and individual meaning-making undertaken by teachers at levels beneath the policy actor roles discussed by Ball and colleagues. As a result, common outcomes and coherence between policy and practice can be difficult to achieve.

The study of policy enactment considers the diverse environments policy enters and how its interpretation, translation, implementation, and effect is contingent on material, interpretive, and discursive factors (Ball et al., 2012). While the three factors are interwoven, this article primarily examines the interpretive process of translation of policy, whereby human interpretation is central in the making of meaning (Yanow, 2000). In policy enactment, meaning-making occurs in part through the interpretation and translation of policy into practice; it is 'policy work' undertaken by 'policy actors'. *Interpretation* is the initial reading of the policy and the process of its explanation to teachers—in the school setting—establishing a framework for practice. This interpretation is undertaken by a policy actor(s), such as a school leader or designated staff members. Further policy work, which may involve a range of staff members (or policy actors), is involved in translating the policy interpretation into practice. Interpretation is situated within the contextual dimensions of the school and draws on what Ball and colleagues (2012) refer to as situated contexts, professional cultures, material contexts, and external contexts (p. 21). This situatedness determines that the interpretation of policy is individual to each school and potentially the departments and teachers within (Ball et al., 2011, p. 636).

Translation is the process of developing institutionally-based policy texts before putting them into practice, the literal 'enactment' of policy (Ball et al., 2012). This policy work, undertaken by policy actors, occurs in numerous ways, from conversation, meetings, and events, to formal procedures and classroom observations. Significantly, policy translation occurs through both "staged events and processes" and "mundane exchanges", so it is that "policies 'drip', 'seep' and 'trickledown' into classroom practice to become part of the bricolage of teaching and learning activities, sedimented upon or displacing previous translation effects" (pp. 45-46).

Thus, enactment (interpretation and translation) of policy on parental engagement, such as the *NZC* principle of engagement, is contextually based and involves various policy actors undertaking an array of policy work.

Broad national policy settings on parental engagement

Parental engagement can be broadly defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). The activities comprising that participation can vary by policy requirements, age of the child, school context and policy, and the interest and experience of both teacher and parent. Both involvement and engagement have been used to describe parent participation, frequently interchangeably; however, greater differentiation is drawn between the two terms by some scholars. For example, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) differentiate the terms using a continuum: 1) parental involvement in schools; 2) parental involvement in schooling; 3) parental engagement in learning. The stages in the continuum differentiate by the purpose of the activities (on schools, schooling, or learning) and the location of agency (involvement has greater school agency and engagement greater parent agency). Further, Jeynes (2010) identifies subtle aspects of parental engagement, such as having high expectations of children's learning, as having the most powerful impact on academic outcomes.

Policy for parental engagement within Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools has developed over recent decades through various documents and initiatives. Policy emphasis on parental engagement has also developed as research examining its value grew (in particular, see Biddulph et al., 2003; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Brooking, 2007; Bull et al., 2008; ERO (Education Review Office) 2008a; Hattie, 2009). Starting with a schooling strategy, the government emphasised schools working with families

and whānau to enhance children's learning (MoE, 2005b, pp. 27-34). This emphasis continues through the 'Community Engagement' principle in the *NZ Curriculum* (MoE, 2007, 2010, 2015a), along with the *National Education Goals,* which recognise "parents in their vital role as their children's first teachers" (MoE, 2015c). Also, the *National Administration Guidelines* and the *Education Standards Act 2001* require consulting with and reporting to parents and the school community on various matters, including students' achievement (Education Standards Act 2001; Minister of Education, 2017). In addition, National Administration Guideline 2 requires every school to have a strategic plan detailing how the school will give effect to policy, including the *NZ Curriculum* (Minister of Education, 2017); the Education Review Office (ERO) monitors this. These policies supplement a well-established policy of parental engagement in administration and decision-making through school Boards of Trustees (BOTs) (Education Act 1989). Parents are the primary members of BOTs, forming part of a self-managing school model developed during the 1980s.

As stated, schools' actual parental engagement activities vary, and policy does not typically make explicit statements about *how* parental engagement should occur. Nevertheless, guidance on the topic for schools is readily supplied by the Ministry of Education, and other agencies, revealing the government's expectations of schools and teachers. For example, the *NZC* broad policy statement concerning parental engagement is: "The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau, and communities" (MoE, 2007, p. 9). Guidance about how schools might enact this from *NZC Online* highlights the definition for engagement given by the ERO (see below) and its emphasis on *partnership*, stating "The community engagement principle calls for schools to build productive partnerships with each family to engage their support and ensure that teaching and learning meets the needs, interests, and talents of their children" (MoE, 2020c). A suite of tools, examples, and resources guide schools in determining how this might be applied in their context (MoE, 2015a, 2020c).

Another prominent source of policy guidance to schools, ERO, produced a series of evaluation reports addressing parental engagement (ERO, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Engagement is defined here as "a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focuses on improving the

educational experiences and successes for each child" (ERO, 2008a, p. 1). This definition elaborates on the *NZC* principle of engagement to specify a particular type of *support* (educationally focused) through the medium of *partnership*. Further, ERO identifies six critical factors for successful engagement: leadership, relationships, school culture, partnerships, community networks, and communication (ERO, 2008a). The examples and discussion accompanying these factors provide further detail on *how* schools might enact parental engagement policy.

A final example of policy and expectations is the teaching code of 'professional responsibility' and standards for teaching. The code and standards both emphasise a commitment to parents and whānau through their engagement in collaborative learning-focussed relationships (ECANZ, 2017b). Supplementary guidance proposes this might occur if teachers are "using effective approaches to communicate with families and whānau about their child's learning, aspirations and progress" (ECANZ, 2017a, p. 19). This would require schools to have in place, for example, policies and/or processes facilitating teacher–parent communication in ways accessible to their community, appropriate monitoring and assessment of learning, and processes to capture student aspirations.

This policy context frames and informs notions of what parental engagement should be. Despite this, and the more detailed guidance offered in support of policy statements, the intention is that schools develop context-specific responses in the enactment of policy. The following section examines the school-specific context and the institutional policy setting influencing policy enactment at Korimako School.

Policies on parental engagement at the local level: Korimako School

Korimako School is a mid-to-large-sized, English-medium, Year 0-8 state primary school. It has a culturally diverse urban community, with approximately one-quarter of the students identifying as Māori, a further quarter is made up with a combination of ethnicities (particularly Asian). The remaining half of the student roll are NZ European (also known as Pākehā). Additionally, more than ten percent of students are native speakers of other languages. In addition to being culturally diverse, the parent community comes from a breadth of socio-economic backgrounds occupying both working-class and professional occupations. The school campus features a mix of buildings from different eras and is located in a busy urban setting

with proximity to business districts. These situated (e.g., school intakes and histories) and material (e.g., buildings and infrastructure) contexts (for more on context, see Ball et al., 2012, p. 21) influence policy enactment, including the development of an institutional narrative.

The institutional policy setting for Korimako School is captured within what Ball and colleagues (2012, p. 51) describe as an *institutional narrative* or what is known in leadership literature as an organisational vision (Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010). The institutional narrative might articulate an "improvement plot" (how the school aims to improve what it is doing) and a narrative about the sort of school 'we' want to be (Ball et al., 2012, p. 51). Korimako School presents an institutional narrative around belonging and openness, built through quality relationships founded on shared values. This narrative is represented, in part, by a vision statement contained in the school charter which states school "values will be integrated into all aspects of school life - social, academic & cultural". But it is more than that; the institutional narrative represents 'how things are done around here' and seeks to engender commitment and generate enthusiasm for the narrative—this is a kind of institutional storytelling (Boje, 2008). This narrative is evident on the school website, where the home page articulates the "open-door policy" and the "restorative" approach to "quality" relationships between staff, parents, and students. The school values are Ako (learning together), Kaitiakitanga (environmental guardianship), Manaakitanga (caring for each other), Rangatiratanga (giving our best), and Whanaungatanga (respecting each other). These values align with the restorative approach whereby relationships are strengthened through "openness and care" so that in situations where damage is done to those relationships, "restoration can be achieved through involvement, dialogue and consideration for and by all involved" (Restorative Schools, 2009, para.2).

David (deputy principal) described how central the restorative approach was to relationships and how it connected to the school values.

> The one thing that sets us apart is how rigorously we apply the restorative
> behaviour framework… and it goes back to… teachers saying positive things
> about kids… [The teachers] celebrate success in the values in their classrooms
> [and]… if the principal's award is given out in assembly it's given out for one of
> the values…Then when we have the restorative conversations, we go back to

them as the context for that conversation, 'which of the five values are not present in this interaction?'

A significant and complementary part of the institutional narrative is the 'open-door' policy, which also relates to developing in parents a sense of belonging or connection with the school and of valuing the community. The principal, Peter, describes this in several ways:

> I'm obviously always available for meetings, board meetings etc. because that's part of the job, but… [also] by making sure that two or three times a week I go out and walk up and down the decks at the end… or the start of the day and just say hello to people. Most people, I think, know that they're welcome to drop by. So in the newsletter, I'll always say, 'if you want to know more, drop by'.

> What is important [is] just that respect and valuing rather than necessarily *doing* something… but those are the things you can't 'legislate', you can't command [for parents and the community to trust the school or feel a sense of belonging]

This institutional narrative is the setting for the *policy narrative* on parental engagement. The policy narrative is a way to "cohere policy and school" through a "principle of integration" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 52) and is for wide consumption, including by staff, parents, and students. The purpose of the policy narrative is meaning-making; it interprets potentially disparate and fragmented national policy and produces a coherent articulation of that policy for the school context. According to the typology of Ball et al. (2012), this policy work is primarily undertaken by policy actors they term 'narrators' (see forthcoming section).

The parental engagement policy narrative at Korimako School demonstrates some coherence with both the institutional narrative and national policy. It also draws on the characteristics of the parent community identified and discussed by Peter: some parents have had negative experiences of schools and teachers, "for them, who probably don't like schools, probably don't like principals" having positive, 'low-key' interactions is essential. Parents' socio-cultural diversity requires the school to account for parents' varying interests, expectations, and capacity: "different people, different parents, the engagement is a different thing". Finally, parents have many commitments. "People are really busy; they're a lot busier than they were a generation

ago… It's hard to make a living, most of them are working, so it's harder for a lot of them to engage with us… If you're dropping your kid off here all day, going to before school care and after school care, we might not see those parents".

Overall, the Korimako policy narrative articulates robust reporting based on what is helpful for parents; an open-door policy for parents; building relationships based on regular, positive, communication; and valuing what parents have to offer the school. The narrative covers both formal and informal aspects of parental engagement.

Formal aspects of the policy narrative on parental engagement include invitations to parents to come into the school or be recipients of set reporting and communication. The manner of reporting, and some required communication, is outlined in documents such as the school charter, which states, for example, that parents will receive two written reports and two parent interviews during the year, with ePortfolios also being provided to those with students in years five to eight. A draft policy provided further detail of expectations for teachers, such as regular upload of learning to Seesaw, a digital platform for communication with parents. The work was expected to be dated and labelled with the curriculum area/s for reporting purposes, and feedback/feedforward provided for all work. Another policy was about an 'open door', with teachers communicating informally with parents/whānau.

Informal aspects of the policy narrative are consistently raised in the interviews with staff. They include the open-door policy, positive phone calls with parents to build capital, and drawing on parent skills and talents. However, the 'open-door policy' mentioned above is the most strongly expressed aspect of the policy narrative at Korimako School and is consistent with the institutional narrative:

> As a school we do have an open-door policy …and I like to think that parents do feel they can come in… We say open-door policy [not] mean[ing] they can just come in, but we do have [an environment that] I kind of feel like it's quite welcoming and doesn't really restrict parental engagement. (Sam, teacher)

A further aspect of the policy narrative on parental engagement is in the nature of communication with parents. The principal, Peter, clearly articulates recognition of communication as a basis for the home-school relationship and the need for this to be positive:

[We need to be] following through on good things as well, man, you can build some capital by doing that… The [deputy principal] for example, promotes… that everyone should… contact a parent, [about] something positive once a week… If you're only dealing in the negative all the time, then it becomes a negative, and if they're going to hear from me, or… one of the deputy principals… they're going to think it's a bad thing, but if they realise it doesn't have to be… I mean, if you ring them up to tell them something good about their children, you're building good relationships, good engagement and that even makes it easier when you have to do the other as well, because you… know who they are a bit more.

In addition, many staff expressed an aspect of the policy narrative where parents were valued for sharing their skills, knowledge or culture with the school. For example, teachers invited parents into the classroom to lead activities or share information, with Greg stating, "we're all pretty good at… finding parents with special skills and utilising those".

The policy narrative is the contextualised meaning of policy created through policy work undertaken by policy actors, in this case, the staff of Korimako School.

Policy enactment roles in parental engagement: An analytical framework

The 'policy work' of teachers in interpreting and translating government education policy is messy and dynamic and influenced by a range of factors, including, for example, the different professional roles the teacher may hold and their expertise. While Ball et al. (2012, p. 49) caution against the "seductive neatness of typologies", it is helpful to consider the variation of policy work undertaken to dispel any inclination to believe that teachers have a uniform response to policy, even within the same school. Ball and colleagues (2012, p. 49) outline eight types of policy actors (and their policy work) that teachers may undertake:

- Narrators (interpretation, selection, and enforcement of meanings);

- Entrepreneurs (advocacy, creativity, and integration);

- Outsiders (entrepreneurship, partnership, and monitoring);

- Transactors (accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting, facilitating);

- Enthusiasts (investment, creativity, satisfaction, and career);

- Translators (production of texts, artifacts, and events);

- Critics (union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses);

- Receivers (coping, defending, and dependency)

These types of policy actors and policy work are not bounded, as teachers and school leaders may take up a variety of policy work at different stages or in the capacity of various roles within the school.

Enacting parental engagement at Korimako School

Narrators

Narrators interpret policy through filters formed by the constraining and enabling factors of the school. Through the process of selecting and shaping aspects of policy, the narrator creates an institution-level policy narrative, which must be both acceptable and achievable (Ball et al., 2012). This narrative is aimed at the staff of the school, parents, and other stakeholders, e.g., the Education Review Office and wider school community. School leaders are in a natural position to take on the policy work of narrators. Further, ensuring effective policies and practices for parent involvement and effective parent-teacher relationships can be seen as a key leadership responsibility (Robinson et al., 2005, p. 169).

The Korimako School principal saw himself as a "broker" "between government policy, the board… the staff, the parents and the kids". Through [what] Peter identified as 'brokerage', the policy work of a narrator can be recognised. Using an example of enacting the National Standards policy reporting requirements (Minister of Education, 2009; MoE, 2009b), the principal described how he developed what can be identified as a policy narrative. This narrative was informed by understanding and balancing the different expectations of the 'political perspective', or policy rhetoric, and the relevant school stakeholders—parents, board of trustees (BOT), and staff. Peter did this by being informed by relevant research, acknowledging the needs and wants of the school community (including the BOT), and understanding the capacity and expectations of the staff.

The narrator interprets policy and describes what must be done within the school. Then, using various mechanisms, the Korimako principal articulates these expectations to staff, perhaps at a staff meeting or (merging with the work of a translator) through a school plan or policy document (possibly in draft form for finalising after input and feedback). Peter also utilises the senior leadership team and other key staff to reinforce the policy narrative. Mentor teachers are also helpful for guiding and modelling desired practice (see Translators).

Aotearoa New Zealand research shows principals and board members generally believe that the board's contribution is to the school's strategic direction (Stevens & Wylie, 2017); therefore, it is the policy work of the narrator that governors are perhaps the most likely to perform. Some studies show parental influence on policy is minimal (Addi-Raccah, 2020; Munn, 1998) and that boards are likely to follow the lead of the principal (Munn, 1998). However, the likelihood of policy influence might be stronger where partnership is evident between the principal and board, particularly the chairperson, as it was at Korimako School. The principal referred to the contribution of the board chairperson as a valued decision-maker and direction-influencer several times. Peter noted, for example, that the chairperson had instigated the focus on 'plain English', jargon-free communication with parents.

Interpreting and explaining policy is an aspect of policy work undertaken by policy narrators, and their narrative is often shared beyond the school staff. For example, the principal may translate a policy specifically for the parent community, providing an institutional position on, or interpretation of, policy for parents and the school community.

Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs fulfil the role of policy advocates within the school. Ball et al. (2012) suggest this is not a particularly common policy role, as it only occurs where a staff member has 'personally invested in and identified with policy ideals and their enactment' (p. 53). Therefore, this type of policy work is not undertaken in every school, nor for every policy. Entrepreneurs are creative and dynamic to engage others in their work, drawing together and reworking existing and frequently disparate policy fragments and practices into cohesive 'enactable' roles and practices. This type of policy work was not apparent for parental engagement at Korimako School.

An entrepreneur for parental engagement might be more likely to occur in a school where parental engagement is a new or renewed priority for a school, as one of the key roles of a policy entrepreneur is to initiate or advocate as "agents of change" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 53). If, as Ball and colleagues suggest, policy entrepreneurs are not commonplace, they are perhaps more likely to result from an unpredictable mix of personality, personal interest, leadership ability, and a parental engagement policy focus; this was not the current situation at Korimako.

Outsiders

Some policy actors are based outside the school environment and may undertake roles that include "introducing or interpreting policies and initiating or supporting translation work" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 55). The advisor, edu-business or consultant from outside the school can play a significant role in policy translation enactment or support. Since reforms in the 1980s, which initiated the removal of permanent government advisory staff, the 'outsiders' providing support to schools have increasingly been private actors (Thrupp et al., 2020). From 2017 the Ministry have identified professional learning and development (PLD) priorities that inform the regionally-allocated PLD available from government-funded, authorised and accredited, private organisations and sole traders acting as providers and facilitators (MoE, 2020d; 2020e). (The rise and role of outsiders/private actors in schooling have been heavily critiqued, for a recent analysis see, Thrupp et al. (2021)).

One such facilitator, who was already providing services to the school, was contracted to work with the school regarding the 'reporting to parents' requirements of parental engagement. Effectively, the role of the consultant was in supporting policy translation—"the process of accommodating policy to practice" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 55). At Korimako, this entailed working with the parent community to gain their opinions and feedback on the topic 'reporting to parents'. They were seen, by the board chairperson and principal, as offering a neutral conduit for that information while still being familiar with the school.

Transactors

Ball and colleagues (2012) identify two distinct varieties of transactors. The first is concerned with policy monitoring and enforcement, which frequently involves data collection and reporting, and the second refers to a range of ancillary staff who

support, facilitate and, in some cases, interpret policy. While not as transactional as the monitoring occurring for some UK policy, as described by Ball et al. (2012), parental engagement policy *is* monitored in Aotearoa New Zealand, primarily at an individual school level. For example, at Korimako School, the nature and frequency of student achievement reporting are outlined in the school strategic plan. In addition to reporting progress against this to the board, the strategic plan is uploaded to the Ministry portal. The external review agency, ERO, then provides a check through its regular evaluations of schools. Thus, monitoring can make policy visible by 'evidencing' policy activity, and for teacher accountability, this also indicates "the policies that count most are those that are counted" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 57). However, in the case of parental engagement policy, while there is some monitoring of the mandated reporting aspects, most teachers at Korimako did not directly identify that activity as an aspect of parental engagement in their definitions.

The 'support worker', Ben, at Korimako School, represents the second type of transactor, the policy supportive ancillary staff member. He is an ancillary staff member whose role in supporting students means supporting and engaging with their parents and whānau. Ben often helps facilitate greater parental engagement with the school in general and can assist teaching staff in engaging with parents. Ben notes that a part of the advantage he has in engaging with parents stems from the flexibility of not being tied to a class: "The availability and flexibility… has been very beneficial for some parents and their engagement because otherwise, they wouldn't be able to".

Enthusiasts

Teachers who are enthusiasts for some or all of a particular policy exhibit it through their efforts towards its implementation, not necessarily just in their classrooms or areas of responsibility. Aside from the investment of time, energy, and creativity they spend in developing their practice concerning the policy, they represent exemplars or models of the policy in practice and can reveal the policy's potential to others. Through this policy work, enthusiasts encourage collaborative or collective approaches to policy practice and might be recognised as "policy models" or "influential" (Cole and Weiss 2009, as cited in Ball et al., 2012, p. 59). Further, due to their efforts towards policy enactment, enthusiasts are frequently also translators.

Three Korimako teachers demonstrated policy work as enthusiasts for parental engagement, particularly through their efforts in championing one aspect of that policy, sharing student learning with parents—sometimes linked to reporting to parents. These teachers endorsed using the digital platform, Seesaw, to improve how teachers shared student work and classroom happenings with parents. As advocates for this platform (one was also the school administrator for the platform), they were 'influentials' who encouraged this method of parent-teacher communication and modelled its application. Their enthusiasm for this particular approach to parental engagement was clearly expressed, with one claiming, "I might be the biggest advocate; I think I could sell [Seesaw]".

Parents might also undertake the policy work of enthusiasts (or translators), as in the following school-home communication example, using Facebook. One parent, Michelle, significantly changed how parents accessed information about happenings at Korimako School. Michelle said frustration at finding relevant information about what was occurring at school led her to utilise Facebook to get relevant information out to parents. Another parent shared that there had been 'mumbling' amongst parents about the inadequacy of the website as a source of information on current happenings and felt the Facebook page was working well. Michelle managed expectations, modelled how communication could work, and built trust with the staff to manage information by being visible in the school, "so [the teachers got] to know me, and trust [me], and see whether they could approach me". The policy work undertaken by Michelle was in making enactment a "collective process", whereby a particular aspect of parental engagement policy was "translated into action" (Ball et al., 2012).

Translators

The translators undertake the policy work producing texts, artefacts, and events in the translation of the policy text to practice, thus "animating" the policy for others by making it "meaningful and doable" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 60). One example of this is evident in the mentor teacher and provisionally-registered teacher relationship. For policy like parental engagement, which is broad in description and typically not addressed directly in initial teacher training (as is often the case in NZ), the role of the mentor teacher in translating policy to practice can be significant. Their role is a central

(but not sole) aspect of the induction and mentoring programme guiding provisionally-registered teachers (ECANZ, 2015).

Another example of policy translation is creating institutional texts, events or processes, which draw other staff into active policy enactment. Senior leaders typically create these. For parental engagement at Korimako School these included a form for seeking information from parents before 'goal-setting conferences', the school report template, and a draft policy (below) outlining how teachers should conduct the various aspects of reporting student achievement progress to parents:

- Regular upload of learning to Seesaw (most weeks), work needs to be dated and labelled with the curriculum area/s for reporting purposes, feedback—feedforward provided for all work

- No cutting and pasting of report comments—unprofessional and parents know

- Comments to be written from a positivist approach

- Open Door Policy—teachers communicating informally with parents/whānau

- Celebrating of Learning will be linked to teacher appraisal.

These institutional texts and processes assist in guiding teachers in *how* certain aspects of parental engagement will occur in the school.

Critics

Under this type of policy work, the "everyday mutterings" and criticisms that teachers might make are contrasted with "principled and political critique" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 61). For example, the more considered and directed criticism toward a particular policy from union representatives can contribute to policy interpretation and enactment. This type of critique mainly occurs at moments of significance, such as when there is a perceived threat to that union's members (p. 61), such as the introduction of the National Standards policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Union representatives within a school might meet directly with senior leaders to negotiate interpreting policy more in line with union interpretation or provide texts, artefacts or events to aid with enactment. Critics also help maintain counter-discourses or alternative ways of considering current policy rhetoric, potentially drawing on collective professional memory or historical archive to challenge or critique policy.

Notwithstanding evidence of some 'everyday mutterings' about aspects of parental engagement by one or two Korimako teachers, they were generally an expression of a misalignment of a teacher's values and expectations with policy in practice. No demand for change in policy processes or expectations within the school was evident as stemming from these 'mutterings'. Nor did Ball et al. (2012) find translation of this type of 'discontent'—including the, at times, even greater expression of discontent through demonstration or industrial action—into "the more immediate demands of and processes of policy at school" (p. 63).

Receivers

Receivers are frequently, but not always, provisionally registered or early-career teachers who accept, and depend on, the guidance and direction offered by the translators of policy. The policy can be seen as 'must do' (Smith et al., 2019) and at times oppressive, particularly where there is no understanding of the context or history of the work. In the realities of everyday teaching work, policy can seem distant to immediate concerns, with Ball et al. (2012) identifying the "copers" as those who manage while terming the strugglers as "defenders"—where "short-term survival is the main concern" (p. 63).

At Korimako School, some early-career teachers expressed limited understanding of parental engagement policy origins and purpose. Responding to a question about what Ministry expectations are for parental engagement, two such teachers, Ashleigh and Greg, said they did not know what those expectations were. Ashleigh went on to say, 'we've never ever really been told'. Both of these teachers were clearer about what the school expected of them; that is, the processes and actions of the class and school (and the institutional narrative) dominated their understanding of parental engagement policy. Further comments by Ashleigh indicated she was at times struggling with or felt oppressed by the practice of what she viewed as this policy:

> It seems like [the principal] really appreciates parent engagement and feedback, but he almost takes their feedback or… input over ours. …Sometimes parents just think they have the upper hand over us.

Discussion

The need for clear and coherent parental engagement policy

The Ball et al. (2012) typology has helped reveal the role of teachers and parents as policy actors, the pivotal role of narration in making sense of school obligations around parental engagement, and it has drawn attention to matters of coherence within the policy enactment process. A school policy narrative can exhibit coherence with government policy in some or all aspects or develop in an entirely distinct way as the narrator mediates what policy expects with what they believe the school can deliver. Achieving policy coherence is a "dynamic process" whereby policy actors "craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies" (Honig & Hatch, 2004, abstract). Consideration of coherence reveals what policy texts, and the localised interpretation of them through the narration process, legitimise as solutions for the policy 'problem' of parental engagement. Further, the differentiated practice of teachers, given their scope to interpret and apply engagement policy on their own terms, was revealed as they attempted to make sense of these directives.

Parental engagement policy is disparate and broadly defined within the decentralised Aotearoa New Zealand system of self-managing schools, providing much potential for localised responses, as seen with Korimako's 'open-door' policy. A broadly articulated parental engagement policy leads to more locally variable practices—and outcomes—with schools and, ultimately, teachers having considerable freedom in the enactment process. The value of broad policy wording is dependent on the nature of the policy and the context within which it exists. In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a decentralised system of self-managing schools with high degrees of latitude concerning governance and management, and curriculum and programme delivery (Wylie, 2012). Broadly articulated policy in this system might generate positive consequences, giving scope for schools to respond to their local contexts, or negative consequences, where the ability for some schools to successfully enact policy is constrained by the resources available to them and their community (Wylie, 2020).

The analysis also demonstrates that the what, why, and how of parental engagement are scattered across a range of policy documents. This fragmentation means the purpose and goals of parental engagement and how they are to be

achieved are difficult to identify, detracting from the ability of schools to understand and interpret their responsibilities. When fragmentation is combined with the broad definition of parental engagement and applied within a self-managing school system, clarity is challenged. A policy with a clearly articulated—not simply implied—purpose could assist in aligning outcomes more successfully while retaining the agency and creativity of policy actors in schools.

Given the lack of a single coherent policy statement, what does the analysis of parental engagement in Korimako School reveal of the *what*, *why,* and *how* of the parental engagement? Outside of mandated reporting and governance requirements, the school is required to follow government policy, which asks that:

- "The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau, and communities" *NZC* (MoE, 2007, p. 9)—addressing *what* is sought

- Engagement is "a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focuses on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child" Evaluation report on parental engagement, *Partners in learning: Good practice* (ERO, 2008a, p. 1)—*what* and *why*

- Six critical factors for successful engagement: leadership, relationships, school culture, partnerships, community networks, and communication (ERO, 2008a)—*how*

- "The community engagement principle calls for schools to build productive partnerships with each family to engage their support and ensure that teaching and learning meets the needs, interests, and talents of their children" *NZC Online* (MoE, 2020c)—*what* and (partial) *why*

What then do narrators and practitioners identify as 'the' policy on parental engagement? In this instance it is likely the core policy document for non-mandated parental engagement is the *NZ Curriculum*, which every teacher has. However, this policy document not only fails to mention parents (despite being the significant focus of most accompanying guidance) but does not articulate a purpose for the 'engaged support' to be provided. This further emphasises the importance of the narrator—both

in the scope of their knowledge of policy commentary on parental engagement, and their ability to cohere a narrative from fragmented and disparate sources. At Korimako, the principal, Peter, produced a strong policy narrative for parental engagement. As an experienced principal, who had already worked at the school for approximately a decade, Peter practised a narrator's policy work. The senior leadership team, which had also been in place for some time, supported that work. Other schools, with leaders less experienced or familiar with their staff and community, may find this aspect of the policy work more challenging.

Understanding or developing a purpose (or the '*why*') within a policy narrative is part of meaning-making necessary for practice. The practice of an open-door policy, for example, differs depending on why you practice it. A teacher who understands it as building relationship capital between themselves and parents (per a restorative approach) might come out of the classroom with students at the end of the day to say hello to parents and engage in conversation. Another, understanding it as parents having a right to come into the school and classroom or make contact with teaching staff, installs a 'welcome' sign on the door and shares their contact details. While the case study and particulars provided in some policy guidance (e.g., MoE, 2013c) unpack the concept of an open-door policy further, narrators may fail to recognise this as a policy source or may make a 'surface' interpretation. A surface interpretation may demonstrate a degree of coherence (between government and localised narratives) but may also simplify the policy narrative and hide other, possibly richer, engagement practices. For example, the open-door policy understood in simplistic terms might obscure the positive capital building (e.g., outreach to families) that goes on. What is clear is that in the process between policy and action, policy continues to be *made* (Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 8); as such, the meaning-making being undertaken in schools needs closer attention.

Teachers and parents as policy actors

Ball and colleagues state "the school is not always sensible as the unit of analysis for policy research", and what is meant by "the school" "is typically partial and neglectful" (2012, p. 69). They refer, in part, to the additional translations of policy taking place within departments or year levels and within classrooms, as well as the aspects of schools that are not always acknowledged (e.g., the influence of 'outsiders'

or context on school operations)—something illustrated in the analysis of Korimako School. Every teacher is a policy actor (or what Lipsky (2010) refers to as a street-level bureaucrat) undertaking a subsequent level of meaning-making as they enact policy into practice. The policy work typology offers some insights into the policy work undertaken by teachers and how they might respond to policy at an individual or department level.

Further, the analysis helped identify parents and governors as policy actors operating from 'within' the school space, in the way of 'insiders' (as staff might be considered). This contrasts with the 'outsider' actors of Ball and colleagues' typology (2012). Parents' contribution to policy work might occur more readily if a participatory or partnership approach is utilised, but it will also depend on the socio-cultural context of the school. At Korimako School, there were many invitations for parents to engage with the school in various ways. The principal, Peter, was instrumental in this, issuing invitations and responding positively to approaches by parents. While this provided opportunity for parents with the cultural capital to engage, like Michelle, not all parents within the community would contemplate doing so. However, if schools express problems or needs more explicitly to parents, thus allowing the opportunity to "jointly develop an agreed approach and practices" (Brooking, 2007, p. 16), more parents may engage with policy work. There are existing opportunities for this through boards of trustees' policy review processes with parent communities.

Analysis using the typology highlights how a diverse range of school-based actors might enact policy. When all actors have the opportunity to engage with policy, the more chances there are for context-responsive interpretation and translation to occur. This does not necessarily achieve policy coherence, but there may be increased coherence in meaning-making. Coherent meaning-making could drive greater collective understanding and commitment to the purpose or object of the policy narrative whilst not constraining the creative agency of teachers and context-appropriate translation to practice. That being the case, understanding and utilising the typology might allow principals, as key mediators of policy (Thomson, 2002), to create conditions through which the policy narrative is translated into practice to serve the school and its aims best. In addition, the typology illustrates how policy actors can undertake work on *part* of a policy; therefore, individual or departmental interests or

skills could be successfully drawn on by the principal/narrator for different aspects of policy translation.

Developing parental engagement policy using a participatory approach

The discussion highlights the need for clear and coherent policy and policy enactment in parental engagement. The role and impact of teachers and parents as diverse policy actors in policy enactment is also emphasised. Through an improved understanding of the policy enactment process and its participating actors, these findings suggest that the use of a participatory policy development approach would suit a decentralised system such as Aotearoa New Zealand's. A participatory approach could develop a common, clearly articulated policy purpose for parental engagement through a coalition of actors (Wagenaar, 2015), of which parents and BOTs (or their association) could be key participants. Where there is a common purpose, coherence is brought to the work of policymakers and teachers. As Wylie (2012, p. 16) identified, the value of this type of coherence is as one of six principles for testing the "soundness of the infrastructure built by… educational policy". Further, common purpose does not necessarily restrict localised responses; there can be various ways of arriving at the same outcome.

Given the critical role of principals in the interpretation of policy, the policy work of school governors and parents, and, importantly, the role of *every* teacher in the translation of policy to practice, it would serve governments well to do everything possible to bring these actors with them when developing education policy. This is not just a matter of offering professional development for a new policy, for example, but providing space and opportunity for these actors to lead or participate in policy development. The dangers of not doing so have been demonstrated in Aotearoa New Zealand, where there has been push back in response to some policy, for example, National Standards, by these actors (e.g., NZEI, 2010b; Watson, 2010; Wood, 2009).

Conclusion

There are dual concerns in policy implementation—and enactment—research "*to explain* 'what happens' and/or a concern *to affect* 'what happens'", with many researchers interested in both (Hill & Hupe, 2009, p. 2). In this article, Ball and colleagues' (2012) typology and the case of Korimako School have been used to explain what happens to parental engagement policy as enacted in an Aotearoa New Zealand

primary school. What policy expects of schools concerning parental engagement is framed in broad terms across various policy documents. While offering flexibility, the lack of specificity leaves schools and teachers without a coherent purpose for parental engagement's differentiated and complex activities. The role of the 'narrator' is pivotal in articulating a rationale for parental engagement to staff and the school community through an institutional narrative. Further translation occurs as teachers enact this narrative into practice, resulting in differentiated outcomes to parental engagement. The findings show parents are potentially important policy actors contributing to the interpretation and translation of policy in the school setting. Their involvement contributes to a more participatory approach to policy development.

Given the heightened awareness of the importance of parents in education revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it makes sense to want to use these findings to help parental engagement policy better serve schools, parents, and students. Policy writers should give attention to how parental engagement policy is articulated. They might encourage actors to consider parental engagement as a policy concern in order to develop a democratic understanding of the issue and what policy could seek to achieve. A fuller understanding and more coherent expression of all elements of a policy will assist in its enactment. Further research is warranted in diverse schools and classrooms, examining how teachers 'make sense' of parental engagement policy texts, individually and collectively.

Just as this one case study does not capture all the ways in which schools enact parental engagement policy, it would be a mistake to think this analysis method reveals *all* the ways in which policy work occurs or is enacted—nor do Ball et al. suggest this. However, speaking of the "policy interpretation genre" where the inclination has been to view policy actors (except school leaders) as equal, they say, "A great deal of the complex and differentiated activity that goes into the 'responses' of schools *to* and their work *with* policy is…obscured and distorted" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 49). Thus, the typology offers a device to help to reveal much more of the policy enactment process, providing a helpful basis for a more nuanced examination of, and a democratic approach to, the enactment of policy into practice.

8 Built Space and the Policy Enactment of Parental Engagement

"We shape our buildings, and afterwards,

our buildings shape us."

Winston Churchill (1943)

"A school is a school is a school. Or is it?"

Thomson and Hall (2017, p. 5)

Another potential factor in the difference between the practices of parental engagement and what theory or policy might propose is the impact of material context. Material context (e.g., buildings, technology, staffing) is a frequently neglected aspect of policy making and policy research, and yet, "buildings and infrastructure join with human agents to 'do policy'" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 33). The relationship between material contexts (particularly, "space, sunlight, visibility, departmental geography, the condition of buildings") and policy was one that Ball and colleagues were interested in pursuing further (p. 147). The significance of built space in policy enactment is that it is not neutral, and "techniques of power" (Foucault, 1993, p. 164) are invested there. These long-lived artefacts shaped by policy, can enable or constrain the interpretation, translation and practice of policy.

The limited scholarship on built space as it relates to policy has focused primarily on its relationship to learning, particularly the contemporary focus on modern/innovative learning environments (e.g., Benade, 2017a; Starkey & Wood, 2021). While space is relational (Massey, 1994) and social practices and interactions influence the "the nature, use and experience of space", it can also reciprocate as a factor in 'mediating' those relationships (Blackmore et al., 2011, p. 3). It is the latter, in relation to parental engagement, which is of interest to me. In part, this is because there is no obligation for parents to be present within the school in the same way that students are within a classroom. When considering learning environments, relationships related to the social practices of teaching and learning will develop more quickly due to the daily interactions between teachers and students. For parents, space has a greater potential to mediate relations due to the irregular and largely

voluntary nature of physical parental attendance at a school. This distinction provides a starting point for my focus on built space.

This article, then, focuses on the contextual dimensions of policy enactment and how the school-specific built environment impacts the enactment of parental engagement. Using mental mapping to explore parents' experiences with the built space had been part of my research design from the start. However, my own experience with the school environment confirmed the value of examining built space for its potential impact on parental engagement. My reflections, captured in field notes, form part of the analysed data and inform interpretations. This understanding follows what Matthews and Ross (2010, p. 51) consider "reflexive data…the thinking, understandings and actions of the researcher in relation to [their] research."

Schools can alter their built environments to enhance parental engagement. Further, Kim (2009) argues that it is easier to focus on barriers to parental engagement presented by, and within, the school than concentrate on the individually varying ones faced by parents (e.g., social, cultural, economic)—schools have a greater capacity to initiate action. It makes sense then to examine built space as a school-based influencing factor that is interacted with on a (potentially) daily basis.

Examining the built space of Korimako School presented challenges for maintaining confidentiality. The buildings and streets of the school and its community that are likely to be recognisable—particularly in a country as small as AoNZ—added a layer of complexity to 'writing up' this article. I overcame this in several ways; firstly, by the method in which I had parent participants capture the school maps, which avoided identifying markers (described in Mental mapping). I also utilised descriptions (and a rendering) of similar buildings in other schools and, finally, took care that descriptions of identifying features (of the school or neighbourhood) were vague enough to deter association.

In addition to the aforementioned field notes, sources for this article include the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews of staff and parent participants, school documents, photos and maps of the school environment, and various historical and policy documents on schools and school property. The following research question informed the article:

- How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?

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How built space impacts parental engagement: Contextual dimensions of policy enactment

Abstract

Current education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand requires schools and teachers to engage with parents and the school community to enhance student educational experience and achievement. The broad wording in these policy statements allows schools and teachers to tailor their parental engagement practice to specific community contexts. There is, however, little attention given to the built space of the school itself as an aspect of the material context within which parental engagement occurs. This article draws on a case study analysis of a single, bounded primary school in Aotearoa New Zealand, to examine how the school's built environment influences parental engagement. It involves the analysis of plans and other school artefacts, semi-structured interview transcripts of staff and parents, and the mental maps of parents. The findings reveal that multiple meanings are read from built space, with staff at risk of underestimating those readings and their agency to author new stories.

Keywords: built space, school context, policy enactment, parental engagement, school environment

Introduction

During primary schooling, the first contact between many parents and teachers occurs in the school's built environment. Parents read (consciously and unconsciously) from the built space just as readily as from their interactions with teachers and staff. Built space conveys meaning in the same way as non-verbal cues, which are crucial to face-to-face communication, and similarly, it is trusted as part of the 'real' message being told (Yanow, 1995). However, school leaders and teachers frequently overlook the stories conveyed by the school's built space, but they are necessary to attend to. This is particularly important for those who wish to prioritise engagement with their parent community. As such, this article considers how built space, as a contextual factor, affects how parental engagement policies are enacted by schools and

experienced by parents. Further, by foregrounding Yanow's (2014) approach, which highlights the material forces of policy, this article contributes to education policy analysis by illuminating and attending to the 'taken-for-granted' spaces which shape and are shaped by policy.

Parental engagement

Parental engagement with schooling has been subject to greater policy attention since the 1980s and has become an established education policy concern in Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ), as in many countries. This can be seen in a variety of policy documents (e.g., Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017b; Ministry of Education (MoE), 2007) and reflects similar emphases in other countries (e.g., Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Broadly defined, parental engagement is 'parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children' (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). This may occur within the school or elsewhere and can be overt (e.g., participation in school activities) or subtle (e.g., high parental aspirations). Scholarship on the topic (e.g., Epstein et al., 2002; Hornby, 2011; Jeynes, 2014; Vincent, 1996) has grown alongside increased policy attention, with some researchers emphasising the positive impact some forms of parental engagement can have on student achievement (e.g., Hattie, 2009; Jeynes, 2010). Jeynes (2010), for example, has drawn attention to how the nature of the engagement is important, with subtle, harder to measure engagement, such as parents having high expectations of their child, being most influential. The basis for more positive forms of engagement can be assisted by strong links between home and school (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). These links are seeded in the school grounds during a child's initial years at school. Education policy seeks this engagement which is located in the particular physical and socio-cultural context of a school.

In AoNZ, education policy is situated in a context of self-managing schools, where, essentially, the intention is that the Ministry of Education provides direction, and schools make their own decisions (MoE, 2019b). So, while legislation and regulation mandate particular actions such as reporting, consultation and governance such as the Education Act and the National Administration Guidelines ("Education Act 1989"; Minister of Education, 2017), other forms of policy set out the principles

schools are expected to follow, as a guide such as *Ka Hikitia* (MoE, 2013b) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC, MoE, 2007). This second form of policy allows enactment by individual schools to meet the needs of their specific situation or context.

The basis of policy guidance to schools on parental engagement is a *NZC* foundation principle, which states: 'The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau, and communities' (MoE, 2007, p. 9). A Ministry update presents various cases that followed different approaches to enacting the principle '…recognising that each school's relationship with its local whānau and community will be different' (MoE, 2010, p. 1). These statements frame parental engagement as something driven by schools and unique to each school's context. Therefore, the Ministry recognises a school's specific context as influential in shaping the nature and extent of parental engagement. An obvious example is whether a school teaches primary, intermediate, or secondary aged students. These observations raise questions about how we understand the impact of context on parental engagement enactment and the implications for policy and practice.

Context

The wide-ranging scholarship on context in education draws attention to differing contextual concerns and definitions (e.g., Braun, Ball, Maguire, et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2018; Thomson & Hall, 2017). For example, Braun et al. (2011) defined context as broadly considered and covers a range of conditions under the categorisations of situated contexts, professional cultures, material contexts, and external contexts. These categories cover conditions where school actors may have some agency to change (e.g., teacher commitments) to those where they do not (e.g., school histories). The purpose of this broad conceptualisation of context is to provide a framework or heuristic device for policy analyses by which context is 'taken seriously' (Braun, Ball, Maguire, et al., 2011, p. 595). In contrast to this broader definition, Thrupp (2018b) prefers to restrict contextual factors (external or internal) to those that school actors cannot easily change. In doing so, school actors can better push back against a 'politics of blame' which attempts to 'hold teachers and schools responsible for problems beyond their control' (p. 93).

For my purposes, context captures a broad range of factors, drawing attention to both those that can be changed and those that cannot. Firstly, this aims to promote action in response to factors where the possession of agency and the option of action may have become concealed or forgotten. For example, a myriad of pressures—both 'must do' and an avalanche of 'could do' (Smith et al., 2019)—exist on schools and teachers; as a result, school actors can become stuck in their responses to some issues, or may simply no longer 'see' them, due to a severe constraint on time and resources available. Secondly, following Thrupp (2018b), I seek to add to the understanding of contextual factors in order for school-based policy actors to 'speak truth to power' (Wildavsky, 1987). Research such as this can help raise relevant voices to speak those truths (e.g., Beckett, 2016). Thus, this article contributes to a fuller understanding of school context and how it can constrain or enable parental engagement.

Built space

This article focuses on one particular aspect of material context: the physical environment or built space. Thinking and theorising about space has shifted from viewing space as separate and independent, to theories of spatiality, particularly through the work of Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1989), where space was reimagined as through "triadic conceptualisations" emphasising the "dialectical relations among conceptualisations of space, sociality and temporality" (Benade, 2021, p. S15). This shift proposes that spatiality and social life are dynamic and entwined—both produced and producing (Soja, 1989). While these works were part of a 'spatial turn' in social theory in the latter part of the twentieth century, a similar focus has been late to occur within education (Gulson & Symes, 2007). Benade (2021, p. S14) also finds that spatiality theories are not well developed in education, nor is 'spatial theorising' commonplace in the discourse. Nevertheless, what does exist reveals a range of approaches being used to examine space including Lefebvre's triad (Kellock & Sexton, 2018), new materialism (Charteris et al., 2017), and school climate framework (Cardellino & Woolner, 2020).

In this article, I introduce Yanow's (2014) interpretive approach as a further way to think about and analyse space in the education context. In assuming a hermeneutic relationship between design elements (such as those described below) and meaning-making (e.g., by designers and users), Yanow (2014, p. 370) allows consideration of the

(policy) meanings conveyed by built space and centres space as an important contextual element for education research. By speaking of "built space, rather than buildings or place," her work emphasises the role of people in shaping spaces (producing spaces) and how diverse spaces communicate "social-political-cultural meanings" (produced by spaces) (Yanow, 2014, p. 370).

Yanow's (1995, 2014) approach highlights how space communicates meaning to users despite the way they form a 'taken-for-granted backdrop [within our] cognizance' (Yanow, 2014, p. 369). Built spaces communicate through a 'vocabulary' of design elements (including construction materials and physical characteristics, particularly located within the cultural or societal context); design gestures (which communicate relationships such as status); proxemics (proximal spatial relationships or orientations); and décor (including signage, furniture and art) (Yanow, 2014). There are several critical dimensions to the study of built space and the meanings they convey. Firstly, it examines the symbolic relationship of buildings as representations of values, beliefs and feelings. Secondly, it is an interpretive inquiry drawing on the first-hand spatial experiences of the researcher and other users. Thirdly, both the built space and the researcher are situated entities. Finally, whilst the shaping of behaviour and acts can indicate or enact a power relationship, users of a built space are not without agency (Yanow, 2014). Yanow's (2014) methodological approach to analysing built space grounds this article.

Drawing the threads together

School spaces provide a foundation for parent-school relationships, both as sites of interaction and a mode of communication (as built space communicates "social-political-cultural meanings" (Yanow, 2014)). The scholarship distinguishes between parental *involvement* (typically school-based, where schools have agency) and parental *engagement* (typically home-based, where parents have agency) (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2018; Pushor, 2007). Built space can support parental *involvement* by welcoming parents (e.g., communicating a sense of belonging by displaying relevant cultural artefacts in decor) and their participation (e.g., through easy wayfinding, access to appropriate spaces). Martin and Vincent (1999), for example, identify "a sense of 'belonging'" as a key motivator for parental involvement (which they call active volunteerism) (p. 144).

A study of principals who successfully foster parental *engagement* in student learning (Willis et al., 2018) found they used a number of strategies linked with the built space. The strategies included developing a "welcoming, inclusive school climate" (p. 9), open-door policies and opportunities for incidental and face-to-face interactions between teacher and parent (p. 39), and celebrating multi-culturalism (p. 20). These strategies can be supported by the same type of elements noted above, e.g., clear wayfinding, open 'all-weather' spaces around classrooms, easy access to grounds and classrooms, décor or architectural elements demonstrating cultural appreciation and ability to host parents in culturally appropriate ways (such as gathering for food or performance). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011, p. 5) identified that any strategy for enhancing parental engagement must be a "whole school approach", and given the way space communicates meaning to users, built space must be considered within that scope.

Despite these observations about the support built space can offer parental involvement and engagement, there is little discussion about it as a factor in parental engagement. Two rare examples include Sisson et al. (2021) on the value of co-design for shifting power relations; and Pushor (2007) on the relevance of space and place for parents. There is more research outside of parental engagement, drawing attention to the importance of space in education more broadly or for other concerns (e.g., McLeod, 2014; Meighan & Harber, 2007; Thomson, 2002; Woolner et al., 2018). Recently, however, the majority of this research has focused on the activities of teaching and learning in relation to built environments. These have been particularly concerned with flexible learning spaces or innovative learning environments (e.g., Benade, 2017b; Charteris et al., 2017; Leighton & Byers, 2020; McGregor, 2004).

This article's primary focus is the impact of the physical environment as one of the more underemphasised and underestimated aspects of context, particularly as it relates to parental engagement. Just as we use many cues to interpret meaning in our interactions with each other, policy meaning is derived from 'not only… literal policy language, but also… contextualizing acts and objects, including spaces' (Yanow, 1995, p. 407). Further, where sources of meaning (or artefacts) contradict, we tend to trust cues from other sources (e.g., actions, tone, spaces) over 'literal words' (p. 407). In this way, built space can be understood to communicate policy (or policy stories).

The findings of this article show that relevant parental engagement policy publics (e.g., parents) read (interpret and make sense of) built space. Their readings are based on their own experiences and cultural capital, resulting in multiple meanings being read. Some of these readings support the school's policy intentions (such as its 'open-door' policy for parents), and some constrain it. Readings are further influenced by physical and socio-cultural borders and individuals' wayfinding abilities using the décor of the built space. In addition, teachers are at risk of becoming detached from the embodied experiences and meanings read by other users of the school space; however, they have some agency to author new policy stories. Re-positioned as 'guest hosts' (Pushor, 2007), teachers can probe the beliefs and practices that create a more welcoming space for parents.

This case study offers insights into the relationship between context, policy, and action, which could be helpful to teachers as they engage with their parent community. In addition, the analysis provides a perspective that those in schools and classrooms frequently don't have the time, energy, or resources, to consider but have some agency to influence.

Korimako School study

This article contributes to a broader study (Smith, 2020, 2021) examining how policy goals of parental engagement in the provision of primary education in AoNZ are enacted by policy actors, while paying particular attention to the impact of contextual dimensions at schools as sites of enactment. The policy enactment study is a single bounded case. The research question 'How do contextual factors affect the way policies of parental engagement get enacted by schools and experienced by parents?' was one focus of semi-structured interviews of staff and parents ($n = 21$) at an urban full primary school, identified here as Korimako School. Observation (including photography) and discourse analysis of published school material was also undertaken. Finally, I used mental mapping (also known as mental sketch mapping, Gieseking, 2013) with parents ($n = 6$) to explore their experiences of the built space of the school and community.

Mental mapping is a multi-dimensional approach, undertaken in this study with interviews, which allowed parents to share their cognitive maps, stories, and experiences of the school's built space through their own hands using a "lens of space

and place" (Gieseking, 2013, p. 723). Cognitive maps are created through a mental process whereby "an individual acquires, codes, stores, recalls, and decodes information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in his[/their] everyday spatial environment" (Downs & Stea, 2005a, p. 9). Cognitive maps are stored in our memory. Using the mental mapping method, participants capture their cognitive map on paper. They are asked to add elements to their drawing as the discussion about their experiences progresses. Questions and prompts are used to facilitate this, for example

> I would like you to picture yourself on an average visit to the school. On this visit, where do you enter the school? What people do you interact with? What are the paths or places of importance? Are there any places you wouldn't go to in the school? Are there any 'invisible' or visible boundaries for parents in the school?

This method provides a richness of data not available by interview alone. Two maps are included in this article to illustrate how distinct parent experiences of the school can be.

The research expresses a constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist research paradigm. Following a constructivist epistemology, "truth and meaning [knowledge]…are created by the subject's interactions with the world" (Gray, 2018, p. 22), enabling a multiplicity of understandings of a single phenomenon to exist. Further, knowledge claims are made from an interpretivist stance, as "*interpretivism* allows the [researcher's] focus to be fixed on *understanding* what is happening in a given context" (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014, p. 65, original emphasis). This interpretivist research paradigm is expressed through an interpretive analysis approach (Yanow, 2000, 2014) and the policy enactment framework proposed by Ball et al. (2012).

Built space stories at Korimako School

Research and analysis of built space is necessarily an embodied process—the bodily experience gives the researcher an understanding of the language of a space and "what is being 'said'" (Yanow, 2000, p. 64). This understanding grounds the researcher's interpretations of the meanings made by others, as "the intentional effort to understand what it means to another entails a projective imagining that draws on the researcher's own experience of the space" (Yanow, 2014, p. 371). The Korimako

School case explored in this article is concerned with parental engagement, and access into a school is one of the first opportunities for the built environment to impact parents and their engagement. For my first approach to Korimako School, I drew on experiences as a parent, former teacher, and board of trustee's member (all at other schools); I have a broad knowledge of New Zealand schools. What follows is drawn from my notes about my first visit to Korimako School via the main entry.

I used a Google Maps search to direct me as I approached the school, by car, for a 2 pm appointment. I needed to search for a carpark as there were only very short-term parking options in front of the school, and cars were parked up and down surrounding streets. Feeling a bit anxious about the time impact this might have, I managed to find a park a block away on a residential street. After parking, I walked quickly back towards the school, which is distinct from its residential neighbours by its scale. There is a wide street frontage with a long weatherboard building fenced off from the street and running along much of that frontage. As I approached, I was uncertain as to where to go, so I looked for signs on where to head for the main entrance. A process of deduction led me to it. I had already passed (on the street of the school address) what I took to be a secondary entrance (due to its lack of signage and no noticeable office), so I decided it must be further along the fence line. The fence ran behind a long wooden building with high windows and only one door (onto a fenced-in deck). On reaching the end of the fence, I saw a letterbox and a ramp entrance to a set of doors. I still hadn't seen any signage for the school but noticed a small 'office' sign tucked above an adjacent window. I entered through the doors into a hallway of sorts with class photos and some student work on one wall. On the other wall was a partly-frosted internal window that incorporated the first sign I had seen with the school logo, and on rounding the corner, I found the main office desk and sign-in book.

This experience of uncertainty and searching for the entrance prompted me to consider more critically how built space impacts parental engagement. Although researchers are themselves "instruments" in interpretive methods research, their "interpretations are always provisional" (Yanow, 2014, p. 372), and in this research on

built space, the meanings I read from Korimako School cannot be assumed the same for others.

Authored stories—conveyed by spatial elements

What stories are conveyed through the spatial elements of built space? Following Yanow (2014), I use the term 'built space' rather than 'buildings' to signify that the space around buildings and other structures is not neutral and forms part of the story being told. This terminology also emphasises the human role in creating them (p. 370). The human role is in 'authoring'—through the design, development, mandating, or assembly of the various spatial elements—the 'stories' which built space tells. These stories are 'read' (by passers-by and users). This terminology demonstrates the type of shorthand Yanow's (2014) approach uses, for example, 'built space tells a story' represents "the buildings comprise of elements that their designers intended to use to convey…," and 'users read' represents "users and passersby interpret these spatial elements to mean…" (p. 383).

This section presents the spatial elements chosen by the designers and occupiers of the school; and analyses the stories, "values, beliefs and/or feelings" (Yanow, 2014, p. 371) they represent. I identify occupiers as the board of trustees and staff who inhabit the school and now add to or change the stories authored in the original development of the built space. These stories are then examined concerning the aims and intentions expressed in relevant policy and other documents and contrasted—in the following section—with the differentiated readings of the built space by school staff and parents.

Korimako School campus was established at its urban site in the 1940s. It is located near business districts and serves a culturally and economically diverse community. It currently features a mix of early-to-mid twentieth-century buildings and newer classrooms from later in the 1900s to this century. The campus also includes a school field, playgrounds, mature trees and numerous gardens. School campus development reflects the era and beliefs operating at the time. Following government policy of an 'open-air principle' for classroom design from the 1930s (Kellaway, 1981, p. 189), the core Korimako School classrooms were built as open-air pavilion-style rooms in what was termed a 'linear design' (pp. 163, 191) or 'open air veranda blocks' (MoE, 2013a), consistent with the example from another school shown in *Figure 7*. As

per guidelines, these were oriented north for light and air (Kellaway, 1981, p. 163).

Including central administration housing, the linear blocks were "very formal, [and]

impressive" (p. 191). Despite the addition of many other buildings to the school

landscape, the original linear block at Korimako remains an impressive and dominating

feature. This building tells a story of similarity in that the building style and materials

align with the behaviours sought (Yanow, 1995, p. 417): an early twentieth-century

sensibility of formality, order and deference to authority, combined with a growing

desire for improved health and connection to the outdoors is evident in the building.

Figure 7

Linear / open-air veranda block: Sydenham School: George Penlington / David Hutton

Note. Source Penlington (n.d.)

The majority of the other buildings, including those built in the last ten years,

represent a variety of single-cell classroom designs some of which attend to modern

requirements for light and ventilation. These typically include decks and verandahs for

shelter and school bag storage. This style of "modularised cost-effective" classrooms

tell stories consistent with the industrial era and frequently characterise an

"authoritarian and transmissive" approach to education (Alterator & Deed, 2013, p.

315)—something Nair and Fielding (2005, p. 17) referred to as a "cells-and-bells"

approach to education. Within single-cell classrooms, the layout of doors, windows,

and fixed surfaces (including whiteboards, display surfaces, and floorcoverings), often

limits movement and furniture placement. The classrooms are occupied in a semi-

organised way by year level teams (e.g., Junior Team years 0-2), although this is not

consistent across the school. The classrooms feature room numbers (typically on the

door to the classroom) but are not always in numerical order. There is no school map on the school grounds (or website).

A story of valuing history, the environment and te ao Māori (the Māori world) can also be read from the built spaces at Korimako. These values can be read from the historical-cultural (celebrating past events and people relevant to the school) and environmental projects (outdoor classroom, gardens) visible in the school grounds and promoted to the school community. It can also be read from the displays in the administration foyer—an artwork created to celebrate the school's heritage using materials from an old school building and a prominent Māori weaving. Being able to read and identify with the values of the school and, even better, see themselves represented through artefacts are ways in which a sense of welcome for parents is enhanced, thus helping to create "a sense of place and engagement for parents" (Pushor, 2007, p. 6).

The stories authored by the designers of these spaces can be supported or countered by documents and other policies. Korimako School promotes an 'open-door policy' to parents (Smith, 2021), while current government policy objectives focus on learner-centred education that draws on the support and partnership of parents and whānau (MoE, 2007, 2019a). The school property strategy 2030 (MoE, 2020f) supports those objectives; however, schools live with 'the ghosts of architects' (Meighan & Harber, 2007), and the buildings at Korimako have not been designed to welcome the participation of parents in the way currently envisaged for them. For example, classrooms do not cater to parents' presence as observers or participants through the furniture size and placement, and the overall space for additional adults. McGregor (2004) states that the long-lived nature and form of structures like classrooms "reflects and affects the persistence of certain forms of pedagogic or classroom practice, where (power) relations are inscribed and embodied in the material" (p. 355). In another example, signage and organisation of classrooms are confusing and underdeveloped, creating barriers for parents' movement within the school (see Navigating space—wayfinding). These factors do not create an environment that welcomes parents, making them feel relaxed or valued as partners in education. This story being read from the built space contradicts the policy stories of the government and the school.

Reading spatial elements

The presentation and analysis of the stories authored through the spatial elements of the previous section provide the context for the readings contained in this section. Readings of built space are personal due to the experiences, values and cultural capital users bring to their reading. Murray et al. (2015) found several aspects of cultural capital to influence parental involvement, which are equally relevant to the reading of built space. They include parents' level of education and their cultural background (language and ethnicity). Multiple readings also occur because users physically experience space differently, which is a critical element of their meaning-making (Murray et al., 2015; Yanow, 2014). User readings are understood through "physical-kinesthetic means: feeling on and through our bodies the mass and scale and ambient environment" (Yanow, 2014, p. 376).

This section presents and analyses some of the diverse readings taken of Korimako School under sub-headings. However, I begin with an illustration of the differentiated readings of parents as users of school space by introducing two parents, Michelle and Paula, with their mental maps. While I have provided a brief contextual biography of each parent, I have not attempted to analyse the experiences or demographic factors that have made their readings distinct. Instead, their mental maps demonstrate, as per the article's focus, how spatial elements can be read as telling different stories.

Michelle is a parent with two children at Korimako School; she is also a parent-teacher association (PTA) member and administers the school Facebook page. She has been involved with the school for approximately four years, and her children are in classes within the junior and middle schools. Michelle displayed immediate recognition and confidence when a school map was presented to her, noting some room number changes. She was articulate and thorough when asked to map out her movements and experiences as a parent on the school campus. Michelle's map (**Figure 8**) demonstrates the high level of comfort and familiarity she has with the built space while also showing how active she is across the school grounds in her role as Facebook administrator and PTA member.

Figure 8

Michelle's school map
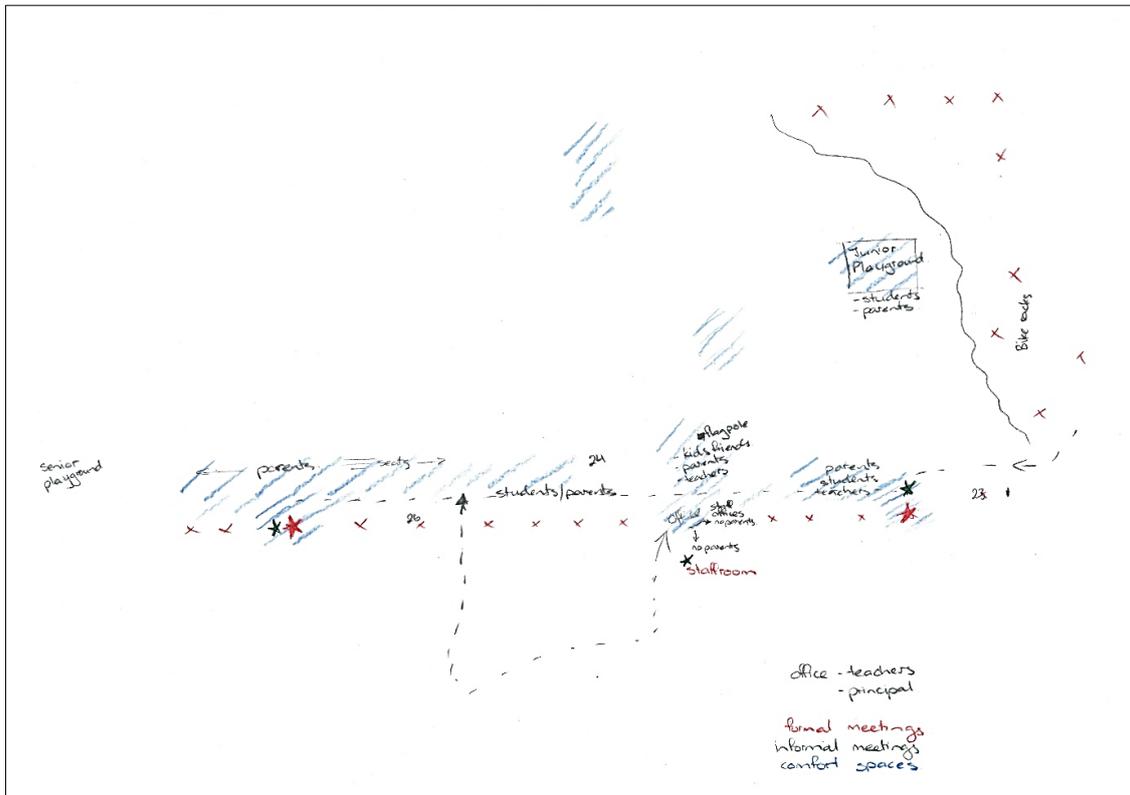

Paula is a parent with one child at Korimako School and has been connected to the school as a parent for approximately five years. Her child is in a senior year level class. Paula works shift hours, so she is not always available to come to the school. As the map (*Figure 9*) shows, Paula makes limited movements around the school, typically coming and going from the same access point.

Figure 9

Paula's school map
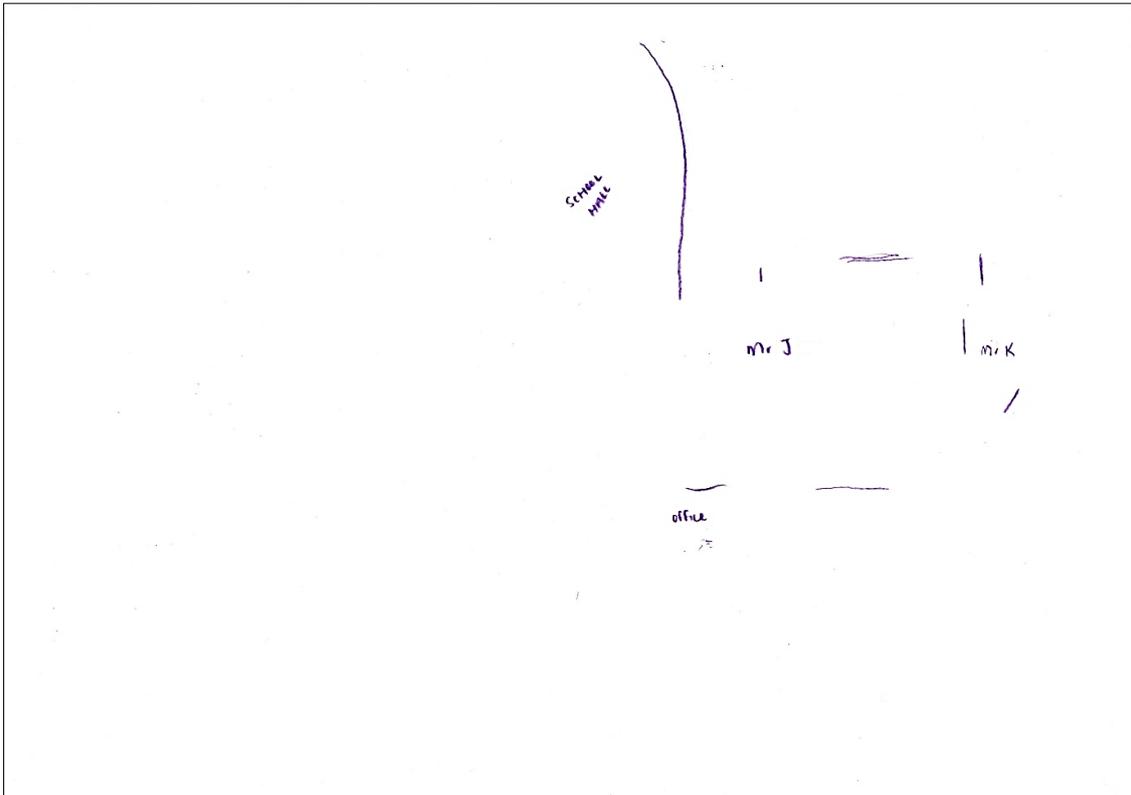
Welcoming spaces? An open-door policy

According to Piro (2008), school architecture often needs to strike a balance between different needs. Concerning parents, the balance may need to be struck between engaging with parents (e.g., open-door policy) and managing their time and activities within the school and with teachers (e.g., 'signing in', perimeter fencing). This presents an increasing challenge in creating a welcoming environment for parents and illustrates the further potential for different stories to be read from the built space.

Some Korimako users read an 'open-door' story; this story aligns with one of the strongest aspects of the policy narrative of the school (see Authored stories—conveyed by spatial elements). Teachers generally thought there was either no or positive impact from the built space on its enactment:

Sam: I like to think that parents do feel they can come in… we do have the rooms with the big open doors that can slide open… I kind of feel like it's quite welcoming and doesn't really restrict parental engagement as such.

Greg: It's pretty open, so it's pretty easy to find your way around, isn't it? Sort of one long building in a kind of an L over here and then nothing else.

The openness of the playground and the folding glass doors are read and analysed in relation to proxemics, the relationship between, and orientation of, parts of built space (Yanow, 2014, p. 379). The openness of the playground forms the spatial surrounds of the classrooms and can invite parents to congregate or move freely across. This openness can contribute to a sense of comfort as, for example, their 'personal space' (the physical space around a person that they consider 'theirs' for comfort and safety) can be maintained (Hall, 1966).

Many parents also read this from the built space—after their initial reading had been 'tempered' by other experiences which layered different meanings. For example, Michelle, Samuel, and Chhavi all thought the built space of Korimako was open and welcoming; however, they also spend lots of time at school active in a variety of ways. Chhavi reflected when she first came to school that finding her way and knowing where she was 'allowed' to be "was a bit funny…a bit awkward", but now, due to her time spent there and positive interactions with individual staff members, she felt very comfortable. This adjustment can be compared to how initial negative impressions of people can be moderated by their behaviour and additional information we receive about them—if we stay long enough to receive that information. This alignment of readings between parents, staff and the 'open door' policy story assumes two things. First, parents will have the cultural capital and interest to stay beyond any initial negative impressions, and second, there are counter, positive stories being authored and read (this particularly concerns how teachers can 'act on built spaces' constructing different stories (Yanow, 2014, p. 373)—see Agency). Counter stories might come from, for example, orientation for new parents that welcomes them to the school and helps develop a sense of place (see Pushor, 2007), or individual teacher efforts to seek out and value the contributions of parents in their class.

A story that contrasts to one of welcome was read by some staff who saw barriers to parental engagement in the built space. They identified a lack of appropriate space for parents acting as partners in education, both collectively and individually:

Ben: The nicest space we've got here in our school is our library and, you know, that's where we have things like [group parent meetings]… [But] you don't sit in there and think, "Oh, this is a nice, comfy chair. I can relax." You sit in there and think, "Oh, yeah. I'm in a kid's library." So… you're not going to just really settle in and then be like, "Okay, sweet. Let's flow. Let's talk" You know, that's just not [set up for parents].

Bridget: I have… had that happen where [parents] want, need, to speak quietly, so I've either tried to see if there's a room next door that we can use, or I've even gone down to the toilets with the parent… [or to] the cloak bay area or I've gone to see if the office is available… so even though we're pretty big …every room's sort of taken.

A welcoming entrance is one of the key built features of a school and it can support parents (and the wider community) in their engagement (Nair et al., 2013). As described earlier, my experience of visiting the school and looking for the main entrance read a story at odds with a welcoming entrance. It is missing the design elements (e.g. a covered entry, a broad open expanse, contrasting colours or materials) that make it distinct from the surrounding built space. The main entrance is examined further under Navigating space—wayfinding.

Borders, barriers, and boundaries

The built space of a school is defined by borders that direct the movement of parents and other users within. Borders can be physical, such as walls, fences, or signs (Steele, 1973, p. 9) or socio-cultural and an expression of norms, rules, and relationships. They are an aspect of the proxemic analysis of spatial surrounds and encourage or dissuade certain activities (Yanow, 2014, p. 379). The mental maps developed by parent participants showed their borders for movement within the school varied considerably (as illustrated by the maps of Michelle and Paula). Their borders depended on the classrooms they accessed for their child(ren), their entry point into the school, the reasons they had spent time in the school and the subject position they identified with. For example, those involved in the parent teacher association or school board and other activities indicated less extensive boundaries than those who had not. What is important here is not their involvement in overt and visible activities of parental engagement, rather their level of comfort and confidence

within the built space as a facet of ease in the school environment and the 'system of education.' Lynch (1960) describes how our movement through an environment allows us to be a part of it, and it improves our knowledge of it, allowing "more power and agency" to be drawn from it (Symonds et al., 2017, p. 10). This familiarity with an element of the 'language of schooling' may enable greater overall participation in the more critical parental engagement activities.

The parent, Paula, described a socially-derived border for her movements in the school that developed as her daughter had become more independent. Asked if she comes to her daughter's classroom ('Mr K' on map: *Figure 9*), she responds

> Oh, not usually, just 'cause she's like, 'No, you can just leave me [here] because my friends are here.'… You've got your boundary, 'Okay, I'll just stop here. I know where your class is.'

This border meant the classroom was a place she no longer visited as often and is an example of "a sociological fact… [expressed] in spatial form" (Evans, 1974, p. 27). Evans (1974) goes on to say, "where the line is drawn at a given moment reveals the character of the relationship" (p. 27). Boundaries for parents are representations of the relationship between the school (and teachers) and parents, and parents and their child. These will vary between parents as a collective and as individuals. As a collective, common parent subjectivities will help define the boundaries; for example, the border for 'parents as problems' will differ from 'parents as partners' (Smith, 2020).

One significant reading of Korimako was the difficulty of access due to the proximity and relationship of the main entrance to the surrounding streets. As I read on my first visit to the school, it is in close proximity to residential streets crowded with parked cars. Restricted 15-minute parking is available in front of the school. Teachers and parents also read that the crowded streets with limited parking are barriers to parents accessing the school. Parent participants described the chaos of cars banked up on the streets at drop-off and pick-up times, which had also led to tense altercations. Samuel stated it was "it's absolutely ludicrous coming through that" to get a child to or from school. Several teachers felt that this was a barrier to their engagement with parents, as it meant parents were often not coming into the school:

Joanne: [There is] difficulty in getting into school in the afternoons or mornings, with parking [and] traffic. As a parent, if you're in a hurry to get to work, you are going to stop and let your child out and "bye-bye." And I think that [has] stopped a lot of that engagement...

Once parents stop coming into the school, teachers (particularly those teaching Years 0-4) felt it limited their opportunities to develop the rapport necessary to build effective working relationships.

Navigating space—wayfinding

Wayfinding is concerned with how users read built space for navigation. Individuals find their way through spaces by processing external 'sensory cues' (e.g., paths, colour schemes, gardens) available to them (Iftikhar et al., 2020). These sensory cues are particularly related to décor and proxemics (Yanow, 2014). Considering the main school entrance, for example, signage and the spatial relationship read between the entrance and the adjacent built space are design elements that impact whether visitors are encouraged or discouraged in their approach to the school.

As noted previously, entrances are critical elements of the school environment for welcoming parents and supporting their involvement with the school (Nair et al., 2013). To signify the main entrance, for example, a visitor might expect to see architecture indicative of an entrance—a clear or large opening and path, such as a tomokanga (carved gateway entrance) or a colour scheme to highlight it from the surrounding building(s)—and signage in a place and style relevant for the typical users. The main entrance at Korimako School (as described earlier) was not distinctive as the main entrance. It was indicated as an entrance through elements such as a letterbox, a pathway to/from the footpath and letterbox, and numerous small signs (e.g., office and various security-related). However, the positioning and nature of these signs and the recessed, somewhat narrow approach into the building are read as more indicative of a staff entrance than one for visitors and parents. Following Hall's (1966) concept of proxemics, the relationship between these spatial features combines with the multi-sensory perceptions of users (of the built space and their personal space) to discourage approach to this entrance.

Once in the school, parents generally indicated that they were confident in finding their way around for their purposes. However, out-of-sequence classroom numbering could still confuse them just as it had initially. Recalling how they visited the school to find her child's first classroom, Michelle said, "We spent *forever* looking for this—*and* it's labelled on the door [but the door is out of direct sight] …It was quite confusing." Paula found the out-of-order classroom numbering was sometimes still an issue, "I think that's why I always get confused, 'cause it's like, 'Where is that room again?'." Experiencing even momentary and minor uncertainty (or *geographic disorientation*) can generate feelings of anxiety and frustration and may lead to delay (Montello & Sas, 2006, p. 2004). According to the teacher, Joanne, parental engagement is already hampered by time constraints and parking frustrations, so any increased anxiety experienced through navigating the school space itself presents a further barrier. Signage is an easily added element of wayfinding that is especially useful when "other design elements are inadequate" (Higgins et al., 2005, p. 33). For example, signs could help direct movement when the layout and proxemics of the built space would otherwise prohibit or confuse.

Agency

While users (in a passive-reactive role) are shaped by space, they also have agency (in an active role) to act "on built spaces, modifying them, rejecting their intended uses, and so forth" (Yanow, 2014, p. 373). Historically, teachers have had little active participation in developing physical school spaces, particularly beyond the classroom. Teacher agency is diminished where "top-down, scripted" policy implementation occurs (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018, p. 186). This top-down, scripted approach effectively describes how the built environments of many schools have historically developed. In research concerning the influence of teachers on classroom environments, Martin (2002) described awareness as a precursor to action, but that habitual ways of thinking block what teachers perceive to be possible. Making changes may require greater knowledge of the impact of the environment (e.g., environmental competence, see Steele (1973)) and reflexive practice (e.g., on the purpose of parental engagement and the role of built space in that—see the *school environment scan* suggested by Pushor and Amendt (2018)).

As has been observed elsewhere (Martin, 2002), staff at Korimako School tend not to see themselves as authors with agency to address space outside of their classrooms—viewing it as largely immutable "hard architecture" (p. 152). In talking about the built space of the school, one teacher stated, "well, there's not much we can do about it." This view does not acknowledge the design elements (see Yanow's (2014) categories under Built space) staff (and boards of trustees) *can* act on or redefine. Despite this view, there are examples of agency being employed at Korimako. For example, the teacher Bridget actively redefined spaces to fit her needs for a quiet space to meet with a parent. There is also evidence of the use of décor (e.g., welcome signs on classroom doors and meaningful artworks in the office) and proxemics (e.g., the open space of the junior playground and siting of some outdoor seating) to communicate a welcome to parents. One key demonstration of teacher authorship is through classroom displays. While much of this presentation centres on displays of student work demonstrating the value and recognition of students, it is also something students and parents enjoy together. These displays can be read as welcoming to parents (Maxwell, 2000). These stories challenge and contrast those read off other design vocabularies and gestures (e.g., the unwelcoming entrance, the size and height of the linear classroom building representing authority and grandeur).

The staff and principal perceived parents as having agency and resilience when navigating the school built space and what it required of them. Perimeter fences and increased security are increasingly closing off schools from their communities to mitigate damage and reduce through traffic (Collins, 2019). However, the principal thought Korimako parents had adapted well when discussing the impact of new perimeter fencing and the need to 'sign in' as a visitor to the school grounds.

> *Peter:* parents have received it pretty well. The fact that they've got to come and sign in when they come to the school—which is pretty standard these days… it's working well. We thought we might have to have someone in the Office... like the senior students, to take people over… but we didn't need it. Parents just come in and don't mind signing [in]…

Collectively the parents' interviews and mental maps demonstrated that they could navigate the school environment. Despite initial difficulties finding the office or the classroom they needed, they approached children or staff to overcome this. These

participants do not capture those parents who may have stopped coming into the school due to increased security measures; it is an area for further research.

Discussion and conclusion

The built spaces we inhabit day-to-day tend to recede into the background, where we cease to pay particular attention (Yanow, 2014). Our attention shifts as we become familiar with a space and experience it differently. For example, first-time users (e.g., researcher; the parent Michelle) may notice signage and other wayfinding cues much more than someone who has used the space every day for many weeks, months, and years (some teachers and parents). Further, a space that communicates as unwelcoming may not continue to overtly register that way as we become accustomed to it or as other experiences dilute that meaning. This means familiar users of a space have to work harder to recognise the potentially differing readings of the built space made by other users. The implications for parental engagement are that school staff and boards of trustees may need to make conscious efforts to recognise the impact of built space on parents and their interactions with teachers (e.g., see Pushor & Amedt's (2018), built environment scan).

In addition, the meaning of built space, "our comprehension of and response to," is "tacit knowledge," which is difficult to articulate (Yanow, 2014, p. 369). Both parents and teachers are subject to positions constructed by practices of power through institutions such as 'the school.' For parents, these subjectivities inform their expectations as to their place within the school (for more on parent subject positions, see Smith, 2020). Teachers, too, are subjects "encultured into a community of practice that is entrenched and both difficult to recognize and challenge" (Woolner et al., 2012). In practice, these subject positions can reduce the agency of the user who may not perceive they can change or influence built space.

In the taken-for-granted spaces that form our schools, staff and some parents operate with a tacit understanding of how to make sense of or move around when applying the deceptively simple concept of parental engagement. This article has considered built space a material aspect of context whose impacts are understated in policy enactment. The case of Korimako School has revealed how built space can enable and constrain parental engagement and the multiple stories read through embodied and person-specific meaning-making. The buildings can be read in keeping

with intentions (e.g., open-door, parents are welcome), but this is most likely to occur by those who already share the values and beliefs espoused (Yanow, 1995, p. 415). Parents may 'correctly' interpret the intended 'message', may act on it, ignore it, or read it differently. For example, they may instead read a contrasting story of formality and deference to authority from the original linear block. Then, combined with the lack of space for parents to observe, participate or 'be,' and the underdeveloped wayfinding, read a story of parents as peripheral to schooling.

The article has further revealed contextual constraints that teachers have (some) agency in addressing where time and resources allow. It offers an interpretation that steps back from the 'taken for granted' understandings of those school-based policy actors, who can get 'caught in context' and become inattentive to the impact of built space and assumptions made about parents. Pushor's (2007, pp. 8-10) conceptualisation of school staff as 'guest hosts' offers a way to consider the built space as an element of parental engagement.

> A re-positioning of educators and staff as guests in a community is needed in order to interrupt… [the] common story of educators as owners and to create a new story in which parents are welcomed into schools… [which] means that staff members open the door to the school as hosts who recognize they are simultaneously guests… being guests means educators look inwards at their own beliefs and practices and ask themselves, "What is it we need to do to cause more parents to feel welcomed? What is it we are doing that may be keeping some parents away?"

These insights between the built space context, policy, and action, may be helpful to teachers as they engage with their parent community. The spatial focus of this study offers a novel way of thinking about parents' experiences and needs in primary education, thus extending the scholarly work on parental engagement and spatialising education.

9 Exploring parental engagement in digital spaces

"…having Seesaw for two terms, I've had more feedback and

response from [parents through] that than what I've had from 13

years of writing school reports."

Sarah, teacher participant

The second contextual factor attracting my attention as influencing the enactment of parental engagement was the virtual space created by digital technologies. During the fieldwork, I attended a couple of meetings about reporting to parents. In the course of the round-table discussions at these meetings, I heard about the Seesaw app that the school had just started using. The parents expressed their keenness for what they felt Seesaw offered them; it was an enthusiasm that interview participants also later described. As a result, I applied for ethics approval for further interviews to specifically explore the use of Seesaw with three parents and three teachers.

The use of digital technologies are ubiquitous in our everyday lives (Kemp, 2021). For parents with contemporary pressures like the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis (Gabel, 2022), traditional modes of physical, at-school-based engagement have been increasingly threatened. In this context, it is understandable that new digital technologies offering new ways of undertaking a variety of parental tasks, responsibilities, and interests in the education sector are being developed. The use of these technologies (known as EdTech) has increased significantly (Escueta et al., 2017; OECD, 2018), and digital devices in the classroom have become one of the most important changes to education this century (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). Combined, these factors make the potential of digital technologies for parental engagement particularly interesting by offering new opportunities to connect with parents online, where they "live" (Gustafson, 2018).

Given the widespread and rapid switch to e-learning (or online-learning) during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is heightened interest in both the potential and problems of EdTech (e.g., Grimaldi & Ball, 2020; Selwyn et al., 2020; Sutcliffe, 2021). At a pragmatic level it is easy to understand the appeal of technology, but this must be

held in tension with questions about its effectiveness for delivering appropriate outcomes. The research concerning devices and e-learning suggests their use and impact is not clear-cut, and an evidence-based approach to their implementation is required (Sutcliffe, 2021, p. 2). Other concerns include the role of private actors in EdTech education (e.g., Williamson, 2018; Wright & Peters, 2017), and increased surveillance and performativity (e.g., Manolev et al., 2018; Nemorin, 2017).

There has been little research into the use of technology where it concerns parental engagement. In the following article, I provide one case study on how it is being used and the impact it is having on existing parental engagement practices, and future research might also examine the implications of the use of EdTech for parental engagement as it relates to e-learning. This analysis of virtual space offers a counterpoint to the built space focus of the previous article while still expanding understanding of material context in policy enactment. As noted previously, the material context can enable or constrain policy enactment as it forms the environment within which sense-making and practice occurs. During the literature review process, it took some time to find Harrison's (2018) framework for the spatial analysis of digital learning spaces, as it is not an approach widely used in educational research. However, once adapted, the framework offered a straightforward way to critically examine *how* a digital platform like Seesaw might alter parental engagement practice. I again drew on the teacher and parent participant interview transcripts, particularly the six that focused explicitly on Seesaw. Other material analysed included school documents and various policy documents. This article responds to the research question:

- What potential do digital spaces and technologies offer for parental engagement?

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Virtual connections for parental engagement: What do digital spaces offer?

Abstract

This article examines the potential of digital technologies for parental engagement by focusing on the popular e-portfolio app Seesaw and drawing on Harrison's (2018) analytical framework for the spatial analysis of learning spaces. It is based on observations in a single case study school, and focuses on how the Seesaw platform transforms ordinary routines of parental engagement and how teachers and parents make sense of and negotiate these transformations. The analysis draws on data from semi-structured interviews (*n*=6), specifically on the use and experience of Seesaw of three teachers and three parents (one from each class). These were supplemented with transcripts from semi-structured interviews (*n*=21) of staff and parents from a broader study on parental engagement. Findings show there are opportunities for teachers using the Seesaw app to enhance communication between school and home, increase and sustain parent-child learning conversations, and support parent-teacher partnerships for learning. The article concludes, however, that without a clear purpose following principles of parental engagement and supportive training and guidance, schools risk a replication and perpetuation of well-established parent subjectivities, where schools retain agency and parental engagement in learning is not maximised.

Introduction

Education policy in many countries highlights the value of parental engagement and the importance of educational partnerships between teachers and parents (e.g, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018; Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017b; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Research has indicated that engaging parents in their children's education is beneficial for

educational outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2005). The parent-teacher relationship has typically been envisaged in the physical—on the school campus and using face-to-face and newsletter communication. Following developments in telecommunications and digital technologies (including platforms and apps), new virtual spaces provide additional relational spaces. To date, there has been little in the way of spatial analysis on the merits of these for enhancing parental engagement.

This article suggests the Seesaw space offers opportunities to enhance communication between school and home, increase and sustain parent-child learning conversations, and support parent-teacher partnerships for learning. For these benefits to be realised, I conclude, schools and teachers must determine a clear purpose (following principles of parental engagement) for efforts in this digital space and work with students and their parents. Without this, there is a risk of replicating and perpetuating problematic parent subjectivities, where schools retain agency (and power) within the home-school relationship and parental engagement in learning is not maximised. The article begins by introducing the scholarship on parental engagement and education technologies, and presents an overview of the Seesaw app through the lens of spatial analysis. The following section presents the case for a spatial perspective to digital spaces, and the research method. The spatial analysis is then organised under the three main headings of the analytical framework, and the article finishes with discussion and conclusions.

Parental engagement

Early research into parental engagement can be traced to Epstein's model of participation which described it as something that occurs largely within the school environment and at the direction of the school (Epstein & Becker, 1982). More recently, scholars have distinguished between 'involvement' and 'engagement' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), and the way engagement has potential to contribute to student achievement through parental expectations and communication about learning (e.g., see Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2010). Parents, however, are not always positioned in ways that recognise or value that potential. Contemporary conceptualisations of parental engagement positions parents as consumers or governors, as well as traditional notions of supporters and co-

operative receivers (Smith, 2020). For schools, parents who do not fit a narrowly prescribed role or subject position—that typically features overt actions and particular ways of communicating—can be labelled "hard to reach" (Crozier & Davies, 2007). And, for some parents, teachers and schools can seem inaccessible due to how they are structured, their built space (Smith, 2022), or 'otherness' in terms of values, ethnicity, and expectations (frequently of a white, middle-class nature (Crozier & Davies, 2007)).

Parents who do not start with the same resources or cultural capital for engagement are at a disadvantage and may experience less "effective communication and mutual understanding" with teachers (Marschall & Shah, 2020, p. 703). This hampers the creation of successful educational partnerships of which "timely two-way communication" is seen as a key feature (Bull et al., 2008). In addition, while many parents often come into the school when their child is young, that naturally decreases as the child gains independence. Digital spaces and technologies open up opportunities to overcome and address some of these barriers through social media apps (Baxter & Toe, 2021) and digital platforms, diversifying communication by going "to families in the online spaces where they "live" (Gustafson, 2018, pp. 27-28) and allowing for more frequent and personalised communication (Kraft, 2017) of learning progress (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017).

EdTech (educational technologies) and parental engagement

Digital technologies and the spaces they create have become ubiquitous part of everyday, with 66.6% of the global population being mobile phone users, 59.5% internet users, and 53.6% social media users (Kemp, 2021). Unsurprisingly, these technologies are used for numerous purposes within education, including communication (Gustafson, 2018), enhancing teaching and learning (Comi et al., 2017), behaviour management (Manolev et al., 2018), distance learning (Ames et al., 2021), e-portfolios (Besse, 2017), and parental engagement (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Lewin & Luckin, 2010). However, while digital technologies are used throughout the sector, they do not necessarily alter underlying processes or existing imperatives (Selwyn, 2011). Issues of digital inequalities have long been a concern, but beyond the matter of access, the focus has shifted to the differential nature and use of technology both inside the school and the home (Comi et al., 2017; Crang et al., 2006).

Communication is a fundamental aspect of many EdTech developments concerning parents. Not only is regular information sharing (from school to parent) a crucial first step in establishing successful parent-teacher partnerships, but some schools are using technologies to try and reach greater numbers of parents, particularly those who do not, or cannot, come to the school campus (Bull et al., 2008, p. 9). EdTech developments include the growing use of mobile and digital modes of direct communication between schools, teachers and parents (Kraft, 2017), for example, through posts and direct messaging via social media, emails, and text messaging (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Gustafson, 2018; Thompson et al., 2015). Learning and behaviour management systems also allow direct communication with parents (Laho, 2019). Some EdTech platforms also offer translation functions (e.g. ClassDojo), providing new opportunities to reach parents who speak another language. These technologies expand options for reaching parents beyond the built school space while also removing the need for human intermediaries (e.g., children taking printed documents home).

Beyond the need to communicate with parents about administrative matters and general school information, communication occurs to engage parents in the education of their child. Jeynes (2010) described communication between parent and child about school as a critical aspect of effective parental engagement; technology offers direct, real-time communication to parents of what occurs in the classroom. The information provided in this type of communication can form the basis of richer conversations between parent and child (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017), particularly when the child can make decisions about the content shared (McLeod & Vasinda, 2009). This communication can occur informally (e.g., using Instagram, see Hutchison et al., 2020, p. 175) or more formally through e-portfolios.

E-portfolios are perhaps among the most familiar applications for digital technologies in education (see for example Seesaw, https://web.seesaw.me/). Established in early childhood education (ECE), they are now increasingly utilised in primary schooling (McLeod & Vasinda, 2009). E-portfolios are typically digital versions of learning stories or journals, an important form of ECE assessment documentation (Beaumont-Bates, 2017). There can be multiple purposes for using e-portfolios, but they centre on documenting and reflecting on learning and sharing learning with key

others (e.g., parents) (Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.-a). They offer that 'real-time' window into what is occurring in class, providing an enriched basis for conversations about learning between child-teacher-parent (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017). Children often make decisions about the contributions to their stories which include "descriptions of [their] learning activities, dispositions, actions, and working theories, and [may] include a teacher commentary about possible next steps for learning" (Cowie & Mitchell, 2015, p. 126).

Risks, issues, and concerns

As researchers like Mariën and Prodnik (2014) have indicated, despite the rhetoric of openness, empowerment, and inclusion equated with digital spaces and EdTech, there are associated limitations, risks, and barriers. Notwithstanding steadily improving access to the internet and devices, the digital divide still features as a barrier to some households (Hébert et al., 2020), which has been exposed further during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., from New Zealand, see Digital.govt.nz, 2021; Education Review Office, 2020). Digital inclusion issues are social by nature (Bonne & Stevens, 2017; Mariën & Prodnik, 2014), and the 'new' digital divide, centred on the use and possibility of beneficial outcomes rather than access (Crang et al., 2006; Ragnedda et al., 2019), highlights further advantages the wealthy can leverage (Hébert et al., 2020; Huang & Lin, 2019).

Digital spaces are not always safe, and some technologies have created new avenues for perpetrators of family violence, for example, to monitor and harass (Bogle, 2018). Further ethical concerns exist, such as the positioning of students as subjects (Lindgren, 2012), the surveillance of students (Manolev et al., 2018), and potentially parents and teachers. Security of private data is also a concern, as is the control and use of data collected (Singer, 2014).

Finally, the market imperative of EdTech generates concerns about the role of private enterprise in schooling (Wright & Peters, 2017) and the platformisation of education, whereby "EdTech providers and technologies are key cultural, political, policy and economic players" (Grimaldi & Ball, 2020, p. 2).

About Seesaw

The Ed-tech platform used in the case school was Seesaw Learning, Inc., a private, San Francisco-based company. Growing out of a prior app (Shadow Puppet, released 2012) created by the co-founders, the idea for Seesaw (released 2015) responded to the way teachers were using the multi-media tools Shadow Puppet provided with their students (Clifford, 2020; Lagorio-Chafkin, 2020). Seesaw co-founders reported that the company would be profitable in 2020 (Clifford, 2020).

Seesaw is an app-based programme that began as a digital learning portfolio for students whose aims included

- empowering students to take ownership of their learning and to reflect on their progress over time

- inspiring students to try their best by providing an audience for their work beyond the classroom

- supporting … educators [and]

- creating a meaningful home-school connection so families can better support their child's learning (Seesaw, 2018, November 12)

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the app has evolved into a broad-based learning platform as teachers used it to manage remote learning—this saw the number of Seesaw's paid customers triple and a tenfold increase in student posts (Clifford, 2020). Seesaw is now used in 150 countries worldwide and is in 75 percent of schools in the United States (Albertson, 2021). There are different levels of access, a free version for students, teachers, and parents; Seesaw Plus (individual teacher subscription); and Seesaw for Schools (school/district-wide subscription) (Seesaw, 2021a). The Seesaw Class app is used in the classroom by teachers and students, where teachers can also manage interactions by all other users (students and parents). The Class app is free to download and use on the basic plan and has high functionality with all the Seesaw basic classroom level functions. Additional plans expand the functions available, particularly across school(s) (https://web.seesaw.me/seesaw-all-plans). Parents use the Seesaw Family app (free to download and use) to give them access to their child's portfolio; it has limited functionality for viewing, commenting, and messaging.

More than just replacing traditional communication achieved through email or paper-based modes, Seesaw, as a digital portfolio, has designed a space for a conversation about student learning between student, teacher and parent. With push notifications for when their child (or the teacher) posts on the private online platform, parents do not need to seek out contact but are notified directly. They can access the post via their phone, tablet or computer. The user interface mimics familiar social media platforms and allows similar responses, such as 'likes' and comments. For parents, Seesaw posts offer real-time insight into the classroom and what their child is working on; this provides better learning-based conversation starters for when the child gets home. Potentially, what a child undertakes at school "is more blended into their family life, …[where] a photo of their swirly flower art project, done at a desk miles from home, also gets a view on Daddy's phone and sparks a conversation over spaghetti that night" (Lagorio-Chafkin, 2020, para.15). There are limited studies on the application of Seesaw. Examples include Moorhouse and Beaumont (2019), who examined its use for involving parents in their child's language learning; Baxter and Toe (2021), where Seesaw was one of three social media platforms used for family engagement; and, finally, Kurnava and Sellhorn (2018) who investigated its effectiveness for delivering parent education for parental engagement.

Bringing a spatial perspective to the digital world

Virtual space generated by digital technologies offers the potential to overcome some of the traditional constraints to parental engagement. The new technologies have created new spaces that have potential to overlap and complement traditional spaces for parental engagement (Grant, 2011; Harrison, 2018). As it is, schools were not typically designed to facilitate parental engagement and enact teacher-parent partnerships (Smith, 2022).

However, like built, virtual space is neither 'empty' nor neutral; it is a product of the interaction between technological design and the user, both of which are informed by assumptions on purpose and practice. Space is "produced" and "rendered meaningful" by socialised practices (teaching, filming, taking photos, posting, commenting) which take place in material environments (networks, devices, classrooms, and home and work spaces) (Kuntz & Berger, 2011, pp. 245-246). The productive nature of digital technologies structuring "social activity" through the

coding and algorithmic processes of the designers highlights one aspect of how virtual

spaces are an interplay between technology, humans and social relations (Williamson,

2012, para. 6-7). This interplay is reiterated in the presentation of digital spaces as

"fluid sociomaterial assemblages" the product of "people and things—both online and

offline" (Thompson, 2014, p. 542), and as such, shaping and being shaped by diverse

groups and individuals.

The scholarship has found that simplistic spatial metaphors like 'open' and

'closed' (e.g., built space is closed, virtual space is open) are problematic (Harrison,

2018). Viewing virtual spaces as open, accessible, and democratic, for example, is

simplistic and can overlook how they can create alternative kinds of exclusions and

barriers (Mariën & Prodnik, 2014; Oliver, 2015). Resisting these binaries allows

consideration of what Boys (2011) visualises as the dynamic "horizontal" relationship

between space and the activities undertaken made up "of intersecting, complex and

partially related processes." Oliver (2015, p. 373) suggests we can then consider how

boundaries to desired activities, such as parental engagement, can be overcome or are

'permeable.' This consideration must understand what kinds of openness or access is

appropriate or needed and suited for diverse users (p. 382) and how different

technologies might assist those aims. Finally, Harrison (2018) argues that the

perceptions of students, parents, and teachers "will influence how they both use and

enact their spaces over time," and therefore a more nuanced understanding of the

"relationships that happen within our designed spaces" is appropriate (p. 23).

There is potential in emerging models to adopt a more advanced analytical

framework for examining the spatial dynamic in educational contexts. Boys (2011), for

example, has articulated a framework that links "material space and its occupation as

learning" (p. 56). This framework for the analysis of "socio-spatial practices" (Boys,

2011, p. 56) is grounded in Lefebvre's (1991) *spatial triad* of spatial practices,

representations of space, and representational space. Boys (2011) articulated from this

a trio of parallel running threads that could represent the complexity, partiality, and at

times, conflicting nature of socio-spatial practices (1), within specific designed contexts

(2), and the perceptions and engagement of participants with and between them both

(3) (p. 63). Harrison (2018) has adapted Boys' (2011) model to offer a framework of

three threads that analyses how users (e.g., teachers, learners) "negotiate and enact"

digital spaces (representational) "by exploring the inherent gaps and contradictory tensions that arise between design space (representations of space), and the ordinary routines of learning (spatial practices)" (Harrison, 2018, p. 26). This framework offers a way of analysing how we conceive and perceive digital space for educational purposes and if our intentions for their use are effective.

Method

This article draws on a case study examining how parental engagement policy is enacted within primary schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ) (Smith, 2020, 2021, 2022). The study is particularly concerned with the impact of context on this enactment. It is a single bounded case, identified here as Korimako School, the case school selection being purposive given it is a relatively typical representation of a primary school in AoNZ, being English-medium, urban, co-educational, state-run, and serving a broad socio-economic community (as identified by the Ministry of Education).

Like many schools in AoNZ, and elsewhere, Korimako had been growing its use of digital spaces and EdTech for both learning and interactions with parents. The school had recently started using Seesaw, and as several teachers and parents expressed positive opinions about the app, I wanted to analyse how digital space through EdTech like Seesaw might enhance parental engagement. Three existing parent participants volunteered to undertake a semi-structured interview that focused on their experiences with Seesaw with their child (if they had more than one child, they chose one to focus on). I also conducted a semi-structured interview with that child's teacher, with each teacher working at a different teaching level within the school. The Seesaw participant groupings and their year levels are as follows: Snake (Year 2), Tiger (Year 3-4), and Mouse (Year 7-8). In addition, transcripts from semi-structured interviews with other staff and parents (*n* = 21) about parental engagement were drawn on.

Using NVivo (a qualitative analysis programme), I analysed the transcripts for relevant themes drawn from my adaptation of Harrison's (2018) framework. My framework for analysing digital learning spaces has been adapted to examine the digital space designed by Seesaw and used for parental engagement. Attention is focused firstly on existing parental engagement practices (ordinary routines); secondly,

the processes and functions of parental engagement practices as designed and organised by Seesaw (design); and thirdly, how the ordinary and transformed routines of parental engagement are perceived and enacted by users (negotiated perceptions and enactments). Finally, the tensions, gaps, and contradictions that occur within and across the framework's three threads are considered as part of the complex and partial processes of the design and use of digital space.

Figure 10

Framework for spatial analysis of Seesaw as a digital space used for parental engagement
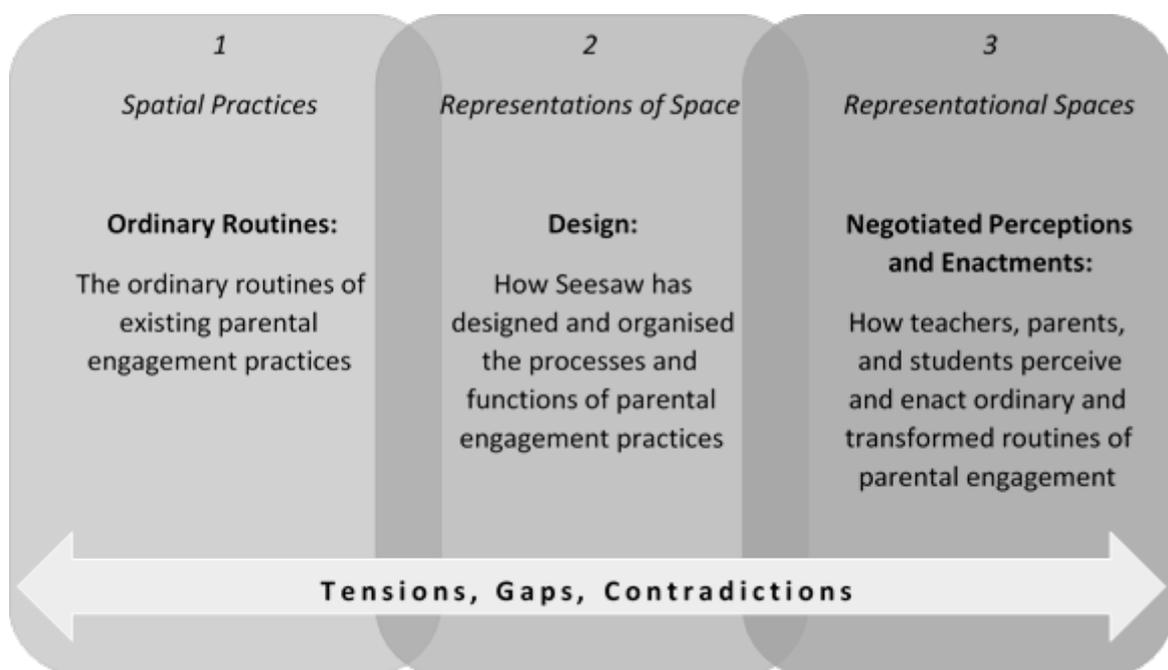
Note. Adapted from Harrison (2018)

Spatial analysis

My adaptation of Harrison's (2018) framework focuses on enacting parental engagement in the digital space designed by Seesaw. It is against this framework that the interviews with teachers and parents are analysed. The analysis is presented following the headings of the framework: ordinary routines; design; negotiated perceptions and enactments; and within and across those, the tensions, gaps, and contradictions observed.

Ordinary routines of parental engagement

This first space that Lefebvre (1991) described as *spatial practice*—the first third of the framework—"produces relationships to people, things, practice, and places of practice" (Sheehy, 2009, p. 145). It is here that policy, theories, and activities of parental engagement; teachers, students, and parents; and the built environments of home and school develop relationships and practices. These are the *ordinary routines* (Boys, 2011; Harrison, 2018) of parental engagement that produce and reproduce relations and subjectivities between and of teachers and parents. This space was also called 'perceived' space by Lefebvre (1991), as ordinary routines are perceived as 'natural' and what is expected (Sheehy, 2009, p. 145). The analysis draws on what teachers and parents perceive as parental engagement—its relations and activities.

Education policy is a significant contributor to the everyday practices of parental engagement, as it establishes some of the 'taken for granted' understandings about parents and their role in education. For example, in AoNZ, reporting to parents is mandatory (Minister of Education, 2017), and teachers and parents accept that parent-teacher interviews and written reports to parents on student progress are ordinary routines. Formal reporting represents one aspect of the 'everyday' communication practices between schools and parents employing two traditional mediums, face-to-face and written hard-copy. Many schools also utilise learning journals, portfolios and e-portfolios for learning and assessment, contributing to real-time reporting to parents (Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.-b). Newsletters and ad hoc notes are routine communication practices, typically via electronic mediums, such as email. Communication and reporting practices are routines in support of the learning partnerships sought (Bull et al., 2008; Epstein, 2018; Hornby, 2011), where parents are *partners* in education (for more on subjectivities of parents, see Smith (2020) and below).

A genealogical study of parental engagement in AoNZ (Smith, 2020) found that the subject positions for parents were dominated by subjectivities that emerged with the policy reforms of the 1980s, situating parents as *consumers* and *governors*. As consumers, key activities for parents are taking responsibility for their child's educational achievement and holding teachers to account. The subject position of

governor is strongly related to the mandatory involvement of parents in the governance of individual schools through a board of trustees. Policy discourses express these subject positions, and they are reproduced in the perceptions and actions of teachers and parents. For example, teachers and parents perceive a need for parents to be proactive and take the lead in parental engagement to *come to* the teacher and the school. Face-to-face interaction (formal and informal) between teacher and parent is an expected form of communication. The invitation—or expectation—for parents to come into schools is often expressed in an 'open door policy' that for many schools, it is the normative approach to parental engagement (for example, see Ashton & Cairney, 2001; Hornby & Witte, 2010a; McKay & Garratt, 2013; MoE, 2013c; Smith, 2021).

Other, long-standing parent subjectivities are evident in parental engagement, and one, *parents as co-operative receivers*, is strongly linked to routine school communication practices. The *co-operative receiver* subject position describes parents as "recipients of generally unidirectional expectations, communication and information" in the expectation these will help the parent better support their child's learning and the programmes and activities of the teacher or school (Smith, 2020, p. 12). Routines of information sharing encompass items such as portfolios of work, assessment results, and notices about units of study and events in the class or school. Communication may also address teaching techniques (e.g., for reading or mathematics) used by the school or that the school would like parents to use at home (e.g., in support of homework programmes).

Finally, the subject position of *supporter* has been dominant in the spatial practices of parental engagement since formal schooling began (Smith, 2020). Parental support for their child and the school is a "typically expected and generally forthcoming behaviour" (p. 11). Parents express this support through parent help roles (e.g., helping prepare resources, coach sports, listen to readers, attend camp), participation in parent-teacher groups or committees, and assistance with fundraising. These activities are a form of 'active volunteerism' and everyday practices of parental engagement; however, they are frequently only undertaken by parents with 'sufficient capital' to do so (Martin & Vincent, 1999, p. 144).

These examples of the ordinary routines of parental engagement are not exhaustive but serve to illustrate how they occur in the everyday practices of home and school. The routines described above reveal some of what the adapted framework describes as 'tensions, gaps, and contradictions.' Family-school relationships through traditional means of formal and informal communication and interactions (and other subject positions) are well established and accepted (Hipkins & Cameron, 2018), challenging both teachers and parents when trying to create the sought after educational partnership model (Education Gazette editors, 2018). The impact of the built space of schools is often in tension with the desires or expectations of parental engagement routines (such as open-door policies) (Smith, 2022). Parents are not homogenous, and differences in culture or socio-economic group can create gaps between what is expected and what is appropriate or necessary to meet their needs (Lareau, 2000; Murphy & Pushor, 2004). Other routines (e.g., in-class support) are often gendered, with expectations for how mothers engage and take responsibility for their child's education higher than fathers (Vincent, 2017). Finally, many of these ordinary routines of parental engagement aren't, or don't support, what some research has identified as the most salient factors for improving student achievement (Jeynes, 2018).

Designed transformations within Seesaw

Lefebvre (1991) described the space denoted by the second third of the framework as *representations of space* conceived by experts such as architects or programmers in digital spaces. This space represents the *spatial practices* or *ordinary routines* perceived in the preceding section by organising them around "specific conceptions of knowledge" and, as such, is a production of power (Sheehy, 2009, pp. 146-147). However, drawing on Boys (2011), Harrison (2018) expands this idea by conceptualising educational space in the *design* third of the framework, as not only being "inscribed" by experts (e.g., teachers, programmers) but by anyone (including parents and students) trying to make sense of their world using space—"conceptual, material, social or personal" (p. 23). Specifically, the space is a representation of "attempts at specific designed transformations of [the] 'ordinary' routines of learning" (Boys, 2011, p. 56). For this article, the focus is a space designed by Seesaw where aspects of parental engagement (in the form of school-home communication and

learning portfolios) are organised and 'made sense' of. In this attempt, Seesaw experts (programmers and designers) have drawn on or responded to user feedback (Clifford, 2020; Lagorio-Chafkin, 2020). Seesaw was initially designed as a student-led digital portfolio, and when I conducted the interviews with teachers and parents, this was the basis of their use of the app. Since then, the global COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how teachers use Seesaw, and it has developed more fully into an e-learning space (it remains to be seen if Seesaw will continue to be used in this way beyond the pandemic). The designed transformations analysed in this section are identified by the parent and teacher participants and promoted by the creators, focusing mainly on its application as a digital portfolio and communication platform. As such, the ordinary routines of parental engagement that have been transformed relate particularly to reporting and communication and impact the subject positions of parents as co-operative receivers and partners.

As an e-portfolio, Seesaw enables students to demonstrate and reflect on their learning and collate and share this with their parents in a digital space. E-portfolios are also one way in which teachers share information for parental engagement. Several features have been designed to transform how this occurs and differ significantly from traditional, hard-copy portfolios. Firstly, the type of work and how it can be shared have been expanded. In addition to uploading hard copies of work completed, Seesaw allows for photos, video, audio, drawing, linking, writing, or a multi-model combination such as screencasting (e.g., capturing audio of a student discussing what they are doing while capturing the computer screen output from something they are doing digitally). According to Seesaw (2021b, para.3), these tools allow students to "show what they know in the way that works best for them" this provides flexibility for the age and stage of the user (e.g., students who are too young or not confident with writing can narrate something verbally). The tools of the digital format can offer increased agency and enjoyment to the student (McLeod & Vasinda, 2009). Further, this has expanded the type of learning content students and teachers can capture to include things parents would previously have to be there in person to experience, such as speaking another language or swimming. Following media richness theory, this highlights the "informational richness" (Guydish & Fox Tree, 2021) of the Seesaw mode of communication that contrasts with traditional modes (where the purpose of the communication is to share student learning with parents).

Seesaw has transformed the volume of items that can be collated far beyond that of any hard-copy system. It has unlimited storage space for each student journal (https://bit.ly/seesaw_storage), although files size is limited to 250 MB or 1MB for photographs (https://bit.ly/seesaw_filesize). This means students can accumulate a significant portfolio which can be archived at the end of each year. The link to each year's portfolio can be maintained against an individual student account for those in a school on the Seesaw for Schools plan. This transformation also allows for improved organisation and filtering of content. For example, parents can filter their view on Seesaw by child or work folder (https://bit.ly/seesaw_familyapp). As the designed space allows for the easy sharing of a high volume of multi-modal messages and posts, teachers can also share different information with parents. For example, there is the opportunity for teachers to share a video showing how to complete a mathematic process or show an exemplar for a homework activity. Jeynes (2018) suggests that schools can model to parents salient factors for raising student achievement, e.g., valuing education, having high expectations of students, and how to support learning at home. Seesaw has designed a space where this type of modelling can occur.

Further to the designed flexibility of modes (e.g., audible, written, visual), Seesaw has transformed communication and reporting possibilities by facilitating the translation of most written text into the language setting of the device in use (https://bit.ly/seesaw_translation). This transformation allows parents with language barriers greater access to their child's learning and teacher feedback, providing enriched opportunities for sense-making of their child's educational world. In turn, the parent's contribution in their own language, via comments and messages, can be 'heard' by the teacher. There are currently over 55 languages available for use.

Seesaw's transformed communication routines with parents have provided students with an authentic audience for their work. An authentic audience is one typically beyond the classroom (although it can include peers), which "support the growth happening in the classroom" (Dillon, 2015, p. 52). Being an authentic audience also gives parents greater insight and understanding of their child's learning progression. This is facilitated by work being shared in 'real-time' and by Seesaw providing the opportunity to provide feedback (via 'likes' and comments). In addition, the real-time posting is complemented by push notifications, email, and/or SMS alerts,

which notify parents of updates. Combined, aspects of the transformed routines, such as real-time sharing, notifications, translations, and being an authentic audience, have transformed how parents initiate conversations about learning with their children by allowing timely, informed questions and discussion (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Lewin & Luckin, 2010).

I conclude this section by examining the key 'tensions, gaps, and contradictions' of the designed transformations. Perhaps the most apparent gap evident is what parents can do from the Family app. For example, while Seesaw is designed to allow teachers to message parents directly, currently, parents cannot initiate a message to a teacher (https://bit.ly/seesaw_parentmessaging). Parents are also unable to post to the portfolio; this means that a child cannot share their learning occurring at home via their parents and the family app (https://bit.ly/seesaw_parentpost). This functionality gap is in tension with the aims of parental engagement, particularly where parents are positioned as partners in education, as it continues unidirectional (school-home) information sharing reducing the dialogue potential of the app. This is also a general concern with digital technologies for school-home communication (Goodall, 2016). Hipkins and Cameron (2018, p. 44) identified that while digital technologies are being successfully used in real-time reporting, they did not find evidence that two-way digital collaboration was common between home and school. Further, this restriction on input to the portfolio from home maintains the power imbalance between school/home and teacher/parent by valuing what is school-based over that which is home-based.

As with any system or "knowledge infrastructure", there are important considerations about power and ownership, at both user, designer, and system-level (Buckingham Shum, 2018; Hipkins & Cameron, 2018). For example, how does the increasing use of digital technologies in schools influence education's values, beliefs, and purpose? Does EdTech contribute to the "privatisation of… education by stealth"? (Wright & Peters, 2017, p. 174). Buckingham Shum (2018) raises questions about ownership of data, the role of stakeholders and users in the design process, and how users, researchers, and others maintain a level of mindfulness about this type of digital infrastructure (given how readily, as designed space, it becomes a "taken-for-granted backdrop" (Yanow, 2014, p. 369)) (Hipkins & Cameron, 2018, p. 45). We (all

stakeholders) must be mindful of the "hierarchies, roles, and rules [that] are perpetuated and replicated in our digital spaces" (Harrison, 2018).

Negotiated perceptions and enactments

Lefebvre (1991) presented this third and final space, *representational spaces*, as oppositional to the second *representations of space*. Representational spaces are where "ordinary people seek to appropriate and/or transform the normative representations of space made by [experts]" in the second space (Boys, 2011, p. 55). As per the last section, these activities are also a form of meaning-making, but this time through the *negotiated perceptions and enactments* of ordinary and designed routines of parental engagement by teachers, parents, and students. By adapting and working to make the designed space fit their needs, the users "inscribe different meanings" (Harrison, 2018, p. 24). The practices through which users transform and enact the routines of parental engagement are drawn from interviews with parent and teacher participants and are limited here to two main interrelated themes, communication and posting and commenting. The *communication* theme examines how the Seesaw space is perceived and utilised for communication with parents in practice. The *posting and commenting* theme considers the practice of posting, its purpose, and the responses it elicits from parents.

Communication

Communication is central to any relationship and supports effective parental engagement (Jeynes, 2018). Participants highlighted how they perceived several designed transformations impacted positively on their practices. Transformed aspects included the timeliness the digital space offers ("the parents… they get notified straight away"), and the ability for posts to go directly to parents via the Family app ("[it] is good because it comes straight to [parents] and you can see them in real-time commenting"). Other relevant aspects offered by Seesaw include the ease of use ("a great thing about it is it's so easy on a smartphone") and the ability to see inside the classroom ("it's like you're in the class with them"). Two final communication routines that parents and teachers perceived transformation related to the relationships the communication fosters and the purpose (e.g., reporting); I now consider these in more detail.

Information is a core requirement for evaluating student progress and is used by teachers, students, and parents. Teachers are responsible for reporting to parents on student progress (this is mandatory in AoNZ, see Minister of Education, 2017), and both teacher and parent participants from Korimako School had come to perceive Seesaw posts as transforming those routines. Many participants believed that parents gained insight and information from the regular, individualised, Seesaw posts that also supported formal reporting. The posts being described support the type of quality information (regular, individualised, and ideally including how parents might support the learning at home) supporting effective parent outreach (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Kraft, 2017). One parent explained how she perceived the posts supported formal reporting:

> you only get 15 minutes with those face-to-face [interviews], if you've already seen the [posts], you've already been able to form your questions, and have them ready to ask, then you're not spending that whole time getting the information, and then run out of time for discussion.

When interviewed, the teachers were trialling how Seesaw might work for them and were negotiating how information shared through Seesaw related to their formal reporting and what that might mean for each process. A transcript extract highlights that negotiation:

> …it was pretty much always just a replacement [for the hard-copy portfolios]— there was no change in the expectations. It was always one sample per term, per curriculum area. And to put a comment… [But] if you're doing more than one sample [at a time], then you only really have to put a comment on one… I feel like that probably takes a little bit longer [than the traditional portfolio] because... if it was an in-class thing… you'd tick it, and you'd easily be able to tell if they had achieved or not achieved. Whereas I feel like we are, at this stage, [doubling-up]…, because you're writing a comment which also is your report comment. Because you're normally putting it on [the] final piece of work, it's pretty much the same as what you would write in the report. [So, the purpose of the comment is to be informative and value-added for the parent], and they have started talking about doing the Next [Learning] Step, but I don't know if that's required yet. I think if [Seesaw] becomes next year more of a

report for the other curriculum areas, then I think we would have to… do Next Steps and things in our comments.

Finally, parents and teachers perceive that the type of communication enacted as a result of using Seesaw posts provides a new, richer picture to parents of what their child is doing at school. Jeynes (2018) describes supportive and informative communication as a crucial element of supportive learning relationships, and participants see transformations in parent-child relations. One staff member described a change he had observed:

> …parents are so enthusiastic about their kids learning and the sorts of things they are celebrating in, for want of a better word, digital public. …They are actually publicly praising their kids, now [there] are the parents that would also praise their kids in a crowded room, but there are some that are going "WOW, I didn't know that you could do this, wow, this is…" and it's the stuff you would never get in a written report… you'd never get it in a parent conference.

This observation is indicative of the shift toward more salient parental engagement by, for example, increasing the expectations parents have for their child's educational achievement (e.g., Jeynes' (2018) *high expectations*).

Posting and commenting

The breadth of content able to be shared with parents in 'real-time' has been transformed by Seesaw. For example, one teacher described how it allowed her students to better share their language learning with parents:

> [Previously] you had to get them to write down the Māori—but Māori's supposed to be an oral language—and so now I can film children having a conversation… so I think that shows their true understanding. Whereas [before] if they're… low in writing that affects their ability to show what they can do in Māori.

Teachers also described how the social development of students was becoming more visible using Seesaw. Staff reported that this was something frequently prioritised by parents but previously challenging to convey or report on. Through video posts, parents saw their child in group interactions, for example, or how they conducted themselves in class. Further evidence of developing social skills was available through

the option of peer commenting, something particularly noted by teachers and parents of senior year level students.

The purpose of the posts created on Seesaw was something teachers were still negotiating through their practice. This was also found in other case studies and was a point of reflection and discussion in reflective practice meetings (Baxter & Toe, 2021). Several Korimako teachers discussed the need for a clear purpose for Seesaw to be identified and adhered to school-wide. While the principal clearly articulated that using Seesaw was a replacement for previous portfolios (and as such would contain samples of (typically best) work), teachers had discovered other purposes through their practice, and its use was noticeably varied amongst them. One teacher thought posts could be utilised to demonstrate a more "authentic indicator" of student progress to parents by requiring more selective and consistent sampling at certain times of the year (e.g., a writing sample of set criteria at the beginning and end of each term). Another teacher identified the potential for posts to encourage repetition and practice of what they are learning in class and reiterate key feedback. Agélii Genlott et al. (2019) propose that teachers retain a degree of flexibility in the approach and use of digital technology for it to be sustainable. They recommend teachers develop and participate in social systems beyond the small environment of a single school (e.g., Seesaw teacher communities on Facebook) to foster "actively shared practice" which can support diversity amongst teachers (e.g., in uptake and skills) (p. 2034).

The final point of consideration for this section is commenting on posts. What Seesaw offers for parental commenting or feedback on student work is relatively new for parents in its scale and regularity. Teachers found that this was an area parents were still navigating, with some responses limited to 'likes', while others offered richer, more constructive feedback. Other researchers have also observed this (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2019). At Korimako, commenting and its purpose were still being negotiated between teacher-teacher and teacher-parent, which speaks to the unclear purpose of the posts. One teacher noted, however, how parents were starting to respond to and model their comments on teachers':

> At first it was a lot of, kind of what you expect from a [beginning teacher], "well done" "good work son" …that type of thing, but now it's already developed into a lot of "I hope you listen to your teacher's feedback and act upon it" or

"you've done a really good job using descriptive language, but we really need

to spend some time at home working on punctuation and spelling."

The modelling potential, teacher-to-parent, is a progression of development that could be aided by support information and clear expectations for comments (e.g., see Paramata School (2019)).

Tensions, Gaps, and Contradictions

Several tensions, gaps, and contradictions were observed in the enactment of parental engagement using the digital space afforded by Seesaw. A gap was perceived between what teachers practised or felt they needed to practice with Seesaw and their access to technology to support that ("if they all had an iPad then that would be fantastic, and I think there'd be a lot more work on Seesaw, but with just two it's quite hard"). The cost was also a factor in an additional source of tension, where some staff were wanting to access the full range of features Seesaw has designed ("we're trying to convince the board that we should go for the paid version… there's quite a bit more you can do with it").

Two central tensions have been indicated above through ongoing negotiations in practice. Identified through the analysis and by participants is the realisation of the potential of Seesaw posts to engage parents in a way that is agentic for parents (parental engagement with children's learning on the Goodall and Montgomery (2014) continuum) and supportive of the most salient forms of parental engagement (which are home-based, as per Jeynes (2018)). Tensions arise from the design of the Seesaw Family app and the purpose—and therefore content—of the posts made to portfolios by children and teachers. Further to what has already been discussed, the gap in Family app design is now considered.

The Family app used by parents does not have the same functionality as the Class app, and posting is not possible. While a child may log on to their account via the Class app at home, this can be harder to achieve with young children who may use a QR code (instead of an email address) to log on in class. As one parent described:

I was telling my son's teacher how he read a book … it was a big chapter book. She said, 'Oh, you should put that on Seesaw.' Well, the parents can't post

anything themselves, and so it would be great if it was a two-way communication tool.

With remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, students have become more familiar with logging on at home, and Seesaw has subsequently designed a *home learning code* (https://bit.ly/seesaw_homelearningcodes) that allows secure non-email logons by students to the Class app. Teachers and schools also need to be cognisant of how posts can perpetuate a belief that learning is school-based when restricted to school-only posting and content (Baxter & Toe, 2021). Further, it stifles the *dialogue* (where both teachers and parents give and receive information) that is instrumental to developing an educational partnership between parent and teacher and the self-efficacy parents need to effectively engage with their child's learning (Goodall, 2016). This is a gap in the functionality of the Seesaw Family app.

The aforementioned negotiations on purpose and content express the tensions in educators' uptake of new technologies (Agélii Genlott et al., 2019). A related concern is a gap in uptake and use by parents. Lack of uptake can be for several reasons, including online safety and data security (as discussed previously). A teacher described one parent "who was quite against it" for those reasons and did not participate until he had undertaken extensive research, which in this case, allayed his concerns. A further consideration is with the digital divide (Crang et al., 2006). The digital divide refers to more than who has access to the internet (first level), it is also concerned with how the internet is utilised, online participation, and the different digital skills used (second level); the final level is focused on the disparities in "benefits and concrete outcomes" (third level) (Ragnedda et al., 2019, p. 795). Although staff indicated uptake to Seesaw by parents is relatively high at Korimako (80-90 percent), some parents were still identified as unable to participate due to lack of or restricted internet access. One participant observed, "access… can be very limited for some. Priorities [for data use] become very different when you're forced to have them." Even with a very small sample of parents there were clear differences in the way they (visibly) utilised the Family app.

Table 8

Responses made by parents to posts individually identifying their child

Parent	Child year group	Percentage of posts with	
		'Likes'	*Comments*
Snake	Junior school: Year 2	53	20
Tiger	Middle school: Year 3/4	90	33
Mouse	Senior school: Year 7/8	70	1

Mouse parent was cautious with data use and only accessed the app when she was at home and could use her internet connection. This mother also indicated that while she could access the Family app, her digital skills were emergent rather than proficient, "I'm still learning how to [do things]—I've just learnt how to email back from my phone the other day." This parent stated she didn't use the internet frequently, and it wasn't required in her job. As these examples from the analysis indicate, some aspects of the first and second levels of the digital divide may apply to this parent and may limit the outcomes gained. Parent responses also illustrate that while Mouse 'liked' 70 percent of posts about her child, she only responded to one percent of posts with a comment (see *Table 8*). A phenomenon also found elsewhere (Moorhouse & Beaumont, 2019). What does this suggest about this parent's engagement? Blau and Hameiri (2012) present passive and active online interactions as a possibility, describing "passive interactivity [as]… logging into the system" (p. 703).

Regarding Seesaw interactions, I propose 'liking' is not much beyond passive interactivity, whereas commenting demonstrates a more active interaction (as would sending messages). However, Goodall (2016) cautions equating visible (active) responses with interest as users may seek the information supplied but not choose to interact themselves (passive). In fact, all three parent participants talked extensively about the posts on Seesaw and what they learnt about their child, the learning taking place in the classroom, and the teacher. Two parents (Snake, Tiger) also gave examples of how the information gained was discussed and extended at home and indicated communication with the teacher about this. While this kind of use may be developed in other parents with greater clarity around purpose, it may also depend on how the teacher uses the space. For example, the teacher for Mouse's child very rarely

commented on individual posts, restricting most interaction to 'likes;' as a user with low digital skills and other socio-cultural and economic factors that relate to levels of the digital divide (Ragnedda et al., 2019), this parent may be modelling their interactions (even subconsciously) on that of the teacher.

Discussion and conclusion

A spatial analysis of the digital space designed by Seesaw has demonstrated that while tensions and gaps must be considered, the space offers potential for enhancing parental engagement practices at an elementary/primary school level. The spatial approach draws attention to how such a space can be enacted for parental engagement and whether it can positively transform routines and blur the boundary between home and school or overcome constraints to practice. The adaptation of Harrison's (2018) framework allows us to assess this space and identify the tensions met by users in practice.

Some of the most salient forms of parental engagement do not require parents to be at the school physically (Hattie, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2018), and as explored by other researchers (e.g., Baxter & Toe, 2021; Goodall, 2016; Olmstead, 2013), technology has potential to support these home-based aspects. The Korimako case, analysed using Harrison's (2018) framework, illustrated how the Seesaw digital space is relational, a product of designers and coders, but also the users and material context (Thompson, 2014). The findings demonstrate how teachers and parents negotiate this space and the opportunities and tensions that surface through their enactments.

The *ordinary routines* of the framework are shown to be based on established ways of communicating that reproduce the familiar relationships and subject positions (such as parents as co-operative receivers and supporters) while in tension with sought after educational partnerships and potentially more salient forms of parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Jeynes, 2018). Analysis of the *designed transformations* within Seesaw revealed the potential for the digital space to extend communication for parental engagement in new and enriched ways. The space facilitated the sharing of information that was either previously only accessible to parents by physically coming into school (such as modelling of learning processes or everyday classroom practices) or was enhanced (direct to parent, real-time, language

translation, greater volume, and multimodal). These aspects contribute to more timely and informed learning conversations between parent and child (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Lewin & Luckin, 2010). The findings also show that a key tension of the Seesaw design is the functionality of the Family app, which impedes the potential for communication to shift beyond the unidirectional teacher-parent flow.

Analysis of the *negotiated perceptions and enactments* illustrated some of the previously identified opportunities and tensions. Teachers and parents perceived the potential of the Seesaw space and were able to make sense of it in many ways that aligned with their expectations and practice (e.g., communication to support reporting, richer information on the learning process and student progress). There remained tensions on the purpose of Seesaw and, as a result, the content of posts and comments made. Predominantly, the findings showed that without the potential for sharing information parent-to-teacher, genuine dialogue was hindered along with the realisation of educational partnerships. This presents a risk that the digital space offered by Seesaw will perpetuate and replicate existing roles ways of being (Harrison, 2018) (e.g., parents as co-operative receivers) rather than support new relationships (e.g., parents as partners in learning).

Further research is now needed to explore how the global Covid-19 pandemic has, and continues to, influence virtual spaces and parental engagement. The pandemic has been the catalyst for an explosion of research examining distance education and digital technologies (Bonk, 2020), but there is still more to consider, particularly as it concerns parental engagement. What changes has the pandemic brought to home-school relations? Are the efforts made in response to the 'emergency' temporary, or will they be sustained beyond the lockdowns and isolation requirements? Breslin (2021) notes that returning to "parents' evenings in crowded halls or as a room-to-room dash along unknown corridors for rushed appointments can never hope to satisfy the spirit of genuine parental *engagement* that has emerged in some schools during lockdown" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Have the changes designed by Seesaw to adapt to the pandemic environment aided or hampered parental engagement via the app? Do the relationship bonds and understandings forged by parents and teachers under pandemic conditions continue when children are back in classrooms and parents resume their work/life routines? Initial research

suggests at least an interest in building from those empathetic foundations (Breslin, 2021, p. 20).

In conclusion, I argue that Seesaw has the potential to be transformational. It has already started to transform the way in which written reporting to parents occurs at Korimako School and elsewhere (as indicated on the New Zealand Seesaw Teachers Facebook page). The potential for regular, real-time information on learning has demonstrated greater value to parents than the traditional written reports, and was found to supplement parent-teacher interviews. The digital space designed by Seesaw has created a new opportunity for schools to invite parents to engage with their child's learning, thus potentially connecting with parents who did not, or had been unable to, respond to other invitations. However, for Seesaw to fully realise its potential in facilitating a learning partnership between teachers and parents, to enhance children's learning, then the ability for parents to create posts and initiate communication needs to be designed into the Family app space, allowing reciprocal enhanced communication/information sharing. Additionally, by articulating a clear purpose that attends to the principles of parental engagement with children's learning (Goodall, 2016; Jeynes, 2018), and supporting teachers and parents with training and guidance appropriate to their context to enact that, the nascent advantages already seen in practice can be maximised without relying on further alterations in design. In this way, schools can realise an aim of not simply using digital space to inform parents through their communication, "but rather… support their effective engagement with the learning of their children" (Goodall, 2016, p. 126).

10 Conclusion

"In terms of educational research, the reliable answers that

teachers and policy makers are (said to be) looking for are not (and

cannot be) offered ready-to-hand by the educational researcher.

Rather, what is offered is the possibility of dialogue; what is

delivered is a contribution to dialogue and praxis; what is implied is

that reliability is not a straightforward empirical matter."

Ramaekers (2014, p. 57)

This thesis aimed to develop a deeper understanding of parental engagement and its enactment in primary school education in AoNZ. In particular, I have been concerned with examining more closely the discourses that inform policy and practice in AoNZ, schools as sites of enactment, how they make-sense of policy and the complexities of parental engagement, and the impact of contextual factors on the enactment process. It has been important to pursue this understanding as research has shown that there is a gap between what is found in the literature as the ideal practice of parental engagement and what is practised in schools (Goodall, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In addition, while parental engagement is the subject of educational research, the enactment of relevant policies have had less focus, particularly in AoNZ. This lack of focus is indicative of an observed paucity in the availability of academic scholarship focused on education policy in AoNZ (Wood et al., 2021).

For me, policy enactment provided the framework through which to examine the rhetoric and the reality of parental engagement within a case study. The policy enactment approach allowed for the diversity of methods needed to examine the complex nature of parental engagement and the dynamic environment in which it is enacted. The methods used were observation, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, mental mapping, discourse/artefact analysis, and spatial analysis. I also utilised a genealogical method to examine the emergence of the concept of parental engagement within AoNZ.

The aim of this study was to answer the overarching question: How do we understand parental engagement and its enactment in primary school education in

AoNZ? The thesis has outlined how the unique system of self-managing schools (Tomorrow's Schools) makes this an important consideration, as parents are 'built-into' the system in AoNZ in a way that differs from many other jurisdictions. The research has identified that there is a high level of ambiguity concerning parental engagement in policy and within schools. At a policy level, this reveals that assumptions are being made that the concept of parental engagement is well understood, despite the widely varying ways parents are positioned in relation to their children's education. It is staff and parents who perform the policy work of enactment and that work of interpreting, translating, and making-sense of parental engagement is mediated by the unique context of schools in important ways.

This final chapter returns to the specific research questions underpinning this study and draws on the findings to support these.

- What discourses and implicit ideas, concepts, and categories have shaped our understanding of parental engagement over time?
- What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?
- How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?
- What potential do emerging digital spaces and technologies offer for the enactment of parental engagement?

Each of the questions is addressed in turn. The chapter also identifies implications for policy and practice before identifying areas for future research.

What discourses and implicit ideas, concepts, and categories have shaped our understanding of parental engagement over time?

There have been strong links between parents, schools, and teachers since formal schooling began, and the first article addressed questions relating to the emergence of current discourses of parental engagement and their implications for practice. It did so through a genealogical study that focussed on the emergent subject positions of parents within the parent-school relationship. The primary focus was on the implications of the period following the reforms of 1988, which, grounded in

neoliberal ideology, have played an important role in constructing parent subjectivities. The following subject positions were identified:

- Parents as consumers
- Parents as governors
- Parents as supporters
- Parents as co-operative receivers
- Parents as problems
- Parents as partners
- Parents as whānau

The analysis revealed continuities with long-standing ideas and beliefs, such as parents as supporters and parents as problems. These two subjectivities, in particular, position parents in a way that neatly fit traditional roles within education. Teachers are positioned as experts, and parents either support them (and schools and schooling, but in the manner expected by the school—being overinvolved is also problematic) or do not. Concepts, like that of the whole child (which emerged following World War II), and changing ideas about upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) extended to other subject positions, for example, parents as co-operative receivers, parents as whānau, and parents as partners. The subjectivities of whānau and partners position parents as more agentic in their children's education.

The genealogical analysis found that neoliberalism has profoundly influenced the most dominant subject positions that emerged from reforms after 1988, particularly in terms of the way parents were positioned as consumers and governors. Through legislation and regulation (e.g., the national administration guidelines—NAGs), policy formalised these subject positions and provided supporting structures and processes (such as reporting, national standards, BOTs). These formalising mechanisms created default-like settings for engaging parents as consumers and governors. Despite the strategy and curriculum policy documents of the contemporary era frequently positioning parents in other ways (especially as partners), there is not the same specificity or impetus to drive the practice. For example, the *NZC* (MoE, 2007), as a primary policy document for teachers, fails to mention parents in the very principle for guiding their engagement. This makes the actions in support of other

subject positions more reliant on individual school efforts and vulnerable to the day-to-day pressures described in chapter six.

The dominant and somewhat default subjectivities of consumers and governors position parents as agentic and responsible in their relationships with schools. Parents are agents—governing teachers and schools through their involvement and 'holding to account'—and subjects—being held responsible for the choices they make concerning their child's education—of governmentality (from Foucault, see Ball, 2013). These subjectivities dominate parental engagement contributing to inequalities and constraining engagement by narrowing the role of parents and limiting which parents can participate.

The analysis suggests the subjectivities that position parents draw on three particular concepts, care, agency, and responsibility, as technologies of governmentality. These ideas are interrelated and how they are enacted depends on the context and the knowledge frame or subjectivity informing their interpretation, for example, the neoliberal ideology found within the AoNZ education sector. There is a need to be wary in enactment that the discourses of neoliberalism do not overwhelm those of partnership and whānau, for example. The findings align with McKay and Garratt (2013), who argue that not all parents have the cultural capital to respond to governmentalities in the same way and, as such, existing inequalities can be reproduced. Greater consideration, therefore, must be given to the diverse set of potential subject positions for parents in policy and practice.

Caution needs to be taken that parental engagement does not become another responsibility of parents. Parents' care for their child's education is not always visible to or recognised by the school; parental agency within the education setting may not be recognised as such, or be chosen to be exercised by, parents, and; responsibility denotes expectations that parents behave in ways that fit certain ideological and cultural norms. In these examples, the "moralised agency" described by Olmedo and Wilkins (2017, p. 577) of neoliberal parent subjectivities, like that of the consumer and governor, can have the potential to filter into other positions. Parents have responsibilities to care (parents as supporters), to exercise agency (parents as partners), and (not) behave in specific ways (parents as problems). Failure or refusal to

do so is a "transgression of parental duty" and "morally repugnant or irresponsible" (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017, p. 577).

What are the current policies for parental engagement, and how do schools, teachers, and parents enact them?

Education policy outlines an expectation in AoNZ, as in many other countries, that schools and teachers will engage with parents. The third article (7 Policy Enactment of Parental Engagement) examined current policies for parental engagement to identify the expectations contained therein. The article drew on the policy enactment framework of (Ball et al., 2012) to analyse the enactment of those policies at the case school.

The analysis found a lack of a coherent policy statement on parental engagement expressing *what* is meant by the term and what is required of schools, *why* it is required, and *how* to deliver it. There are mandated reporting and governance requirements (Education Act 1989; Education Standards Act 2001; Minister of Education, 2017) and teacher-parent relationship expectations in the standards and code for the teaching profession (ECANZ, 2017b). However, the enactment study found the core policy for parental engagement was likely the *NZC* (MoE, 2007) and its broadly articulated principle of Community Engagement, which does not even mention parents. Further guidance on this broad wording was found distributed across updates, an online portal (MoE, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2020c), and reports from the school audit and review agency (ERO, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). As a result, while policy collectively referred most often to partnerships with parents, the messaging was fragmented, making it difficult for schools and teachers to understand what the purpose and expectations for practice were. This suggests an assumption that the complexities and purpose of parental engagement are well understood.

An outcome of the policy-setting thus described is that the policy work that needs to occur in schools is increased. The narrator's work especially becomes more critical, and variability of outcomes (between teachers and schools) is more likely. The meaning-making undertaken by staff also has a greater distance to go as the *NZC* policy basis is further from practice. As a result, schools under more significant strain

through resourcing and community pressures are more vulnerable to important policy work being compromised.

Analysis of the enactment of parental engagement at Korimako School confirmed many of the policy actors and work identified in the typology of Ball et al. (2012, p. 49). Narrators, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators and receivers were all identified as undertaking policy work on parental engagement, and the actors included both staff and parents. The principal undertook critical work as policy narrator and was instrumental in drawing from the broadly-worded and dispersed threads of policy a narrative on parental engagement for Korimako. While the analysis focused on school-level policy work, the findings confirmed that all teachers are policy actors (or street-level bureaucrats, as per Lipsky, 2010), continuing to make sense of narratives as they enact policy into practice within individual classes, further differentiating parental engagement practice.

The article's main findings indicate how the enactment of parental engagement policy might be better supported. Firstly, the need for a coherent policy statement on parental engagement with a clearly articulated, shared purpose was demonstrated. Understanding the *why* of policy is an essential aspect of meaning-making for enactment, and does not remove the ability for schools to respond to the needs of their communities. Secondly, parents undertaking the policy work of narrator and enthusiast as 'school insiders' was an important finding of the analysis. By increasing the diversity of policy actors, there is potential for more context-responsive policy enactment. This leads to the third finding whereby a participatory approach could be used to develop parental engagement policy in AoNZ. A coalition of actors (Wagenaar, 2015) that includes parents and teachers could contribute to the process of developing a shared purpose and clarity for parental engagement policy, bringing greater coherence to the outcomes sought.

How do contextual factors affect the enactment of parental engagement policies by schools and the experience of parents?

Context is a material factor in policy enactment and has been a particular focus of my research. As a result, it is an element of several articles presented in chapters six, eight and nine (explored in the following section). Chapter six examined

contemporary pressures of the school environment that are relevant as a site of research and also policy enactment. It found schools are often at an intersection of competing and overwhelming demands, producing what Ball et al. (2012, p. 70), drawing on actor-network theory, describe as "precariousness" (p. 70). This precariousness illustrates the complex and dynamic context within which the process of parental engagement enactment occurs.

In the article of chapter eight, context is the primary concern. This article considers the impact of built space as an underemphasised and underestimated factor in schools' enactment of parental engagement policy and how parents experience that. The study drew on Yanow's (2014) interpretive approach, which foregrounds built space as a material force of policy.

The analysis of Korimako School found that the designers, founders, and occupiers of its built spaces authored 'stories' through their design and assembly of spatial elements. The stories told were both positive (valuing history, the environment, and te ao Māori; openness) and restrictive (imposing, authoritarian, unwelcoming, confusing) for parental engagement. The findings revealed how physical (fences, busy streets, tight/open spaces) and socio-cultural (expression of norms, roles, and relationships) borders defined the built space for parents and impacted their access to the school (or parts of the school) and their interactions with teachers.

Authored stories can become "ghosts of the architects" (Meighan & Harber, 2007, p. 81) which continue to haunt the school with the values and intentions of the original designers/founders rather than more contemporary visions. The findings show there is potential for these stories to be rewritten through changes made by current occupiers (for example, using signage, décor, landscaping) or how users can overcome or become 'blind' to those stories. Despite many parents describing varying levels of confusion as they first visited Korimako, as they became familiar with the built spaces and had positive experiences with teachers, some started to read the space differently. This is an expression of agency—whereby parents act on and modify the spaces and their 'reading' of them. The article supports the literature, however, that the readings and agency to act upon spaces is differentiated and depends on the experiences, values, and cultural capital of the reader/user (Murray et al., 2015; Yanow, 2014).

The findings showed that teachers, as everyday users, are particularly at risk of 'getting caught in context,' where their familiarity with the built spaces of Korimako obscures the stories that other users, particularly parents, may read. I argued that a conscious effort might be needed to recognise the impact built space has on parental engagement (supporting the undertaking of something like the school environment scan suggested by Pushor and Amendt (2018)). Enhancing this type of awareness is also a precursor to taking action to author new stories (Martin, 2002).

What potential do emerging digital spaces and technologies offer for the enactment of parental engagement?

Virtual space created by education technologies has opened up new parental engagement environments. Chapter nine explores this context (created by the Seesaw app) and its impact on the enactment of parental engagement using a spatial analysis method (drawing on Harrison, 2018).

One aspect of the analysis specifically examined how the virtual space transformed existing practices, finding it presented a new and enriched way of communicating real-time information on learning to parents. This was transformative in two ways—it offered information parents had previously needed to come to school to receive (e.g., anything not possible to capture in two dimensions, like swimming and speeches; modelling of learning processes), or it was enhanced (e.g., real-time and direct to parent, with language translation, unlimited in volume, and multimodal). This type of communication has been found to contribute to timely and better-informed learning conversations between parent and child (Baxter & Toe, 2021; Besse, 2017; Lewin & Luckin, 2010). In addition, the study found that this type of communication enhanced existing modes of reporting to parents, such as parent-teacher interviews, and was likely to formally supplement or replace written reports.

The analysis showed teachers and parents both perceived the possibility Seesaw offered for developing parent-teacher learning-centred conversations; however, the Family app (used by parents) design restricted the development of these by preventing posts by parents. The findings also demonstrated how the potential for Seesaw, as a digital technology, to enhance parental engagement was not always realised. As found elsewhere (Lewin & Luckin, 2010), this seemed to centre on an

ambiguity around purpose—for example, the purpose of posts and what comments should or could contribute to learning. Rather than being a catalyst to realise educational partnerships between parents and teachers, these things risk reproducing those subject positions that limit enhanced engagement (e.g., parents as co-operative receivers).

Overall, Seesaw presented a new opportunity for teachers to invite parents to connect with their child's learning and provided a space for engaging some parents who did not or had not been able to respond to other invitations.

The review of key insights from the analysis of evolving discourses of parental engagement, the actual practice of parental engagement, and important contextual factors provide a basis for considering the implications of the research. What follows is a reflection on the implications for policy and practice, particularly in relation to the potential to enhance how parents are recognised and valued within learning-focused relationships with teachers and provide greater clarity for parental engagement in AoNZ.

Implications for policy and practice

The community engagement principle of the NZC could be reworked into a more explicit commitment and expectation for parental engagement

In order to partially address the lack of clarity as to the meaning and purpose of parental engagement, the community engagement principle of the *NZC* could be renamed and amended. Given the status of the *NZC* as a policy document foundational to practice, the amended principle could explicitly identify parents (retain whānau) and be clear about what is being sought in order for some immediate level of understanding to be possible. This type of reworking aligns with the current undertaking of the MoE and government to 'refresh' the *NZC* to provide "greater clarity and guidance" to teachers (Davis & Tinetti, 2021, para. 9).

A shared purpose for parental engagement could be developed in schools, and communities, and for AoNZ

The lack of shared understanding of the purpose of parental engagement could be partially addressed through government-provided support through funding

facilitators and guidance material. Initially, this support could be for schools to work with their parent communities to develop a shared purpose for parental engagement. This work could then support a participatory approach to developing a statement of shared purpose for parental engagement in AoNZ, which would provide legitimacy for the inclusion of parental engagement in both ITE and the NZC.

A statement of purpose for parental engagement could then ground a curriculum of parental engagement within ITE programmes. As a principle of the NZC and an aspect of practising teacher standards, it is an emphasis that could be better understood.

Recognising the parent community as heterogeneous and possessing grounded knowledge

Through initial teacher education (ITE) programme approval, the government could require an emphasis on the development and use of socio-cultural knowledge in teacher training. To better support any curriculum principle for engagement—which encompasses parental engagement and holistic teaching—teachers need to identify and recognise the diverse socio-cultural capital and grounded knowledge parents and whānau contribute to the education sector and their child's learning.

This has implications for the guidance and support schools need to develop an enhanced socio-cultural knowledge of their parent communities. This socio-cultural information could supplement existing socio-economic data. Support could then extend to professional development for teachers on seeking, understanding, and using socio-cultural information in their practice of parental engagement.

Increased diversity in the teacher workforce could reflect the population better

The more diverse the teacher workforce the better able they are to make meaningful connections with students, their parents, and their families. This could include efforts through affirmative action or ITE programmes designed to appeal to particular communities or diverse intakes.

Future research

In addition to the implications identified above, there is also a need for further research in the following areas:

- There is a need to examine how teachers undertake the translation and enactment of policy (policy work) at a personal classroom level. Research could extend the work of chapters three and seven by exploring how the subjectivities of parents are reproduced or disrupted by the policy work of teachers enacting parental engagement policy. The research question might ask: How does parental engagement get "integrated into older ways of working—the history of prior discourses—and become invisible or asserted within new technologies and new ways of doing school…"? (Ball et al., 2012, p. 142).

- Greater understanding is needed of how the built spaces of school can be enhanced for parental engagement. Drawing on the findings of the built space analysis, further research could focus on developing environmental competence in educators (Steele, 1973) and the concept of a built environment scan (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). A potential research question is: How can schools author stories of welcome and partnership with parents?

- This research addressed only one school and there is potential to expand this to other schools to enable comparative discussions.

- One of my initial research directions was to explore the potential for shared understandings of parental engagement between policymakers, schools, teachers, and parents. This could be investigated by drawing using Q-methodology as I had planned, as it is suited to studies that have potentially diverse and/or contested views about an issue or topic, such as the diverse views about parental engagement, how it is understood, and how it might be enacted. Value statements about parental engagement drawn from the data from this case study could be used for the Q sort survey. This research could contribute to developing a shared purpose for parental engagement for AoNZ.

- Research is needed to examine how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted parental engagement. There are several potential research questions: Has the move to digital and at-home learning shifted parental engagement in children's

learning in ongoing ways? In addition, has it changed how the parent-teacher relationship is focussed or manifested? If there are changes, are they temporary or are they permanent? Initial research suggests an interest in building from the empathetic foundations forged by parents and teachers under pandemic conditions (Breslin, 2021, p. 20); how might this occur?

- The research undertaken for chapter nine on the potential of digital space for parental engagement needs to be expanded to examine the experiences of a more extensive and diverse parent and teacher population. A future inquiry might also examine, for example, whether the changes designed by Seesaw to adapt to the pandemic environment aided or hampered parental engagement via the app.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Co-authorship form

Appendix B: List of publications and presentations arising from this thesis

Appendix C: Ethics approval, 7 October 2016

Appendix D: Overview of research project

Appendix E: Principal information sheet

Appendix F: Principal consent and release form

Appendix G: Principal and staff interview questions

Appendix H: Staff & BOT participant information sheet

Appendix I: Staff & BOT participant consent & release form

Appendix J: Parent participant information sheet

Appendix K: Parent participant consent & release form

Appendix L: Parent & BOT parent member interview starter questions

Appendix M: Parent interview school mapping guide

Appendix N: Parent focus group discussion and community mapping guide

Appendix O: Ethics approval – Seesaw, 14 August 2017

Appendix P: Participant information sheet - Seesaw

Appendix Q: Parent participant consent & release form – Seesaw

Appendix R: Teacher participant consent & release form – Seesaw

Appendix S: Seesaw interview discussion guide

Appendix T: Transcription confidentiality agreement

Appendix A: Co-authorship form

Co-Authorship Form

This form is to accompany the submission of any PhD that contains research reported in published or unpublished co-authored work. **Please include one copy of this form for each co-authored work.** Completed forms should be included in your appendices for all the copies of your thesis submitted for examination and library deposit (including digital deposit).

Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

Chapter 6 from heading: Contemporary Pressures on School-based Research: A Cautionary Tale for School Leaders
Smith, M., Thrupp, M., & Barrett, P. (2019). Contemporary pressures on school-based research: A cautionary tale for school leaders. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice, 34*, 45-64. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21307/jelpp-2020-001

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	The candidate prepared the full draft of the manuscript and supervisors' comments and input have been to the same extent as for a usual thesis chapter.
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	80%

CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Martin Thrupp	Discussed the concept of the article in supervision meeting and made a few comments on drafts.
Patrick Barrett	Discussed the concept of the article in supervision meeting and made a few comments on drafts.

Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:
❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors

Name	Signature	Date
Martin Thrupp	*[signature]*	21/04/22
Patrick Barrett	*[signature]*	7/04/2022

July 2015

Appendix B: List of publications and presentations arising from this thesis

Smith, M. (2016). Expressed, enacted, and experienced: A case study of parental engagement in compulsory education. *Women Talking Politics, November 2016*, 18-19. http://www.nzpsa.com/resources/Documents/WTP/WTP%20Nov%202016.pdf

Smith, M. (2018, October 19). *"You're not top of their list": The status, purpose and on-going feasibility of field-based research in education*. [Seminar]. Political Science and Public Policy Programmes Public Seminar Series, Hamilton.

Smith, M. (2018, November 26-28). *"You're not top of their list": The status, purpose and on-going feasibility of field-based research in education*. [Paper presentation]. NZ Association for Research in Education (NZARE) Conference, Auckland University of Technology, Manukau.

Smith, M., Thrupp, M., & Barrett, P. (2019). Contemporary pressures on school-based research: A cautionary tale for school leaders. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice, 34*, 45-64. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21307/jelpp-2020-001

Smith, M. (2020). Parent participation practices and subjectivities: New Zealand primary education 1988–2017. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 53*(3-4), 175-197. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2020.1825353

Smith, M. (2021). Enacting parental engagement: Policy work in a primary school setting. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-021-00227-y

Smith, M. (2022). *Same school, different space: Parents' mental maps of their child's school* [Image]. Images of Research Exhibition, Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education, University of Waikato.

Smith, M. (2022). *How built space impacts parental engagement: Contextual dimensions of policy enactment* [Unpublished manuscript]. University of Waikato.

Appendix C: Ethics approval, 7 October 2016

Ethics Research Application

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Expressed, enacted, and experienced: A case study of parental engagement in compulsory education

Megan Smith

Te Whiringa School of Educational Leadership and Policy

Overview

Principal Supervisor

Martin Thrupp

Research Team

Patrick Barrett

Additional Personnel

n/a

Interest in Topic

The topic of parental and community engagement in education interests me foremost as a parent of a child still at school, but also as a member of a community with several local schools. I have noticed a difference in how schools and teachers have interacted with myself as the parent of a student, and as a member of the school community at large; there have been common themes along with the differences. Secondly, I have experienced, both as a teacher and a parent, the involvement of parents through the formal mechanism of a Board of Trustees (BOT). These experiences highlighted the varying expectations of BOT members as to the role of parents, in the BOT setting, and in the wider school community. Finally, as a scholar in the public policy discipline, I am keenly interested in how policy is enacted. Engaging parental involvement in education is an idea that has steadily gained in prominence and is captured in education policy. When we unpack policy rhetoric and the reality of policy as it is enacted and experienced, are there consistencies in intent and outcome? I wonder what influences the enactment of policy at a school and teacher level, and how parents experience the engagement initiated there.

Appendix D: Overview of research project

Overview of Research Project

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

This doctoral research project explores questions around parental engagement in schools. The Ministry of Education states that parental involvement is very important in the life of a school, and yet we know little about how parents do engage with schools, the factors that influence this, and how this engagement could become more worthwhile.

What is the research about?

This research project arose initially from my personal and professional experiences of parental involvement in education. I originally trained and worked as a primary school teacher, experiencing a variety of approaches to engaging with parents and the school community. Since that time I have been a parent, interested and engaged in the education of my son. I have also been a member of two boards of trustees, first as a teacher and later as a parent. What these experiences highlighted was a variety of expectations and experiences parents have about involvement in schools. This research aims to explore parental involvement within your school, further, it aims to identify factors that affect the way schools and parents engage with each other, and how that might be enhanced.

An overview of the methods

Discourse / artefact analysis

This type of analysis provides the initial understanding of how parental engagement is expressed, and to do so, the research project will examine a wide range of items, including, government policy documents, communication to schools and media. At the school level, items of interest will include policy and procedures relating to parents, Board of Trustee meeting minutes, and school communication such as newsletters and achievement reports. Other physical and digital artefacts include, the school website, posters and displays, buildings, and signs.

Interviews

The one-on-one interviews are designed to reveal the experiences of parental engagement for the participant – parents and staff. The themes and perspectives from this activity will feed into the Q Sort survey.

Focus group

The focus group will be used to explore the concept of parent engagement and community with parent participants. A mental mapping activity (described below) will be used to stimulate discussion. The themes and perspectives uncovered here will be pursued further in the individual interviews and Q Sort.

Mental mapping

Mental mapping is a method which is able to draw out the experience of parents of the school built environment. The built environment is a factor that influences how policy is applied at an individual school level, therefore understanding how parents experience it is part of the lived experience of parental engagement. The mental mapping method will also be used to explore aspects of 'school community', as experienced and constructed by the parent participants. The method allows for multi-dimensional ways to capture the stories and experiences of parent participants through their own hands, providing a type of data not able to be gained through methods such as interview alone.

Q Sort survey

The statements and beliefs about parental engagement gathered via the preceding methods will be 'sorted' by all participants by their level of agreement through an online Q Sort activity. This allows for identification of common ground, or otherwise, amongst the different participant groups.

What involvement will be required?

The research is scheduled to take place throughout 2017. The *principal* will participate in one 60 minute semi-structured interview. The principal will be asked to check and amend the interview transcript to validate his or her answers. A second and final interview of 60 minutes may be conducted towards the end of the data gathering timeframe to clarify any comments or questions left unanswered. In addition, as project sponsor, the principal will facilitate document and other data collection for analysis; this is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. The time commitment for addressing any ongoing or ad hoc requirements will be negotiated directly with the principal,

as they will be determined, in part, by the particular environment of the case school. These requirements might relate to meeting the needs of the school, and the individual participants within it, or may arise from the research project as it unfolds.

The *staff* and *BOT* (including *BOT Chairperson*) volunteer participants will participate in one (1) individual 60 minute semi-structured interview. They will also be asked to check and amend the interview transcript to validate their answers.

Parent volunteer participants will participate in a focus group of 90 minutes, and an individual interview of 60 minutes. Mental mapping will form part of both of these activities and the individual meeting will include a semi-structured interview.

The final activity of the research project will be to invite all participants, along with the wider parent community, to participate in an online Q-sort survey. The Q-sort survey will consist of value statements drawn from the various participant activities.

What are the benefits for the school?

There scope for the school to work with the researcher to gain information that will be of use for their own purposes. This can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Gaining a greater knowledge parent and staff perspectives of parental engagement and its many aspects, including communicating with, and reporting to, parents.
- Understanding the variety of context specific factors that impact on the delivery, and experience, of parental engagement.
- To contribute to implementing the Ham West Way and upholding school values, particularly that of 'Ako – we learn together'.
- To contribute to school self-review, respond to the 2016 ERO Review 'Next steps' and 'Domain 3: Educationally powerful connections and relationships', of ERO's School Evaluation Indicators.

What will happen to the information collected?

Only I, a transcriber, and my supervisors (Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett) will be privy to the recordings, notes and transcriptions made in the course of the project. These will be stored securely at my university office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of subsequent research findings and reports, and in presentations and scholarly publications in the future.

As this research project fulfils a component of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, the completed thesis will be loaded onto the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, and neither individuals nor the school will be identified. Seven years after completion of the research, all research notes and recordings will be destroyed.

If the school decides to participate in this research, participants will have the right to:

- ask questions of the researcher at any time;
- answer all research questions in their own way;
- review and edit the initial transcription of their personal interview data to ensure its accuracy;
- withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw their data before the data analysis process commences; and
- have access to a copy of the final research report.

I hope that you will agree to be involved in this important research. If you have any further queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475
Supervisory committee:
Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907
Dr. Patrick Barrett   pbarrett@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 5028

Appendix E: Principal information sheet

Principal Information Sheet

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

My name is Megan Smith and I am seeking your participation in a research project exploring questions around parental engagement in schools. This research is to fulfil the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Te Kura Toi Tangata the Faculty of Education, at the University of Waikato. The Ministry of Education states that parental involvement is very important in the life of a school, and yet we know little about how parents do engage with schools and how this engagement could become more worthwhile.

What is the research about?
This research project arose initially from my personal and professional experiences of parental involvement in education. I originally trained and worked as a primary school teacher, experiencing a variety of approaches to engaging with parents and the school community. Since that time I have been a parent, interested and engaged in the education of my son. I have also been a member of two boards of trustees, first as a teacher and later as a parent. What these experiences highlighted was a variety of expectations and experiences parents have about involvement in schools. This research aims to explore parental involvement within your school, further, it aims to identify factors that affect the way schools and parents engage with each other, and how that might be enhanced.

What will you be involved in and how long will it take?
I would like to meet with you for a 60 minute semi-structured interview which will be digitally recorded. You will be provided with a copy of the guiding questions one week prior to the interview. Following your interview, the transcript will be returned to you for checking and amending if needed. A second and final interview of 60 minutes may be conducted towards the end of the data gathering timeframe to clarify any comments or questions left unanswered.

As project sponsor, your (or your delegate) assistance will be required to facilitate document and other data collection for analysis; this is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. You will be able to arrange directly with me your preferred way of addressing any ongoing or ad hoc requirements and of being kept informed of the research project.

Finally, you will be invited, along with the whole school community, to take part in an online survey about parental involvement.

Where will the interviews take place?
The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed setting; either in the privacy of a suitable school room, or off-site.

What will happen to the information collected?
Only I, a transcriber, and my supervisors (Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett) will be privy to the recordings, notes and transcriptions from your focus group and interview. These will be stored securely at my university office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of subsequent research findings and reports, and in presentations and scholarly publications in the future.

As this research project fulfils a component of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, the completed thesis will be loaded onto the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, and neither you nor your school will be identified. Seven years after completion of the research, all research notes and recordings will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will have the right to:

- ask questions of the researcher at any time;
- answer all research questions in your own way;
- review and edit the initial transcription of the interview data to ensure its accuracy;

- withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw your data before the data analysis process commences; and
- have access to a copy of the final research report provided you have remained as a participant in the research.

I hope that you will agree to be involved in this important research. If you have any further queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475

Supervisory committee:
Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907
Dr Patrick Barrett   pbarrett@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 5028

Appendix F: Principal consent and release form

Principal Consent & Release Form

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Project supervisor: Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907

Researcher: Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the *Principal Information Sheet*.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that notes will be taken during interviews, and that they will also be recorded and transcribed. All participant data from the project will be kept securely for seven years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw (by contacting the researcher) the information that I have provided up until data analysis starts.
- I understand that the findings from this research will used for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. I understand that I can ask to see the research report when it is finished.
- I understand that sections of my transcript may be presented as a quotation with pseudonym.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed; however, neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in the report or any presentations or publications that may arise from the research.
- I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, a transcriptionist (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), and members of her supervisory panel that includes Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett.
- I agree to take part in this research.

_____

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

☑ Please send my transcript to the email noted above ☐ OR to the address noted below ☐

_____

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *7 October 2016*   Reference number FEDU098/16

Appendix G: Principal and staff interview questions

Principal & Staff Interview Starter Questions

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Parental engagement / involvement

1. Describe what you think parental engagement is and what it should involve

The school engaging with parents

1. What's your role in the school and your involvement with parents?
2. Describe parental engagement at this school
3. What is your experience of that engagement?
4. In your experience, how do the following things (positively or negatively) influence parental engagement?
    a. Material factors (for example built space, technology infrastructure, staffing levels, or budget)
    b. Professional factors (for example teacher experience, training, or practice)
    c. Situational factors (for example school history, community, or location)
    d. External factors (for example Community of Learning, health & safety legislation, or media)
5. How do you think the school is going in terms of responding to the Ministry requirements for parental engagement?

Parents engaging with the school

1. How do parents engage with the school?
2. What has been your experience of that engagement?
3. What types of things make that engagement hard?
4. What types of things make that engagement easy?

Appendix H: Staff & BOT participant information sheet

Staff & BOT Member Participant Information Sheet

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

My name is Megan Smith and I am seeking your participation in a research project exploring questions around parental engagement in schools. This research is to fulfil the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Te Kura Toi Tangata the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The Ministry of Education states that parental involvement is very important in the life of a school, and yet we know little about how parents do engage with schools and how this engagement could become more worthwhile.

What is the research about?

This research project arose initially from my personal and professional experiences of parental involvement in education. I originally trained and worked as a primary school teacher, experiencing a variety of approaches to working with parents and the school community. Since that time I have been a parent, interested and involved in the education of my son. I have also been a member of two boards of trustees, first as a teacher and later as a parent. What these experiences highlighted was a variety of expectations and experiences parents have about their involvement in schools. This research aims to explore parental involvement within your school, further, it aims to identify factors that affect the way schools and parents interact and work together, and how that might be enhanced.

What will you be involved in and how long will it take?

I would like to meet with you for a 60 minute semi-structured interview which will be digitally recorded. You will be provided with a copy of the guiding questions one week prior to the interview. Following your interview, the transcript will be returned to you for checking and amending if needed.

You will also be invited, along with the whole school community, to take part in an online survey about parental involvement.

Where will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed setting; either in the privacy of a suitable school room, or off-site.

What will happen to the information collected?

Only I, a transcriber, and my supervisors (Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett) will be privy to the recordings, notes and transcriptions from your focus group and interview. These will be stored securely at my university office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of subsequent research findings and reports, and in presentations and scholarly publications in the future.

As this research project fulfils a component of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, the completed thesis will be loaded onto the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality and neither you nor your school will be identified. Seven years after completion of the research, all research notes and recordings will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will have the right to:

- ask questions of the researcher at any time;
- answer all research questions in your own way;
- review and edit the initial transcription of the interview data to ensure its accuracy;

- withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw your data before the data analysis process commences; and
- have access to a copy of the final research report provided you have remained as a participant in the research.

I hope that you will agree to be involved in this important research. If you have any further queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475

Supervisory committee:

Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907
Dr Patrick Barrett   pbarrett@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 5028

Appendix I: Staff & BOT participant consent & release form

Staff & BOT Member Participant Consent & Release Form

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Project supervisor:	Prof. Martin Thrupp	thrupp@waikato.ac.nz	07 838 4907
Researcher:	Megan Smith	megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com	0274532475

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the *Staff & BOT Member Participant Information Sheet*.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interview, and that it will also be recorded and transcribed. All participant data from the project will be kept securely for seven years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw (by contacting the researcher) the information that I have provided up until data analysis starts.
- I understand that the findings from this research will used for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. I understand that I can ask to see the research report when it is finished.
- I understand that sections of my transcript may be presented as a quotation with pseudonym.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed; however, neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in the report or any presentations or publications that may arise from the research.
- I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, a transcriptionist (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), and members of her supervisory panel that includes Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

☑ Please send my transcript to the email noted above ☐ OR to the address noted below ☐

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *7 October 2016*   Reference number FEDU098/16

Appendix J: Parent participant information sheet

Parent Participant Information Sheet

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

My name is Megan Smith and I am seeking your participation in a research project exploring questions around parental engagement in schools. This research is to fulfil the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Te Kura Toi Tangata the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The Ministry of Education states that parental involvement is very important in the life of a school, and yet we know little about how parents do engage with schools and how this engagement could become more worthwhile.

What is the research about?

This research project arose initially from my personal and professional experiences of parental involvement in education. I originally trained and worked as a primary school teacher, experiencing a variety of approaches to working with parents and the school community. Since that time I have been a parent, interested and involved in the education of my son. I have also been a member of two boards of trustees, first as a teacher and later as a parent. What these experiences highlighted was a variety of expectations and experiences parents have about their involvement in schools. This research aims to explore parental involvement within your school, further, it aims to identify factors that affect the way schools and parents interact and work together, and how that might be enhanced.

What will you be involved in and how long will it take?

I would like to invite you to take part in a 90 minute focus group with other parents, to examine your experience of being a part of this school community. The group discussion will be recorded for the research, and a transcript produced. It will not be possible for individual participants to review and amend the transcription of the focus group due to the collective nature of the data.

You may also be invited to participate in a 60 minute individual interview which will explore your personal experience of parental involvement at this school. This, too, will be recorded. Should you choose to take part, you will be provided with a copy of the guiding questions one week prior to the interview. Following your interview, the transcript will be returned to you for checking and amending if needed.

You will also be invited, along with the whole school community, to take part in an online survey about parental involvement.

Where will the activities take place?

The focus group will take place at the school or a setting agreed to by the group. The individual interview will take place at a mutually agreed setting; either in the privacy of a suitable school room, or off-site.

What will happen to the information collected?

Only I, a transcriber, and my supervisors (Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett) will be privy to the recordings, notes and transcriptions from your focus group and interview. These will be stored securely at my university office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of subsequent research findings and reports, and in presentations and scholarly publications in the future.

As this research project fulfils a component of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, the completed thesis will be loaded onto the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality and neither you nor your school will be identified. Seven years after completion of the research, all research notes and recordings will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will have the right to:

- ask questions of the researcher at any time;
- answer all research questions in your own way;
- review and edit the initial transcription of the interview data to ensure its accuracy;
- withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw your data before the data analysis process commences; and
- have access to a copy of the final research report provided you have remained as a participant in the research.

I hope that you will agree to be involved in this important research. If you have any further queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475

Supervisory committee:
Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907
Dr Patrick Barrett   pbarrett@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 5028

Appendix K: Parent participant consent & release form

Parent Participant Consent & Release Form

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Project supervisor:	Prof. Martin Thrupp	thrupp@waikato.ac.nz	07 838 4907
Researcher:	Megan Smith	megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com	0274532475

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the *Parent Participant Information Sheet*.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that notes will be taken during focus groups/interviews, and that they will also be recorded and transcribed. In addition, the result of any mapping exercise becomes part of the data of the project. All participant data from the project will be kept securely for seven years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that the identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw (by contacting the researcher) the information / maps that I have provided up until data analysis starts.
- I understand that the findings from this research will used for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. I understand that I can ask to see the research report when it is finished.
- I understand that sections of my transcript (from focus groups/interviews) may be presented as a quotation, or illustration in the case of any map, with pseudonym.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed; however, neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in the report or any presentations or publications that may arise from the research.
- I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, a transcriptionist (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), and members of her supervisory panel that includes Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

☑ Please send my transcript to the email noted above ☐ OR to the address noted below ☐

_____

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *7 October 2016*   Reference number FEDU098/16

Appendix L: Parent & BOT parent member interview starter questions

Parent & BOT Parent Member Interview Starter Questions

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Parental engagement / involvement

1. Describe what you think parental engagement is and what it should involve

The school engaging with parents

1. Describe parental engagement at this school
2. What is your experience of that engagement?
3. In your experience, how do the following things (positively or negatively) influence parental engagement?
   a. Website (or other digital media)
   b. School site – for example, the buildings and signs
   c. Communication with parents
   d. People – for example, staff, other parents, community members

Parents engaging with the school

1. Describe the different ways you have initiated engagement with the school
2. What was your experience of that engagement?
3. What types of things make that engagement hard?
4. What types of things make that engagement easy?

Appendix M: Parent interview school mapping guide

Parent Interview School Mapping Guide

Explanation of the process

Interview and mental mapping:

- I learn from you (the positive and/or negative things you choose to share)
- In this project, I am doing focus group discussions with mental mapping, individual interviews and an online survey. Some of the information and ideas we identify today may be used later in the online survey.
- You will see from the materials in front of you that we are going to be undertaking another mental mapping exercise. This mapping activity is slightly different to the first one we did on the school community, it is to help you share your experiences of the school.

Logistics

- The individual interview will last about an hour
- Where is the bathroom? Exit?

Turn on Recorder

Questions: Ask if there are any questions before getting started; address those questions.

Mental mapping exercise – the school

1. What first comes to mind when you think of your school? How would you describe it in a physical way? (verbal answers if this is conducted one-on-one)
2. I have provided a copy of the school map under a piece of paper for you. I would like you to picture yourself on an average visit to the school:
   a. Making a trip through your school, what people do you interact with – what are the paths or places of importance?
   b. Add these elements (paths, people, places etc.) to your map
   c. Where are the places you engage with teachers (formal/ planned (interviews) or informal/ unplanned (chats)) – mark them on your map and perhaps indicate whether they were planned or unplanned
   d. Are there places where certain groups meet or gather? – mark the groups and their meeting places
   e. Are there any places you wouldn't go in the school? Are there any 'invisible' or visible boundaries for parents in the school?
   f. How do you feel moving about your school? Include these feelings on your map
   g. If you think a key or legend would help explain some of the features on your map, please add it.
   h. On a post-it note – can you please write your name and stick it to your map?

Discussion

1. Is there any information about the school missing from your map?
2. How would you describe your school to others?

Concluding question

- Of all the things we've discussed during this exercise, what would you say are the most important ideas you would like to express about the school and your experience of it?

Materials and supplies for interview

- Interview Mapping Guide for Researcher
- Paper for map for participant and a copy of the school map to use under it
- Pencils, colouring pencils, erasers, washi tape and post-its
- Phone and video camera recording devices, extension cord
- Notebook & Echo pen for note-taking
- Sweets (with quiet paper wrappers)

Appendix N: Parent focus group discussion and community mapping guide

Parent Focus Group Discussion & Community Mapping Guide

Facilitator's welcome, introduction and instructions to participants

Introduce myself (see Information Sheet):

- Who I am and what I'm trying to do
- What will be done with this information
- Why I asked you to participate

Explanation of the process:

Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. About focus groups:

- I learn from you (the positive and/or negative things you choose to share)
- Not trying to achieve consensus, I'm gathering information
- In this project, I am doing focus group discussions with a mapping activity, individual interviews and an online survey. Some of the information and ideas we identify today will be explored further in the individual interviews, and later used in the online survey.
- You will see from the materials in front of you that we are going to be doing a hands on activity – this is called cognitive mapping. The mapping activity is to help us share (our experiences of the school and) our ideas about the 'school community' – it is a way of capturing information, but does not rely on any skill as an artist! You can see a range of example maps on the walls – this shows the individual ways people draw maps – there is no 'right' way to draw a cognitive map.

Logistics

- Focus group will last about an hour and a half
- Feel free to get up and stretch
- Where is the bathroom? Exit?

Ground Rules

Introduce these ground rules, ask for any further contributions:

- Everyone should participate
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations – please try not to talk over each other
- Turn off cell phones if possible
- Relax and enjoy

Turn on Recorder / HandyCam

Questions

Ask the group if there are any questions before getting started; address those questions.

Participant introductions

- From my left - go around table: Can you tell us your name and the year you first had a child at the school

(By using 'from my left' it gives a pattern to the participants which can be matched up later)

Cognitive mapping exercise – the school community

1. Brief talk about the idea of 'community' being people "joined together through mutual activity or sets of beliefs which set them apart from others" - in this case the school. It can also be about the locality where those people reside. This school community is one of several communities you may belong to.
2. Just thinking to yourself for a moment: what first comes to mind when you think of your school community? Now think about the physical parts to the school community – what do you see?
3. I would like you to draw a map of the school community as you see it (NOT of the school itself):
   a. Can I suggest you start with the school and perhaps where you live and then try to cover all the main features that make up this community?
   b. I don't expect an accurate detailed drawing – just a sketch of what *you* remember
   c. It's not important if you can't remember the names of places, but do label those places you can recall.
4. (after 10-15 minutes) I would like you to picture yourself on an average day:
   a. Making a journey to or from the school, what people do you interact with – what are the paths or places of importance?
   b. Add these elements to your map
   c. How do you feel (safe, confident, wary...) moving about your school community? Include these feelings on your map
   d. If you think a key or legend would help explain some of the features on your map, please add it
   e. On a post-it note – can you please write your name and your address and stick it to your map?

Discussion

1. Is there any information about the school community missing from your map?
2. How would you describe your school community to others?

Concluding question

- Of all the things we've discussed today, what would you say are the most important ideas you would like to express about the school community and your experience of it?

Conclusion

- That concludes our focus group
- Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with me, I hope you have also found the session interesting
- If you have any concerns or additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group, please feel free to contact me directly
- I would like to remind you that any comments featuring from this focus group will be anonymous, and to please keep the members of this group and our discussions private
- Before you leave, please hand in your maps (make sure your post-it note is stuck to it!)
- If you know another parent who may want to take part in another focus group please let me know

Materials and supplies for focus group

- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator
- Consent forms (one copy for participants, one copy for me)
- Paper for one community map for each participant (and some extras)
- Pencils, colouring pencils, erasers, washi tape and post-its
- Phone and video camera recording devices, extension cord
- Notebook & Echo pen for note-taking
- Subway & drink

Appendix O: Ethics approval – Seesaw, 14 August 2017

Dean's Office
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: **Megan Smith**

cc: **Professor Martin Thrupp**

From: **Associate Professor Carl Mika**
             Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee

Date: **14 August 2017**

Subject: **Request for Extension to Research Ethics Approval – FEDU098/16**

Thank you for your request for an extension to ethics approval for the project:

**Expressed, enacted and experienced: A case study of parental engagement in
compulsory education**

It is noted that you wish to add smaller case studies using the digital portfolios of three children and that the
data included in the project will include digital platform user analytics. Thank you for supplying the additional
participant information letter and consent forms.

I am pleased to advise that your application has received approval. Please feel free to proceed with your
research. However, we would ask you to work with your supervisors to incorporate any changes into the
existing documents for the participants. We would appreciate any finalised versions when you have them
ready.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first
instance if any further changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

Carl Mika

Dr Carl Mika
Chairperson
Research Ethics Committee

Appendix P: Participant information sheet - Seesaw

Seesaw Case Study Participant Information Sheet

> **Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school**

My name is Megan Smith and I am seeking your participation in a case study looking at how Seesaw is used by teachers and experienced by parents in your school. This case study will contribute to a wider study on parental engagement in which you have already been involved.

What is the Seesaw case study about?
This case study aims to explore how teachers and parents use and experience the digital portfolio platform, Seesaw. Through this case study I will examine how Seesaw, as an emerging digital tool, is used for engaging with parents – how it contributes to the way teachers and parents interact and work together, and how that might be enhanced.

What will be involved and how long will it take?
Parent: I would like to invite you to take part in a 60 minute interview, to examine your personal experience of Seesaw. During this interview we will look at your child's Seesaw portfolio, discussing the different posts and your response to them – examples of these may be captured as screen shots or photos in order to illustrate your experience. Our discussion will be recorded and a transcript produced. Following your interview, the transcript will be returned to you for checking and amending if needed. I would then like to interview your child's teacher to discuss with them their use of Seesaw using your child's portfolio as an example.

Teacher: After gaining permission from the parent to use their child's work as an example, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview to examine your personal experience of Seesaw. During this interview we will look at a child's Seesaw portfolio to explore how you make use of the platform in engaging with parents - examples of posts may be captured as screen shots or photos in order to illustrate your experience. Our discussion will be recorded and a transcript produced. Following your interview, the transcript will be returned to you for checking and amending if needed.

Where will the interview take place?
The interview will take place at a mutually agreed setting; either in the privacy of a suitable school room, or off-site.

What will happen to the information collected?
Only I, a transcriber, and my supervisors (Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett) will be privy to the recordings, notes, photos and transcriptions from your interview. These will be stored securely at my university office and used in the strictest confidence in the writing of subsequent research findings and reports, and in presentations and scholarly publications in the future.

As this research project fulfils a component of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, the completed thesis will be loaded onto the University of Waikato Research Commons Database.

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality and neither you nor your school will be identified. Seven years after completion of the research, all research notes and recordings will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will have the right to:

- ask questions of the researcher at any time;
- answer all research questions in your own way;

- review and edit the initial transcription of the interview data to ensure its accuracy;
- withdraw from the study at any time, and withdraw your data before the data analysis process commences; and
- have access to a copy of the final research report provided you have remained as a participant in the research.

I hope that you will agree to be involved in this important research. If you have any further queries about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Megan Smith   megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com   0274532475

Supervisory committee:
Prof. Martin Thrupp   thrupp@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 4907
Dr Patrick Barrett   pbarrett@waikato.ac.nz   07 838 5028

Appendix Q: Parent participant consent & release form – Seesaw

Parent Participant Consent & Release Form - Seesaw

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Project supervisor:	Prof. Martin Thrupp	thrupp@waikato.ac.nz	07 838 4907
Researcher:	Megan Smith	megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com	0274532475

- I have read and understood the information provided about this case study in the *Seesaw Case Study Participant Information Sheet*.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that notes will be taken during our interview, and that they will also be recorded and transcribed. In addition, any examples of my child's work or my comments, taken from Seesaw through screen shot or photo, become part of the data of the project. All participant data from the project will be kept securely for seven years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw (by contacting the researcher) the information / Seesaw examples that I have provided up until data analysis starts.
- I understand that the findings from this research will used for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. I understand that I can ask to see the research report when it is finished.
- I understand that sections of my transcript (from the interview) or Seesaw examples may be presented as a quotation, or illustration, with pseudonym.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed; however, neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in the report or any presentations or publications that may arise from the research.
- I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, a transcriptionist (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), and members of her supervisory panel that includes Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____   Phone: _____

☑ Please send my transcript to the email noted above ☐ OR to the address noted below ☐

_____

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *14 August 2017*   Reference number FEDU098/16

Appendix R: Teacher participant consent & release form – Seesaw

Teacher Participant Consent & Release Form - Seesaw

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Project supervisor:	Prof. Martin Thrupp	thrupp@waikato.ac.nz	07 838 4907
Researcher:	Megan Smith	megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com	0274532475

- I have read and understood the information provided about this case study in the *Seesaw Case Study Participant Information Sheet*.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that notes will be taken during our meeting, and that they will also be recorded and transcribed. In addition, any examples of my comments taken from Seesaw become part of the data of the project. All participant data from the project will be kept securely for seven years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw (by contacting the researcher) the information / Seesaw examples that I have provided up until data analysis starts.
- I understand that the findings from this research will used for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. I understand that I can ask to see the research report when it is finished.
- I understand that sections of my transcript (from the interview) or Seesaw examples may be presented as a quotation, or illustration, with pseudonym.
- I understand that while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed; however, neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in the report or any presentations or publications that may arise from the research.
- I understand that the information that I provide will be confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, a transcriptionist (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), and members of her supervisory panel that includes Prof. Martin Thrupp and Dr. Patrick Barrett.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

☑ Please send my transcript to the email noted above ☐ OR to the address noted below ☐

_____

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *14 August 2017*   Reference number *FEDU098/16*

Appendix S: Seesaw interview discussion guide

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Seesaw Discussion Guide

Teacher Interview Guide

Introduce case study (see Information Sheet):

- Who I am and what I'm trying to do
- What will be done with this information
- Consent from parent

About Seesaw:

- As a classroom teacher what role do you see for Seesaw? Does it replace or supplement other activities you use?
- Tell me about how it works in practice
- What are the barriers / opportunities for this platform from a teacher / parent perspective (e.g. parental access, time taken to use it effectively)

Review of child's profile:

- Let's look through this profile, talk through what posts have been made – who chose them and how they fulfil the role you see for Seesaw (take screenshots or photos of examples)

Parent examples:

- View the parent chosen examples
- Who chose them and how they fulfil the role you see for Seesaw

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Parent Interview Guide

Introduce case study (see Information Sheet):

- Who I am and what I'm trying to do
- What will be done with this information

About Seesaw:

- As a parent what role do you see Seesaw as playing in your engagement with the school? Could it or does it replace or supplement something else?
- Tell me about how it works in practice
- What are the barriers / opportunities for this platform from a parent perspective (e.g. access, timeliness)
- If you have more than one child, do you notice a difference between how the teachers use Seesaw?

Review of child's profile:

- Let's look through your child's profile, talk through what posts have been made – how they fulfil the role you see for Seesaw

Profile examples:

- Capture 2-3 examples that stood out for the parent, and make notes about why
- Screenshot or photo of these

Appendix T: Transcription confidentiality agreement

Transcription Confidentiality Agreement

Experiences of parental engagement within a New Zealand school

Researcher/s Name: Megan SMITH
Address: Te Whiringa School of Educational Leadership & Policy, The University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
Phone number: 0274532475
Email: megan.pearce.smith@gmail.com

I, _____, (full name - please print) agree to ensure that the audiotapes I transcribe will remain confidential to the researcher, Megan Smith, and myself.

I agree to the following:

1. I will ensure that no other person hears the recording.
2. I will ensure that no other person has access to my PC.
3. On completion of transcription, I will not retain or copy any information involving the research project.
4. I will treat in absolute confidence all information that I become aware of in the course of transcribing the interviews or other material connected with the above research topic. This means I will respect the privacy of the individuals mentioned in the interviews that I am transcribing. I will not pass on in any form information regarding those interviews to any person or institution.
5. I will not discuss any aspect of the recording with anyone except the researcher, Megan Smith.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Name: _____

Approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on *7 October 2016*   Reference number FEDU098/16