CREATING AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING CULTURE IN A NEW SCHOOL

A thesis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of the Principal and staff during the establishment of a new school, to understand the development of a learning culture and to examine the tensions for leadership.

This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm and uses two methodologies: self-study research and case study research. Methods of collecting information in this study were designed to capture the culture in the school as it developed. The combined documentation of my professional journal, the focus group and school documents allowed an insight into the realities of developing a learning culture in a new school.

The findings of this study highlight four themes:

- Stakeholders having ownership of touchstone documents to provide focus.
- The importance of relationship building.
- Focusing on learning for students, staff and the community.
- Leadership challenges for new schools.

The study concludes by making recommendations at policy level to support new school principals and at school level to offer suggestions for focus points.

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

BOT   Board of Trustees. 5-8 members of the community elected by school parents to govern the school.

EBOT   Establishment Board of Trustees. 5- 8 members of the community appointed by the Ministry of Education to establish the school. At Sand Dune School, the Establishment Board governed for 2 years before passing the governance to the elected Board of Trustees.

ERO   Education Review Office. Employed by the Ministry of Education to review schools performance.

FOTS   Friends of the School.

IT   Information Technology.

MOE   Ministry of Education. While New Zealand schools are self managing, the Ministry of Education has systemic leadership of education.

SLT   Senior Leadership Team. At Sand Dune School, this consisted of Principal, Deputy Principal and two Assistant Principals.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

IN THE BEGINNING

Throughout my career, I have had a strong interest in creating a new school. As a beginning teacher I used to dream about what I would do "when I started up my own school".   In 2009, the opportunity arose with applications being invited for the Principal's position of Rocky Shore School. While the timing was not ideal, as I had only been leading my current school for two years, it was an exciting opportunity. After much personal reflection and discussion with principal colleagues (who unanimously advised me against applying due to the workload and stress), I applied and was appointed as Principal of Rocky Shore School.

On leaving my former school for the last time, I considered all the dreams that I held for the "ideal" school. The school I was leaving had had a great heart – and you could "feel it" when you walked in the gate, however the school was over 100 years old and had a strong connection with the local Maori community. The new school was in a newly built housing area. How could I translate this "heart" to a new school? "How could a similar culture, one with heart, community and family be created in a new school?" Could culture even be created?

ROCKY SHORE SCHOOL

The focus of this study was a new school built in a fast growing residential area, located on the outskirts of a New Zealand city. The Ministry of Education (MOE) appointed the Establishment Board of Trustees (EBOT) from applicants in the wider community in early 2009. Each had a passion to create an effective community school. Amongst the many EBOT tasks, three were crucial: "design" the layout with the architect, consult with the local community on a vision and values, and appoint the Principal.

The EBOT considered community voice essential for the vision and values. Two community meetings were held to gather data regarding what was important for the families in the area. Key themes to emerge from the

consultation were a dynamic, creative education, an inclusive and flexible learning environment, quality teaching and learning, strong community relationships and a pride in the local heritage.

The school opened in February 2011 with 83 students from year 1 to 4. 70% of students were New Zealand European and 28% New Zealand Maori. We were graded as a decile 5^1 school, however this was probably low in reality. Our school families were typically two parent families, where the fathers worked full time in the trades and the mothers worked part-time or were at home full time. Teaching or teacher training was common among the parents' professions. Many of the students were eldest children, meaning that a number of families had not attended other primary schools before. Many families owned their own homes in the new subdivisions surrounding the school. The local community was a very tightknit group, was supportive of each other and keen to work together to make the community and its local environment the best it could be.

During the first 12 months, we focused on building relationships with the staff, students and community. We realised, however, that relationships were not enough. They needed to be learning-focused. We then focused on not only the learning of our students, but also the learning needs of our teachers, our leaders and our community. We worked hard to engage and involve our parent community in their children's learning.

THE STUDY
This study provided a unique opportunity to document our journey of opening a new school, analyse documentation through a learning culture lens and contribute towards research material for future new school principals to use. My original intention was to investigate the leadership actions taken to build "heart and culture" and examine their impact. During the study period, the research question was redefined to focus on a

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[1] New Zealand schools are given a decile ranking from 1-10, one being the lowest socio-economically.

learning culture as culture and learning are heavily entwined. Culture is the basis for quality learning and learning is the core purpose of schools.

My literature review was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to a school being described as effective?
2. What are the features of an effective school's culture?
3. What role does leadership have in an effective school culture?
4. How is a new school different to an established school? Which aspects of the effective school, culture and leadership literature are relevant to a new school?

A substantial body of literature explores effective schools, culture and leadership; however there was little evidence of links to new schools. This study attempts to address some aspects of culture in a new school.

This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology involving case study research. By using case study research, I was able to capture rich descriptive data and reflect on themes and trends more effectively.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
By pursuing this research, I anticipated having a clearer understanding of the factors contributing towards developing an effective learning culture in a new school. As new school research is scanty, the information gathered from this study may assist newly appointed Principals when developing a learning culture in their school. While the context of this study is specifically relevant to new New Zealand schools, there may be relevance to new schools opening internationally.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY
The study is presented in six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study and explores the background of Rocky Shore School explaining my interest in establishing culture in a new school. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature in the effective schools, culture, leadership and new schools' fields. Chapter Three explains the research design and

explores the methodologies and methods, describing case study research. The processes used to analyse all collected information are also outlined. Finally, relevant ethical issues of the study are described. Chapter Four describes a chronology of Rocky Shore School's development in the first 20 months of operation and Chapter Five presents thematic findings of the study. Chapter Six presents a discussion of the findings of this study and describes limitations. Chapter Seven gives a summary of the study and then points to implications of the findings for the MOE and other new principals.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the factors contributing to an effective learning culture in a new school. The intention is to understand the development of a learning culture while examining the tensions, pressures and barriers to success. The five areas reviewed in this chapter are:

- school culture,
- effective schools,
- culture in effective schools,
- leadership of an effective school,
- creating culture in a new school environment.

A substantial body of literature explores school culture, school effectiveness and effective leadership practices, however there is little acknowledgement in New Zealand literature of effective culture in new schools. The research cited in this literature review has been found via the University of Waikato library online catalogues and databases, the World Wide Web and in my own personal collection of leadership books. Much of this literature is from the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. This omission in New Zealand literature is one that I hope to address.

SCHOOL CULTURE

Culture is often referred to as "the way we do things around here" (Bower, 1966, p. 22), however there has been much debate by researchers over many years about what we mean when we talk about culture. Deal & Peterson (1999) note that there is no globally agreed upon "best definition" of school culture. Barth, (1981, p. 145) describes culture as a "useful if intricate and elusive notion" and Dimmock & Walker (2005, p. 8) assert that "culture is clearly a difficult and abstruse concept to define". School

culture, however, can be viewed in one of two ways (Prosser, 1999; Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

1. Firstly, culture can be described by social theory. In its broadest sense, culture refers to society and the way of life of the members of a particular group. These can be expressed through thoughts and actions or through icons and monuments or more significantly through social interaction. Deal & Peterson (2009, p. 7), in their extensive work on school culture, concur by describing culture as consisting of the "stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behaviour over time", while Deal & Kennedy (1982) as cited in (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 7) describe "shared beliefs and values that closely knit a community together". This is a notion that culture is all around us and we interact with each other to continually co-construct culture that is meaningful to us. Studies that draw on the "wider" definition of culture emphasise the relationship between a nation or community's culture and the school's culture. It would be shortsighted to consider that schools can separate their culture from the culture of the local community.

2. Secondly, culture can be viewed from an organisational theorist's perspective, which sees culture as more specific to a particular organisation and the values and norms within it. Prosser, (1999, p. xii) describes this as a "system of related subsystems which in turn organise the relationships among cultural patterns". These include values and beliefs, norms of behavior, social structures, systems and groups, roles, control systems, rituals and traditions. Organisational culture provides a way of looking at and thinking about the behaviour of and within schools. Barth (2002, p. 6), agrees when he describes culture as "a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the

organisation… it wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act".

Similarly, Schein (1997), in his extensive work researching culture in clinical situations and as a consultant across a wide range of organisations' worldwide, emphasises organisational structures of culture when he describes culture as

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (p. 12).

Schein has analysed levels of culture to determine the essence of culture. He describes artefacts (very visible organisational structures and processes, for example, physical environment, emotional displays and published lists of values), espoused values (strategies, goals and philosophies) and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, thoughts and feelings) as the three levels of organisational culture.

Figure 1: Schein's Model of Organisational Culture

Figure 2.1. Levels of Culture.

Artifacts	Visible organizational structures and processes (hard to decipher)
Espoused Beliefs and Values	Strategies, goals, philosophies (espoused justifications)
Underlying Assumptions	Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. . . (ultimate source of values and action)
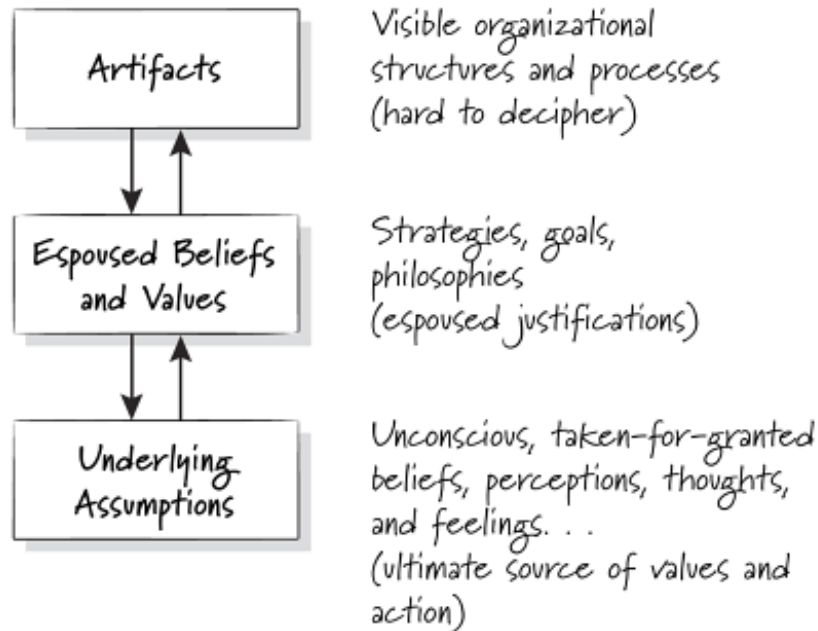
(Schein, 2004, p. 26)

He asserts that while the essence of a culture is easily observable in artefacts, these do not always reflect real meaning. Different people, depending on their own feelings and reactions, also interpret artefacts differently.

To analyse culture more deeply, one could investigate the espoused values of the school. Espoused values are those values shared at a conscious level. These values often determine what people will say in a particular situation but may not be in line with what they actually do. This is an interesting level of culture to explore as the espoused values may be aspirational, rather than reflecting what is happening in a school. For example, a school may have clearly written values; while the leaders may state that they are what the school believes in, their actions may represent another reality.

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To really understand a culture, Schein, (1997) suggests that one must try to analyse and understand its shared assumptions and how they came to be. Schein's iceberg model illustrates this effectively by demonstrating that while there are visible cultural aspects of a school, there are also significant hidden elements that are difficult to decipher.

Figure 2: Schein's Iceberg Model of Culture
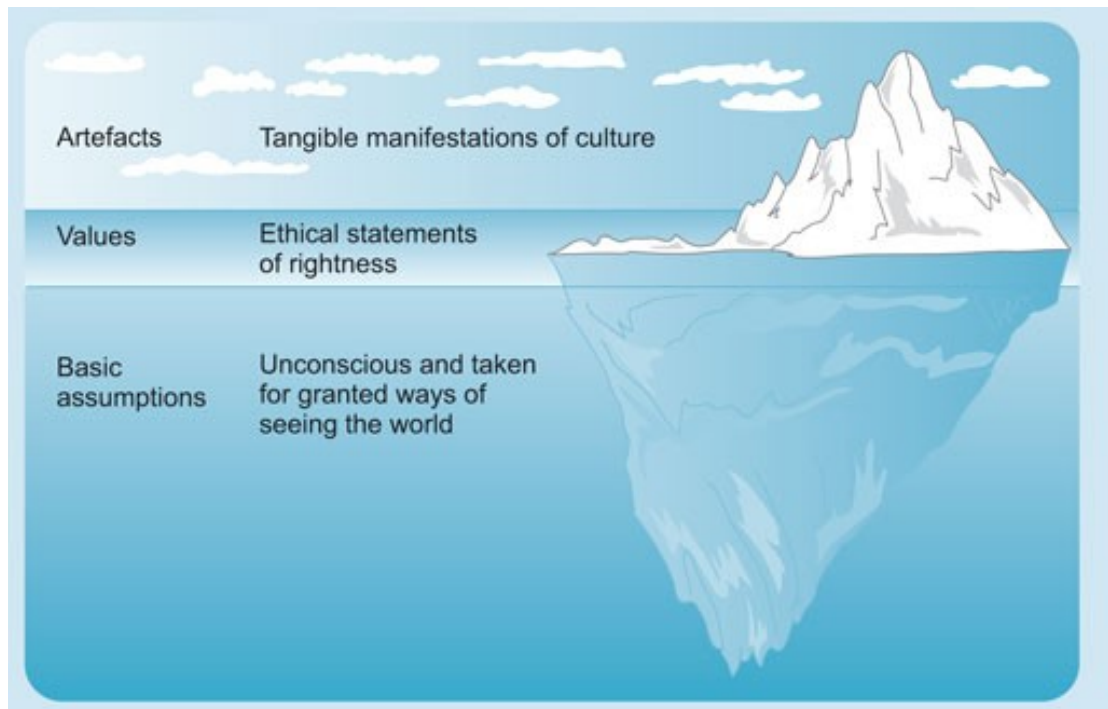
("Organisational culture - Management: Perspective and practice," n.d.)

Schein maintains that the most central issue for leaders is how to understand the deeper levels of culture and how to assess the functionality of individual and shared assumptions. The key to Schein's theory is that we need to understand all three levels to truly understand an organisation's culture.

In contrast to social theories, organisational theories demonstrate "how culture is created, embedded, developed and ultimately manipulated, managed and changed" (Schein, 1997, p. 1). Organisational theories make strong connections between culture and leadership. "If culture is not

accepted as an organisational feature, it cannot be treated as a variable to explain, for example, the behaviour of members of the organisation" (Van Houtte, 2005, p. 84).

Sergiovanni (2000), in his extensive work on educational leadership, effective schools and culture, offers a different perspective when he describes the "lifeworld" of a school. He uses this term to refer to "the stuff of culture, the essence of values and beliefs, the expression of needs, purposes, and desires of people, and about the sources of deep satisfaction in the form of meaning and significance"(p. 5). In contrast, a school also must have a "systemworld", best understood as management systems ideally designed to support the "lifeworld". This is a world of "efficiency, outcomes and productivity"(p. 4). Sergiovanni, (2000, p. 4) emphasises that the "systemworld" and "lifeworld" need to work together in a symbiotic relationship to have an equally valuable standing. "If the systemworld drives the lifeworld, organisational character erodes" (p. 4).

For the purpose of this study, I will explore school culture using the perspectives of social and organisational theorists. This study will therefore reflect my underlying belief that school culture is socially constructed and reflects the community it is within, however that the creation, development and embedding of a culture can be encouraged and developed by leadership.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS
Effective schools research analyses the consequences of actions on student achievement, showing specific interest in the impact those different variables have on student learning. Lezotte, who worked alongside Edmonds, one of the original effective schools researchers, asserts

> An effective school is characterized by high overall student
> achievement with no significant gaps in that achievement ... The
> effective school is built on a foundation of high expectations, strong

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leadership, unwavering commitment to learning for all, collaboration, differentiated instruction and frequent monitoring of student progress (Lezotte & McKee Snyder, 2011, p. 15).

In New Zealand (NZ), the Education Review Office (ERO) has analysed and synthesised 36 national evaluations and reports of good practice over four years to identify qualities of effective schools. Regardless of the context of a school, ERO have found that an effective school focuses on the learner's potential by analyzing needs, progress and achievement, has an inclusive culture which promotes leadership**,** makes decisions that enhance effective teaching**,** engages with their community and aligns all aspects of the school with agreed values and priorities and these are reviewed continuously (ERO, 2011). The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in the United Kingdom commissioned a similar study in 1994 (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995). Researchers found eleven key characteristics of effective schools. Like the NZ report, this list also emphasised quality relationships with the parent community, a shared vision and values, and purposeful teaching and learning that monitors student progress. Both reports also described the need for high quality professional leadership by the Principal and the development of the school as a learning community.

Findings from extensive effective schools literature have generated seven characteristics that effective schools share, commonly known as the correlates of effective schools. These correlates represent the knowledge that educators need to successfully teach children.

Figure 3: The 7 Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte, 2011)

The 7 Correlates of Effective Schools
(Lawrence W. Lezotte)

1.) Instructional Leadership

2.) Clear and Focused Mission

3.) Safe and Orderly Environment

4.) Climate of High Expectations

5.) Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

6.) Positive Home-School Relations

7.) Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task
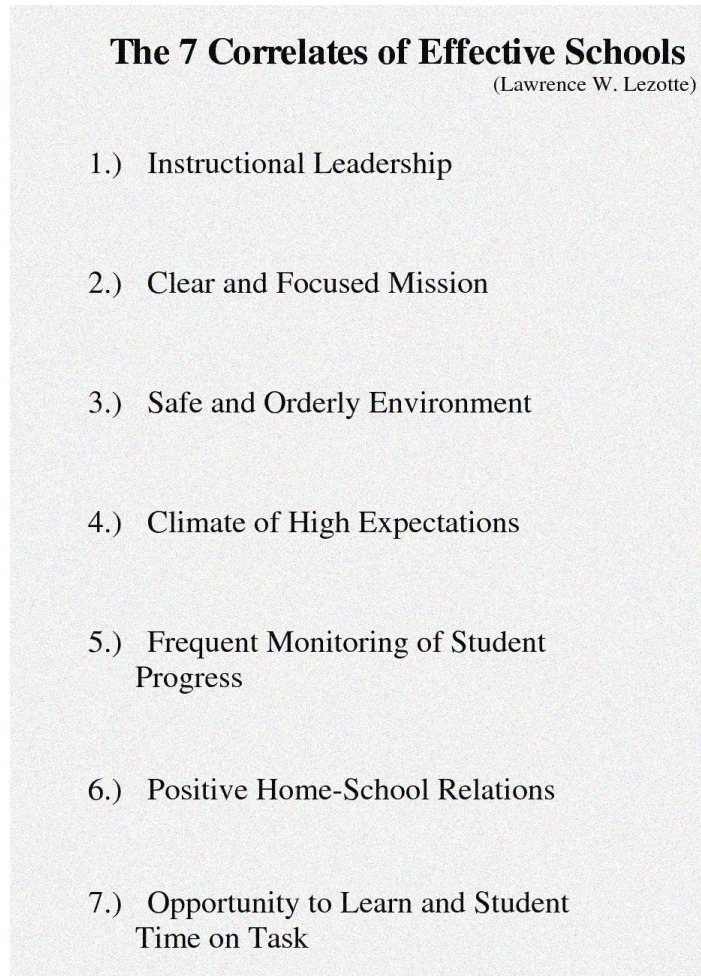
The correlates are designed to be more than just theory, rather to describe what effective schools actually do. It is interesting to note that while "it is important to understand what effective schools do, we know little about how to get there", (Barth, 1991, p. 40) citing Ronald Edmonds.

Next, I will review literature on three key areas: touchstone documents, a focus on learning for all and community engagement.

Touchstone documents
From an anthropological perspective, school culture manifests itself in the artefacts of culture (Schein, 1997), which are the vision, values, rituals, symbols, stories, and beliefs (Stoll, 1998; Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Saphier & King, (1985), assert that a clear, articulated vision which embodies core values and beliefs, gives shape and direction to a school culture. In an effective school, stakeholders create clearly articulated vision, mission and values documents, which focus on successful learning for all. These "touchstone" documents indicate what the school community believes about learning at the school, the values that are important and what the school aspires to become.

Many studies of effective schools emphasise the importance of shared "touchstones" in order to deliver aspirations, unite in purpose, develop a consistent approach to learning and build congenial and collaborative relationships (Sammons et al., 1995). Ideally, stakeholders should collaborate to form shared understanding and commitment to the schools' priorities in these documents as "sustainable change will only come from the collective internal understanding and commitment of the educators and other stakeholders to a common mission, a moral imperative of learning for all" (Lezotte & McKee Snyder, 2011, p. 66). Barth, (1991, p. 150) asserts "Why should educators be placed – or place themselves – in the position of only implementing the grand ideas of others, ideas with which they may not agree?   Nothing is more toxic to the development of a community of learners." ERO (2009) found that schools where staff collaborated using a school-wide approach, were better aligned with the school's strategic goals, which resulted in a better-shared understanding of the curriculum.

While it is not always possible to co-construct touchstone documents, attention to the vision, values, beliefs, and school norms could begin in personnel selection (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Pawlas, 1997) by using them as a filter for selecting staff. In his thesis, which investigated effective practice by administrators when creating school culture in a new school, Holmes, (2009, p. 71) states that "making sure that new staff members will accept and support the existing culture, expectations and direction the school has embraced is crucial". "If all the staff are pulling in the same

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shared direction…we are more likely to achieve our goals" (Hargreaves, 1999, p. 57).

In contrast to much of the literature, Haberman, (2004, p. 2) believes that visioning is the leader's role and implies a "lead from the front" mentality when he asserts "he creates a common vision; builds effective teams to implement that vision; and engenders commitment to task, i.e. the persistent hard work needed to engender learning" (p. 2).

In the next section, the importance of learning in effective schools is discussed.

Learning

Arguably the most important theme from effective schools research is a focus on learning. Southworth (1994) as cited in (Sammons et al., 1995) asserts that a "Learning School" needs learning at five interrelated levels – student, teacher, staff, organisational and leadership. ERO, (2011); Lezotte & McKee Snyder, (2011) and Sammons et al., (1995) describe effective schools meeting student learning needs through careful needs analysis and monitoring of progress and achievement. ERO recommended, "making decisions which enhance teaching" as a key aspect of effective schools. This included delivering high quality education by having high expectations, providing rich authentic learning programmes, differentiating the programme to meet student needs and building collaborative learning relationships.

The literature reflects the importance of positive relationships in schools (Barth, 2002; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Goleman, 2002; Pawlas, 1997) and their impact on student learning outcomes. ERO (2011) found that positive relationships were integral to developing a successful learning environment. Absolum (2006, p. 29) citing Black & William, 1998, asserts

> Students who are active in their learning, who are motivated to learn… who test their learning and reflect on their learning, learn

much better than those who experience passive learning situations. A foundational step in establishing this type of environment is the creation of the right type of relationship – a learning focused relationship – with the student.

Effective schools promoted learning relationships by encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning, understanding how they best learn and designing learning goals that were relevant to them. They encouraged students to take risks and collaborate with others to enhance their own learning.

There is extensive evidence in the literature that teacher (and leader) learning is also an important factor of an effective school. "Excellent schools are learning organisations, with teachers and senior managers continuing to be learners, keeping up to date with their subjects and with advances in understanding about effective practice" (Southworth, 1994, p. 52). Barth, (1981, p. 145) asserts

> Probably nothing within a school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. When teachers examine, question, reflect on their ideas and develop new practices that lead towards their ideals, students are alive. When teachers stop growing, so do their students.

ERO's (2008b) report highlighted the importance of teachers being involved in collaborative discussions about best teaching practice, planning professional learning which was directly linked to student needs and their teaching practice, and being part of a supportive and reflective environment. The effective school movement emphasises teacher excellence, collaboration, and mentoring so that schools become "places where every educator is recognized as a valuable contributor with unique strengths and impressive potential to learn, grow and improve" (Johnson, 1997, p. 2).

Fullan (2005) contends the same approach is true for students. Effective schools design professional learning for teachers and leaders to strengthen their knowledge and pedagogy. This has an impact on student learning.

Community engagement and positive parent relationships

Effective schools have positive relationships with parents and the community. Byrk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton (2010) in their study of 100 successful and 100 problematic elementary schools found that strong home-school ties were an essential support to quality education. In their work on family involvement in schools, Hiatt-Michael & Hands, (2010) emphasise this further by arguing that these relationships are one of the most powerful forces in education.

ERO (2008b) identified six key factors as critical to enhancing and strengthening the partnership between schools and their parents.

- A vision and commitment from **school leaders to working in partnership** with all parents
- Formal and informal **relationships based on mutual trust and respect**
- An **inclusive school culture** that enables all parents to be actively involved
- **Teachers work in partnership with parents** to provide opportunities for them to learn about and share their child's learning and achievement.
- **Parent and community expertise is valued** and contributes to school programmes.
- A variety of opportunities for parents to exchange information with teachers are available. **Consultation is integral** and there is a shared understanding about the priorities for student learning

Epstein's (1995) framework for parent-school collaboration identifies six ways that parents and schools can complement each other.

Figure 3: Epstein's Keys to Successful Partnerships

Type 1 — Parenting
Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.

Type 2 — Communicating
Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.

Type 3 — Volunteering
Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.

Type 4 — Learning at Home
Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

Type 5 — Decision Making
Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.

Type 6 — Collaborating with the Community
Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

(National Network of Partnership Schools, n.d.)

Effective schools consult with their parents to set school priorities, listen to the aspirations they have for their children and feedback relevant information about the school and their child's learning in a timely manner. The staff in an effective school are approachable and willing to embrace parents as partners in their child's learning. ERO, (2008a) found that "the better the relationship and engagement (of parents, schools and communities), the more positive impact on students' learning."

In contrast to the literature emphasising the positive impact for parental involvement, Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, (1988) found a

negative effect in the form of Parent –Teacher type associations and suggested that formal, organised parental involvement could not only present barriers (to those not within the "clique") but also was not sufficient to ensure effective involvement that enhanced learning goals.

CULTURE IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Unsurprisingly, the culture of an effective school links closely to school effectiveness studies. Fullan (2005, p. 58), observes that of the 134 schools who were part of the Hay Group study in 2004 in England, that "successful schools had a much more demanding culture – hunger for improvement, promoting excellence, holding hope for every child – while the less successful school had less of a press on improvement and were more forgiving if results were not forthcoming". Stoll & Fink (1996) as cited in (Stoll, 1998) describe school cultures as either effective-ineffective or improving-declining in their model of five cultures. Moving schools, the most effective of the five cultures described in the model, are those that strive for continuous improvement as an organisation and as individuals within it. Through this quest for continuous personal and organisational growth, a "moving school" adds significant value to student learning outcomes.
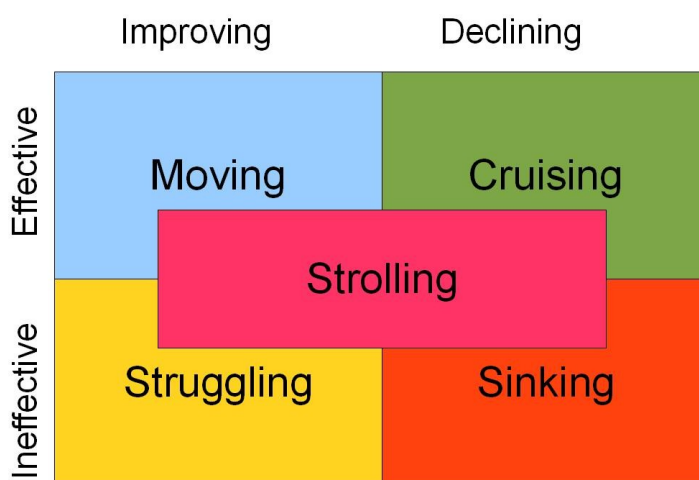
Figure 4: Stoll and Fink's Effective – Ineffective Model

("Stoll and Fink's - Moving schools," 2010)

The literature indicates that there are three features of school cultures linked to continuous improvement and student learning: professional learning community, organisational learning and trust (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009).

Professional learning community

From their extensive academic and business work in the area of communities, Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder,(2002, p. 4) define communities of practice as:

> Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

Research from this field contributes to our understanding of communities and how they function and evolve. While there appears to be no agreed upon definition of a learning community, there is a consensus that it will involve a group of teachers sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth promoting way (Mitchell and Sackney 2000; Toole and Louis 2002, as cited in Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 2).

To be successful, a professional learning community needs to have a clear direction and focus for the future.

> A school cannot function as a PLC until its staff has grappled with the questions that provide the direction for the school as an organisation and the individuals within it   … When a staff can answer this they are articulating the shared mission, vision, values and goals that constitute the foundation of a PLC.   This becomes the basis of all the decisions that drive the school (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 3).

Much of the literature emphasises the value of teachers working together to achieve better outcomes for students. "Schools that function as

professional learning communities are always characterised by a collaborative culture" (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 5).

> The idea that a single teacher, working on her own can do everything to meet the diverse needs of many learners is an idea whose time has passed. Our teachers and youth deserve an opportunity to draw on the collaborative power of teamwork that has become the key to success in every high performing organisation in our economy, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010 cited in Allison et al., (2011, p. 86).

Teachers will be more effective working together to learn, grow and change while taking collective responsibility for student's learning.

Organisational learning

Closely linked to learning communities, organisational learning focuses on the ways that the organisation learns as a whole. How does the school bring in new ideas, evaluate them, use them, sustain them and then generate new knowledge from them? Organisational learning also requires teachers to work together in professional learning communities to contribute to continuous improvement of the school (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009). Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, (2010, p. 222) describe an effective school culture as one which is associated with "student and teacher motivation, student academic achievement, teacher job satisfaction, commitment and collaboration, and school community building". Peterson, (2002) concurs when he describes a positive school culture as one where "meaningful staff development, successful curricular reform and the effective use of student performance data" (p. 383) are evident. He also asserts

> The most positive cultures value staff members who help lead their own development, create well-defined improvement plans, organise study groups, and learn in a variety of ways. Cultures that celebrate

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recognize, and support staff learning bolster professional community (Peterson, 2002, p. 383).

Trust

Finally, trust is the "glue" that holds the learning community together. While in businesses trust has been linked to organisational effectiveness, in schools, trust between staff members and students has been linked to higher student achievement, Tschannen-Moran, (2004) as cited in (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009). Collegial trust is essential to build effective communities of learners who are confident in risk taking and problem solving. "When trust exists, organisations tend to think more creatively, take more risks and share information more readily" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 104). The effective school, which has a culture of collaboration and trust, promotes "quality relationships, characterized by genuineness, caring, unconditional acceptance and inclusiveness "(Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 37).

Collaborating and learning together is not without its challenges. Teaching has changed; "classrooms are now more transparent and the nature of teaching and learning are open to almost continuous scrutiny" (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, p. 5). This adds pressure to teachers' workplace environments. Rogoff, Goodman, & Bartlett (2001), taught in a public school in the USA, based on collaborative learning. They describe how time consuming and frustrating group decision-making could be. "Group decision making is always a slow process, and constructing a shared sense of meaning never comes easily", (p. 23). They also discuss the challenges of the public accountability of the collaborative process. "There was always someone watching me no matter what I was doing - planning, managing, teaching, evaluating. At first this bothered me a lot" (p. 28). Eaker et al., (2002) in their work about reculturing schools as professional learning communities, discuss how in a collaborative learning environment, individual teachers have to give up a degree of personal autonomy to collectively answer questions about teaching and learning.

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Collective inquiry and action research are now the tools teachers need to use to expand their professional expertise.

LEADERSHIP OF AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

What is leadership?

For this study, descriptions of leadership used in the School Leadership and Student Outcomes (BES), (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) have been adopted as this represents a meta-analysis of a large cross section of current research. The term leadership is used to describe "positional and distributed leadership, is highly fluid and is embedded in specific tasks and situations" (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 66). It includes the Principal, BOT, and senior leadership team and teacher leaders.

As we are educationalists, a more specific definition of educational leadership is also necessary. Educational leadership is defined by Elmore, (2004, p. 13), as "guidance and direction of instructional improvement". Robinson et al., (2009) describe educational leadership as follows:

> The purpose of educational leadership is not only to develop a cohesive culture, have good communication channels with staff and students and monitor and evaluate instruction – it is to do all these things in a manner that improves teaching and learning. Educational leadership is leadership that causes others to do things that can be expected to improve educational outcomes for students (p. 69 – p.70).

The BES analysis of the impact of school leadership on students, compared transformational and pedagogical leadership (Robinson et al., 2009).   Transformational leadership emphasises relationships, the school vision and inspiration. Pedagogical leadership has more emphasis on educational purposes, clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teaching and learning. Interestingly, pedagogical

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leadership was shown to have four times the impact on student outcomes as transformational leadership. It could be argued that these theories are complementary and both are needed to be successful. Neither emphasised solely will be as effective as a mutual emphasis.

Leadership and culture

This section examines the strong interconnection between leadership and the culture of the school. Elbot & Fulton, (2008) in their guide for building an intentional culture, argue that very few leaders understand the importance of school culture and therefore do not take a considered plan of action to intentionally shape it.

> Given the impact that a school's culture can have on a student's life – present and future – the stakes are simply too high to leave its shaping to chance: adults need to thoughtfully and deliberately create the kind of educational environment in which every student can flourish (Elbot & Fulton, 2008, p. 3).

The role of the leader in an effective school is critical to the development of an effective learning culture. Lezotte & McKee Snyder, (2011, p. 63) state "effective school research has consistently found that effective schools have strong and effective leadership". While the leader's influence on teacher practice and student achievement is largely indirect (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), indirect effects are the largest because leaders work "with and through others" (Southworth, 2011, p. 74). Habegger (2008), in her work with three highly effective principals, asserts, "principals need to create a positive school culture that promotes learning and engagement for students and adults…school culture is the heart of improvement and growth" (p. 42). Stoll, (1998) describes the role of leadership in relationship to school culture as central. Schein (1997, p. 5), goes so far as to say that the "only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture". Habegger (2008) noted that a culture that empowered and instilled confidence in teachers allowed other components

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of successful schools to flourish. She concludes that there were two significant types of activities on which these highly effective principals focused their attention: creating a sense of belonging and providing a clear direction for teachers, student and parents. By purposefully shaping school culture, a leader can build trust, promote high standards of student and teacher learning and develop a positive involved community. School culture is a critical factor of an effective school.

Leadership and a shared vision
While the Principal's role in leadership is important in an effective school, senior leaders, teacher leaders and those in governance roles also have important roles to play.   These roles need to be grounded in the vision, values and expectations of the school and set the tone for the school culture. "Everyone understands the importance of building a shared commitment to the school's vision and the way in which their individual and sometimes multiple roles contribute to this" (ERO, 2011, p. 28).   "The school-wide touchstone is a central tool for shaping an intentional school culture" (Elbot & Fulton, 2008, p. 17).

Lezotte & McKee Snyder, (2011) in their review of research related to leadership, defined a number of qualities and abilities that leaders need to build and maintain an effective school. Two of the five qualities listed were linked to the vision. These included being able to develop and articulate a shared vision of what the school might become and using data to monitor the progress made towards it. In the New Zealand (BES), Robinson et al., (2009) identified "establishing goals and expectations" (p. 96) as first among five key dimensions. Goal setting is defined as "the setting, communicating and monitoring of learning goals, standards, and expectations and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals" (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 95). Building vision and setting directions is also identified by Leithwood & Reihl, (2003) as one of the key practices of educational leadership. They also assert "leaders do not merely impose goals on followers, but work

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with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction" (p. 2). Hattie (2009, p. 83) clarifies the role further by arguing, "It is school leaders who promote challenging goals, and then establish safe environments for teachers to critique, question, and support other teachers to reach these goals together that have most effect on student outcomes". While Haberman, (2004) expects the principal to create the clear school vision as part of his or her role as an effective leader, many academics promote the creation of a shared purpose or vision.

Leadership and learning

It is not difficult to make connections between learning and school leadership. Southworth, (2011, p. 71) asserts, "School leadership involves keeping close to student outcomes, achievements and progress". Leithwood, Day, C, Sammons, Harris, A, & Hopkins, (2006, p. 6) go as far as saying that school leadership is only second to classroom teaching in influencing student learning. In the BES (Robinson et al., 2009) meta-analysis, five leadership dimensions were identified and analysed. "Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development" had double the effect size of "establishing goals and expectations" and "planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum" (p. 95).

Effective school leaders influence a quality learning culture by modeling behaviours that expect it. If learning is important to a leader, he or she may demonstrate this by sharing learning in classrooms, having discussions about teaching and learning with teachers and ensuring that teacher time (for example in meetings) is predominantly focused on learning.

> Learning-centred leaders are role models to others because they are interested in learning, teaching and classroom, and want to
>
> know more about them and keep in touch with what is happening in these key areas across the school. (Southworth, 2011, p. 76)

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Effective school leaders also carefully monitor and analyse student achievement and progress data. This could also include visiting classrooms and providing useful teacher feedback and feed forward. Southworth, (2011, p. 76) asserts "where monitoring is effective the quality of teaching is noticeably higher than in schools were monitoring is poor and infrequent". Observations of teachers can also play an essential role in a collaborative learning environment where teachers are inquiring collectively to improve their practice.

Effective school leaders promote collaborative learning cultures within the school. They create the conditions where teachers can have quality learning conversations and learn from and with each other. "Professional conversation enables teachers to expand their teaching repertoires and to improve their understandings of their teaching practices" (Southworth, 2011, p. 78).   In his work, Leithwood, (2011) describes core leadership practices that improve student learning. By providing individualised support for teachers, building collaborative cultures and nurturing collaboration within the organisation, Leithwood believes that there will be a positive impact on student learning. Collaborative learning cultures encourage sustainability within the organisation.

> Principals who establish collaborative cultures increase the likelihood that there will be this continuity of direction because it is already built into the culture, and culture has powerful persistence. Culture *is* legacy. (Fullan, 2008, p. 19)

There are some challenges for principals focused on developing a collaborative learning culture. Principals, particularly in New Zealand where schools are self-managing[2], have a broad leadership role however they must prioritise learning. Fullan (2008, p. 41) suggests, " the principal who is focused on leading a learning community has to figure out how to run an effective school without actually doing the managerial and

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[2] Principals in New Zealand manage finance, personnel and property portfolios.

operational work." Some of this work could be delegated to SLT members or administration staff.

CREATING AN INTENTIONAL CULTURE IN A NEW SCHOOL

While there is very little acknowledgement of new schools in the literature used, there are four theses referred to in this study, three doctorates and one masters (two from the United States of America and one each from Australia and Canada respectively) that have specifically examined new schools. Much of the rest of the literature used for this section of the review has been sourced from school improvement, change management and re-culturing studies.

Leadership and creating culture in a new school

The effectiveness of a new school is judged by a number of things. In Bolender's (1995) master's thesis, which was a case study of one new school's evolving image, she asserts

> The effectiveness of the school and its resulting image, rested heavily on the shoulders of the principal. … The leader was seen as the model and facilitator of success. Parents and teachers, although willing to do their part, nevertheless looked to the principal to blaze and light the trail (p.18).

Schein (1997, p. 212) agrees when he states, "one cannot overlook the enormous importance of leadership at the beginning of any group process". There is some expectation that leaders of new schools are directly or indirectly responsible for all areas of the school development.

Development of the school culture is a key area that a new school leader must consider. Gruenert (2000) believes that leaders must be aware of and have a clear understanding of the concept of school culture in order to do this. In describing what leaders must do to create and shape culture Peterson (n.d.), asserts that leaders need to "read" and then "assess" the culture, specifically trying to understand current norms and values and

tracking back through historical sources to identify where the current values in the community have come from. Even in a new school, the leader needs to be aware of what the incoming members of the school (parents, staff, and children) bring to the group so as to develop it appropriately.

Ownership

It is not enough for the Principal to have a vision – all stakeholders need to have some ownership. Nicholas' (2008) EdD thesis was a single school case study of a new secondary in Australia, focussing on the creation and sustainability of a new school, over two years of establishment. In this work, a list of new school design characteristics was presented as recommendations for new schools. Amongst these recommendations it was noted, "the vision must be clearly articulated …(and both it and the) philosophy of the school must be shared and developed in a collaborative manner amongst all stakeholders" (p. 200).

In Schein's (1997) research on the creation of organisational cultures, he explains that the founders of a new organisation choose the basic vision, the original group members and the environmental context in which to translate their aspirations for the group. This has significant implications on the culture created as these founders have a strong ownership of these things. In a new school in New Zealand, this process begins with the Establishment Board of Trustees (EBOT) and the MOE (MOE). In my context, the EBOT appointed the Principal against the vision that they had co-constructed with the community. Each subsequently employed staff member was then appointed against the vision of the school. The appointment of the Principal is critical to a new school's culture as they have a significant impact on every aspect of the school.

Collaboration

The effective schools literature identified collaboration as a key feature. This relates specifically to a new school environment such as ours, as

teachers team-teach in flexible, open environments. In his discussion of the early development of culture, Fullan, (2001), describes how a new organisation works through complex problems and experiences together. Within the apparent "disorder" of the process of creation, there are hidden coherence making features; norms develop and the strongest norms become rituals and traditions. By collaborating during the creation period, a group shares a commitment to actions and pathways (Fullan, 2001). During this time, leaders can actively shape the culture, positively reinforcing useful components and transforming negative aspects (Peterson, 2002; Gruenert, 2000). Bolender (1995, p.22) argues that "effective schools do not happen by chance; they are the product of focused effort and collaboration on many levels". Nicholas, (2008) includes recommendations that there should be specific structures in place to ensure that decision-making processes are collaborative, open and inclusive. Bolender (1995, p.23) describes the impact on the school culture when she asserts "collaboration in the planning stages of a new school sets an example and a foundation for further shared decision-making at the school level".

In a new school, change is constant, as new staff and students join the school and the culture is defined and redefined. Nicholas (2008) argues that this educational change should be seen as positive and ongoing, ideally with all members of the school community owning innovations and change.

Communication

Schein (1997) believes that communicating culture is a process of actively teaching organisational members rather than passive learning. This is an instructional process and is specifically leader imposed. Leaders deliver messages through their ability to communicate major assumptions and values clearly and precisely. Most are explicit, conscious actions however communication can also be unconscious and unintended. Leaders need to be aware of all conversations with staff and community members including

conscious or unconscious messages sent in meetings (Peterson, 2002; Schein, 1997). Informal messages are very powerful because they accurately reflect the leaders' assumptions. Peterson, (n.d., p. 113) describes how "every interaction with someone in the school is a chance to reinforce the core values of the school. It is critically important to be able to understand the school culture …and shape it in everything that you do".

Schein (1997) warns that when foundation members do not think alike, the consequence can be staff attrition typically resulting in a more homogenous, coherent environment. Hargreaves, (1999) warns that homogeneity is not always a sign of strength. Differing opinions and ambiguity can be healthy as it encourages rigor and robust discussion. Channelled well, this can build strength into a school culture.

Building relationships with the community
In a new school, building quality relationships with the foundation community is essential. Barth, (2006) asserts,

> the nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else… the relationships among the educators in a school define all relationships within that school's culture (p. 8).

While there are many purposes for parental involvement in schools, the most important one is about the learning environment in the school. Bolender (1995) found that helping parents "make the paradigm shift from their educational experiences to those of their children" (p. 13) was important. In her study, parents stated that they would be more supportive of the school if they were privy to the rationale behind school actions and decisions. Bolender felt that involving parents as partners in their children's learning was a way of achieving better communication with them. "Parents must be engaged as valuable and necessary partners with

the school in the pursuit of educational excellence for their children" (1995, p. 22).

To involve them further in the school environment, she also utilised the parents as volunteers and found that in the first year a large number of enthusiastic parents volunteered to help with fund-raising and other areas of the school. While this was an effective way of involving parents to begin with, by the second year the parent group wanted to become involved in more 'political' areas of the school. This had an impact on the working relationship between parents and teachers.

McGhee, (2001) in his thesis investigating the principal's role in opening a new school, highlights the importance of the principal's interpersonal skills. He argues that how the principal treats people has the biggest impact on success. He also asserts that interpersonal skills, while important in all successful schools, should carry more of an emphasis in new schools.

Challenges for new schools
The literature briefly identified challenges that were relevant to new schools. Bolender (1995) identified the most significant challenge as the ever-increasing numbers in the school, which caused the daily pace of life to increase, consequently making it difficult to collaborate at the original levels. Other reasons given for the collaborative culture diminishing included

- The enthusiasm of the "honeymoon" period waned over time
- Less opportunity to meet together
- Growing numbers of staff which made collaboration and collegiality more difficult
- Early in the development of the school, teachers needed to be collegial to survive. This need reduced as the school became established.

Nicholas (2008) discussed the need for teachers to have their "professional lives taken care of to ensure sustainable involvement and practice" (p. 97). As new schools are creating everything for the first time, time and workload are issues for teachers in new school. Nicholas (2008) made six recommendations for new schools specifically referring to staff, which included support for professional development, adequate time for planning, implementation, reflection and modification and structures and processes to ensure that members of the school community own all innovations.

Lack of time was identified as a factor in new schools (Holmes, 2009; McGhee, 2001). Both Holmes and McGhee recommend that the principal should be contracted during the planning phase of the school. Holmes (2009), identified the disproportionate amount of time spent on management tasks as opposed to leadership and learning tasks as a tension for principals of new schools. He cites "principals as having to address a variety of issues that emerge from not having time to establish routines, policies and procedures" (p. 113) as a pressure.

Finally, Holmes argues that new schools require additional funding to ensure that students have access to the same resources as schools that have been open for several years have.

SUMMARY

A critical review of the available literature identifies that there is very limited new schools research. There are however, a significant number of studies undertaken in the areas of school culture, school effectiveness and leadership that can be translated in to a new school environment. There is extensive evidence in the literature that school culture underpins school effectiveness. Key areas identified within the effective school literature include the importance of the vision and values (touchstone documents), focusing on learning for all and building positive parent relationships.

Effective school literature consistently emphasises strong and effective leadership as an essential factor. The role of the leader in an effective school is critical to the development of an effective learning culture. The leader should focus on learning by demonstrating an interest in their own learning and growth, modeling quality practice and carefully monitoring student progress and achievement. Effective leaders also develop people and provide the conditions for the development of a collaborative culture.

Despite there being limited new school literature, research used in this study describes ownership of touchstone documents, the development of a collaborative environment, explicit and timely communication, and involving parents as partners in the school as important. The literature also documented a number of challenges magnified in new schools, which included the challenges of sustaining the original collaborative focus due to constantly increasing numbers of staff and students, the pressures on staff, providing time to support workload challenges and the need to finance the school more generously.

By gaining more in-depth knowledge of the development of a learning culture in a new school, this study hopes to add to the literature by identifying factors that contribute to its successful evolution and also the barriers that impede progress.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the purpose of this study is restated, the setting described and the research design is explained. I have attempted to describe how this study is underpinned by qualitative research and situated within an interpretive paradigm. While initially, action research seemed an appropriate method because of its cycles of action and reflection, case study seemed to be a more appropriate approach. Case study and self-study research methodologies have been described from a theoretical and research design perspective. Reliability and validity of this study are also explored. A focus group, document analysis and the principal's professional journal were used to collect data and are explained. Next, the processes used to analyse information are outlined. Finally, relevant ethical issues of the study are described.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

In a new school, it can be assumed that there is no established school culture; therefore a study exploring the journey of a new school during the establishment period is relevant. The purpose of this study was to record and analyse the experiences of the Principal and staff of a new school during the establishment period, to understand the development of a learning culture and to examine tensions for leadership.

Supporting questions relevant to this inquiry were explored in the literature. This study will add to the literature by providing rich description and analysis of how a learning culture was developed in a new school led by the researcher. The key questions of the study were:

What factors contributed to the establishment of a learning culture over the first twenty months of a new school?

What challenges were there for staff and students?

MY ROLE IN THIS STUDY

As Principal of the school and researcher of this study, I am positioned "inside" this research study. The term "insider research" is used in studies where the researcher is directly involved or connected with the research context (Robson, 2002). Insider research is in direct contrast with traditional views of scientifically based research where the researcher is an "objective outsider" investigating people or contexts external to themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Insider research is complex and when in this role, the researcher needs to consider the following questions.

- What effect does the researcher's insider status have on the research process?
- Is the validity compromised?
- Can a researcher maintain objectivity?
- Is objectivity necessary for validity? (Rooney, 2005)

By considering these questions carefully, the researcher can work towards minimising potential negative effects of insider research.

RESEARCH DESIGN - METHODOLOGY

The research questions were addressed using the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative study. Qualitative research involves collecting descriptive data to unlock a comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. This data is typically rich in its description of people, their actions and conversations (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) identifies five key characteristics of qualitative research. Firstly, qualitative research is naturalistic and attempts to capture participant perspectives accurately within their own context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). "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" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p 3). They engage a wide range of interconnected

interpretive practices, attempting to get a clearer understanding of the subject matter. As each practice makes the world visible in a different way, there is often a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Other characteristics of qualitative research include the researcher being the "primary instrument" for collecting and analyzing the data and this happening in the "field" or on site. While the researcher is physically in the setting being studied they can be very responsive to the context. He or she can modify methods and data collection instruments to meet needs, consider the total context and clarify, synthesise and evaluate throughout the study (Merriam, 1998).

Finally, qualitative research utilises an inductive research strategy and because this is undertaken in context by the researcher, this is richly descriptive. Qualitative researchers build new theories, abstractions and concepts rather than testing those already existing. Often they are undertaken because there may be an absence of theory in the area being studied.

As I was specifically interested in studying one school in context and collecting and analysing the perspectives of the school community and staff members, qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology. This study is designed to provide a holistic, contextualised, account of the phenomena being studied.

The following section discusses the major theoretical perspectives underpinning this study: interpretive research, case study and self-study research.

INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM
Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle (2006), comment that "traditionally, purely qualitative research is often done by persons who hold a framework referred to as interpretive, constructivist or naturalistic" (p. 7). Merriam

(1998, p. 4) describes the three orientations that "delineate the worldview of qualitative research" as positivist, interpretive and critical. For this research study, interpretive research best aligns with the philosophical orientation taken.

> In *interpretive research,* education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory-generating mode of inquiry. (Emphasis authors) Merriam, (1998, p. 4)

Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, (2007, p. 21) assert, "The central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience". Interpretive researchers begin with individuals and develop theory from their specific context. Researchers make meaning from rich data generated from the perspectives of the participants and the resulting theory is applicable to those involved at the source. Theory is 'grounded' in this context based data and follows rather than precedes research (Cohen et al., 2007).

In this study, I believe that the researcher's values impact on the study and its outcomes. While it is impossible for a researcher to separate themselves from these values, it is important for one to be explicit and openly acknowledge them. The researcher's values should be recognised as an influence. As both the Principal of the school studied and the researcher, my beliefs have the potential to impact on the study. I believe that

- Culture can be created by intentional actions.
- Knowledge is socially constructed.
- In a professional learning community, people learn not only from each other, but also from reflection on practice as well as from research.

- While the knowledge co-constructed in our context is specifically relevant to us, our experiences may be useful for others.

An understanding of the interpretive paradigm is important in this study as I am utilising case study and self-study methods to find tentative answers to my study questions. Findings will be constructed from multiple perspectives and have a local applicability.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

A case study is a specific investigation designed to demonstrate a more generalised notion, for example a study of a single school, or a single class (Cohen et al., 2007). Yin, (2003, p. 13) defines a case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."   As research contexts are unique and dynamic, case studies are able to investigate and report the complexity of human relationships, interactions and events within a specific situation.

Case study research can delve into situations that numerical analysis could not. Case study research is used to answer "how" and "why" questions and is useful if variables studied are embedded and can not be identified ahead of time (Yin, 2003). Cohen et al. (2007, p. 253), state that case study research provides "a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than by simply presenting them with abstract ideas or principles". Case study research also provides a chronological narrative of events, blending a description of events with the analysis of them. As it focuses on individuals and groups and their perceptions of events, the researcher is often integrally involved in the case study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Merriam, (1998, p. 19) asserts, "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.

The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in contest rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation."

As case study research provides a snapshot of a particular time period and rich data from a single site, it was a relevant methodology to use in this study. Some of the strengths of using a case study design result from its anchorage in real-life situations. The case study is a means of investigating complex contexts with many variables. It results in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon being studied which can increase the readers' knowledge base and provide a basis for future research (Merriam, 1998). This research is detailing and analysing the experiences of the Principal and staff during the 20-month establishment period, attempting to understand the development of a learning culture in one new school. As I am the Principal of the school being studied and the researcher, self-study research was also an important methodology.

SELF STUDY RESEARCH

In self-study research, the goal is to focus the inquiry on one's own practice. Through focusing the research on themselves, self-study researchers develop personally significant understandings of their own practice. "Learning about practice through self-study is continually facilitated and reinforced as research informs practice, which in turn, informs research" (Berry, 2009, p. 159). LaBoskey (2004) describes self-study as self-initiated and focused, with the aim being for researchers to improve their practice, personally and at institutional levels. Samaras, (2011) also describes self-study as personal and interpersonal in its nature, asserting that it draws from the researchers personal experience and through collaboration and feedback from others, critically generates new thinking and learning. LaBoskey (2004) extends the idea of collaboration and feedback from others by emphasising the involvement of a critical friend as important to self-study research. A critical friend is able to give feedback, collaborate to help find new solutions and create community (Bambino, 2002). Samaras, (2011, p. 14) concurs stating,

"Critical friends are invaluable because learning, thinking and knowing arise through collaboration and reappropriating feedback from others". Self-study moves beyond reflection and narrative analysis, to producing new knowledge, offering others insight into their practice.

Finally, LaBoskey (2004) asserts self-study research is advanced by the "construction, testing and re-testing of exemplars of practice" (p. 851). Researchers study their own practice to improve their work as professionals, inform future decisions and make a difference to the learning of students in their care. Self-study research, if made public, contributes to the wider knowledge base of the personal, school and wider profession. Clandinin & Connelly, (2004) claim that "self–study holds the highest possible potential for improving education" (p. 597). Self-study research however, is not just about the researcher, rather about the researcher in relation to their practice and others who share a similar setting.

> Quality self-study research requires that the researcher negotiate a particularly sensitive balance between biography and history. While self-study researchers acknowledge the role of the self in the research project… such study does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in. (Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) as cited in Samaras, (2011, p. 13)

Part of my role as Principal has included collaborating with others and receiving feedback from them to assist in my reflection of my practice. In this study, I have also used a critical friend to critique decisions made and actions undertaken. This has allowed me to reflect in more depth on my leadership practice.

All qualitative research needs to address validity. The next section discusses the validity of qualitative research studies.

VALIDITY

Validity is an essential requirement for any effective research. While typically described as controllability, replicability and predictability in positivist research, Maxwell (1992) as cited in Cohen et al., (2007, p. 135) argues for five kinds of validity in qualitative research that explore his notion of "understanding". They are descriptive validity (factual accuracy), interpretive validity (has the research captured the meaning, interpretations and intentions accurately), theoretical validity, generalisability (any theory generated may be useful in other similar situations) and evaluative validity. Qualitative researchers use subjective data like participant's opinions, attitudes and perspectives, which together could contribute an element of bias. "In qualitative data, validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher", Winter (2000) cited in Cohen et al., (2007, p. 133). Gronlund (1981) advises that validity should not be seen as an absolute state, rather, a matter of degree.

There are a number of strategies a researcher can use to enhance validity. Triangulation of data is one way of identifying how closely research findings match reality. Triangulation of data involves the researcher viewing information from more than one perspective. Data might be collected using different methods or from different sources. This can also mean comparing data from different participants (informant triangulation) or using data collected at different times (time triangulation) Denscombe, (2010).

Other strategies that the researcher can use to increase validity are peer examination, long-term observation and being aware of researcher biases (Merriam, 1998). Peer examination requires the researcher to ask peers or colleagues to critique the findings as they evolve. This could be a critical friend. Gathering data and observing in context over a long period of time also assists in increasing the validity of the data. Themes and patterns

can emerge more definitely and therefore represent a higher validity. Finally, it is important for the researcher to clarify their assumptions and beliefs at the beginning of the study.

In order to address validity issues in this study, all of the strategies described above were utilized to some degree. A number of forms of triangulation have been used to increase validity in this study. The data has come from multiple sources, including staff, students and the community. The second form of triangulation has been time triangulation. Data was collected throughout the period of the study over the period of 20 months. This data was also collected in different situations: a focus group, anonymous surveys, my professional journal and field notes. Another strategy used to strengthen the validity of this study was cross checking with staff to ensure that their experience at a new school had been captured accurately in the study. A presentation was given to the staff to allow them to comment on the data captured and the findings. Staff agreed that the findings reflected their experience. Because this study was a 20-month research project, time triangulation added strength to this study. To critique my findings, I used a critical friend as themes began to emerge.

A possible validity issue for this study was the impact of "The Hawthorne effect"[3], as the staff and the Board of Trustees knew that they were part of a study. This may have changed how they would have typically behaved, or responded to questions (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001). While it is possible that this has also had an impact on my practice, my awareness of the Hawthorne effect should help to minimise its impact. I was also cognisant of the impact of insider research. "Researchers can never eliminate all of their own effects on subjects or obtain a perfect correspondence between what they wish to study – "the natural setting" - and what they actually study – "a setting with a researcher present"

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[3] The Hawthorne Effect refers to a phenomenon in which participants alter their behavior as a result of being part of an experiment or study.

(Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 39). The advantage of this in-depth knowledge of the setting however, is that this understanding can be used to generate additional insights and views of the context. As far as possible I have taken steps to ensure that validity has been maximised in this research study by being explicit about my beliefs in the beginning, collecting data over a 20-month period, being aware of the Hawthorne effect and trying to minimise its impact, triangulating the data collected and analysed, and obtaining critique from participants and a critical friend.

Reliability is another important consideration in this study. The next section explains how the research study has been designed to address reliability issues.

RELIABILITY

The term reliability in positivist research refers to the ability to replicate the material. Qualitative research has different tests of reliability. In qualitative research, researchers are interested in the "accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under the study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations"(Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 40). Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in (Cohen et al., 2007) use the term dependability instead of reliability. Dependability involves respondent validation, triangulation and persistent observations, all of which were used in this study.

METHODS OF INFORMATION GATHERING

This study required methods of information gathering that would generate data on the actions, attitudes and challenges of creating the culture in a new school. These methods needed to capture data from group discussions, staff professional learning, community feedback, general meetings and also individual perspectives from the staff and the community. In my role as Principal, I had professional relationships with

all participants in the project, including the general community. It was important for me to remain as objective as possible and collect as many primary sources of data in order to increase reliability and validity.   Being aware of the possible distortion caused by the Hawthorne effect, I tried to place more emphasis on collecting information from sources naturally occurring in the running of the school.

The information for this study was gathered from the following sources:

- One focus group interview involving staff volunteers facilitated by an independent chair. The interviews involved discussing volunteers' perceptions of school culture after three terms.
- Feedback from the community, Board of Trustees, staff and students. This was in the form of casual conversations, email communications, feedback passed on from the community and voluntary online surveys.
- The researcher's professional journals.
- Official school documents held by the school.
- Internal school documents including meeting minutes, induction programmes and notes from professional learning collaborations.

The school also employed a leadership mentor to coach and critique the thinking, actions and reflections of the whole leadership team.   Eight meetings were held during the year; three of these were occasions where we met as a team together and five where we each met individually with the mentor. Key points from the coaching sessions were shared with me at the end of each session where relevant and not breaching confidentiality. These meetings were the beginning of much reflection, questioning and brainstorming for me. Notes from these reflection sessions were recorded in my professional journal.

Document analysis

The data collected in this study was mostly official school documentation. The advantage of using documents for analysis in this study was that they were produced as a result of the natural workings of the school, rather than specifically for this research. This means that they were not subject to the same limitations as more specifically focused forms of data (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the documents used included weekly school newsletters, BOT meeting minutes, professional learning session notes, minutes from staff and leadership team meetings, anonymous community surveys, policy and procedural documents, student achievement data, enrolment and induction material and any other readily available school material. All documents were filed in chronological order, similar files together. Documenting, reflecting, developing ideas further then evaluating were continual cyclical processes that allowed themes and issues to be identified for further analysis. This allowed me to look for patterns, ideas, words and consistencies.

Professional journal

Personal documents are a trustworthy source of someone's thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs of their context. Because the author is the only one to select what is actually written, the material could be considered highly subjective, however they reflect the perspective of the writer and this is what most qualitative research is seeking (Merriam, 1998). A professional journal is typically a tool used to document ideas and collect data or evidence. Holly, (1987, p. 4) describes a journal as "impressions plus descriptions of circumstances, others, the self, motives, thoughts, and feelings… it can be used as a tool for analysis and introspection… it is the awareness of the difference between facts and interpretations". A research journal can therefore be used as documentation for formative and summative analysis and evaluation.

From the beginning of my appointment, I took detailed notes in my professional journal. My journal was a combination of a log where I used

structured, descriptive and objective notes, and a diary, which was at times much less structured as I reflected on events by recording my thoughts and feelings. Notes in my journal included feedback from parents, my reflections, further questions and musings, and the resulting actions and evaluations. Detailed accounts of formal and informal discussions with staff and community and general happenings in the school were also recorded. Regular readings related to my current practice were recorded and resulting practices critiqued by a critical friend. Glesne and Peshkin (1996) as cited in (Nicholas, 2008) recommend writing field notes or professional journals so that they can be easily understood and that emerging themes can be identified and further explored. Accounts in my journal were generally descriptive to begin with and became more analytical as I was able to critique the results of our actions.

Focus groups

Krueger, (1994) describes a focus group as a carefully designed group discussion with the aim of gathering perceptions of a planned and defined area of interest. During the discussion participants share their ideas and perceptions, at times influencing each other when responding to comments. Focus group interviews work because attitudes and perceptions are partly developed by interactions with other people, as some people need to interact with others before developing their own opinions or viewpoints. The moderator also has the ability to probe further with questions to establish better clarity of ideas (Krueger, 1994). One of the unique things about a focus group is that there is no requirement for the group to reach a consensus.

There were some advantages in using a focus group for this study. This method allowed the facilitator to probe participants further in their answers to questions. Focus group discussion also has "high face validity" (Krueger, 1994). Information can be presented with direct quotes and examples from the participants. The relaxed nature of the questioning

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means that the participants are more likely to respond with increased candor. Focus group interviews are also a relatively quick way to get a lot of valuable and quite specific information.

All staff members, including teaching and support staff, were offered the opportunity to participate in the focus group; the group contained a mixture of each. With support and teaching staff participating in the focus group sessions, a broader range of perspectives was given. The date and recording equipment were booked two weeks ahead. An independent facilitator, who had worked as the principal's appraiser and senior leadership team mentor, led the meetings without the researcher present.

As the group was well known to each other, they did not need to spend time getting to know each other however in order to get clarity of thinking and feedback, the facilitator led the group through a structured format of questions that I had designed, starting with questions to introduce the discussion, followed by transition questions, key questions and future recommendation type questions. The facilitator and I discussed the intent of the questions prior to the meeting to ensure that he had a clear understanding so that he could probe further into statements made if necessary. The meeting took 60 minutes and was digitally recorded on two separate devices for transcription and later analysis. Feedback from the staff involved was that they found the process stimulating. The comment was made that "we should have done this sooner and more often" (Anecdotal feedback). I listened to the recording straight after the meeting and took notes on points of relevance and things to reflect upon.

One of the potential limitations of a focus group was that the participants could have gone off topic. By utilising an experienced facilitator who kept the conversation focused, probed for further information and asked the group to clarify their thinking, this was minimised.

The use of a focus group in this study was for two purposes: capturing perceptions about the school culture and respondent validation of findings.

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DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of data and can be highly intuitive. Merriam, (1998) states that a qualitative research design is emergent and it is likely that the researcher will not know ahead of time who will be interviewed or what questions will be asked, only understanding where to look next as data is collected and analysed regularly throughout the study.   "Hunches, working hypothesis, and educated guesses direct the investigators attention to certain data and then to refining or verifying hunches… analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155).

In this study the main form of analysis used was the constant comparative method of data analysis which was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Merriam, 1998). This method is consistent with theory generating research such as this study. This strategy involved the researcher regularly comparing data; for example, I compared focus group interview notes with notes in my professional journal and staff professional learning meeting minutes.   I then analysed these comparisons according to themes, patterns, ideas and words. This allowed me to develop tentative categories that I could compare using other forms of data. Further coding was used to reorganise data into more specific groupings including evidence of consistencies between espoused aims and practices, unexpected events and frustrations within each area. Using this coded material, themes were triangulated by informant and time triangulation methods.

This was largely an intuitive process however it was informed by the study's purpose, my professional knowledge and the material investigated (Merriam, 1998). These categories captured a number of pieces of data and were named to reflect the ideas represented. For example, one category in this study was *relationships*, which linked to staff, students, parents and the wider community. I attempted to name categories to reflect possible answers to my questions and to ensure that the categories

were exhaustive, that is, all relevant data could be placed in the appropriate category. As the study evolved, categories were refined and linked together to assist in establishing findings.

In this study, document analysis assisted in gaining an understanding of how people worked within the systems and structures in our school, what our philosophies, espoused beliefs and actions told us, and how our school functioned on a day-to-day basis. Due to the vast amount of data collected for this study, quality processes for data management were essential. Despite using file folders, diagrammatic displays, colour coded charts and summary sheets, synthesising large amounts of documentation and ensuring that the main themes had been identified accurately from the data was a challenge.

RELEVANT ETHICAL ISSUES

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato approved the study.

The following issues were discussed fully with the participants in this study.

1. Only information that was in the public domain and within the boundaries of the law has been reported. Permission to use any information that could be deemed sensitive has been sought before use.
2. All data and related comments were anonymous.
3. Written permission was gained before use of any primary source data, such as children's work and direct teacher opinions. Participants were given the opportunity to check and approve any of this information.
4. While much of the work for this research project was part of the teachers and BOT members' professional expectations, it is possible that there was an increase in workload for those staff or BOT members who volunteered to be part of focus groups or contributed

to the analysis and interpretation of data.   This was a voluntary component of the research.

5. Because I am the Principal there were potential power issues. There may be some participants who were afraid of being honest in discussions due to my position in the school. I endeavored to be sensitive to these issues and to reassure staff that it was the leadership in the school as a whole that was under scrutiny, not them specifically.

6. There is the potential for our school to be recognised as part of the study as there are so few new schools opened each year in New Zealand. However, no individuals beside me are likely to be recognised.

SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the research design, specifically referencing the literature on qualitative research methods as it relates to this study.   This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm and uses self-study and case study research.

Methods of collecting information in this study were designed to capture the culture in the school as it developed. The combined documentation of my professional journal, the focus group and school documents allowed an insight into the realities of developing a learning culture in a new school.

Two forms of triangulation, time and the use of multiple sources ensured that the validity and reliability of the study was strengthened. Other strategies used were: allowing the participants to critique the findings, using a critical friend throughout the study, and being aware of and trying to minimise the Hawthorne effect.

Accurate data analysis is important in all research. Data in this study was collected, analysed and categorised into themes, sythesised and coded. One challenge of such a large amount of data was ensuring that findings

reflected the reality of the participants. This was checked with the staff to ensure accuracy.

Finally, in any study, ethics is a major concern and researchers are responsible for producing a study that is disseminated in an ethical matter. I have listed the ethical issues of which I was aware and were considered in this research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY CHRONOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore how a learning culture developed in a new school and to identify challenges faced by leadership team members during the establishment phase and the first year of operation. This chapter describes four time periods: the establishment period (2009 to January 2011), term one (January to April, 2011), term two (April to June, 2011) and the second six months of the year (terms three and four).

THE ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD – 2009/ 2010

The period of time described as establishment was the two years prior to the school opening. For this study, the focus of the establishment section however, is the eight months prior to the school when I was officially the Principal of the school. Before the school opened, a number of critical issues had to be addressed by the Establishment Board of Trustees (EBOT) and/or the Principal. They included the creation of the vision and values of the school, the appointment of the Principal and staff, approval of the design of the school and ensuring the involvement and buy-in of the local community. These issues are discussed below.

The Establishment Board of Trustees

The Ministry of Education (MOE) appointed the EBOT from interested applicants in the community. Establishment Board members each came with their own strong backgrounds in education and governance; three of the five had been Board Chairs for several terms[4], and two had educational leadership experience. Each had a passion to create an effective community school.

The EBOT considered it was essential to get community voice and buy-in to the development of the new school. An excerpt from their minutes emphasises this: "Co-option of parents concept discussed… encourage

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[4] A term is typically a period of 3 years.

the relationship with the community!" (9 September 2009, EBOT minutes). Key themes to come from community consultation meetings were providing a dynamic, creative education, an inclusive and flexible learning environment, quality teaching and learning, strong community relationships and a pride in the local heritage, EBOT minutes (Dec, 2009). Values identified by the community were set out as a set of desirable behaviours.

Figure 5: Values (Rocky Shore School Charter, 2010 - 2012)

- **R**espect ourselves, others, our school, environment and community
- **Communicate** openly, honestly and effectively
- Act with **integrity,** being honest, truthful, reliable and honorable
- Be **courageous, taking ownership and responsibility for our actions**
- Have **fun** and enjoy our learning.

To shape the learning programme, a school graduate profile was also developed, with children expected to meet these ideals by the time they graduated at the end of year 6.

Figure 6: Learner Profile, eventually named Graduate Profile

Our mission is accomplished when our learners leave our school with a Learner Profile that means they:

- **Are unlimited thinkers**

Open minded, lifelong, excited, eager, looking forward to the next step, self motivated

- **Know how to learn**

Understand their ability, learn from mistakes, know how to study, have key literacy and numeracy skills

- **Can make choices**

Know right from wrong, self-actualise, aware of consequences, balanced risk takers

- **Understand themselves**

Happy and fulfilled emotionally and spiritually, sense of control over their learning, can keep themselves safe, know their place in the world.

- **Confident and articulate learners**

Confident in their ability with great self esteem

- **Responsible, compassionate, kind, considerate and tolerant**

Support others less able and have a sense of community.

Appointment of the Principal

Using the vision, values and graduate profile created with the community, the EBOT appointed the Principal of the school at the end of 2009. The

application package explained the community's vision and applicants were asked to write to the vision to apply. Shortlisted applicants were asked to make a presentation to the EBOT discussing what the school would look like in five years under their leadership. Finally, the appointments committee visited two applicants in their current schools. The EBOT, talked to staff and children in classrooms and any available parents. The EBOT hoped that this process would ensure that the appointed Principal would be able to deliver the vision.

Appointment of the leadership team

Delegates from the EBOT joined the Principal to appoint the senior leadership team using a similar approach to that used in the appointment of the Principal. Each position was appointed with the view that they should complement the already appointed team members. For example, once we had the Principal and Deputy Principal positions, a needs analysis was undertaken to ensure that the next two leadership team members possessed skills to complement those that we already had. As a result, the senior leadership team had complementary strengths.

Appointment of other staff

Application packages for teaching positions stated the school's vision and values and outlined that the successful applicants were expected to "live" them. All applicants were asked to write how they could deliver the vision in their teaching and learning programmes. Referees were asked to submit written reports commenting on the applicant's capability to deliver the vision; for example the ability to collaborate with other teachers and be flexible in their approach to learning. This process filtered those applicants that did not believe in the vision, could not articulate how they might deliver it or whose referees felt that they had not demonstrated abilities in these areas. Matching potential staff against the vision was the key criteria for appointment.

Building community relationships

A key concept emphasised in the vision was the establishment of positive community relationships.   The EBOT involved the community in the co-construction of touchstone documents and encouraged the development of a "Friends of the School" (FOTS) group to make some school decisions. With the purpose of involving the community and sharing ownership of the developing school, the newly created FOTS split into two action groups – one to consult on whether to have a uniform and if so, what it might look like, and the other to investigate, design and raise funds for an adventure playground. The EBOT ensured that the FOTS' interactions with the wider community were upholding the vision and values by providing guidelines for them.

All interactions with the wider community were planned to give them a voice, answer their questions honestly and openly, and begin to develop a positive welcoming culture. New parents and their children were encouraged to meet with the Principal and discuss student interests, nominate preferred reading books and post questions on the "wondering wall" in the temporary office. Prior to opening, the leadership team sent out personal invitations to all pre-enrolled students for a "Sneak Peek"; the first look around the school. The children were involved in games, learnt school songs and participated in other activities to familiarise themselves with the school community and meet other children who would be part of the school. The leadership team consciously built up a sense of excitement and a sense of belonging by involving the children and their families in the new school community as soon as possible.

Regular newsletters were emailed to the wider community, including local businesses, and an enthusiastic parent group delivered 1000 printed newsletter updates to all the local families.

Curriculum development

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) spent some of our early time together establishing shared beliefs about learning and leadership. The team co-constructed documents that explained our beliefs about leading and leadership, curriculum and pedagogy, and the use of flexible learning spaces. Each team member had a role in researching and critiquing proposed programming. I had an expectation that all programme development proposals had to be research and practice based. Once team members had created a proposal, we critiqued it, making team decisions on curriculum, learning and the use of our spaces . This ensured that the SLT felt that they had ownership of all learning documentation created.

OPENING OF THE SCHOOL – TERM 1, 2011

Implementing the vision

While the SLT had appointed teachers that we believed shared the school's vision, each person's interpretation of the vision was different. It was essential for the staff to spend quality time together, building a sense of being a team and developing a shared ownership of the school that we were about to create. While we believed that the most appropriate way of building a sense of team would have been to go away together, an application to the MOE to release teachers from their current schools was refused. Consequently, we called teachers back three weeks before the end of the holidays to complete an induction. The senior leadership team prepared two weeks of induction for new teachers and the teachers then had one week to work independently before the school opened. One teacher was not being paid during this time, as it was her first teaching position. The commitment of this group of teachers to be part of creating a great school was obvious.

Each morning of the two-week induction period, we concentrated on educational issues. The programme included the following key ideas:

- Powerful learning
- 20th century learning versus 21st century learning and pedagogy
- The importance of reflection
- Visioning – what will the school look like, feel like, sound like?
- Professional reading
- A focus on collaboration and team building within classes
- Developing the culture of the school
- Using the learning spaces, including furniture and IT
- The curriculum and learning programme, including teaching expectations and assessment.

Each afternoon was spent team building. We completed activities like building beach sculptures, competing in an "Amazing Race", creating a personalised clock for each person and blokarting. The purpose of this team building was to encourage and model collaboration, risk taking and problem solving, as these were the skills that we believed teachers would need to contribute effectively to the development of our school.

Building relationships with the community

Term one's major focus was to building positive relationships with our families. During our induction programme, we discussed how we would interact with parents and children and set expectations for staff during casual interactions. For example, staff were expected to greet all parents that they met around the school and children were taught to introduce themselves in a friendly manner. At community events, staff were expected to mingle amongst families and introduce themselves to parents they did not know. This was a very proactive approach to quickly building relationships with the community. Feedback from parents demonstrated that this friendly and welcoming approach was highly valued.

From week one of 2011, weekly newsletters were produced and distributed. The newsletters were designed to focus on the students, the families, our "way of being" and the learning in the school. At the front of

each newsletter, photos illustrated an array of music, culture, learning and sports activities.   In term one, the newsletters asked for community involvement, fed back the results of community surveys and attempted to showcase what the school offered. Each newsletter requested help and thanked the community for their contributions. The purpose of this was to ensure that families felt that their children were getting an education at least as good as they were getting before, despite our newness, our small size and the discussion in the community to "let them get sorted for a year". (Principal's professional journal, February 2011.)

Early in the first term we planned a number of events, social and educational, for parents. This included a special first day where families were involved, a community BBQ, a parent teacher transition meeting, a powhiri for the official opening and regular learning celebrations. A number of our parental interactions focused on reminding them of "the Rocky Shore School way". As we started as a small school with only 83 students we worked hard at making the children feel part of our "family". Informal feedback was positive. For example, a parent commented in February 2011: "My child feels that they are really part of Rocky Shore School and connected to the school already. They have never really felt part of their previous school". We also worked on building student confidence and providing opportunities to lead activities in the school.

Another way of building relationships and collecting community voice was through regular online anonymous parent surveys. The first survey went live in the third week and asked, "How are we doing?" 35% of families responded. Most of the feedback included comments on the "feel of the school".

- "The routines and school identity have already been established very well and have helped a settled and relaxed feeling – the first day was unbelievable!"

- "Communication is great, with regular emails and newsletters. The face to face contact with all the management team is great, the enthusiasm and energy and positive vibe is fantastic".
- Great to see staff at stationary points outside the school in the mornings and afternoons and whom are all very welcoming to everyone".

Early in term one, we called for volunteers to help with gardening, resource making, student support and other duties. Twenty-five people attended the meeting to offer help. As consistency was crucial for us, we held training sessions for parents to learn the Rocky Shore School way to help with reading and how we expected them to interact with children if they were helping in the classroom. This became the beginning of a parent induction programme.

Culture: PROUD Living

The SLT attempted to create a specific "culture" of the school. A number of sources including the vision and the New Zealand Curriculum were used, (Dweck, 2006; Covey, 2008; Lundin, Paul, & Christensen, 2000) to create our philosophy and guidelines. The acronym PROUD was adopted to represent the values and dispositions that we wanted to develop in our students – proactive, respectful, open, understanding and dependable.

Figure 7 - Being PROUD – (everyday living)

Proactive	I choose the 'weather' of my mind I plan what I want to do and how I want to be I work then play
Respectful	I respect myself and others I am confident and caring I can be humble
Open	I am open to new learning and ideas and the ideas of others I am willing to solve problems
Understanding	I understand myself and how I learn I listen carefully to others so I can understand them and communicate well
Dependable	I can count on me Others can count on me too

This material was initially used as a skeleton for the staff to build upon with their students and formed much of the work we did with the students and the community in the first term. We felt strongly that students needed to live positively, be respectful to others and contribute to the world effectively. To embed this work, teachers spent non-core curriculum time on building this capacity with their children. A well-known children's song was rewritten to emphasise PROUD criteria and we sang this at every opportunity. It quickly became a way for children to identify with the school, it assisted them to remember what it meant to behave in the Rocky Shore School way and it also became an icon for the school. Each week, a different classroom hosted our Learning Celebration. Classes would take a letter from "PROUD" and present what the related concept "looked like" in practice.

Teaching and Learning

At the beginning of term one, we completed student assessments, discovering that our new students scored particularly low in core areas. 93% students were at risk of not meeting expectations in Mathematics National Standards and 28% in reading. When this information was shared with the parents concerned, most expressed relief that we had discovered this with some suggesting that they had been trying to address this with previous schools.

During the sixth week we met with each child and their parents for a transition meeting. I expected that staff would ensure that every parent attended. This was achieved. The purpose of this meeting was to share with parents the level their child was currently achieving in reading and mathematics, what their next steps were and what parents could do at home to help. An anonymous community online survey was again created for parents to feedback their thoughts. While responses were generally very supportive, there were some mixed reactions from parents, specifically around the time frame for each interview. This was not

surprising to the leadership team as the parent group had quickly become used to having a lot of one on one time with teachers.

> Parent comment, March 2011: She is being challenged and is really enjoying school. True to word, an email was sent home with links to appropriate level maths games.

> Parent comment, March 2011: It just felt very rushed for us and would have liked it to be more intimate really, not a long time but it felt like there was a definite time limit.

At the end of term one, during the two-week holiday break, staff attended a two-day conference led by an international thinking and inquiry consultant. The purpose of this professional learning was to ensure that we had rigor in our learning programmes and our teachers had support in trialing the new teaching ideas. All teachers were expected to attend and begin to trial aspects in their teaching and learning programmes.

External pressures

During term one, a significant amount of my time was spent discussing with MOE personnel the inequity of finance and property processes for a new school. As a new school has a typically low initial enrolment, (we started with 83 children), we had extremely tight budget constraints[5]. This meant that we did not employ a caretaker, we had zero budget lines for all non-fixed costs with the exception of a part-time school secretary and we were concerned about cash flow. It took many hours of debate and a letter to the Minister of Education to be approved enough money to ensure positive cash flow. This did not include any extra support or caretaking staff however we could pay the essential accounts, for example, power and water.

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[5] In a new school, the core buildings (library, hall and administration) and grounds are prepared for the size that the school is designed to be eventually. This generates significant costs that are not covered by the operation grant allocated, which is directly related to children enrolled at the school.

The MOE had also restricted our student numbers by limiting our enrolments to Year 1-4 students, creating a very small enrolment zone around our school, and overlaying the neighbouring school's zone on ours. All of these restrictions contributed to a small initial enrolment, a very unhappy local community who were out of zone but wanted to be in, financial challenges as discussed above and significant time for me negotiating with the MOE officials and the local Member of Parliament to increase the catchment area.

Another area requiring my focus in term one was preparation for the changeover from EBOT to elected BOT. Once the school was actually opened, the EBOT felt that they had met their responsibilities. While we continued to meet regularly until April, trustees were clear that they were ready to pass the governance role to parents of the school. In April we went through the BOT election process and appointed the new Board of Trustees. Unfortunately this election was deemed illegal due to the MOE not "gazetting" the required information. As we were instructed to repeat the process, it was not until the end of term two that we had a replacement BOT. This left the school with no Board of Trustees for much of term two, despite one EBOT member being appointed for continuation purposes until the process could be completed. Each school typically works with one specialist MOE manager who is appointed to support the school. In the first 12 months, I worked with a series of eight different people, all of whom were either new to the job or had no prior experience with new schools. This significantly impacted on my time to focus on learning within the school.

The final area that impacted on my time was the considerable challenges we experienced with our IT infrastructure. For the first two months of opening we had sporadic use of technology including phones, computers and alarm systems not operating, as they should have. While this had a critical impact on the functionality of our basic communication systems our website and day-to-day learning activities were also heavily impacted. For

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nine weeks our interactive white board system was unusable, limiting the ability for teachers to use IT tools effectively in the classroom. Early in term two it was discovered that a radio tower built close to the school boundary was impacting on all technology in the school. The solution was that the IT companies custom-made equipment that would not be affected by the interference. This took a lot of my time to resolve as I was dealing with four different providers: the consortium that built the school, local developers and the Ministry of Economic Development[6].

By the end of term one, my energy was considerably drained and I was increasingly frustrated by the amount of my time being spent on issues unrelated to learning and teaching. To have substantial challenges in areas such as property, finance, personnel (lack of support staff), zoning and governance, all at the same time as trying to create a new school, was very frustrating. The resolution of many of these issues only came once a letter describing these frustrations was sent to the Minister of Education in April 2011.

REPRIORITISING – TERM 2, 2011

Relationships and team building

During the three induction weeks in January, we had collectively decided to enter the whole school into a Junior Stage Challenge competition being held at the end of term two. This involved every child in the school performing a dance that told the story of the school's creation. This served a number of purposes:

1. All children performed so they had a common experience and bonded quickly with each other.
2. Children's non-core curriculum learning (not Mathematics and English) for the term was specifically focused around the Performing Arts, which allowed us to meet parents' expectations of

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[6] The Ministry of Economic Development manages radio towers in New Zealand.

a broad curriculum and us to trial parts of our professional learning in another curriculum area.

3. Parents and families got involved with props, costumes, makeup and other areas of performance, which built relationships within the community.

4. The school publicly performed at a large theatre, which gave us a presence in the community and a sense of excitement around the school.

5. A school "event" was created to become an icon for the future.

While these things were all positive, the time taken to prepare the children for the performance inadvertently removed our attention from embedding quality learner-driven learning.

Teaching and learning

Early in term two, we had a visit from another Principal who visited our school to look at our learning environment. While describing our philosophy of learning and teaching to her, it occurred to me that what I was describing and what I was seeing was incongruent. Teachers had defaulted to traditional teaching practice. All teachers had positioned themselves in one place in each classroom space, a number had utilised the flexible furniture as a teacher desk and some very traditional "teaching from the front" was observed. The visiting Principal questioned me about how we could organise our learning differently so that we utilised the teachers' strengths and the learning spaces more effectively. During the next two SLT meetings, we discussed how we could ensure that the learning in classrooms reflected what we believed in. We reflected on our leadership practice and how we were ensuring that teachers were creating learning opportunities in line with our learning vision. By trying not to put too much pressure on teachers, we had inadvertently allowed incongruence.

To address the need to focus on learning, the staff professional learning focus for the term became about shifting from building relationships to

building *learning-focused* relationships.   "A learning–focused relationship is one where the student and the teacher know that by working together, the quality of student learning will be much better and the standard of achievement will be much higher"(Absolum, 2006, p. 28). Teachers read about the characteristics of teachers and students in a learning-focused relationship and discussed how they could shift their current focus from quality relationships to including some of the key elements that differentiate the two, for example, clarity about what is to be learnt, collaboration, being reflective about learning and teaching and being clear about next learning steps. These aspects are important for students and teachers.

We also spent some time together investigating the benefits of our learning spaces and the opportunities that we could see to use them more effectively for learning. Collectively, we rediscovered the types of learning environments that children learn best in and how we could offer that environment for them.   Using Fisher's work, (2005) we reviewed our practice and the needs of our students. We asked the following questions:

- What student abilities and dispositions do we want to achieve?
- How can we assess these attributes?
- What pedagogies should be used to achieve these desired learning outcomes?
- How can we use our learning environments to fit these pedagogies?

We wanted students to be able to work effectively independently and in groups, to be able to problem solve, take risks, collaborate, think and critique, use appropriate 21st century tools and capabilities and develop resilience and independence. Because we wanted teachers to model these capabilities as well, it was disappointing to discover that an earlier decision to ensure that all teachers had access to fixed projectors and teaching walls, had an unintended negative consequence. Teachers fixed

themselves to the furniture rather than utilising the space and each other in a shared team environment.

By June of 2011, we made a whole staff commitment to explore different ways of organising student learning. Variations of these organisations included cross grouping across two classrooms, four teachers collaborating sharing all their children, and team teaching in a variety of forms. Very quickly, we had feedback from parents expressing concern that their children were working with teachers who they felt did not *know* their children. As a consequence, teachers felt concerned about these classroom learning organisations and pressured by parents. Confidence was quickly lost.

While the SLT had created detailed documentation about expectations for classroom practice, teachers did not have ownership of this material. Observational data collected from SLT walk-throughs highlighted that teachers did not have a *shared understanding* of our learning models. As a result, eight of the eleven weeks in term two's professional learning programme focused on building learning-focused relationships and the teacher knowledge and practice that underpins effective learning in classrooms.

Communication

Communication in term two shifted from a heavy emphasis on relationships to a more obvious emphasis on learning. Nine of the ten newsletters sent out in term two discussed learning in the school in some way. Parent learning conferences hosted in term two were in two parts, a National Standards report describing where the child was achieving against National Standards and a guided student-led learning conversation. This was a different format to the transition meeting we held in term one and was a conscious attempt to transition parents from the traditional parent interview structure to a student-led conference. Parental feedback was sought regarding the understanding of the written material

given and how they felt about the students leading the learning section. Results from this feedback showed that all respondents understood the material and most enjoyed sharing their child's learning. Two parents felt that the teacher knew about the learning so what the children had to share about their learning was not as important.

> I liked how it was so positively framed, there weren't screeds of writing but it still managed to get a lot of information across. I liked how it fitted into the PROUD structure. I found the specific ideas for helping her very useful. (Anonymous parent survey, 2011)

> Amazed in the change in my children. They both confidently contributed and explained their learning whereas in the past they have said nothing when prompted. (Anonymous parent survey, 2011)

Despite the leadership team feeling that the learning focus needed to go deeper, parents were very happy with their children's progress. This reminded us to slow down, bring our parents with us and do "less better".

Leadership

Term two was a period of uncertainty for everyone on the staff (including the leadership team) due to the realigning of our classroom practice. In SLT meetings, we discussed the need to model good practice, however there was only one team member with a full teaching load. This presented a challenge for us. This was partially resolved by term 4 as the second Assistant Principal started a class and the Deputy Principal released all the teachers for release time. This allowed them to clearly model teaching strategies and collaborative organisation.

The role of the leadership team became that of a guide working alongside the teachers while my role was one of strategic leadership and guardian of the vision. We spent time as an SLT discussing what leadership in this environment could be like, what was important to us and how we could

track this. I facilitated discussions with the SLT to solve any problems that were presenting themselves, encouraging them to collaborate and then create solutions to these challenges together.

Another leadership challenge was that as a school, our focus was developing the learning organisation, which meant that the "PROUD way of being" that we had concentrated so hard on in term 1 was starting to diminish. Student voice collected in June demonstrated that all children had positive feelings about school, but none of our PROUD work was explicitly mentioned. The challenge for me was how to keep the focus on the everyday "living" culture while building the "learning" culture. Transitioning into the third term, teachers were becoming more comfortable with trialing new things and collaborating on student learning challenges. We had also found a better balance of heart and learning by specifically promoting a learning focus.

Governance

By June 2011, the new Board of Trustees was elected. This was a different group from those chosen in the earlier April election: all were first time Board of Trustee (BOT) members. While their newness to the role did not have a major impact on my time, their newness is important to note, as I did need to spend some extra time guiding and advising the BOT in many of the school matters discussed at meetings. Trustees have commented informally that they feel that it takes up to a term (3 years) to understand and feel confident in the role of a trustee (Principal anecdotal notes).

PERSONALISING LEARNING – TERM 3 AND 4, 2011

Throughout term three and four, the SLT addressed the need for a *fully* shared understanding of effective learning. We approached this from a number of directions: professional learning through research and reading, research linked teacher inquiries, new school visits, Skype meetings with

practitioners experienced in collaborative teaching environments and finally through SLT modeling. I have expanded on these below.

1. Professional learning.   We held five two-hour professional learning meetings in quick succession, which focused on learning. Together, using reading materials, we explored

   - Our shared conceptions of learning and what effective learning in classrooms looks like
   - The need to be able to connect children's prior knowledge to the learning task
   - Withinness
   - Active learning
   - Learner Driven learning
   - Metacognition

From this work we developed our PROUD learning criteria, which is on the right side of the table. This work was co-constructed by the staff and utilised in a similar way as the PROUD living criteria used in term 1 and 2.

Figure 8: PROUD Living and Learning

Proactive	I choose the 'weather' of my mind I plan what I want to do and how I want to be I work then play	I am prepared to take risks and ask questions I am curious and keen to explore learning I lead my own learning
Respectful	I respect myself and others I am confident and caring I can be humble	I respect my own and others learning I can collaborate with others to learn
Open	I am open to new situations and ideas and the ideas of others I am willing to solve problems	I believe I 'can' and I challenge myself I am flexible and open to new learning I am prepared to take risks and I learn from my mistakes
Understanding	I understand myself and how I learn I listen carefully to others so I can understand them and communicate well	I understand how I learn and my learning needs I can talk about and reflect on my learning I can demonstrate my learning by teaching others I can apply my learning
Dependable	I can count on me Others can count on me too	I persevere I am responsible for my own learning

2. Teacher Inquiries. All teachers were involved in inquiries, specifically learning about their practice and how they could improve their teaching further to enhance student learning. This involved at least two peer observations and follow-up discussions, research and reflection (personal and shared). The findings from these inquiries were presented back to the staff to share and discuss what had been learnt.

3. New school visits. All staff visited the new college, which our students will eventually attend. As this school was newly opened also, it was a good opportunity to stretch the teachers' thinking about the learning spaces we had and how we could use them differently. We also closed the school for the day and travelled out of town to visit two other schools, one of which was also a newly opened school. This gave the staff another team building opportunity but more importantly the opportunity to discuss learning environments similar to our own.

4. Skype meetings. The leadership team had a Skype meeting with two senior leaders who had led the creative use of learning environments in their previous schools. Both were open and honest about the challenges they faced creating successful, personalised learning environments, which utilised flexible spaces and collaborative teaching.

5. After the SLT modeled possible practices, classes trialed a number of structures to personalise learning, for example children electing workshops to attend to meet their learning needs.

The result of these five strategies was a shared teacher commitment to personalising learning for students, meaning that teaching was specifically targeted at student needs. There was almost no whole class teaching demonstrated during the day. Teachers collectively decided when it was appropriate to teach whole class, for example, taking the register and reading a story (passive reading to only). Teachers worked hard to use the knowledge from their own professional learning to engage students and

encourage them to take ownership for their learning. This was evidenced in our end of the year student achievement data, which showed very high achievement levels for a vast majority of students at Rocky Shore School. This was a big shift from our very low beginning of the year results.

Figure 9: 2011 Year-end National Standards Results

Reading	• 78% of all students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 76% of boys are meeting or exceeding expectation • 80% of girls are meeting or exceeding expectation • 81% of Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 77% of non-Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation
Writing	• 78% of all students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 71% of boys are meeting or exceeding expectation • 85% of girls are meeting or exceeding expectation • 88% of Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 69% of non- Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation
Mathematics	• 83% of all students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 88% of boys are meeting or exceeding expectation • 83% of girls are meeting or exceeding expectation • 92% of Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation • 79% of non- Maori students are meeting or exceeding expectation

One of the challenges faced while attempting to personalise learning was consistency in learning organisation across the school. This was important because it provided reassurance to concerned parents however teachers were embracing collaboration at different rates. We attempted to address this by revisiting the school's touchstone documents in professional learning sessions and formulating minimum expectations for all learning environments.

At the end of term four, the full teaching staff reviewed the year (including the two teachers who had indicated that they were leaving). We reflected upon our trials to enhance learning and the direction we would take as a school for 2012. Collectively, the teaching staff decided to team-teach, and rather than allocate children to one teacher, they elected to allocate

them to two. This also meant that two classrooms would be used as one space and furnished accordingly. Teachers decided that this organisation would encourage everyone to use the spaces more flexibly and in line with our vision of learning, to expect collaboration from each other and to be cohesive in our learning organisation. All staff felt very passionate about formalising this organisation, as they had been trialing variations of this for terms 3 and 4.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEMATIC FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of data gathered over the period of this study. My research was designed to explore how a learning culture developed in a new school and to identify the challenges encountered by leadership team members. Four overarching themes emerged from an analysis of a focus group, school documentation, my principal's professional journal and anonymous surveys.   The themes are:

1. Touchstone documents
2. Relationship building
3. Creating a learning community
4. Leadership challenges and barriers to success

TOUCHSTONE DOCUMENTS

 "Touchstone document" refers to the documents that staff constantly refer to, to guide our decision-making and our educational direction. In our case this was our charter[7] and eventually the parallel documents (PROUD) that we created.

Understanding, buy-in and ownership

To be appointed to Rocky Shore School, all staff had been through a comprehensive appointment process and expressed their professional alignment with the school vision and values.

> This was the hardest job I've ever been for. By the time I had read the application and put together a presentation, I really had a feeling for the school. I really wanted the job. (Anecdotal comment from staff member, recorded in Principal's professional journal)

> I felt I had a good understanding right from the beginning through my application pack and then I was able to put a little bit of my light

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[7] Charter documents in New Zealand schools include the mission, vision, values, strategic plan, annual plan and targets.

on the situation when I was doing my write up with my application that I sent in. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

While we thought that this was ideal, in practice, being aligned was different to being involved in the generation of philosophies and ideals. As no staff or BOT members were involved in creating the vision, no one had ownership or a true understanding of what was intended by the statements.

> To implement something that you don't have a part of to begin with felt foreign. It had to develop. (Focus Group, Teacher 2)

> It felt more a void…it hadn't already developed. You had seen it on paper of how *they* wanted it to be but when you arrive on day on it is not there. But you don't know at that stage, whatever is on paper, if it will come alive. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

I felt it was important that the touchstone documents should be meaningful, living documents, used by teachers and children in their everyday work. An excerpt from my professional journal describes my thinking.

> While I philosophically agree with this vision – what do they (EBOT) actually mean by these statements? Where is the learning? It is hard when practitioners didn't create this (vision). How do I make this "live" with teachers and students? (Principal's professional journal, April 2010.)

As the vision had been created with the purpose of EBOT functionality and operation, using it for any other purpose was very difficult.

> We started out looking at the vision. I think because it wasn't clear, we didn't keep going there and then suddenly…we realised we needed that (some clarity). (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

The school values presented the SLT with similar challenges. The SLT had to decide whether to use the values as they were written or to create a parallel document that was useful to us. Because of the difficulty using and interpreting the vision, another set of documents was created which encompassed both the vision and values. The new BOT felt more ownership over these documents as they were relevant to them and their children and were being used daily at school.

> Let's just change the values to the PROUD stuff – that's what everyone uses now anyway. No one even knows what the values are. (Comment made at BOT meeting, Nov 2011, Principal's anecdotal notes).

It appears that *ownership* of key philosophies is essential to their success and sustainability. For documents to be used successfully as a touchstone, all teachers, children and the wider community need to have a thorough understanding of their meaning and intentions. This is more successfully achieved if everyone has a part in creating them and they are constantly revisited and revised. Two focus group members described this as follows.

> It was nice to see us all come together, right from the beginning, well before school started, and we talked through everything in detail so that we were all on the same page. Before school started and that was really good for me. Good grounding. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

> …a relentless clarifying of purpose and direction, because it may look great on paper but when you enact it, when you actually introduced and initiated it, it may work out differently (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

For Rocky Shore School, the newly appointed BOT decided in their third meeting together, that it was important for them to review the vision and

values within the following 12 months so that the current community and staff could own them. This review was scheduled for term four, 2012 (BOT self-review plan 2012-2014).

Priorities and direction

Touchstone documents can help to ensure that the school has focus and direction. One of my responsibilities was to ensure that we stayed committed to our educational direction. In our new school, there were many new things to consider; decisions regarding not only learning programmes and teaching content, but also furniture, IT purchases and community relationships each of which had an impact on learning. By asking staff to link their recommendations or ideas to the school vision, we were able to filter out ideas that might have been worthwhile but not a priority at that time.

> Principal appraisal: the staff collectively spoke about the Principal in respect to the vision being tied to everything we do. (Staff Minutes 23 August 2011, BOT minutes August 2011.)

It was useful to collectively clarify how suggestions would impact on our development plan and to focus on a smaller number of key things to develop. This allowed us to focus on doing fewer things better.

From a leadership perspective these documents gave the SLT a transparent way of making decisions and an assurance to the staff and community that we had a clear pathway in which to create our new school learning environment.

> I think it is important that SLT know where they are going. It doesn't mean you cannot change it, as a member of staff you want to have the captain of the ship kind of knowing which way you are going. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

Despite our "actual" vision being difficult to use, we did refer to it in conceptual terms. Staff embraced the concepts that were co-constructed

within the parallel documents and worked hard to grow the ideas further and use them in their teaching.

> We were given a starting point … and then from there, it has to grow. So because everyone came in on that same platform they were moving in the same direction. The school culture was allowed to develop and grow cohesively. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

My role became one of the "guardian of the vision" which was challenging not only because of the dual documents (charter, PROUD documents) that we were using as touchstones, but also because there were so many decisions that needed to be made at once.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

I believe that a school's heart and culture can be created. To do this, leaders need to provide the right experiences and model the desired outcomes. An excerpt from my journal below explains my thinking.

> It occurred to me in my PPLG (Principal's Professional Learning Group) today when xxxxx was quizzing me about my new school that I truly believe that heart and culture can be created. He thought it was inherited and dependent on the community, but his questions really made me think. I know some of it (culture) is what comes to you through the gate but I think we CAN create our heart, our environment – we just need to be explicit. It's a bit like explicit acts of teaching – they are explicit acts of leadership. (Principal's Professional Journal, March 2011)

> Building relationships with staff, students and the wider community were an essential part of creating the culture. Two statements in our school vision refer to the importance of relationships at Rocky Shore School.
> - o A safe, nurturing and inclusive environment

- Strong community relationships which support student engagement in school and community

A significant part of our establishment phase was building relationships and demonstrating that we cared about people and their families and valued their contributions to the school.

Community consultation

Developing a culture of quality relationships based on transparent communication and regular consultation was important in our development. Parents responded positively to being involved in regular consultation with the EBOT, BOT and Principal. This was reflected early in the establishment phase of the school in comments made by prospective parents. One parent emailed the EBOT with the following comment:

> I appreciate your willingness to interact with us all as parents, and I think this will go a long way in encouraging the local community to provide Rocky Shore School with our support. (Email from a community member to EBOT, 2009)

To review the quality of the relationships that we perceived we had with our families, we consulted regularly. In an anonymous digital survey in the third week of the new school year, we asked whether families felt welcome at the school. 100% of families responded that they did. 94% of families stated that their children were enjoying coming to Rocky Shore School. When asked what the school was doing well, comments reflected the focus on relationships.

> Putting a strong emphasis on creating a 'feeling of belonging' for the children (and parents). Seeing the Principal and DP's smiling faces outside school at the beginning and end of each day is delightful. I feel completely confident that my child's teacher and all

teachers at the school have my child's best interests at heart.
(Anonymous parent survey, Feb 2011)

Staff expectations

Both internal and external expectations of staff had an impact on the development of our school learning culture. All staff were expected to embrace the community and this was made clear in the initial appointment packages that were sent to applicants and in the early induction sessions. This was reflected in the feedback from the focus group.

> Through the PD and those initial days we learnt… This is the culture we want to achieve and display to the community. I expected it to be like that even before the interview, through the application, I had an expectation that the school would be very strong in terms of wanting the community in and a strong sense of cohesiveness and collaboration. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

Throughout the year a continued emphasis was placed on building and maintaining relationships. The teachers were expected to get to know families and build relationships so that any concerns could be shared early.

> The parents get individual attention. If they have an issue they know it is going to be sorted out. We know all the parents. We know all the kids and I feel they feel they get that individual attention every time and the kids get it as well. (Focus Group, Teacher 2)

> We value teacher-home relationships because at parent interviews we needed to get 100% parent touch base. There has been a push around trying to get that relationship which can be difficult sometimes. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

Feedback collected from parents, staff and children throughout the year demonstrated that our specific actions to build positive relationships were making a difference to how they were feeling about the school.

Supportive staff relationships

It was also important to the leadership team to build strong supportive relationships with all staff. A new school presents staff with many challenges as all aspects of the school are newly created. Consequently, I felt that it was important that staff felt supported as we developed our school.

> I feel that the staff are very valued. I feel quite well supported. It has been quite a challenge coming into this environment. There has been a lot to learn and take on board. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

> I think we value each other and that is really important. We respect that if someone wants to say something - you know that you don't have to worry (about being criticised)… there is a lot of respect. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

Staff feedback described feeling supported by the SLT and each other. This was essential for the times when pressure increased and when we wanted teachers to take risks and model being learners themselves.

Learning-focused relationships

While learning was always a key priority at Rocky Shore School, we consciously decided to develop the school heart and a sense of caring and community first. During enrolment, a number of parents had made the comment that they "just wanted their child to be happy". As this was a key concern for parents, we made this our initial focus for the children.   Early in term two we identified that we were ready to shift our emphasis from "heart" to "learning" as our children and families were happy and settled. This shift in emphasis from heart to learning was in response to personal reflections, a colleagues visit and community feedback. A reflection in my journal describes my thinking.

Have we weighted PROUD living too heavily for too long? Where is the learning focus in our everyday conversations? (Principal's Professional Journal, May 5, 2011)

My reflections were then shared at the next SLT meeting and we discussed how to move forward.

Reflection on progress (of our school culture) so far: community response has been about atmosphere, heart and climate but not about learning. Our core purpose is learning…what can we do to move forward? (SLT Minutes, 23 May 2011)

While we believed that the child must have quality relationships with teachers to learn effectively and parents ultimately wanted their children to be happy, quality learning was our core business and therefore very important to us. As a result the SLT spent professional learning time with the staff defining learning focused relationships.

Building learning focused relationships - the difference between caring and learning relationships (Staff Professional Learning Meeting 24 May, 2011)

It's about the learning too, we do it in the same cohesive way and heart too. Heart and learning. (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

The emphasis on learning-focused relationships reminded everyone that learning was our core business and that it was essential for us to have learning as our central goal.   The shift in our teachers' interactions with parents was evident in the anonymous survey comments from parents over the 12-month period. When asked, "What is the school doing well?" in February, the comments below reflected the general responses from parents.

Lovely environment. Proactive in getting classroom dynamics right. (Anonymous parent survey, Feb 2011)

Teacher is so approachable and available. Problems are being addressed quickly. From what I can see, things are not being rushed so there is time for everyone to get familiar and comfortable. Communication with parents & community is "real" which is fantastic! (Anonymous parent survey, Feb 2011)

When asked the same question at the end of the year, parent responses still included feedback about the welcoming nature of the school but all commented on the learning at the school as well. Two typical examples are recorded below.

It's a fabulous learning environment. Love the readers that have come home. The teachers are amazing, seem so dedicated to their jobs. Senior management are incredibly approachable as well - thank you! (Anonymous parent survey, Nov 2011)

Know the children well, their progress monitored, their needs being met, and communication within newsletters great, very informative. (Anonymous parent survey, Nov 2011)

The transition to learning-focused relationships was successful once parents felt that their children were happy and settled.

BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY
While learning was always paramount, we initially emphasised building quality relationships to lay a strong foundation for the learning that lay ahead. In a new school, all aspects that have been planned for cannot be tackled at once, so priorities must be made.

Clear links to research
One of my expectations during the establishment phase was that the SLT would use academic and practitioner research to

- design and develop all curriculum and programmes,

- make relevant decisions about the use of learning spaces, computer hardware and flexible furniture
- improve their own practice and that of others

This was not easy for the SLT as none had ever engaged with research in this way before. While the team found this process extremely challenging, all have independently stated since then, that the process was valuable.

> I hated doing that research. It was very stressful because I didn't know where I was going with it. But I love it now. It's the best thing! It (the research) all comes back on itself so I know it well. I can talk about my things (portfolios) and I really understand it and know its base. (SLT comment recorded in Principal's Professional journal, 2010)

At regular points through their inquiry process, the SLT were required to synthesise their findings and then present the information back to the rest of the team for critique until a final recommendation could be made. This process served three purposes.

1. It required the team members to investigate areas out of their knowledge base.
2. It forced open critique and a sense of team.
3. It ensured that we were making informed decisions about current practice and not just regenerating what we knew already.

Using a research base for the creation of our school philosophies and programmes gave us confidence in what we were doing and why we were doing it. This is important because as a new school you are regularly asked to justify your thinking to parents, the wider community and staff. When asked to give advice for new schools in the future, one focus group member simply recommended "Look at the research, stick to the research". (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

Explicitly focusing on learning

Another of my core beliefs was that to develop an effective learning community, we had to explicitly focus on learning in the school. We wanted to build capacity within the leadership team, the staff, the students and also the community. It is important to note here that while student learning was not a specific focus of this research; assessments demonstrated significant achievement shifts from the beginning to the end of the year. Findings described below concentrate on the leadership team, the staff and the community.

Leadership learning

Because the leadership team needed to lead and mentor others, I thought it was very important to focus on our own growth as leaders. A leadership advisor was employed by the EBOT to appraise me and mentor the team. His brief was to challenge us, encourage us to think critically and to help us to build capacity. The leadership mentor received mixed reactions from team members depending on the current pressure in the school.

> I really got a lot out of that session with xxxx this time. I can see where I need to develop. He's going to give me some readings about systems. (Comment from SLT member, Anecdotal notes, Principal's Professional Journal)

> I'm really not sure about working with xxxxx. I am too busy and I don't always think he understands that or our new school nuances. (Comment from SLT member, Anecdotal notes, Principal's Professional Journal)

The benefit of using an outside provider as a mentor was that meeting times were pre-booked; consequently, they were not cancelled when it was a busy time. The disadvantage for us was that at times we were really under pressure and it was very precious time. This was a tension at different times for all SLT members. For me, using an outside mentor was one way of ensuring that leadership discussions, reflections and critiques

actually happened and with someone not involved emotionally with the school.

Teacher learning

To ensure that the students of Rocky Shore School were engaged in quality learning, it was important to me to build capacity within the staff. The reflections in my professional journal depict a focus on thinking about the development of a learning culture in a new school.

> While I am focused on the heart and culture of the school – it has to be about learning too. We need to make sure that learning is our focus. I want teachers to be passionate about their own learning, to show initiative with learning innovations, to take risks and solve kids learning problems. (Principal's professional journal, June 2011)

To assist the development of a learning culture, emphasis was put on professional learning for teachers, with two two-hour learning meetings held each week. The purpose of these meetings was to co-construct learning programmes, to collaborate on school expectations and to collectively solve problems. This focus ensured a shared understanding and staff ownership of every aspect of the school's systems, learning programme and emerging culture.

> When we have had PD or meetings, we come along and there is an expectation that we will (contribute to the discussion) and it is our role to give some of our thoughts on the ideas, the SLT's (initial) idea is not exactly set 100% in concrete so we can give our ideas or break something down so that we can understand it a bit more or ask questions and clarify what is being talked about. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

> Learning has had a lot of emphasis this year and I feel a lot clearer about what learning is because we have had spent a lot of time breaking it down. Getting our teeth into inquiry learning and what

that is all about and allowing the students to have some ownership over their learning which I think has been highly valued this year (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

Teacher confidence

A challenge for all staff was translating our desired processes and outcomes into practice. By week six, teachers were asking for feedback about their practice and we observed that most had reverted to traditional teaching. Teachers were struggling to cope with the demands of a new teaching level, a new teaching space, different furniture and new technology.   This was surprising to the leadership team, as we had underestimated the ability of teachers to transfer their skills to a new environment. We had not accounted for the "performance dip[8]".

To address issues of teacher confidence in doing the "right thing", the leadership team modeled quality learning practices, in learning meetings and in classrooms. The impact of this modeling was reflected in this statement from the focus group.

> It filters through doesn't it, start at the top, they model for us and we model for the children and then we are all on the same page doing the right thing. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

Rather than experimenting and taking risks, teachers wanted regular explicit feedback to ensure that they were being the best that they could be.

We also tried to address teachers' lack of confidence by asking each teacher to design his or her own teacher inquiry. The aim was to improve our practice together and lift the achievement of our students. Teachers inquired into their own practice and were critical friends for colleagues. Inquiries took place over two school terms and were specifically related to an area of learning a teacher wanted to improve on.

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[8] The performance dip is part of the Kubler-Ross Change Cycle. When people are required to change their practice, their performance "dips" before skill and confidence increase which then reflects positively in their practice.

It was really useful having xxxx observing in my room. She wrote down all this stuff for me that she noticed. She also did some student voice, which told me the kids don't know what I thought I'd taught them. I'm a bit embarrassed about that… I need to break it down more for them. Anecdotal notes from teacher inquiry presentations, (Principal's Professional Journal, November 2011).

As no teachers had been involved in an inquiry before, this process added a certain amount of pressure however it also empowered them to take ownership of their own practice.

I think there is a need to be open and willing to take risks because we have been learning a lot this year and taking a lot of risks in the classroom to alter and improve our practice and in the long run I think we have become better off because of it. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

Sharing their own inquiry findings also contributed to the collective knowledge of all staff and made student learning a strong focus across the school.

Building leadership capacity in teachers was important to me and with a teaching staff of high performers I was warned by other Principals to expect a lot of competition for leadership opportunities. To this end I had planned for two Management Units to be allocated to interested staff members to lead and develop curriculum areas. It was surprising when none of the teaching staff expressed any interest in these roles. I had assumed because they were high performers and most had come from 2-3 management unit leadership roles in their previous schools, that there would be competition for these positions. I interviewed all eligible teaching staff about their reasons for not applying for these roles. All teachers felt that they wanted to concentrate on doing a "good job of their teaching role" and felt that they were not yet confident enough to take on anything new. Time to put into the role was also a factor mentioned by all staff.

Pressure on teachers

While all staff had come to our school as high performers, the experience of teaching in a new school was very challenging for all staff. The shared learning environment with its flexible spaces and my expectation of team teaching and personalising learning, while exciting to them, was also foreign and extremely challenging.

> It has been quite a challenge coming into this environment. There has been a lot to learn and take on board. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

While a "higher than usual" workload for teachers was expected, an unintended consequence of appointing a group of like-minded teachers and support staff was that no one wanted to let the team down. While this was a good thing for the school, it intensified the pressure that staff felt at a number of periods throughout the year.

> There is a group of teachers who are high achievers in their own way…you look at other people working and you think "better pull finger and keep going." I look at all of you working hard, and I think got to keep working and it brings along its own pressures. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

All staff members felt that there was an enormous sense of responsibility in being appointed as a foundation member of a new school. This added to the pressure that they already felt.

> It is a huge responsibility and I don't think any of us for one moment took that lightly, in fact sometimes I think we might have underestimated it, the sense of responsibility because we knew we had to link arms and be united and we were passionate about it. (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

This pressure felt by teachers was not directly influenced by anything specific, rather an expectation of themselves to perform at a level in line

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with general expectations of the leadership team, the other staff, the students and the community.

> Actually everybody had to give their absolute best … if you are a big staff and half of them do it you will get there, but here everybody had to play their part and do it well. Do their best, for the kids, for the parents, for each other, to bring it alive. It's lots of pressure on every person to do it, because if you don't… everyone would know that you are not playing your part. (Focus Group, Teacher 2)

Because teachers were committed to the vision of the school and they were high achievers, there was significant pressure to meet everyone's expectations, including their own.

Community learning

To further ensure quality learning for our students, involvement of parents in their own learning and in their children's learning was very important. An induction programme was created to ensure that parents understood the "Rocky Shore School way".

> Thanks for the induction morning. Now I understand why your classes are organised the way they are. School has changed! You answered all my questions and it was nice to meet other new mums and dads to the school. (Parent comment after induction meeting for parents, November 2011)

The purpose of these meetings was twofold – informative and social. Parents were given the opportunity to hear about the school in general terms, ask questions and build relationships with other new families starting the school.

As learning at our school was significantly different to the experience our parents would have had at school, evening meetings were held to explain the learning programmes in the core curriculum areas and answer questions. Sharing quality learning information was important to us.

Lots of practical ideas as to how we can support our child's learning at home were given. We really appreciate and value the individualised learning that our child is being given. (Parent feedback from anonymous survey)

The aim of these meetings was to generate discussion at home and give parents the confidence to have quality learning conversations with their children. Other more general meetings were also held to help parents understand the school learning philosophy, the school culture (PROUD living) and school organisation. These meetings were all well received, which is reflected in this comment from a parent.

Covered the broad topic of 21st century learning well. From how learning and teaching has changed since we were at school, to the development of RSS culture, to the specific learning and implementation of policies, school culture in junior, middle, senior school. Appreciated the team teaching handout to take home. (Parent feedback from anonymous survey)

Parents were also invited to student transition meetings after six weeks at school. These meetings were designed to give parents a basic understanding of how their child had settled in to class and a snapshot of their current learning progress.

We feel our child's needs are being met and that she is being supported in her learning, which is of the utmost importance to us. These meetings are so crucial in developing respectful relationships of partnership with our child's teacher. (Parent feedback from anonymous survey)

One of our learning meetings during the year involved students sharing their learning with their parents. While the response to children sharing their own learning was largely positive, we were surprised by two parents,

who felt that their child's recount was less valuable than the teacher's input.

> It was good to hear our son talk about something, but we were having to say, come on, hurry along, so we could get back to what the teacher had to say - so even though it was important, it wasn't as important as what the teacher needs to discuss. (Parent feedback from anonymous survey)

This was an area identified for further parent education in the future.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

As a new school Principal there were a number of challenges presented to me.

Constant pressure from the community

An overarching pressure came from wanting to be successful as a new school in the area. By encouraging families to be heavily involved in the school, parents felt confident in passing judgment and giving feedback, both positive and negative.

> There are also community expectations. We are in a bit of a goldfish bowl. People were looking in. What is going to happen there? So there was all of that expectation as well (that added pressure). (Focus Group, Teacher 2)

Another unintended outcome of building close relationships with the community was that parents appeared to keep expecting more and more from the staff. We needed to consider what was realistic to expect from our teachers to ensure that it was manageable. My role as Principal began to include protection of staff time. This was at odds with our open, "get everyone involved" philosophy, so at a number of community events, I was very specific about what the parents could expect from the staff (and what they could not). For example, they could expect that teachers would make time for them to discuss their child's needs, however they could not

expect that teachers would be available to meet during class time or for hours at a time.

Parental boundaries

One of the leadership challenges that resulted from the constant consultation and involvement of the parent community in the school, was defining appropriate boundaries for them. All parents that were involved in the school were trying to be helpful and they had been encouraged to be involved and to take the lead in some areas. As volunteers, they had not been part of the extensive collaboration and alignment of thinking that all paid staff had. Due to this, there were a number of occasions when parents acted in a manner that was not in line with our professional conduct. To give parents some useful guidelines, the EBOT and Principal created documents describing conduct and protocols, chains of command and decision-making. This was a useful support for parents who were trying to lead other parents. For example in the fundraising group, clear plans and procedures were developed for money handling and event management. For the more formally organised groups supporting the school, these procedures were helpful. For parents who were part of the school in more informal support roles, some explicit conversations were required with parents to help them understand why we made particular decisions and how they could help us to embed them. The SLT were proactive in having these conversations with parents.

Successfully empowering teachers

One of the leadership team's tensions was to know when to challenge teachers and when to support them. We had to find an appropriate balance between stretching teachers and building their confidence; giving them enough scope to trial new things, collectively finding solutions to students' learning problems and being innovative, but not enough that they felt unsupported or that they lost confidence in their ability. A constant dilemma for me was to find an appropriate level of expectation when teachers experimented with ideas. This was challenging if they didn't

appear to be aligned with our vision or collaborative discussions or they were giving up on new ideas too early. This tension is reflected in the following excerpt from my journal.

> How long should everything go through me to ensure we maintain our direction? How do I take staff with me, build their skill base and confidence, and give them ownership? How much and when do I let go? Obvious answer - collaboration. (Principal's professional journal, 22 March 2011)

I did not want to micro-manage teachers, however needed to ensure that they had enough support to be successful and learning programmes were aligned with our vision. The solution we found to be most successful was to collaborate on all aspects of learning. While initially teachers worked as silos, they quickly felt more comfortable working with others and in turn this provided them with support that was not "top-down".

> I feel that I can talk to anyone and they respond in a positive way and give me all the support I need and encouragement that I need. (Focus Group, Teacher 3)

An unintended outcome of collaborating on everything was that teachers did not independently innovate; they collectively innovated. This had the benefit of ensuring that the community saw a very cohesive, consistent approach to learning across the school.

Time and workload

A significant pressure for teachers and leaders was the need for more time. Rather than borrowing other schools' programmes of work, my expectation was that we would create learning specific to the needs of our children and our community. This intensified the workload and time pressures.

> Because we have had so much other stuff to put in place, just foundation stuff … setting up our culture and … then we have been

trying to build on the learning and doing inquiry focus and I guess in an established school, focusing on inquiry it wouldn't have been such a big deal because all of that foundation stuff would have already been in place, you have got systems running, things are good, you know what needs to happen, so its just another learning curve you are going down (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

When asked in the focus group, "What challenges has the school had in implementing the things that we value?", three of the five teachers responded that time was the key factor.

Time to spend time together to have professional conversations. Because we have had lots of meetings, sometimes opportunities to have one-on-one professional conversations about learning don't necessarily have the opportunity to happen. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

A challenge for me as Principal was to identify the important things then to prioritise them by allocating specific time to them, for example, the development of our learning culture. At times I had to make a decision about pace of learning for teachers. The tension for me was when to do "less better" and when to continue a reasonable pace of development. If every area of the school was worked on slowly and in-depth, I was concerned that some areas would never be developed. A certain amount of momentum needed to be maintained. Teachers felt this too.

A reflection on this year would be giving more time but then you don't want to lose the momentum. Time is important. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

I think that part of the reason that we have been able to keep going is that because it is a new school and we do understand that have got to keep up that momentum. (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

This emphasis on lack of time in a new school also highlighted the amount of work that teachers needed in order to cope effectively.

> Be prepared to breathe and live work for the first year, it is really hard work. Everyone is putting in heart and soul. It is the only way you can achieve what you want because there is so much to do. (Focus Group, Teacher 1)

There was also an element of pressure for me, knowing that teachers had an expectation of hard work and time commitment for the first year but that this could not be expected for much longer. For me, this pressure was about getting to a point in the school's creation where we could sustain our momentum, continuing to co-construct our school programmes in a similar time frame that established schools reviewed their programmes. Everyone had a limited ability to continue to work at the pace that we had started at.

> But I wouldn't be able to maintain the momentum we have had sustainably for another couple of years. I think we do need to slow it down. (Focus Group, Teacher 2)

The lack of time to establish one thing at a time and the resulting work load teachers had, had an impact on teachers' abilities to absorb new concepts and ideas and added significant pressure.

Lack of time and workload pressures also had an impact on teachers' personal lives. Only three teachers had children and only one of these had children still living at home. This teacher found work-life balance challenging.

> I felt there was no time, for me personally I am balancing family and this huge work commitment. If there could be a work commitment and I could (also) be with my kids (that would be okay). I felt that real pressure and pull between the two. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

The workload and time needed to be successful at a new school was significant. The social aspects of our school also suffered as everyone always had so much work to do.

> It was hard to get to know people because everyone was so busy. Maybe (more) drinks at 3 o'clock to fit it all in. (Focus Group, Teacher 4)

We did not have as many social events as we might have had in an established school, as everyone felt too busy to either organise them or attend. All staff social events were collaboratively organised to ensure full attendance. We all saw attendance as an important part of our team building.

Concentrating on the big picture

Another of my challenges as Principal was to ensure that we continued to develop conceptually. I felt that my role included critiquing and reflecting on the "big picture" and ensuring that our espoused theories, school documents and actions were congruent. The questions below are an extract from my professional journal in April 2011.

- What did we truly want to focus on in our school? (heart and culture, learning, use of space, leadership, 21st century pedagogy)
- How are we emphasising these things?
- Is this reflected in our strategic plan? Our annual plan?
- What is happening in our classrooms? At our meetings?
- How do teachers/children know what is important to us?

This involved constant personal reflection, and questioning and discussion with colleagues. It also involved me modeling and leading this with the staff. It was very easy to get side tracked on the "here and now" and at times we did. There is so much to do in a new school that "what's on top" is what gets addressed. The tension between what was currently

happening in the school and what I wanted to see happening was constant. Having the overarching view is very important.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of a learning culture in a new school. A new school presents its leadership and teaching teams with a challenging and rewarding experience. What themes emerged from focus groups, school documentation, anonymous surveys and the principal's professional journal?

The findings in this study represent four themes: touchstone documents, relationship building, building learning communities and leadership challenges. The key findings in this study can be summarised in the following statements.

1. The creation of school touchstone documents gave us direction and helped to identify the current and future priorities. Understanding and buy-in of these documents was important for all stakeholders, however *ownership* of these documents and the concepts behind them would have been more effective.
2. Time spent explicitly developing quality caring relationships between staff, students and the community early in the school development gave us a positive basis from which to build. Evolving these relationships into learning-focused relationships gave the school a more specific learning focus.
3. Specifically focusing on learning with links to research, for students, teachers, leaders *and* the community, laid the foundation to begin to develop a learning community within the school.
4. There were significant pressures for all staff that were magnified by being a new school.
5. The Principal of a new school needs to have a "big picture" view and be strategic in their leadership.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the Principal and staff during establishment of a new school, to understand the development of a learning culture and to examine the tensions for leadership. The findings led to five propositions that were described at the end of Chapter Five. I will discuss each finding with reference to the relevant literature and my own experiences.

TOUCHSTONE DOCUMENTS

There is extensive evidence in the literature that having a clear vision is important (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 1992; Pawlas, 1997; Prentice & Hunter, 2006; Saphier & King, 1985; Schein, 1997; Stoll, 1998). In their Educational Leadership Toolkit, the National School Boards Foundation (NSBF) of the USA, recommended "identifying a direction and purpose of the school and being able to apply this with a laser-like focus" (Creating a Vision, n.d., para 4).

By using the touchstone documents, we were able to set the school's direction and establish priorities. In a new school, everything needs to be created at once (for example, developing quality teaching and learning programmes; consulting and reporting to parents). These documents, which included the charter and the PROUD documents, worked as a filter and a priority setter and resulted in better efficiency, continuity and productivity. Other advantages of creating clear touchstone documents included "promoting interest and commitment, encouraging confidence in the people using them and promoting loyalty through involvement (ownership)" (NSBF, para 4).

Because Rocky Shore School had a comprehensive staff appointment process, all staff had an interest and commitment to the touchstone documents. While our appointment process was the first step to appointing

people with the right mindset and initially new appointees felt that they had a good feel for the school direction, in reality we did not have a shared understanding of any of the material. Meaning needed to be co-constructed before teachers could use them in practice. As Deal & Kennedy, (1982) and Pawlas, (1997) suggested, Rocky Shore School attempted to get buy-in of the vision and values documents by using them as a filter for selecting staff. Buy-in of the touchstone documents was important as no current stakeholders, (with the exception of a very small number of parents) had been involved in creating these documents so there was limited genuine ownership.

Later attempts to clarify and make meaning from these documents were an attempt to have a truly *shared* understanding of their meaning so that they could be used more comprehensively in the everyday life of the school. Eaker et al., (2002) emphasised that the first critical rule of developing an effective learning community was to build a foundation of shared vision, mission and values. The charter documents were not created by those who had to implement them and were holistic in nature rather than with an explicit focus on learning. This made our use of these documents difficult and required us to create parallel documents to supplement them.

As described in Chapter Four, the parallel documents (PROUD) created by the staff, met a number of needs.

1. We understood what we meant by the documents we created, so could articulate their meaning.
2. We owned them and therefore had a loyalty to them and commitment to see them implemented.
3. They had their foundations in learning.

Lezotte & McKee Snyder (2011), emphasised leadership being able to develop and articulate a vision as being one of the qualities of effective schools. Our development of the parallel documents was an attempt to

achieve this. While all teachers had buy-in of the "official" touchstone documents, they had personal investment and true ownership of the parallel documents (PROUD) that they used in their practice.   This provided staff with expectations (which eventually became norms) for behaviour management, learning programme delivery, community interactions and staff relationships. Staff became confident about the school direction and the philosophy behind it.

While we utilised the parallel documents to support the original touchstone documents, it is important to note that the direction and focus did not change from the original intention. We were committed to the conceptual direction that the EBOT had created with the community. The PROUD documents added detail to support the vision and values and allowed them to be more useful.

In a new school, it is a tricky balance to establish the purpose for the touchstone documents and create them accordingly. These documents need to be able to be used by all stakeholders for a number of different purposes; early on, for selecting the leader, appointing the staff and attracting interest from prospective parents; later, for practical, educational use in the school by the Principal, staff and students. This was a difficult position for the EBOT and SLT to be in, as to attract new students some vision work needed to be done in the community, but as the current staff and Principal were not part of this, it was hard for them to interpret meaning and ultimately deliver once the school was open. This dilemma was not addressed in any available literature used in this study.

RELATIONSHIPS
A substantial body of literature in the fields of effective schools, culture, learning communities and new schools indicate that positive relationships are crucial (Barth, 2002, 2006; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004; Pawlas, 1997; Sammons et al., 1995). Barth (2006) asserts that the relationships between adults in a school have the greatest

influence on the quality of the school. In their book about vision-driven leadership, Prentice & Hunter, (2006, p. 199) assert "while money, resources, buildings, equipment, technology, professional development, strategic planning, training, leadership and vision all matter – *people matter most*." (Authors emphasis).

Developing positive relationships with the wider community was an early goal for the EBOT and the SLT in the pre-establishment phase. Using our PROUD documentation, we focused on developing caring and interested interactions with the parent community. For the school to be successful in this community, we used three main strategies to engage the parent community: honest and open communication, involvement in school wide events/project organisation and encouraging partnerships in their child's learning.

Honest and open communication
Our strategies for engaging the community were closely aligned with NSBF's ("Education Leadership Toolkit," n.d.) recommendations for effective public engagement and Epstein's (1995) framework for parent-school collaboration. The EBOT held community meetings to consult about the emerging vision, values and graduate profile and to answer questions about the learning environment being planned. I used my local knowledge to address historical educational concerns and made attempts to personalise my leadership of the proposed school. I also addressed difficult questions answering them honestly. For example, one parent asked when we would get a swimming pool. Rather than giving a vague answer, I explained fully how the funding worked and why it was unlikely that we would ever get a pool. In line with NSBF's recommendations I attempted not only to answer questions honestly but also to give more information that was needed so that community members felt informed. I also openly addressed myths and incorrect assumptions of which I had become aware.

During the foundation year, parents were consulted regularly to gain their feedback so that we could improve all aspects of the school. Part of the induction process for new families also included aspects on how we treat each other and communication systems and pathways. In anonymous surveys, parents identified our commitment to honest and open communication and regular consultation as a strength of our school.

Involvement in the school

ERO (2008b) highlighted developing an inclusive culture that enables all parents to be actively involved, as a critical factor to enhancing and strengthening the partnership between schools and their parents. Building quality relationships with our school community included giving parents ownership of a Friends of the School group to help with designing and sourcing the uniform and researching, planning and building the playground, as well as being key fundraisers for the school. As Bolender (1995) found, this was an effective way to get parents involved in the school. The benefits of involving parents at this level meant that there was a "buzz" around the school; they felt as though they had ownership of their portfolios and parents working together built a sense of team and community.

Bolender, (1995) also described challenges schools may encounter when parents become involved in political areas of the school. Similarly, we experienced some challenges with defining boundaries for parents. As a new school, the initial goal was to get parents involved. It was very difficult when we encouraged an open door policy, consistently consulted and asked for feedback and gave parents ownership of particular areas, to then try to discourage them from entering other areas of the school workings or have them give feedback on areas that were not their domain.

Rocky Shore School community could be described as middle class. Many of the mothers were stay-at-home mums who had had recent professional careers. Involvement in voluntary roles at school filled a

personal need as well as a genuine want to contribute to the development of the school. Fullan, (2005, p. 61) asserts,

> Principal and leadership capacity and confidence are all the more important with middle-class parents. Here it is the *parents* who are more often experienced as threatening. A collective sense of efficacy on the part of the school puts them in a position to be proactive and non-defensive. (Emphasis original)

Fullan, (2005, p. 60) also emphasises the challenge that parental relationships present when he states "how best to relate to parents and the community is right up there with changing school cultures on the scale of difficulty". While this tension is briefly mentioned in Bolender's (1995) and McGhee's (2001) new school studies, it is absent from the other two new school studies referenced. Nicholas' (2008) study was based in a secondary school where the parental input is usually significantly less.

Encouraging learning partnerships

Effective school literature emphasises the need for schools to share with parents their child's learning and achievement (Epstein, 1995; ERO, 2011; Lezotte, 2011). While parents identified their child's happiness as of paramount importance, we believed that learning was our school's core business and therefore must be central to our quest for effectiveness. We found it useful to prioritise the development of caring relationships between staff, students and the community *before* concentrating specifically on learning. Caring relationships allowed trust to be built amongst the parents and staff resulting in a positive culture. We felt that these relationships allowed us to have quality learning conversations and focus on learning more effectively with parents. This is supported by Bolender, (1995, p. 22) who, in her new school study, found

> Communicating information with parents and providing a welcoming climate are the first steps, but the school must go beyond these.

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Parents must be engaged as valuable and necessary partners with the school in the pursuit of educational excellence for their children.

While we started the first term with a heavy emphasis on building a school heart, we also held learning meetings to report to parents about where their children were achieving academically. During term two, our emphasis with the parents and the students shifted to learning-focused relationships. Absolum (2006) in his work on learning-focused relationships asserts, "Teaching and learning is founded on the quality of the relationship built between the teacher and student. This relationship is the foundation for learning upon which all else rests" (p. 22).   Data collected from anonymous surveys demonstrated a significant shift in parent responses when asked what the school was doing well. Early in the year the statements made were about the "feeling" of the school and the caring relationships, while later in the year the comments had shifted to an emphasis on learning. While Absolum (2006) discusses learning-focused relationships in his work, an area not examined in the selected literature was the need to build strong caring relationships *before* moving onto learning-focused ones in a new school environment.

While we focused on learning for students, teachers, leaders and the community, the next section will examine our emphasis on learning for teachers and our parent community only.

LEARNING FOR ALL
Learning should be the core purpose for all schools. Southworth (1994) as cited in (Sammons et al., 1995) asserts that a "Learning School" needs learning at five interrelated levels – student, teacher, staff, organisational and leadership. While at Rocky Shore School, we tried to address learning at all five levels; teacher and community learning will be discussed in more depth in this chapter.

Teacher learning through collaboration

In order to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement for everyone, we focused on creating a collaborative learning culture with strong research links. In their work with collaborative cultures, Eaker et al., (2002), assert collaboration is an important key to highly effective teams. "We must shift from a culture of teacher isolation to a culture of deep and meaningful collaboration" (p. 10). Rocky Shore School strived to create a culture of collaboration by discussing all aspects of the school with staff members. This included new systems and structures, behavior management programmes, learning and teaching programmes and the creation of new events. These actions are supported by Eaker et al., (2002, p. 11) when they state that

> in a professional learning community, collaboration is embedded into every aspect of the school culture. Every major decision related to the learning mission is made through collaborative processes.

Teachers also worked collaboratively in their teaching spaces as team teaching at Rocky Shore School was an expectation. Team teaching promoted constant collaboration: every day in the classroom and in planning and meeting time. The development of a collaborative culture gave teachers and leaders the support to try new things without the fear of failure. Teacher 3 stated, "I feel that I can talk to anyone and they respond in a positive way and give me all the support I need and encouragement that I need". The emphasis was on their learning.

Collaborative cultures are not without their challenges and in a new school some of these challenges felt magnified, for example, to collaborate with others and generate all things from nothing, took an enormous amount of time. Eaker et al., (2002) highlight a number of important aspects of collaborative cultures including making time for collaboration, pursuing specific and measureable goals and making explicit the products of

collaboration. While we tried to prioritise collaboration time and had clear expectations of how this time would be used, time was still short as there was so much to do. With everything needing to be completed at once, it would have been impossible to collaborate at all times. To make the workload achievable, the SLT carefully planned professional learning sessions over the year to utilise the strengths of the collaborative process. At times, the SLT drafted ideas and asked the staff to feed back or contribute further, at other times the staff critiqued near finished ideas and sometimes they generated ideas from initial concepts. While these levels of collaboration were not addressed in any literature used in this study, Rogoff, Goodman, & Bartlett's, (2001) experiences while establishing their new school mirrored much of ours.

Research based practice

A significant part of the learning focus at Rocky Shore School was the development of a culture of research-based practice. Early in the establishment phase, there was an expectation of the SLT to read widely to research all aspects of their allocated portfolios. While this was challenging, "I hated doing that research. It was very stressful because I didn't know where I was going with it". (SLT member), it served a valuable purpose. SLT members felt that when new parents queried our programmes they could justify them easily and refer to research which gave them confidence. " I can talk about my things (portfolios) and I really understand it and know its base" (SLT member). Teachers, also, were expected to be practitioner researchers and each was required to inquire into their own practice. This practice continued to embed norms of continuous improvement. There is extensive literature which reflects the importance of teachers inquiring into their own practice (Bolender, 1995; Epstein, 1995; ERO, 2008b, 2011), however none of the new school literature addressed either this or the need to base programme design on researched practices.

Community learning

The literature indicates that there is considerable evidence that strong home ties are one of the essential supports to quality education (Bolender, 1995; Epstein, 1995; ERO, 2008b, 2011; Sammons et al., 1995). Learning opportunities for the parent community to help them understand their child's schooling is a part of this. At Rocky Shore School, we worked hard to involve parents in the "learning work" of the school. Our community partnership efforts were closely aligned with Epstein's (1995) framework of involvement for family partnerships. While all areas link both directly and indirectly to learning in the classroom, the three main areas that will be discussed are: communicating about learning programmes and children's achievement, volunteering-in-class programmes and learning at home.

To endeavor to communicate with parents about their child's learning, we designed conferences where parents could discuss their child's achievements and gather suggestions for how they could help at home. We held termly workshops for parents to engage in the learning their children were involved in at school with suggestions about home activities. To further engage families, we recruited parent volunteers to help in class learning programmes. The advantages we saw for parents are in line with Epstein's expected results and include parents having a better understanding of school programmes; understanding how to support their children at home more effectively, including being able to respond effectively to their child's learning problems; an appreciation of the teachers skill and an increased comfort in the school (Epstein, 1995). Anecdotal and survey information collected throughout the year described the main advantage for students in this partnership as being a more cohesive approach to learning between home and school. Parents who were trying to help their children at home were not at odds with methodology or content. This is supported by Bryk and Schnieder's (2002) work on high and low trust models as cited in (Fullan, 2005) when they assert,

Teachers active encouragement of parents, coupled with their demonstrated personal regard for the children, open up possibilities for teachers and parents to negotiate complementary roles in the children's education (p. 61).

NEW SCHOOL PRESSURES

Management challenges

There is little acknowledgement in the literature of the pressures on new schools. At Rocky Shore School there were a number of significant challenges that were early barriers to our success. These included the large amount of time that needed to be spent on the site while it was being built, very limited budgets with which to work, discussions over the school enrolment zone area, limited initial student enrolments and inconsistent and challenging interactions with the MOE. Early in the first term of operation, further challenges ensued with telecommunications and IT equipment not working, large amounts of resources needing to be processed, staff needing to be inducted and furniture delivered and organised. Early in term two, the transition from an EBOT to new Board of Trustees was delayed by the MOE as their processes let them down and the election had to be repeated. With the exception of needing a reasonable budget, which was identified in Holmes' (2009) work and Nicholas, (2008) who found that there should be adequate resources provided for new schools, few of these things were emphasised in any of the literature about new schools. These things could not be planned for and they all took their toll on my time and significantly impacted on my workload as the Principal. By spending time on these managerial challenges, my energy was diverted from learning, which at times had to become secondary to getting the school operational.

Workload

While all staff members had an expectation that the workload would be higher in a new school, the extent of the work commitment necessary to

get the school operational and be successful in its first year was significantly more than expectation. In the pre-opening stage of our new school, there were no existing systems and structures, learning programmes were not yet developed and resources hadn't been purchased. All of these things needed much consideration and had a short time frame to be actioned. Holmes (2009), in his work with Principals of new schools, found that new school staff struggled to find a work-life balance in the first few years of opening their schools. A quote from a Principal interviewed describes our experience accurately.

> There just wasn't enough time in the day to get everything done that needed to be done... the whole year was like a blur. I never thought about anything all year long except school. Weekends, weeknights, holidays. (Holmes, 2009, p. 91)

While we were aware that workload would be higher than we were used to, the reality of such a workload at the time was overwhelming. Part of this workload was due to the *need* to complete things to ensure that the school was operational, but part of it was also generated from the *want* to be successful as the new school in the area. We spent extra time ensuring that everything we created was researched, collaborated on and was of the highest quality.

As portfolio tasks were being created for the first time organisationally (and usually personally), workload was exacerbated for staff.   For example, SLT had no prior experience with IT network design or whole school literacy programming. Classroom teachers experienced similar challenges despite only one being a beginning teacher. Teaching in flexible learning spaces was new for all teachers. Only one teacher had taught in a team teaching environment and only two were teaching at a level they were familiar with[9]. This meant that teachers experienced

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[9] As the MOE had opened Rocky Shore School with Year 1-4 students only, and most enrolments were in the Year 1-2 area, it was not possible to place teachers (who were mostly experienced in Year 3-6) in teaching levels that they were familiar with.

pressure and a higher workload to achieve a standard that they were happy with and were used to. Because we were doing things that we were inexperienced in, our experiences can be related to the work done with beginning teachers by Langdon (2007).

> Beginning teachers found the work of teaching and learning to teach unrelentingly hard and boundless, despite being cushioned by good induction programmes. There never seemed to be enough time and they had to cope with new experiences and the lack of boundaries around teachers' work. Although principals recognised the high demands on teachers, they expected all teachers, to be committed to work hard. Long hours were the norms for all teachers (p. 230).

This statement relates well to our experience because while we realised that we were working hard, we also had the attitude that it just had to be done and we needed to just get on with it. There was an element of needing to survive through the first year, and then everything would be all right.

Pressures for teachers
Challenges specific to our teaching environment, also put pressure on teachers, for example, flexible learning spaces where there is high visibility and public accountability of their practice. While collaboration was part of everyday life, the shared learning environments made each teacher's practice public and this was stressful for teachers learning to do new things. All teachers were high achievers in their previous schools and no one wanted to be the poorest performer. While very supportive of each other, teachers inadvertently put pressure on each other as Teacher 5 states here:

> I look at all of you working hard, and I think got to keep working and it brings along its own pressures. (Focus Group, Teacher 5)

As Principal, this required a balanced overview as "effective, highly interactive cultures incorporate high pressure and high support" (Fullan, 2005, p. 73). At times I worried that we micro-managed our teachers but as they were in cognitive overload, it was designed as support rather than management. We attempted to address this by openly discussing how we were feeling in relation to performance, workload and pressure. This could be linked with the phrase coined by Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, (2011), "stress bonding", where they use an analogy of being on a half built plane in a storm. "There is fear, lack of control, adrenaline, uncertainty and knowing only intellectually that the plane will probably not crash" (p 86). Teachers were honest with each other about the pressures they felt to continuously improve and as leaders we led teachers through research to explain performance dips and how change causes dissonance. As a leader this presented challenges which are highlighted by Heifetz and Linsky (2002) cited by Fullan, (2005, p. 101), as they describe the difficulties of leading through deep new learning.

> To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear – their daily habits, tools, loyalties and ways of thinking – with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility.

Another pressure intensified by being a newly established school was the pressure from the community to perform. While we pressured ourselves to achieve, there was also significant external pressure to be successful. The community had been waiting for the school to open for approximately ten years and so was extremely interested in its development. This caused significant pressure both organisationally and individually. Teacher 3 stated, "There are also community expectations…. So there was all of that expectation as well (that added pressure)".

While our efforts to achieve a caring, family-like culture from the beginning helped us to achieve positive feedback from parents, this did not diminish the pressure we felt as we continued to strive to sustain our success.

THE BIG PICTURE

Aside from the frustrating managerial aspects, the most challenging aspects for me were to give clear, specific direction to staff and to keep a focus on the overall vision or "big picture". While not in conflict, this simultaneous focus presented some tensions at times.

As everyone on the staff was completely immersed in their own work, my role was to keep an eye on the detail, but more importantly (as I had been able to delegate some of this to the SLT) to keep an eye on the horizon. This involved ensuring that a reasonable pace of improvement was kept, but that the work we did was of a good quality and we did "less better". There were challenges at times with workload, for example I was asked if we could discontinue our teacher inquiries as people were feeling overworked. In this example, I did not want teachers to discontinue something as important as learning about and improving their practice as this would set a precedent for the future. McGhee, (2001, p. 75) in his thesis about the role of a principal in opening a new school, asserts,

> the ability of the principal to have a vision of what he or she wanted the school to be like, one, three, five even ten years into the future was a characteristic of a successful principal of a new school.

While teachers concentrate on the "now" and the short-term future, the principal's role is to be able to look at detail and the big picture. Fullan, (2005, p. 103) cites Heifetz and Linsky (2002) who describe the role of the leader as

> "staying on the balcony and being on the dance floor" almost simultaneously. The dance floor is the intense leadership for deep

learning. The balcony is standing back to get perspective, and visiting other settings where you can observe from a distance.

When trialing new teaching combinations and organisational structures in term one, teachers were quickly ready to abandon the trials. The resulting compromise was that they trialled more extensively than they preferred, but less than my ideal– a middle ground. With the challenges inherent in establishing a new school, it was important for the Principal to be able to "pace" the rate of change and improvement. By having strong relationships with staff, it was possible to judge teachers capabilities more accurately and continue on our pathway at an appropriate pace. McGhee (2001) identified flexibility and interpersonal skills as important for Principals when opening a new school. He states,

> The construction and occupancy of a new school holds many unexpected pitfalls. The best planning, educational knowledge, vision and interpersonal skills may encounter unexpected roadblocks. Flexibility is necessary for success. (p. 76)

Both flexibility and interpersonal skills were vital to not only leadership but all staff as well.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Both Schein, (1997) and Sergiovanni, (2000) provided models of culture that were useful frameworks for this study. Schein's levels of culture were identifiable on a number of occasions. For example, in term one, when teachers were in cognitive overload trying to improve their practice, basic underlying assumptions, Schein's deepest level of culture, had not altered. Teachers continued to teach the way they were most comfortable. Despite us espousing how teaching would look, we really hadn't made any significant change. Sergiovanni's "lifeworld" and "systemworld" were very relevant to this study as the challenges with the "systemworld", for example, the lack of established systems and structures, had an impact on

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the workload and stress of staff. Both system and lifeworlds need to be functioning effectively to achieve a well-balanced culture.

SUMMARY

While the literature is sparse in the area of new schools research, four new school theses identified aspects of importance similar to my findings. The need to have a clearly articulated, shared and collaboratively developed vision was identified (Nicholas, 2008); the importance of developing an inclusive, supportive culture (Bolender, 1995; Nicholas, 2008); and the challenges of lack of time and workload (Holmes, 2009; McGhee, 2001; Nicholas, 2008). Some of the challenges described as barriers to the Principal's core work were briefly identified in McGhee's autobiographical thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to describe the factors contributing to the development of a learning culture in a new school. This chapter summarises the findings of the study, describes the implications and future recommendations for other new schools and finally acknowledges the limitations of the study.

This study found that having shared touchstone documents, strong relationships between all stakeholders, a focus on learning for all and an eye on the "big picture" were important considerations while attempting to establish an effective learning culture in our new school. Unexpected pressures included the community interest and involvement in the school and the internal and external pressure on us to perform to a high standard. There were also a significant number of unexpected barriers including the large amount of time spent on the site during building, very limited budgets with which to work, discussions over the school enrolment zone area, limited initial student enrolments and challenging interactions with the MOE. Further challenges ensued with telecommunications and IT equipment not working, large amounts of resources needing to be processed, staff needing to be inducted and furniture delivered and organised. Very few of these issues were documented in the small amount of new school literature available so while we all expected to have heavy workloads, we were unprepared for the impact these things had on our time and stress levels.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

A number of implications for future stakeholders of newly opening or opened schools can be drawn from these findings. These will be described in four sections: touchstone documents, relationships and trust, focus on learning and leadership.

Touchstone documents

While the requirement for the creation and submission of a charter is present for all NZ schools, specific philosophical underpinnings are necessary for new schools to attract new students, direct programming and build the school culture.

Relationships

Initial establishment of trust is essential in building relationships between parents, teachers, students and staff. Quality relationships underpin effective school cultures.

Focus on learning for all

Focusing on learning for parents, students, teachers and leaders encourages a positive and inclusive learning environment. This focus on learning encourages all stakeholders to collaborate on achieving quality learning for students.

Leadership

Principals need to be aware of their own leadership philosophies and beliefs and have an understanding of the complexity of the role as a new school leader.

Principals of new schools need to have the time to spend on high-level leadership tasks.

SLT members need to have leadership and management capabilities aligned with the demands of a new school environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

Currently new schools are being opened in New Zealand each year. Policy changes would assist a new principal by allowing them to focus specifically on developing the culture and learning in their school.

1. New school Principals could begin their appointment at least one year before the school is due to open. This would allow

Principals the opportunity to be involved in depth in the building design stages, initial consultation of the community and the visioning process.

2. It would be beneficial for new schools to be allocated staffing earlier. Currently SLT members are employed a short time prior to opening, but no teaching staff are funded to start until the first day of opening in primary schools. Secondary schools are able to appoint their staff for one school term before opening and this allows teachers to build a sense of team, plan curriculum together and have ownership over all aspects of the school. Primary schools could benefit from this preparation time too.

3. The MOE could provide base documents outlining key requirements and considerations for creating a new school. No set-up documents were provided by the MOE. Providing these documents would save a significant amount of a Principal's time.

4. Adequate resourcing could be provided for new schools, which would alleviate some of the pressure on teaching staff and leadership teams. Some examples of this could be: a guaranteed budget for the first two years of operation; the design and install of IT networks included in the building process.

5. A new schools leadership consultant role could be created. While the Principals of new schools in New Zealand typically contact each other for help and guidance in an informal manner, it would be beneficial to have a structure where there are people with experience of opening a new school available to help when required. It would be logical to connect this structure to the MOE as they have a specific department related to new schools.

Part of this study highlighted a number of barriers to opening a new school. These recommendations would provide some support to streamline the process of opening the school and allow the appointed principal time to focus on student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EBOT'S AND NEW SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

People
Underpinning the success of any new school will be the people within the organisation and the relationships that they form between themselves. Processes that may help this process include:

- Careful selection of staff. Staff appointments should align with school's vision for the future.
- Planned induction and mentoring to help embed expectations.
- Collaboration in all aspects of the school.
- An inclusive environment for parents and community members.

Touchstone documents
Having the school's direction clearly detailed in touchstone documents is useful for a new school environment. There are two key recommendations involving touchstone documents.

1. Decide on the purpose of the touchstone documents. A successful set of touchstone documents could be used effectively for all purposes if they are identified in their inception.
2. All stakeholders that will implement the documents are involved in creating them. This gives them a sense of ownership and a loyalty to work towards achieving them.

Learning focus for all
Learning should be considered as important for *everyone*. Specifically involving parents in programmes relevant to their children's learning supports student achievement and gives parents a better understanding of the school's programmes, Supported by Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Irene

Fung, (2007) in the Teacher Professional Learning BES , it is important to encourage teachers to grow their learning by investigating their own practice as this has a direct correlation to their students' progress and achievement.

> What matters is that teachers consider their teaching practices and the theories that underpin them in order to maximise their students' opportunities to learn – and that they test the effectiveness of their efforts in terms of student outcomes (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 201).

The big picture

Leaders need to have the overview of the school's direction and manage the pacing and detail. To achieve this, the EBOT/BOT and Principal need to have a good knowledge of the staff skill base and have fostered quality relationships.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The limitations of this study relate to most single case, self-study research projects and concern the study's generalisability. The school is a new school in a decile-5 beach community with 28% Maori students. This may not translate to other schools with a different demographic picture. In the design and conduct of the study the following limitations are acknowledged:

- This study is of one school, in one context only; therefore generalisability of the findings may be only from the reader finding a commonality with their own context.
- Data from this study could be subject to a number of different interpretations.
- The voluntary nature of the survey feedback from the community and the staff involvement in a focus group means that the information analysed may not necessarily be representative of all stakeholders.

- This study was researched from my personal perspective as the establishment Principal of Rocky Shore School. There may be biases I have to address including: the impact of my own experiences, positive and negative; the relationships formed with the staff, students and community which may have the potential to skew my interpretation of observations; the need to maintain staff professional reputations and that of our school. To some degree I have a vested interest in the research as the Principal of a new school in New Zealand.

While the limitations listed above are relevant, this study also has strengths specific to case study research. This study includes rich and detailed descriptions, written in a chronological narrative form that is relevant to Rocky Shore School. It also analyses these events highlighting particularly relevant issues from the principal's and other stakeholders' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2007).

This study may be of interest to other new schools being created either in New Zealand or internationally. Established schools with an interest in changing their school culture may also find this study relevant to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The intention of this study was to understand the factors that contributed to the creation of a learning culture in a new school. Having completed this study, I can identify a significant gap in the research of new schools. Further new school research could include:

1. A replication of this study with other new schools examining common findings. Are the factors identified as contributing towards an effective learning culture at Rocky Shore School relevant to other new schools?
2. A longitudinal study following the progress of a new school for the first four years. This would allow some reflection and analysis

about the impact of decisions made in the initial year and an investigation of future sustainability.

3. All new New Zealand schools are being currently being designed and built as modern learning environments with flexible spaces. This is a directive from the MOE. During our establishment period, we attempted to research theory supporting the use of these spaces, how best to use them, the impact on teachers and their practice and student achievement. There was limited research in this area; therefore this could be a valuable study to inform new school staff.

4. An in-depth study of the involvement of the community in the establishment of a new school. How does the school encourage ownership, buy-in, involvement and community leadership effectively? How does the school best avoid the challenges inherent with volunteers; cliques, in-fighting and boundaries?

Despite the small scale and single school context of this study, this thesis offers significant insights into some factors that the staff, community and principal perceived to contribute towards our developing learning culture.

EPILOGUE

In July 2012, the Education Review Office reviewed the school. The report was positive about our practice. I have highlighted key points below.

How well are students learning – engaging, progressing and achieving?

- *Achievement information at the end of 2011 indicates that the vast majority of students achieved at or above the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Results also showed that most students made expected or better than expected progress during 2011.*

- *Achievement data is analysed effectively and well used to report to the board, inform decision-making and self review, and to set charter targets.*

- *Teachers make good use of assessment information to provide meaningful programmes.*

How effectively does this school's curriculum promote and support student learning?

- *The school's broad-based curriculum effectively promotes student engagement and learning and reflects current educational theory and research.*

- *High-quality teaching is consistently evident throughout the school.*

- *Teachers work collegially in pairs taking joint responsibility for two classes. This enables them to share best practice and effectively cater for the wide range of ability levels of individuals and groups of students.*

- *Authentic learning contexts provide students with real life experiences including an emphasis on the local community and environments.*

- *The principal and staff are successfully fostering strong partnerships with families, wha nau and the wider community.*

This report provides external support for the conclusions reached in this study.

In 2013 and beyond, we face new challenges. We have a rapidly growing roll and a large number of new teachers. This is requiring us to think carefully about induction and professional learning programmes for teachers and also our communication processes with the large number of

new parents. Parents will find the shift from a small school with a small teacher-student ratio to a medium-large school with ratios typical of other schools, difficult. Sustainability of the positive relationships and the learning culture of our school will be our next challenge.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter

Dean's Office
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: **Melanie Taylor**
cc: Professor Noeline Alcorn

From: **Associate Professor Linda Mitchell**
Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee

Date: 19 May 2011

Subject: Supervised Postgraduate Research – Application for Ethical Approval (EDU028/11)

Thank you for submitting the amendments to your application for ethical approval for the research project:

The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school

The Committee appreciated the highlighted amendments, which made the amendments very clear to read.

I am pleased to advise that your application has received ethical approval.

Please note that researchers are asked to consult with the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if any changes to the approved research design are proposed.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

Associate Professor Linda Mitchell
Chairperson
Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Address

Date

To the Rocky Shore School Board of Trustees

It is a rare occasion in one's career to be offered the opportunity to create a school from inception. While exciting and a little daunting, it is a huge responsibility to create the very best school possible for the students in our community.

On appointment as the foundation principal for Rocky Shore School, I visited other new schools to discuss possible research bases, general philosophies and pitfalls with the principals and leadership teams. It quickly became apparent that there was limited available research to support us on our journey to create our new school. A number of the principals mentioned that they felt that they were "re-inventing the wheel" as a foundation principal as there had been a number of new schools open each year prior and they were all finding the same challenges. I believe that all aspects of a new school need careful consideration before creation, however, that the underlying culture of a school has a significant impact on many of these.

It occurred to me, that researching the impact of leadership on the development of the culture of the school would be an opportunity to investigate my practice and to share our journey with other interested parties. To this end, during 2011-2012, I am taking the opportunity to complete my Masters of Educational Leadership degree. This development had the full approval of the foundation Board of Trustees.

My research question is:

The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.

I will also explore the following question:

> *How does leadership (BOT, Principal, senior leadership team, teachers, children and community) within a new school contribute to the creation of a culture that openly values learning and community engagement?*

This research provides me with an exciting opportunity to analyse our practice with the aim to provide the very best leadership of our school possible.

The analysis and subsequent writing will provide the background for my Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly seminars, workshops or publications. The BOT will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the interpretation of data should they wish and will receive regular reports as per normal school practice. I would expect the data collection to take place during 2011 and the majority of the writing to take place in 2012.

This research project is supervised by Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcom Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato (Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

Please see the attached information sheet for more detailed information. I hope you will continue to give the project full support. Could you please return the attached consent form to me by 15 May 2011 to confirm this or record this support in a Board minute?

Kind regards

Melanie Taylor

Principal

Rocky Shore School

Appendix C: Introductory Letter to Staff

Address

Date

Dear staff of Rocky Shore School

It is a rare occasion in one's career to be offered the opportunity to create a school from inception. While exciting and a little daunting, it is a huge responsibility to create the very best school possible for the students in our community.

On appointment as the foundation principal for Rocky Shore School, I visited other new schools to discuss possible research bases, general philosophies and pitfalls with the principals and leadership teams. It quickly became apparent that there was limited available research to support us on our journey to create our new school. A number of the principals mentioned that they felt that they were "re-inventing the wheel" as a foundation principal as there had been a number of new schools open each year prior and they were all finding the same challenges. I believe that all aspects of a new school need careful consideration before creation, however, that the underlying culture of a school has a significant impact on many of these.

It occurred to me, that researching the impact of leadership on the development of the culture of the school would be an opportunity to investigate my practice and to share our journey with other interested parties. To this end, during 2011-2012, I am taking the opportunity to complete my Masters of Educational Leadership degree.

My research title is:

The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.

I will also explore the following question:

> *How does leadership (BOT, Principal, senior leadership team, teachers, children and community) within a new school contribute to the creation of a culture that openly values learning and community engagement?*

This research provides me with an exciting opportunity to analyse our practice with the aim to provide the very best leadership of our school possible.

The analysis and subsequent writing will provide the background for my Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly seminars, workshops or publications. Staff will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the interpretation of data should they wish and will be involved in much of the data gathering as per normal school practice. I would expect the majority of the data collection to take place during 2011 and the majority of the writing to take place in 2012.

I hope that this project will provide additional opportunities for us all to reflect on our professional practice in a systematic and rigorous way.

This research project is supervised by Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcom Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato (Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

Please see the attached information sheet for more detailed information. If you are willing to be involved in a focus group to discuss analysis of findings please complete the attached consent form and return it by 15 May 2011. There could be up to three focus groups over the course of a year, each lasting an hour.

Kind regards

Melanie Taylor

Principal

Rocky Shore School

Information Sheet for Board of Trustee members and staff of Rocky Shore School, regarding research undertaken by Melanie Taylor.

Research project title: *The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.*

Researcher: *Melanie Taylor, Principal, Rocky Shore School*

Research Supervisor: *Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, Hamilton.* Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

Aim of Research:

The aim of this research is to investigate how leadership can create and develop culture in a new school. It is hoped that this material will be available for other foundation schools in their journey of creation and development.

Design:

The research has been designed to include aspects of culture in its broadest sense that is, community engagement, learning, including staff, student and community and the building of leadership capacity. The research may specifically focus on one or two of these aspects as the research unfolds.

Methods and procedures:

This research will include elements of action research, narrative, case study and self-study methodologies.

Data collection:

Data will be collected from sources that are part of usual school practice. This will include professional learning meeting notes, the school charter, student academic records, meeting minutes, newsletters and anonymous surveys to the staff and community. I will also write a research journal with anecdotal notes, reflections and questions. This will be a significant source document.

Interruption:

There should be little interruption to either the BOT or staff time as much of the work is part of everyday practice. This data will be analysed as per school practice. Staff or BOT members with an interest may volunteer to provide feedback on interpretations of analyses.

Confidentiality:

All data and comments will be anonymous. I will only report information, which is in the public domain and within the boundaries of the law. Permission to use any information that could be deemed sensitive will be sought before use, including any primary source data such as children's work or direct teacher opinions. Participants will be given the opportunity to check and approve any of this information.

Timeframes:

The thesis-writing period is 2011 and 2012. I expect the data collection to be completed by the end of 2011 and 2012 to be used to analyse and write up this information.

Melanie Taylor

Principal

Rocky Shore School

Appendix E: Consent Form for Staff

Research project title: *The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.*

Researcher: *Melanie Taylor, Principal, Rocky Shore School*

Research Supervisor: *Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, Hamilton.* Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have been fully informed as to the purpose, potential ethical concerns and process involved with this research study and freely consent to participate.

 I understand that any concerns or queries I may have regarding this study can be addressed at any stage of the research process.

 I have been informed that all personal information that may indicate my identity is secure and confidential.

I understand that in accordance with the University of Waikato's *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008 (Section 12)* all of the research data will be archived indefinitely and used by the researcher in the writing of her Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications. Personal information concerning participants will be destroyed after five years.

I am aware that at any time during the research process I have the right to express my concerns to the researcher or her supervisor and acknowledge that I have been provided with all relevant contact details.

Tick box

- ☐ I understand the use of school data in this research project.
- ☐ I would be prepared to be part of a focus group to comment on emerging findings. I am aware that the discussions will be recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Signature: …………………………………………………………………………

Printed Name: …………………………………………………………..…

Address: …………………………...…………………………………………

Phone Number: ……………………………………

Email: ………………………………………… Date: ……………………

Information Sheet for parents of Rocky Shore School, regarding research undertaken by Melanie Taylor.

Research project title: *The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.*

Researcher: *Melanie Taylor, Principal, Rocky Shore School*

Research Supervisor: *Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, Hamilton.* Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

Aim of Research:

The aim of this research is to investigate how leadership can create and develop culture in a new school. It is hoped that this material will be available for other foundation schools in their journey of creation and development.

Design:

The research has been designed to include aspects of culture in its broadest sense, that is, community engagement, learning, including staff, student and community and the building of leadership capacity. The research may specifically focus on one or two of these aspects as the research unfolds.

Methods and procedures:

This research will include elements of action research, narrative, case study and self study methodologies.

Data collection:

Data will be collected from sources that are part of usual school practice. This will include professional learning meeting notes, the school charter, student academic records, meeting minutes, newsletters and anonymous surveys to the staff and community. I will also write a research journal with anecdotal notes, reflections and questions. This will be a significant source document.   I would like to use your child's work in this research study.

Interruption:

There should be little interruption to student learning in the collation of their work, as much of the research is part of our everyday practice. Student work will be analysed as per school practice.

Confidentiality:

All student work collected for use will not identify students. I will only report information, which is in the public domain and within the boundaries of the law. Permission to use any information that could be deemed sensitive will be sought before use, including any primary source data such as children's work.

Timeframes:

The thesis-writing period is 2011 and 2012. I expect the data collection to be completed by the end of 2011 and 2012 to be used to analyse and write up this information.

Melanie Taylor

Principal

Rocky Shore School

Appendix G: Consent Form for Parents and Child Regarding the Use of the Child's Work in the Research Project.

Research project title: *The role of school leadership in the creation and development of culture in a foundation school.*

Researcher: *Melanie Taylor, Principal, Rocky Shore School*

Research Supervisor: *Professor Noeline Alcorn, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, Hamilton.* Private Bag 3105, Hamilton Phone: (+64) 7 8384865 Email: alcorn@waikato.ac.nz).

CONSENT FOR PARENTS AND CHILD REGARDING USE OF CHILD'S WORK

I have been fully informed as to the purpose, potential ethical concerns and process involved with this research study and freely consent to for my child's work to be used for this purpose.

I understand that any concerns or queries I may have regarding this study can be addressed at any stage of the research process.

I have been informed that all personal information that may indicate my child's identity is secure and confidential.

I understand that in accordance with the University of Waikato's *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008 (Section 12)* all of the research data will be archived indefinitely and used by the researcher in the writing of her Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications. Personal information concerning participants will be destroyed after five years.

I am aware that at any time during the research process I have the right to express my concerns to the researcher or her supervisor and acknowledge that I have been provided with all relevant contact details.

PARENT CONSENT

Tick box

- ☐ I understand and support the use of my child's work in this research project.
- ☐ I do not wish my child's work to be used for this research project.

Signature: ………………………… *Printed Name:* …………………………

Address: ……………………………………………...…………………………

Phone Number: ……………………………………

Email: ……………………………………… *Date:* …………………

CHILD'S CONSENT

Tick box

☐ I am happy for my work to be used in this research project.
☐ I do not wish for my work to be used for this research project.

Signature: ………………….…*Printed Name:* ……………………………

Phone Number: ……………………………

Email: ………………………….…*Date:* …………………………..

Focus group: Thursday 17 November 2011

Welcome

Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion of culture at Rocky Shore School. As you know, this focus group is to inform Mel's thesis. We want to know how our teachers feel about the culture in the school.

This afternoon we will be discussing your perceptions and ideas about the school's culture. There are no right or wrong answers rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

Before we begin, let us share some ground rules…

- *Please speak up – only one person should talk at a time.*
- *We are recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments – if several people are talking at once, we will miss your comments.*
- *While we might use names today, no names will be attached to comments once they are transcribed.*
- *We are interested in positive points and growth points so please be honest.*

> ### Introductory Questions
>
> 1. What does the expression "school culture" mean to you?
>
> ### Transition Questions
>
> 2. Think back to when you first started at Rocky Shore School. What were your expectations and first impressions of what the school would be like? (in relationship to the emerging school's culture?
>
> 3. What expectations did you have about your role in helping to establish a new school and developing its values and way of working?
>
> ### Key Questions
>
> 4. What is valued at RSS? How do you know?

5. *Give examples of events, statements, routines, Professional Learning or actions that have reinforced those values at RSS?*

6. *What challenges has the school/staff had in implementing those values?*

7. *What do you see as the role of the school leaders in developing the school culture at RSS?*

8. *What do you see as the role of the teachers in developing the school culture at RSS?*

Ending Question

9. *If you had the opportunity to give advice to another foundation school about creating a desirable school culture, what advice would you give?*

Survey 1 - February 2011

How are we doing so far?

1. In your experience so far, does the school feel welcoming and friendly?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Sometimes
○ Unsure

Comment

2. Is your child enjoying coming to Rocky Shore School?
○ Yes
○ No
○ Unsure

Comment

3. What things do you think we are doing well?

4. This survey is about how our school "feels". What can we do to improve your (and your child's) experience?

Survey 2 - February 2011

Meet the Teacher/ Family BBQ and Picnic

1. What did you enjoy about the BBQ/Picnic evening?

3. What could we do to make a meet the teacher type evening more effective?

Survey 3 - March 2011
Transition meetings

1. How easy was the school interviews website to use?

☐ very easy

☐ easy

☐ okay

☐ a challenge

☐ very difficult

2. Did you receive a confirmation email from the website with your time?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure

3. Was your interview started on time?

◯ Yes

◯ Close to the time

◯ No

4. Did you receive clear and easy to understand information about your child's achievement in Maths and English?

◯ Yes, I understood the information

◯ No, the information I received was not clear or easy to understand

5. What was the most successful part of the transition meetings for you?

6. How could we improve our transition meetings?

7. Do you have any other comments?

Do you have any other comments?

Survey 4 - May 2011
JRock

1. Do you think that JRock was a valuable experience for your child(ren)?

☐ ○ Yes
☐ ○ No
☐ ○ Unsure

Comment

2. How often do you think the school should enter JRock? Please note, from here on, children would elect to be part of it as our school would be too large for everyone to enter.

○ Never again

○ Every year

○ Every second year

○ Every third year

○ No opinion

3. What did your child gain from this experience?

4. In your opinion, what went well?

5. What could we do better if we were to enter JRock again?

6. Any other comments?

Survey 5 - July 2011
National Standards and Student Learning Conferences

1. One function of the written report was to give parents a clear understanding of how their child is achieving against National Standards. Did you find the graphs easy to understand?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Comment

2. Did you get clear explanations about the graphs from the teacher?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Comment

3. The written report was designed to complement the discussion you had with our teachers. Please give us feedback on what worked or didn't work for you?

4. We are working towards children leading their own learning. This means that we want them to be able to talk about what they are learning, why they are learning it and how they are going about it.
How did you find this part of conference?

5. Do you have any other comments?

Survey 6 - August 2011

School Uniform

1. Which of the following items would you be interested in adding to our school uniform. These would be optional extras. Select all that interest you.

   ☐ winter hat/beanie

   ☐ long cargo pants

   ☐ long polo

   ☐ sports jacket

   ☐ none

   ☐ Other (please specify)

2. How would you prefer to purchase your child's stationery at the beginning of 2012?

   ○ Through a stationery shop eg warehouse stationery

   ○ Online through the school

   ○ Own choice of provider

Other (please specify)

3. Our school relies heavily on voluntary donations. For 2011, all voluntary donations have been put towards the school playground. What would you like the donations to contribute towards for 2012?

○ classroom games

○ sports uniforms

○ computer and technology equipment

○ other learning resources

○ cultural uniforms

○ other

Other (please specify)

4. We are very lucky as our 73% of our families pay the voluntary donation. How much do you think is reasonable to pay per child for a year?

○ 0

○ $10-$30

○ $31-$50

○ $51-$75

○ $75-$100

○ other

Other (please specify)

5. Please comment on anything else that you would like to raise.

Survey 7 - November 2011

2011 in Review

1. How welcoming does our school feel?

   ○ I always feel very welcome at RSS

   ○ I usually feel very welcome at RSS

   ○ I sometimes feel very welcome at RSS

   ○ I never feel very welcome at RSS

   ○ I don't know

Other (please specify)

2. Describe the service that you get from the office

3. How well do you think your child's learning needs are being met?

4. How well do you think your child's social needs are being met?

5. What are we doing well at RSS?

6. What could we do better to improve RSS?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?