AUSAD
Analysis and Use of Student Achievement Data

Final Evaluation Report Prepared for the Ministry of Education

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E nga mana, e nga iwi katoa
Tena koutou, tena koutou
Tena koutou katoa

Talofa lava, Malo e lelei,
Taloha ni, Kia orana,
Fakalofa lahi atu

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These five studies have involved the time and co-operation of many different people. The leaders, teachers, boards of trustees and parents from many different schools in Mangere and Otara have given their time and expertise to make the studies possible. I would like to thank you all very sincerely. As I have said on many occasions, the willingness and commitment of those involved in education in Mangere and Otara to learn how to address issues of student underachievement has been impressive. I have also learnt much from you and this is the reason I have continued to be involved for so many years. In many of the schools, the children’s educational experience now is very different from that experienced in 1998 when I began research in the two areas.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of my various co-authors. Working with them has taught me a great deal. My name rarely appears first on the individual studies, because others know more and did more work than I.

The Ministry people involved in the AUSAD work not only undertake their jobs professionally and with enormous commitment, but also have taken time out from their heavy workloads to respond to my various requests willingly and promptly. Thank you for making it possible for the research to happen.

I also wish to thank Raewyn Higginson for giving up her weekend to proof-read and edit this report. In addition, two of my children, Justin and Ngaire, have assisted with technical aspects of the data analysis and presentation in the various studies.

Thank you all,

Helen Timperley
### Executive Summary

This group of five studies reports on aspects of the AUSAD initiative in Mangere and Otara that is designed to improve the capacity of the schools to analyse, share and learn from their student achievement information. The Mangere and Otara schools have a predominantly Pasifika school population. In Mangere the schools comprise 64.6% Pasifika students, 23.9% Maori, 7.1% Asian, 2.7% are European, and 1.6% other nationalities. In Otara, 71.5% of the students are Pasifika, 23.8% are Maori, 3.1% are Asian, and 1.3% are European. The studies have been designed to focus on different aspects of the initiative. The first three studies have a teaching and leadership focus and report on the following:

- The professional learning processes and resulting student achievement associated with analyzing achievement information;
- The classroom time involved in collecting some assessment data and the uses to which they are put;
- The impact of assessment information on teaching practice in writing.

The final two studies focus on the community and school interface and examine issues related to parents’ and boards of trustees’ relationships with the teaching professionals and include:

- Reporting to parents in Maori bilingual units;
- Governance understandings of their accountability role in relation to student achievement.

### Study One: Follow-up to Report on Sustainability of Professional Development in Literacy: Shifting the focus to Professional Learning.

This first study is a follow-up to the report on the sustainability of professional development in literacy (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002). The earlier report examined the in-school processes and student achievement over an eighteen-month period in seven schools following their participation in the ECPL professional development in literacy contract with Dr. Gwenneth Phillips. A key finding of that study was that significantly higher student achievement was evident after children had been at school for one year in two of the schools that regularly analysed their student achievement information and discussed it with the teachers as a group. The five schools with lower achievement focused their efforts on improving the quality of their programmes, independently of the analysis of the achievement information. The analysis procedures in the two schools with high student achievement involved plotting the children’s text level on a benchmarked graph (known as the “wedge graph”) according to the number of weeks they had been at school. The benchmarks indicated whether the children were achieving above, at or below expectations of average progress. The children’s class and teacher were identified and teaching strategies were discussed either at the meeting or individually with the teachers for children who were falling below expectations. This report has been summarised in a booklet entitled, “Shifting the Focus: Using Student Achievement Information for Professional Learning” (Timperley, 2003).

During the year following the writing of that research report, the five schools with lower student achievement adopted the same analysis procedures as those with higher student achievement. The schools had varying involvement with the ECPL professional development over this year,
but in most cases, the continued focus involved the literacy leaders who attended meetings once per term, rather than the Year One teachers directly. Issues of how to analyse the achievement data were introduced to the literacy leaders at these meetings.

The study reported here examined whether the changed processes in these schools with regard to the analysis of student achievement were associated with improved student achievement and how the teachers perceived the process. The second part of this study addresses the parallel issues of what might be involved in extending an evidence-based approach beyond the school so that schools share and learn from their achievement data and from one another.

It was found that all five schools regularly examined the text levels reached by the students in their class and syndicate and spent much of their meeting time targeting individual students and discussing the teaching implications. In all five schools, average student achievement scores rose, with this improvement significant in three of the schools. In four of the five schools, the achievement levels were not significantly different from those in the two higher achieving schools involved in the previous study.

A questionnaire survey of 33 teachers and follow-up interviews with 10 of the teachers and the five literacy leaders was undertaken to understand the extent to which they believed they learned from the exercise of examining the data and how it led to different teaching practices and higher student achievement. Nearly half the teachers rated their learning from the exercise very highly, with most of the rest giving a moderate rating. Only three teachers did not consider it helped them to learn much about teaching more effectively. The main reasons associated with high levels of professional learning were the way in which underachieving students were targeted and the support the teachers received to think about and adopt different teaching strategies.

Teachers were also asked if the process of examining the achievement data in a group where they and their students could be readily identified had any negative emotional impact on them. Only one teacher, who was new to the area and the school, indicated that this was the case. The main reasons given by others for the absence of negativity on their part related to feeling supported and being helped to teach better.

The impact of the process of shifting the focus from talking about programmes in the absence of achievement information to analyzing the data together at team meetings was different for different teachers. Some described it as a developmental progression and had difficulty remembering the transition, others remembered if very well. All, apart from the one teacher above, had since become unconcerned about the process because the professional learning benefits outweighed concerns. Conditions that were identified as important to achieve these learning benefits and improved student achievement were a high sense of teacher self-efficacy, an understanding that inflating achievement scores was self-defeating, a shared understanding within the group of the process and pedagogical approach, having an agreed benchmark clearly marked on the graph, and holding regular review meetings when student progress was plotted on the graph and discussed.

Ten principals, deputies and assistant principals were also asked about the conditions needed for these within-school processes to be extended beyond the school so that schools shared achievement data among themselves. The conditions identified included, professional and personal trust, professional self-confidence, a belief that the potential learning benefits justified the risks involved, and a perception that the benefits would be worth the effort.
A condition that few specifically identified, but was evident throughout their responses, was the willingness to become a professional learner. Many of the senior managers involved in these studies actively sought and constructed highly challenging situations from which they could learn. Their student achievement is improving as a result.

**Study Two: Running Records and the Time to Teach**

Running records provide rich diagnostic information on students' reading strategies and fluency. They were developed as an assessment strategy by Marie Clay (1993) to give teachers a tool to analyse young readers’ decoding strategies. In many New Zealand schools, administering running records at regular intervals is an established practice throughout the school and their correct administration and use has become a key part of the Ministry of Education's recent literacy strategy (Ministry of Education, 2000). The diagnostic information is gained only through individual assessment of oral reading. This condition inevitably means that the assessment process takes considerable time. The potential exists for the administration of running records to become a routine practice, which takes up significant amounts of class time, but does not realise the full benefits. This study examined the time involved in administering the running records and the uses that were made of the results by teachers and management staff.

Eight Mangere and Otara schools that were participating in the AUSAD initiative were involved in this study. In each school, observations were made of a minimum of three teachers who, in most cases, administered two running records with the same child and followed each observation with an interview. The principal and the literacy leader responsible for the junior and senior schools were also interviewed.

Running records were administered at both senior and junior levels in all schools. With the exception of the junior department in one school, they were typically administered for all children in the class within a set period (approximately two weeks) of each school term because consistency was needed in those schools where the senior management collated the data. Considerable resources in terms of time were allocated to the administration of these individualized assessments. On average, over all the schools, approximately 20% of reading time was committed to this activity. This time commitment was difficult to justify in terms of the use made of the running record, which was primarily to establish a text level and to group students for instruction. Concerns about the efficient use of time were particularly applicable to fluent silent readers, for whom running records are unlikely to be an accurate indication of their reading ability. In many cases, it was apparent that the texts the children were reading were too easy, possibly reflecting low expectations of the students’ ability.

There is considerable tension between obtaining diagnostic information for classroom teaching and the special requirements involved in collecting data for aggregation school-wide. When the data are to be used for the latter purpose, it is important that the teachers complete the running records with all students within a short time frame. This means that administering them is not motivated by a teacher's need to know about an individual child's reading strategies, but rather the need to complete the exercise within the time frame. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that establishing text level was the main use to which the running records were put.

One of the most powerful ways to promote both professional and student learning is to provide feedback on performance and how it might be improved. Few students received any feedback from their teachers and few teachers received feedback from management about their students’ reading.
The implications of this study are that assessments need to be matched to the purpose, and that the value of the uses to which they are put must be carefully weighed against the time involved in their administration.

**Study Three: Assessment and Its Impact on Written Language Teaching Practice**

The purpose of this study was to understand the assessment information used by teachers of Year Two students to guide their writing programmes. Assessment was once thought of as a summative activity that was undertaken at the end of teaching a topic or unit of work and used to judge the achievement of a student in a specific topic at a specific time. Recent research into the nature of assessment as a more formative process that is designed to promote learning has reframed the notion for researchers, administrators, and practitioners. Teachers are now encouraged to evaluate student learning on an ongoing basis and to use the information to promote that learning.

Assessment policy in New Zealand reflects this shift in thinking. The Curriculum Update recently issued by the Ministry of Education in 2001 states that “The primary purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students’ learning and the quality of learning programmes.”

Written language provides many assessment challenges because of the complexity of the activity. Not surprisingly, there are many suggested frameworks for assessing student progress in writing that are aligned with different conceptions of effective written language instruction. Given this complexity, combined with the variety of demands of most classrooms, it is not surprising that the most significant assessment record has been described as a “log in the head”, whereby the teachers gather assessment information anecdotally and informally throughout the school day and use it to plan their writing lessons.

A variety of frameworks were used to analyse the “logs-in-the-head” of nine teachers in three Mangere schools. All teachers had participated in the ECPL professional development with Dr. Gwenneth Phillips. Each teacher was interviewed prior to a lesson observation, was then observed teaching writing, then re-interviewed about the lesson. The teachers were asked about the assessments they used, their specific lesson and longer-term aims for three students, to describe the three students as writers and how they judged the success of their writing programme.

When asked what assessments were used in writing for the three students, the teachers were not particularly forthcoming. The most commonly nominated assessment (4 teachers) were independent writing samples but two of these teachers indicated that the samples were primarily for inclusion in the children’s portfolio for the benefit of the parents and the two others were vague about how the samples were used. A very different picture emerged, however, when teachers were asked what led them to select particular aims for the children’s writing lesson for that day, and how they would judge if children were on track to achieve identified aims at the end of the following term. Their responses to these questions revealed a much richer picture of observation, talking to children and looking at the children’s work.

The most frequently nominated aim for the lesson was focused on the content or topic that the children were to write about and for the children to become independent writers. Another aim nominated by three teachers was related to production or quantity of writing. Identified skills were primarily at the lexical or word level, i.e. learning to write words. Only three teachers moved beyond the word level of skill complexity when describing aims. Two included text level comments but only one teacher contextualised these comments within a communicative /
rhetorical purpose for the writing. The classroom observations confirmed that the lessons were consistent with the stated aims.

The concern we wish to raise is the knowledge the teachers had of the writing process on which the “log-in-the-head” template was based. For most teachers, their descriptions and their teaching practice were focused at a relatively low level of skill and decontextualised writing from its rhetorical or communicative purpose. Writing was about producing something independently with a focus on word-level skills. While some writing should be personal expressive largely for self, most writing in everyday situations is designed to communicate something to someone, so the communicative purpose and needs of an audience should be fore grounded.

It is increasingly recognised that reluctant writers are often reluctant because writing for them is a skill-based exercise devoid of communicative meaning. A parallel may be drawn with reading as a process of developing skills to decode words, rather than a set of skills designed to enable one to understand the author’s intent (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald, 2001). The risks involved in this orientation to either writing or reading are the training of children who can decode and encode but do not understand the communicative purpose and its associated language resources.

When asked how they judged the most and least successful aspects of their writing programme, the majority of teachers nominated particular activities or how well they managed the programme. Student achievement as a criterion was rarely mentioned. The relative absence of student achievement as a judgement criterion means that it is unlikely that teachers will be focused on accelerating that achievement in the same way as many have in reading (see Study One in this report).

**Study Four: Reporting to Parents in Maori Bilingual Units**

This study focuses on reporting achievement data to parents in Maori Bilingual units in three South Auckland schools (they included two Year 0 – 6 schools, and one intermediate school). This research involves interviews with the teachers and parents. Bilingual units of the type studied in this research are part of a complex picture of initiatives in Maori language education. The Ministry of Education currently distinguishes five different forms of Maori language education: Kura Kaupapa Maori; Kura Maori (also referred to as Other Immersion Schools); Bilingual Schools; Schools with Immersion Classes; and Schools with Bilingual Classes. Added to these forms of schooling type are also classifications of the level of Maori language being used in the school or classroom. The bilingual units are classified according to the percentage of instruction in Maori. These include Level 1: 81 to 100 percent; Level 2: 51 to 80 percent; and Level 3: 31 to 50 percent (Ministry of Education, 2002). Schools are funded according to the level of Maori language being used.

In the context of addressing Maori educational under-achievement what do Maori language educational programmes such as the bilingual units offer? Answering this question is somewhat difficult for while there have been major initiatives to improve schooling outcomes, and significant research that suggests areas needing greater attention in school performance, there is in fact a great paucity of research about what happens in Maori language educational settings. It is difficult to apply research based on immersion programmes directly to bilingual units. The bilingual units fall betwixt and between full immersion in Maori and full immersion in English. Their purpose and individual histories would suggest that they are expected to meet parental expectations about offering Maori language instruction, provide more generalized support for
Maori children in a mainstream school and demonstrate a school’s responsiveness to its Maori parents and community. Some bilingual units may also describe themselves as whanau units with greater emphasis placed on the values and sense of belonging being provided for Maori learners. Some bilingual units probably represent a compromise between parental expectations for immersion or bilingual instruction, school responsiveness and actual availability of Maori language resources including a qualified teacher who is fluent in the Maori language.

In this study, bilingual units are characterized as units that aim for dual medium instruction. Recent New Zealand studies show that Maori parents choose bilingual education as a dual instruction process rather than total immersion because they also want their children to be taught English simultaneously. These parents believe that bilingual education will enskill their child in both English and Maori thus believing they are getting the best of both worlds for education (Doug, 1996; Keegan, 1996; McKinley, 2000).

The reporting process is a key part of involving parents in their child’s education and is linked typically to informing parents about their child’s academic achievement levels and strategies to continue the achievement. Reported achievement is dependent on quality assessment information. However, assessment processes in Maori education are seriously under-developed. (The assessment tool asTTle was not widely available at the time of this study). Assessment in a minority language such as Maori is more than just an educational assessment task as it involves complex issues of language, culture, intellectual development and translation. An additional difficulty experienced by the teachers in Maori bilingual units within a mainstream school setting is the pressure to administer both English and Maori assessments.

It is important that what is reported to parents is not a public relations exercise but serves to promote better student achievement. It has been shown that many schools report what they think the parents want to hear, and this tends to be the positive aspects of the child’s learning. Maori parents, as for any other parents, need accurate information from the teachers on their child if they are to make informed decisions about their child’s education and how to improve learning.

In this study, answers were sought to three questions, “What was reported and how was it reported?” “What conditions determined the reporting process?” and “What conditions influenced parental involvement?” Teacher-parent reporting interviews were observed, followed by separate research interviews of the teachers and parents. A summary of the findings in relation to each of the research questions follows. Firstly, the reporting process consisted of a brief (5-15 minute) parent interview in two of the schools accompanied by written information focusing primarily on achievement in English. Nationally benchmarked information was provided, although this was sometimes difficult to understand and in one school parents had access to this written information only during the interview itself. Portfolios of student work were used in all schools. Reporting on the child’s achievement in Te Reo was rarely mentioned during the 21 interviews and when it was, the quality of the information depended primarily on the teachers’ personal judgments.

Secondly, a mix of conditions determined the reporting process. The type of written report and the structure of the teacher-parent interviews were determined by the mainstream school to which the bilingual unit was attached. Unit staff did not always see these methods of reporting as appropriate.

The limited reporting of Te Reo Maori was related to the level of use of Te Reo in the bilingual units. This use depended on the child’s competence in the language rather than depending on the
the children's best interests to teach curriculum knowledge in a language in which the children were insufficiently competent to understand the content.

Formal assessments in Te Reo Maori were rare because few protocols were available and those that were available were considered inappropriate because of the differing amount of time devoted to Te Reo in different Maori medium settings. The bilingual unit teachers believed that their children would be disadvantaged by comparisons with students who participated in Maori immersion programmes. The units or individual teachers generally designed the assessment tools used to report Maori-related aspects of the instruction. Neither the participating parents nor their children were fluent in Te Reo Maori and there was some confusion about expectations of the students’ attaining fluency in Te Reo Maori. Some parents thought that by sending their children to a bilingual unit, they would become fluent in Te Reo. Students whose parents were involved in this study did not actually become fluent in Te Reo. It appears that a spiral effect of not being fluent in Te Reo Maori prior to attending the unit led to little Te Reo Maori being used because the child could not understand the concepts in Maori. As a result, the concepts were taught in English, with the curriculum emphasis being more closely related to Tikanga Maori than to Te Reo Maori.

Thirdly, in relation to the question about the conditions influencing parental involvement in the reporting process, nearly all the parents reported that they were very satisfied with the reporting process, but half indicated that they would have liked more information on their child’s competence in Te Reo Maori. All units held additional whanau hui during which parents were encouraged to find out about the programme and participate in their child’s education in various ways. In many cases, the teachers placed greater value on this process than did the parents. The interviewed parents all expressed a strong commitment to being involved in their children’s education irrespective of whether their own educational experiences were positive or negative, or whether their own parents had been involved in their education. Sometimes negative experiences and lack of parental involvement in the parents’ own schooling provided the incentive for these parents to ensure the pattern was not repeated.

Study five: Accountability and Governance Understandings of Student achievement

Recent legislative changes relating to governance responsibilities have demonstrated an increasing emphasis on understanding the impact of educational practice. It has become the board’s responsibility to monitor student achievement against expectations for that achievement, and to review the effectiveness of the teaching and learning programmes in relation to the expectations. Given that the board does not have direct involvement with students and programmes at the classroom level, these responsibilities are inevitably exercised through an accountability relationship with the professionals.

The concept of accountability has many facets to take into consideration. Explicit understanding of the issue under consideration is necessary if being accountable is to have validity of purpose and to be an authentic activity for all stakeholders. This would mean boards of trustees had some understanding of what is involved in assessing students, what the data mean and how they can be used for accountability purposes. A potential complicating factor in the practice translation in the educational governance context is the substantial international literature that documents the limited participatory role typically played by lay governors in educational matters. In a situation of limited participation, it is unlikely that boards would be able to exercise their accountability role.
As part of the AUSAD initiative the Ministry of Education provided financial assistance and ongoing support to enskill board members in this role by arranging a number of learning meetings for board members with the broad purpose of promoting better understandings of professional reports that contain student achievement data. External contractors provided the training.

In this study, we sought to determine the understandings of the boards of trustees’ accountability role with regard to monitoring student achievement and what actions might follow. In addition, we sought to find out how this accountability role was enacted in practice during the board meetings.

The intended study involved interviewing board chairs from all participating schools and attending their board meetings when the AUSAD initiative and / or student achievement information was discussed prior to the training, then following it. Competing priorities led to variable attendance of board members and a much slower start to the training than anticipated, resulting in only three boards taking part with no post-training interviews taking place. The study involved six interviews with board chairpersons and parent representatives, three teachers responsible for the AUSAD initiative and one Ministry of Education official. Nine briefing meetings and training sessions were also observed, together with three observations of board of trustees meetings.

The results indicated that the link between accountability and governance with regard to student achievement is a tenuous one for parent board members. The board responsibilities outlined in the legislation and nominated by our respondents implied that boards should have knowledge of student achievement, involvement in setting expectations for that achievement and monitoring likely contributions to it, such as the effectiveness of programmes. The reality of what happened in the board meetings, however, seemed a long way from this description. In one of the three schools, a description of achievement accompanied by a description of AUSAD activities at a very general level formed the basis of the accountability process. In the other two schools, AUSAD activities were described in the absence of the achievement information. Board members rarely participated in any discussion, but rather, adopted a listening role. They did not perceive the accountability role to be difficult or that the professionals were dominating. Rather, it was just the accepted way things were done.

Traditionally, silence on the part of Board members has been attributed to patterns of professional power play that exclude lay members of boards. In this study, the teachers indicated that they were very aware of this possibility and took steps to try to avoid it. Board members themselves confirmed that they felt free to ask questions of the professionals.

The problem probably lies more within the complexities of the task, rather than with any “failings” on either side. The professionals themselves were undertaking intensive training as part of the AUSAD initiative to describe and analyse achievement information, set appropriate expectations, and work out the implications for teaching and learning programmes. These are demanding tasks in themselves. It is challenging to expect boards of trustees to have adequate knowledge of the highly contentious issues surrounding achievement, target setting and monitoring of programmes to the extent that they could hold the professional to account.

These findings need to be set in context in the sense that the board training was in its early stages. The list of training topics itself provides an indication of the complexity of the task being undertaken. A different picture might be evident after more training has been completed. In the
meantime, the accountability aspects of governance with regard to student achievement appeared to be enacted by the professionals going to considerable lengths to make their reports understandable to their boards who were then responsible for holding the professionals to account. The activity was primarily a professional one, while their boards listened to their descriptions and explanations in relative silence.
Chapter One:
Follow up Report on the Sustainability of Professional Development in Literacy: Shifting the focus to Professional Learning from Achievement Information

In 2002 a report was submitted to the Ministry of Education on the sustainability of professional development in literacy (Timperley & Wiseman, 2000). This report examined the in-school processes and student achievement in seven schools that had participated in the ECPL literacy contract with Dr Gwenneth Phillips. The study continued for 18 months after completion of the professional development. The schools were decile 1a – 1c and were located in Mangere and Otara. The Mangere and Otara schools have a predominantly Pasifika school population. In Mangere the schools comprise 64.6% Pasifika students, 23.9% Maori, 7.1% Asian, 2.7% are European, and 1.6% other nationalities. In Otara, 71.5% of the students are Pasifika, 23.8% are Maori, 3.1% are Asian, and 1.3% are European.

A key finding of this study was that significantly higher student achievement after children had been at school for one year was evident in two schools that regularly analysed their student achievement information and discussed it with the teachers. The five schools with lower achievement focused their efforts on improving the quality of their programmes, independently of the analysis of the achievement information. The analysis procedures in the two schools with high student achievement involved plotting the children’s instructional text level on a benchmarked graph (known as the “wedge graph”) according to the number of weeks they had been at school. The benchmarks indicated whether the children were achieving above, at or below expectations of average progress. The children’s class and teacher were identified and teaching strategies were discussed either at the meeting or individually with the teachers for children who had been identified as falling below expectations.

This report has been summarised into a booklet entitled, “Shifting the Focus: Using Student Achievement Information for Professional Learning” (Timperley, 2003).

During the year following the writing of this research report, the five schools with lower student achievement adopted the same analysis procedures as those with higher student achievement. The schools had varying involvement with the ECPL professional development over this year, but in most cases, the continued work focused more on the literacy leaders who attended meetings once per term, rather than directly involving the Year One teachers. Issues of how to use the “wedge” graph were introduced to the literacy leaders at these meetings.

The study reported here examined whether the changed processes in these schools with regard to the analysis of student achievement were associated with improved student achievement and how the teachers perceived the process. The second part of this study addresses the parallel issues of what is involved in extending an evidence-based approach beyond the school so that schools share and learn from their achievement data.

An extensive literature review was reported in the earlier report and has not been repeated here. In essence, the literature indicated, with little supporting empirical data, that teachers who examined their student achievement information within a professional community were likely to have higher student achievement.

1 The author of this study is Helen Timperley
Section One: Within-school evidence-based professional learning

In this study, the analysis procedures used in the earlier study (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002) were again employed to determine the student achievement scores. These procedures involved combining text level and BURT scores that were collected as part of the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) into a single score for each school with a mean of 10 assigned and a standard deviation of 2. Details of the analysis procedures are provided in the Timperley and Wiseman report.

The achievement information has now been collected over four years.

- Year one was regarded as baseline with data collected prior to the professional development and comprised a combined text level and BURT score of all students turning six years during that year.

- Year Two was the six months of the professional development and the following six months and used the same achievement scores for the next group of children turning six years during that year.

- Year Three comprised the scores of the children turning six the following year. Data for these three years are reported in Timperley and Wiseman (2002).

- In this report, a fourth year of achievement data was collected and analysed using the same procedures.

In addition to the achievement data, three other types of data were collected. The first comprised observations of meeting discussions in four of the schools when the data were presented. The analysis protocols used for these discussions were the same as those for the previous study (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002).

The second data source consisted of a three-item survey of teachers’ beliefs about the use of student achievement information. The survey was designed to ascertain the teachers’ perceptions of the usefulness of the process in raising student achievement and their emotional response to the process. Inquiry into the emotional impact was undertaken as a result of feedback received by the author on the previous report in which many people had indicated that such a process would be perceived as threatening to teachers and likely to be resisted. A third question asked if the teachers would recommend that other schools analyse their achievement information in the same way.

The third set of data comprised interviews with the literacy leaders and selected teachers. Interviewees were asked to tell the story of how they experienced the change process with specific probes focused on potential professional learning and the possible negative consequences.

Changes in Achievement

The data presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 are a combined text and BURT score (mean=10, SD=2) for all the students turning six years in that year. They follow on from previously reported data (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002). Because schools entered ECPL in different years, the year designation (year 1, year 2 etc) depended on the time when the schools first engaged with ECPL. For five of the schools, Year Four equates to 2002.

As previously reported in Timperley & Wiseman (2002), in Year Three only two schools analysed their achievement information in ways that promoted a sufficiently detailed examination of the data.
to allow teachers to identify the implications for teaching practice. The achievement in these two schools was significantly higher than in the other five schools.

The Timperley & Wiseman report information was fed back to the schools. At the beginning of Year Four all schools began to analyse their achievement information in a similar manner.

The Year 4 results from the seven schools were added to the total data set for all years before the statistical analysis was undertaken. These additional data resulted in a readjustment of the means for previous years because they were derived from a larger data set so cannot be compared directly with those previously reported in Timperley and Wiseman (2002). Table 1 presents the new means and standard deviations for all four years.

**Table 1**

**Mean reading scores (and standard deviations) for each school for Years One to Four**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year One</th>
<th>Year Two</th>
<th>Year Three</th>
<th>Year Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>9.19 (1.51)</td>
<td>8.72 (1.2)</td>
<td>9.23 (1.5)</td>
<td>9.74 (2.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>8.17 (0.90)</td>
<td>8.86 (1.65)</td>
<td>9.45 (2.00)</td>
<td>*10.58 (1.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>9.20 (1.51)</td>
<td>9.94 (1.95)</td>
<td>10.09 (2.00)</td>
<td>*10.71 (2.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>9.88 (1.51)</td>
<td>10.13 (1.56)</td>
<td>10.43 (2.12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>9.27 (1.24)</td>
<td>9.02 (1.30)</td>
<td>10.2 (1.73)</td>
<td>*10.99 (2.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>10.42 (1.85)</td>
<td>10.53 (2.20)</td>
<td>10.96 (2.24)</td>
<td>11.29 (2.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>10.12 (1.97)</td>
<td>10.63 (2.03)</td>
<td>11.21 (2.18)</td>
<td>*10.48 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note 1: Standard deviation in brackets

*Note 2: *the difference in scores for Years 3 and 4 are significant (*p* < .05)

The trend in the means between Years 3 and 4 shows improvement in all five schools (A – E) that began to analyse their data at the beginning of year four of this study. The differences were statistically significant (showing improvement) in Schools B, C and E only (*t* = 4.47; 2.26; 2.06 respectively; *p* < .05). Schools F & G were the schools that had analyzed their students’ reading data and had significantly higher reading achievement in the previous study. The mean for School G had declined significantly (*t* = 2.94; *p* < .05). This school experienced changes in leadership during Year Three with the new leadership disputing the worth of the literacy programme and the styles of teaching in the junior school.
A one-way analysis of variance in Year Four showed a significant difference among the schools for the combined text level and BURT reading score (F(6,427)=3.523, p<.01). Although the F ratio in Year 4 was significant at p.01, it was much smaller (p-value 0.00205) than for Year Three, (p-value 0.0000000003) indicating that the difference among the schools had reduced substantially.

A Sheffé test of multiple comparisons on the reading scores for each school established that the previous differences among the schools were no longer evident. The reading scores for schools B – G were not significantly different from one another at (α.05). The only significant difference remaining between the schools was evident between schools A and F.

**The Meeting Process**

The same categories for analysis of the meetings were used in this report as in the earlier one (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002) with the addition of one new code, “Analysing reasons for improved student achievement”. This latter activity occurred in four of the five schools but was not apparent in the previous analysis. Overall, the highest proportion of time in the schools was spent discussing problems and solutions specific to the teacher that arose from the achievement information. There were some individual school exceptions to this pattern but School C was the only school where less than 20% of the time was spent in this activity. The difference in this pattern for School C arose because the literacy leader had met with other literacy leaders and the professional development contractor the previous day and wanted to tell her teachers about a new approach to writing. She spent most of the meeting time describing the writing approach (35.6% - not included in Table 2) and answering teachers’ questions about issues they raised (15.8% - coded as “self-identified problems and solutions”).
Table 2
Percentage of Time Spent in Different Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
<th>School E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-teaching related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External or school organisational</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unrelated to achievement data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of programmes</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified problems and solutions</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related to achievement data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral &amp; positive descriptions of data</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems &amp; solutions not specific to teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems &amp; solutions specific to teacher</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing reasons for improved student achievement</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 compares the percentage of meeting time spent in the various categories in Year 3 and Year 4. The analysis in Table 3 can be considered a general indication only because the distribution of time among the categories showed considerable variation among the schools. The average percentages have been derived by taking each school’s percentage of time spent in a particular activity and dividing by five (for the five schools). The averages were not derived from the total time engaged in the activity in all schools, then divided by 5. However, these indicative percentages give a picture of a higher proportion of time spent describing programmes independent of the achievement information in Year 3 than in Year 4. Categories that show a marked increase in Year 4 are descriptions of the achievement data, which is not surprising given that in Year 3 many schools did not have such data at the meeting, and a much higher proportion of time spent discussing problems and solutions specific to the teacher that arose from the achievement information.

The proportion of time spent discussing self-identified problems and solutions remain similar over the two years, but this item is strongly influenced by the high proportion of time spent in this activity in School C because of the unique nature of the meeting as described above. For the other four schools, the proportion of time, on average, was much lower for this category (9.6%).
Table 3
Average Percentage of Time Spent in Different Activities for all Five Schools in Year 3 and Year 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-teaching related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External or school organisational</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unrelated to achievement data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of programmes</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-identified problems and solutions</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related to achievement data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral &amp; positive descriptions of data</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems &amp; solutions not specific to teacher</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems &amp; solutions specific to teacher (including targeting students)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 2 and 3 also use the same data as that presented in the previous report concerning the proportion of time spent in various activities. As can be seen from Figure 2, in Year 4 Schools A – D all increased their percentage of time discussing general problems and solutions to a level similar to that in Schools E – G in Year 3.

**Figure 2**
Percentage of time spent discussing teaching problems and solutions (includes general problems, teacher-specific problems and problems arising from achievement information)

Figure 3 also shows a substantial increase in time discussing data-related problems and solutions specific to the teacher between Years 3 and 4 in four of the five schools. The percentage of time spent in this activity in schools A – D was still lower than that in the two highest achieving schools in Year 3. However, the fact that the activity was present at all in these schools and had become a routine part of regular meetings was probably sufficient to influence the achievement patterns. The interview responses reported in the next section, strongly support this assumption.
The previous report (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002) contains many quotes from the meetings with the differences between the high and low achieving schools highlighted. There is little to be gained from repeating this exercise, however, comparison of one literacy leader’s introduction to the meeting in Year Three reported in Timperley and Wiseman, and the same literacy leaders’ introduction in Year Four serves to illustrate some of the differences that occurred.

Starting the meeting – Year Three:

What we’re going to do today is I just wanted to just very quickly go through the latest bit of data – I’ve given you a copy but I know it’s a paper war and just have a look at it today and if you don’t want it just give it back to me. You don’t have to file it or anything like that at this stage... it’s just hand-written.

Starting the meeting – Year Four

This is a valuable time - collecting all that data in and just looking at it. Although it is a pain getting it ready for me but it is the only way we are going to make a difference. I will give it out to you in a minute and you can have a look and see in your class who is below and who is above and you look especially at the just below ones and think, “What am I going to do to make sure that they are not just below next time?”.

Teachers’ and Literacy Leaders’ Perceptions of the Process of Examining the Achievement Graph

The teachers involved in examining the wedge graph with their literacy leaders in the five schools were asked for their views about the process in two different ways. The first involved a questionnaire consisting of three items, which asked the teachers about their learning from the use of the wedge graph, their emotional reaction to it and whether they would recommend the process to other schools. Thirty-three teachers completed the questionnaire.
The second involved interviews with the literacy leader and two teachers from each school to further understand their perceptions and to identify the important aspects of the process from the practitioners’ perspective. In an effort to obtain a range of views about the process, literacy leaders were asked to nominate one teacher who was likely to be positive about the process and one likely to be negative. Most literacy leaders were unable to identify someone likely to be negative, so nominated the teacher most likely to be equivocal. In all, fifteen interviews were undertaken, 5 with the literacy leaders and 10 with the teachers. The interview questions were open-ended, with the main purpose described to the interviewees as gaining an understanding of how teachers learned from and felt about the use of the wedge graph.

**Teacher Learning**

The first questionnaire item read: “When we analyse student achievement information using the wedge graph, I find I learn a lot about how to teach the children in my class more effectively”. A rating scale from 1-7 using the descriptors “agree / disagree” was used, with 1 representing “Agree” and 7 representing “disagree” and a mid-point of 4 representing “Neither agree nor disagree” identified. Teachers were also asked for the reasons for their ratings.

The pattern of responses for all schools is given in Table 4. For this analysis, the extreme points on the scale of 1 and 2 were combined to represent “agreed – learnt a lot”, the mid points on the scale of 3, 4 and 5 were combined to represent “Neutral – some learning” and the extreme points of 6 and 7 were combined to represent “disagreed that learnt a lot”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed – learnt a lot</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral – some learning</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed that learnt a lot</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, nearly half (48.5%) the teachers agreed with the statement of “learning a lot” with slightly less giving more neutral learning ratings. Only 3 teachers (9%) gave ratings that indicated that the process had little to offer them in the way of their learning.

A school-by-school analysis did not reveal large differences between schools. In one school (School C), all teachers gave ratings indicating that they agreed with the statement and had “learnt a lot”. In a second school (School B), all teachers gave ratings indicating either “high” or “neutral” levels of learning. In the other three schools, all but one teacher gave the same ratings. In each of these three schools, one teacher gave ratings indicating that they disagreed with the statement and did not learn a lot.

The main reasons for the ratings are listed in Table 5. The targeting needs / assessing levels category included any response that related to the analysis of the data that helped teachers to identify where students were achieving and whom they should target. Nearly half (46.5%) of the reasons related to this category. The other positive reason related to teacher learning about improved teaching strategies (20%). This category included any response that referred to helping the teachers to think about different ways to teach, or to learn more about teaching. Three teachers gave both reasons.
Table 5
Reasons for ratings related to learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of times reason given</th>
<th>Percentage of reasons given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targeted needs / assessing level</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped think about different ways to teach</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not tell how to teach</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most commonly cited negative response was that examining the graphs did not help teachers work out how to teach. The final negative reason given by one teacher referred to the process as one that made the teacher feel inadequate.

In the interviews, the issue of targeting needs and improving teaching through looking at the graphs was explored further. How did examination of data points on a graph help teachers to target needs and think about different ways to teach? The teachers explained their learning from a variety of different perspectives. Rather than summarise these processes, because they are complex and interlinked, extensive quotes are provided. Each teacher quoted below came from a different school.

Teacher 1

Well, you can identify where you are with your children and where your hot spots are, like where you need to put more effort in, or why is that child still sitting in that area and how are we going to get him to move on and things like that... It’s the sharing amongst the teacher here, is quite good about our hot spots, like our problems we have. Like, ‘Why is this child still sitting there?’... When we do have a problem we just put it on the table and we all discuss it. Maybe you were doing it differently from someone else, and you know these little bits help you... We all look forward now to actually getting the results.

Teacher 2

Well I keep saying the word focus ... If you don’t have that focus, well then another five weeks goes by and things can crop up, like you can do some folk dancing and a marvelous unit on this, and we did this and this. Now we know that every five weeks we are doing the wedge graph, and you don’t let reading go, you let other things go, but you don’t let that go.... I would like to think accountability was intrinsic, but it used to be getting through the day, keeping the room tidy, having a quiet class. At the end of the day, we would walk out of the classroom not necessarily thinking ‘What have I done today that has helped them to learn to read?’ You would go home with a warm fuzzy feeling, ‘Oh that was a good day. Maybe I will do some more of that tomorrow.’ I think the focus has come right back to “What have I done today and who is moving and who isn’t moving and why aren’t they moving.” That is what you are taking home in your head.

Teacher 3

We had always graphed the children individually, but this [the wedge graph] was a matter of actually seeing it in front of you and then tallying it up together
as a syndicate and then tying it all in together. I think that was a really good push because we could see where the children were actually achieving every five weeks. If we found they were underachieving then we could all get together and discuss what’s happening and how we can improve. Whereas if we hadn’t plotted them on the wedge graph we would have no way of knowing in relation to all the other children in the syndicate of how they were doing. I mean it wasn’t a competition, but we all supported each other enough to know, ‘Hey, what are you doing to get yours up and what do we need to do’ and we helped each other that way. ... I just think it keeps everybody on track and I am always going back to the graph. I am always referring to it and thinking to myself, ‘Oh my gosh, those few children are still on that line’ and I keep in my mind going back to it. Whereas if it wasn’t actually written down I might overlook it.... I feel like actually putting the graph on the wall somewhere, and just keeping an eye on it because I am always looking at it.

Teacher 4

One of the surprises when we first started looking at the graph was how long some of the children had been at school. I think in your room, you don’t focus on that really. They’re just your class and you sort of forget, ‘Well, hey, this one has been here quite a long time.’

Teacher 5

Teacher:  I find that it has been quite beneficial because when I do my graph, you know, and say for example this is the first term and I’ve marked my graph for each child. I can actually see where they’re at, whether they are above the line or below the line. So it’s really looking at each individual in my classroom, so I can see what I need to do and most of the time they do fit within a group. Like we spoke about now [in the meeting], so you look at which one you should be moving on above the line and work with those particular children in the group.

Interviewer:  They’re only marks on a chart. Those little crosses - they don’t tell you how to teach.

Teacher:  But you the teacher knows the children, so you’re basically linking the graph and what you know about your children. Do you know what I mean, it will be different for you because you’re looking at it from a different angle, you’re looking at it as crosses. But for me as a teacher and my class, I’m linking the crosses to children. Although L’s at red I know he’s going to be moving faster than the other two in the group.... And I look at the prompts, because each colour on the colour wheel has its own prompts. So you see if I’m going to be working in magenta, I know that these are the prompts that I must be using at this particular level. And if I can see that one child in that particular group is able to move a bit faster than the rest of the group. I can say, ‘OK, I’ve got another group at yellow and this child is at the end of red I can move her up to that group.’ Do you know what I mean? These are the prompts that I’m going to start her using.

The following teacher (teacher 6) was the only one who expressed a view that she did not learn a lot from the graph. She explained:

I don’t learn a lot about how to teach the children, I get a visual picture of where to focus my efforts, the most needy, those who may need a little nudge or recognition for those achieving well. It stands out and those who may be missing out need extra attention. I do like those visuals; it can help me a lot.
**Emotional Impact**

The second questionnaire item related to the potential negative emotional impact for teachers when their achievement information became available to other teachers and discussed at the meetings. The questionnaire item read, “When we discuss student achievement information using the wedge graph, it is a very negative experience for me emotionally”. The same 1-7 scale was used, with the 1 and 2 ratings collated to represent “agreed - negative experience”, ratings of 3, 4 and 5 representing “neutral – some negativity” and ratings of 5 and 6 representing “disagreed - negative experience”. The ratings are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6**

**Teachers’ experience of analysing the results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of Analysing</th>
<th>No. of teachers</th>
<th>Percentage of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed – negative experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral – some negativity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreed – that experience negative</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 6, over two thirds (69.7%) of teachers did not find the process a negative experience. Nearly a quarter (27%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and only one teacher indicated that it was a negative emotional experience.

The individual school patterns were similar to that evident for the first question. In school C, where all teachers gave ratings indicating high levels of learning, all disagreed that it was a negative experience. Their reasons for giving these ratings were that analyzing the data in this way helped them to understand the teaching implications and define what steps to take next. In School B, where all the teachers had given positive or neutral ratings about learning, five of the six teachers disagreed with the statement about the process being a negative emotional experience. The remaining teacher rated it more neutrally. Their reasons related to both feeling supported by the team and understanding the teaching implications. The remaining three schools were more mixed in their ratings to both questions.

Table 7 provides the pattern of reasons for the ratings. As can be seen, the most positive reasons were either that the teachers felt supported by the team or that the process helped them to develop specific strategies to teach better. Negative reasons included: The process made them feel inadequate and it was too easy to identify the teachers (2 teachers). Single responses included, “*The graph is not representative of absentees*”, and “*My students are soon going to make big strides*”. 
Table 7
Reasons for ratings related to emotional experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of times reason given</th>
<th>Percentage of reasons given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt supported</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped teach better</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand not all children succeed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not emotionally involved</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made me feel inadequate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too easy to identify class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the quotes about learning, these teachers spoke more clearly about how it felt to them than can be achieved through summarising their answers. Each of the teachers is from a different school.

Teacher 7

After we have done the running records, when we get our graph together we always think, ‘How are we going? We always talk to each other about ‘How is your graph looking?’…. Before we meet, we sort of just quietly say to each other, ‘how is your graph looking?’ We actually gain a lot from that. It just keeps us more focused on what we need to do…. I feel that it is a supportive thing because we have got quite a few children here who are scoring below and we know that they can do it. We know they can, but they need the support of the whole syndicate and it does give us that…. I can’t see a downside.

Teacher 8

I didn’t feel particularly threatened by it at the beginning, and I don’t feel threatened by it, but I see it as a kind of useful tool. Sometimes I look at mine and I think, ‘Well I didn’t really want to own up to this’, but it makes me think “What else can I do?”

Teacher 9

Interviewer: Do you feel there are any down sides? You talked before about pressure.
Teacher: Sometimes you sort of, like, if your day is all scrambled up and you think, ‘Oh, I will just miss reading today’, but no, they need reading three times a week to get up there. But I don’t think that is really a negative thing.

The following teacher (teacher 6) is the only one for whom two quotes are used. She expressed a relatively negative view about the potential learning from the graph. She was stronger about the emotional consequences of the process for her. She was also new to the school and this way of doing things.

Teacher: The big thing with me is that the teacher doesn’t need any negatives, she needs help. So if there is an area there that perhaps we could go off to do some kind of teacher development, good…. I think some of it is not fair on the teacher because of the time factor you know. It’s not realistic unless you have got extra help in a class. I don’t think a teacher should be forced into doing “reading to” for instance…. And the expectation that we should be doing magnetic letters with
small groups of three children, or whatever. I think they are good ideas and I think you can incorporate them into your programme, but when you're so pushed for time, it's difficult. I think they need a bit more foundation with their ABC and their sounds, I really do. I worked at [another school] and they all agreed that they must have some foundational ABC and sounds because you can't just shove them up, and that's virtually what they're doing. And that's where that extra teacher aid could help, they could come in and drum it into them [the children] if they need it.... I don't think it's fair when there are huge problems to overcome, some almost insurmountable. I think, 'How can you point and say it's the teachers fault?' when these children come in with limited language.

Interviewer: Do you think it's a good idea doing the wedge graphs at all, or do you think they should be scrapped?
Teacher: I think the wedge graphs are fine but not if it means that teachers are going to be isolated in front of others and made to feel pretty stupid?
Interviewer: Does that happen?
Teacher: Yes. The teacher has got skills that need to be recognized... They've got a lot of beginning teachers happening now and that's another thing. And you can't look an idiot in front of beginning teachers.

**Recommendations for Other Schools**

The final item on the questionnaire asked, “Would you recommend that teachers in other schools analyse their achievement information in this way?” Options of “Yes”, “No” and “Maybe” were given.

Twenty-one teachers answered “yes”, they would recommend it, and 11 answered “maybe” and no-one answered “no”. The teachers in the two schools that had rated the other items very positively (Schools B and C), all gave a recommendation of “yes”. Others’ answers were more mixed using both the “yes” and “maybe” options. The reasons for recommending the process were similar to those identified in the items above: Teachers were able to see where children were at (18 teachers) and could identify the teaching implications (8 teachers). More equivocal reasons included: Such a decision should be left to other schools (2 teachers), the process takes too much time (1 teacher), the graph should not be the only source of information (1 teacher) and it depends how the data is used (1 teacher).

**Shifting the Focus to Learning from Achievement Information**

Literacy leaders and teachers were also asked in the interviews about the transition to examining the data as team for its teaching implications. The first part of this section summarises the literacy leaders’ perspective on managing the process and the second reports the teachers’ perspective.

**Literacy Leaders’ Perspective.** Trust, openness and sharing were all part of the literacy leaders’ management of the process. One literacy leader summarized many of these views:

Literacy leader: You have to manage the fact that if one particular class’ data is low, you're not actually embarrassing that teacher by being open with the data. So we’ve got a very open philosophy but it has taken us a long time to develop.... The other two senior teachers and I decided that we knew that there were a couple of classes that were doing really, really well and they had to be able to share, and sway, what they were doing to influence what was happening in the other rooms.... Initially I thought that could be quite threatening for some of the teachers whose results were really low,
but in hindsight it was probably the thing we should have done right from the start. But I think you still have to build that trust. I still have staff who find it very difficult to talk about what is happening in their rooms and find it quite challenging.

Interviewer: When you say trust, trust of what?

Literacy leader: The fact that somebody could be looking at their graphs result and the results could be lower in their classroom and they knew that they weren’t going to be put down by other staff members when they were talking about it, and saying ‘Oh well, you’re obviously not doing your programme well because your kids aren’t achieving’. Which could easily happen. So we had a talk about things and said, ‘Whatever we shared in the meeting would be valuable to anybody and when we could help others – that’s the idea of looking at our graphs’.

Interviewer: So were you concerned about the management of that process?

Literacy leader: Things could have quite easily gone wrong. I mean we could have quite easily had staff who could have got quite upset and said they weren’t going to talk about things and could have actually got withdrawn. But that didn’t happen.

Several other literacy leaders expressed the view that the whole process of participating in the professional development prior to examining the achievement graphs helped their acceptance. As one explained:

I really think that it was all the in-service that we had done before hand that really did help. We are learning to throw out all those so-called ‘tried and true’ things we have done…. So then we found it quite exciting. We get quite excited to see the results and I think it is just that focus.

Teachers’ Perspective. Several of the teachers explained the change in terms of an evolutionary process from discussing the programme together to discussing the achievement together, as illustrated in the following quote:

When we started the programme we used to get together and discuss what you were finding hard to do in the classroom. Would you like help with certain things? What are you doing well? What’s working for you? And when that piece of paper was there with the data, you know teachers could really look at it and say, ‘Well this one, this one and this one is doing so well because this is what I’m doing. This one I can’t move this one up you know he’s got a language problem, I just don’t know what to do, I give up’. Then within our syndicate what we do is if you’re struggling and you’ve really lost it with a child, what we do is say, ‘Send him to my class - I will put him into a group in my class. Let’s see how he’s going to perform within that group’…. Yes, so we try and help each other just to make it and I think that’s why the data on the graph wasn’t really a big deal. Because we were used to discussing issues already.

For the other teacher from this school, the transition to examining the achievement information using the graph had been so gradual that she could not remember it specifically.

For other teachers, the experience was more memorable as described in the following quotes:

Interviewer: So how did you feel that very first time you looked at the wedge graph?
Teacher 1: I hated it. There was a lot of pressure. But now we are finding the joy of seeing the children move. Now it is a year on, there is a feeling there to keep it going because now you understand what it is.
Interviewer: Do you feel that the pressure was unfair or unreasonable?
Teacher 1: At the beginning it felt unfair, but the results make me happier for them. It shows what I can do.
Teacher 2: It doesn’t worry me now; it is sort of just a part of life. But it was just that first one, especially when [the literacy leader] put out the big graph and we saw all those children below and it is quite off-putting.
Interviewer: Do you think there would have been some better way to have done that?
Teacher 2: Probably not. It was just something we had to go through. So it made us take stock and look.

Several literacy leaders and teachers identified particular conditions that seemed to them to be important for professional learning to become more salient than the potential negative emotional experiences when examining the graph. These conditions included teachers believing that they could make a difference, realizing that inflating the students’ scores would not assist with their learning, developing a shared understanding of the process in the group, having the Stanine 4 benchmark visible on the graph and meeting regularly. Many of these conditions are evident in quotes above, but in this section they have been specifically identified.

**Condition 1: High teacher self-efficacy**
For teachers to be able to use the achievement information to teach more effectively, the most important condition is that they feel they can make a difference, as this teacher described:

Teacher: It makes a lot of difference to me, it means I had to push the children, it’s like a target. You know, I need to get these children to the target.
Interviewer: A target for you or the children.
Teacher: It might be the children because the children learn from me as well. But for me it is me, that wedge graph is me. It makes me think, ’Where did I go wrong, what is missing?’

**Condition 2: Understanding that inflating scores was self-defeating**
The potential for teachers to record children as reading text higher than an appropriate level is obvious. Few teachers reported this temptation because it was ultimately self-defeating. They would not be able to continue with that level over time as this teacher described.

At the beginning, I tended to push the children up. One boy in particular I remember I pushed him up quicker than my instincts told me and then he floundered and I regretted that. But I think that was because I was conscious of the graph and thought, ’I’ve got to push him up a bit to get him up here’ and it didn’t work. So now I think, ’Well, you know I’ll do my best with them, but I’m not going to push them quicker than I feel they need to be pushed.”

**Condition 3: Shared understanding within the group**
Having a shared understanding with the group about both the meeting process, and a shared pedagogy and vocabulary, was also important.

I think our group is the only one that will understand what we are talking about. So it is our group, when we have a syndicate meeting so that is when we try to get help from one another.
**Condition 4: Identifying the Stanine 4 benchmark on the graph**

The wedge graph has stanines four and six (Phillips, MacNaughton and McDonald, 2002) clearly marked. Most teachers shared the expectations that the students should be above the stanine four line and its presence on the graph was highly motivating as these two teachers explained:

**Interviewer:** How important is it to have those lines on the wedge graph?

**Teacher 1:** I think it is important. There is a target; I like to go for a target. Then I know and I ask for help for the children that are below the line.

**Teacher 2:** I think you have got to have expectations and you have got to have something to aim for. It might be that the children are progressing in a steady kind of pattern, but I guess it comes down to what the vision is where we collectively want the kids to be as well.

**Condition 5: Regular review**

All the schools regularly reviewed their reading levels, usually twice per term. Several referred to the importance of doing this, with one expressing it this way:

> I think what’s important is that we do it every five weeks, so it is really regular. If you do it very ten weeks, then you are looking at the end of the term and you have got the holidays when you sort of forget. Whereas five weeks just sort of keeps us on track and the five weeks just comes around so fast that we can’t believe that we are doing them again. I think that using the graph to set the targets for the next five weeks is very important…. It applies a little bit of pressure in a really positive way. Whereas if you didn’t have to plot them on a graph you might think, ‘They might be alright,’ and you just sort of get into cruise mode a little bit.

**Discussion: Within-school Evidence-based Professional Learning**

This chapter has been framed around the question, “From the perspective of the teachers and literacy leaders, how does examination of the achievement data lead to higher student achievement?” The teachers and literacy leaders identified several important processes. Targeting particular students for attention when examining the graph appeared to be a catalyst for further teacher learning and action. The teachers did not perceive the data points as crosses on a piece of paper but rather as children with particular teaching and learning needs. The targeting brought a sense of urgency with it. In five weeks time, progress would be checked again, and several teachers talked about their current focus on reading and their reluctance to miss reading sessions.

Although the amount of meeting time spent discussing specific children’s literacy problems and the solutions that arose from them was less in these schools than reported previously in schools with high achievement (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002), most of the teachers talked about discussing achievement problems with their colleagues more frequently than before, both in meetings and outside of them. How better to teach the children identified on the graph became the subject of intense and regular discussion.

For most teachers, analyzing the data was not a negative emotional experience. In the interviews, more teachers used descriptors like “excitement” rather than ones with negative connotations. One teacher identified on the questionnaire that she had found the process negative emotionally and she was interviewed. She had recently arrived in the school, and for this reason, had not been part of the conditions some of the teachers identified as being important in making the transition to examining
their achievement data in this way. She had not been part of the group who had worked through the professional development and shared problems and solutions throughout the process. In addition, her comments reflected a low sense of teacher efficacy. In her interview, she described how half the class brought special learning needs to school from their backgrounds and it was unreasonable for her to be expected to meet these demands.

This situation, however, appeared to apply to only one teacher of the thirty-three, so does not indicate that teachers need to have engaged in a long period of professional development before they can benefit from the analysis process. It may be desirable, but does not appear to be essential. Several of the teachers who took part in this survey were new to the schools or to the profession. They felt challenged and supported, rather than defensive.

Other conditions that appeared to be important for the process to work well and result in improved student achievement included regular reviews of the achievement data, having a clear benchmark on the graph that teachers aspired to for their students and understanding that inflating student scores was ultimately self-defeating for both teacher and child.

The challenge for the literacy leaders was to manage a process in which high trust replaced suspicion, and to focus the teachers on learning from the achievement data, rather than experiencing blame. In this most appeared to be highly successful.

The process has now become routine within these schools and appears to be iterative in the sense that better teaching methods, higher student achievement and willingness to examine the achievement information from which to learn, all build on one another.

Section Two: Extending an evidence-based approach beyond the school

A question of interest to the Ministry of Education is ‘What conditions need to be in place for a group of schools to share and learn from their achievement data?’ This issue can be conceptualised as transferring the in-school data-based inquiry processes described above to a process that takes place among a group of schools.

Ten interviews of 6 principals and 4 deputy and assistant principals were undertaken in pursuit of trying to find an answer to this question. Three of the principals did not currently share achievement information with others, one deputy principal had moved from a school that did not share data to one that was preparing to do so, and the remaining interviewees were from schools who had agreed to share their achievement data but had not yet done so on a school-wide basis. The technical issues involved are well know to the Ministry and are not reported here. This section focused on the “people-related” aspects.

Not surprisingly, many the issues evident in the teachers’ interviews about sharing their data with their colleagues were evident in the responses about the area-wide sharing of data. The issues described by the different respondents are summarised below.

Issue One: Professional Trust

This aspect of trust focused on a sense that those involved would use the data for collective learning purposes and would not use the data in ways that would put others or themselves in situations of
blame. A sense of “we must all be in this together” was considered essential. “I think it’s trust between schools, with schools near enough to know you would be comfortable sharing the data. It would need to be with schools that have similar philosophies and were doing similar things…. We would want to build that relationship first.”

**Issue Two: Personal Trust and Respect**

Personal trust was different from professional trust in the sense that those involved needed to know each other as people, trust them as people and had interacted with them in both social and professional situations. Alternatively, these interactions may have been in professional situations that had opportunities for more personal understandings to develop. As one described, “I think the personal level is just as important as the professional. If you get on with somebody then you are more likely to feel that sort of collegial thing. If you like somebody then you are far more likely to make the effort to go to meetings and those sorts of things.” Another respondent talked about the need for reciprocity in that the trust and respect between those involved meant they both respected and felt respected by the other.

**Issue Three: Professional Confidence**

Two people mentioned the issue of confidence in their professional work as forming a prior condition to sharing the data between schools. One explained it this way:

> I think not being defensive. You can only not be defensive if you feel like you are doing a good job, so if you felt like you were just doing a really dreadful job and things weren’t happening in your school, then you wouldn’t be as open to sharing, you wouldn’t want people to know that.

**Issue Four: The Potential Learning Justified the Risks Involved**

One of the reasons for reticence from those schools not currently planning to share the achievement data was an uncertainty about what learning benefits would accrue. On the other hand, those who were familiar with working with the implications from data were more able to see benefits:

> “To share the data and have a look at everyone else’s data would be a waste of time. It wouldn’t be a waste of time if you looked at the data and said, ‘OK what is this telling us? What are we going to do now? Is there a trend that is different?’ I know that the word ‘analyse’ has been used to the death, but there is no point in just sharing it and not actually analysing it. I think the value of having a lot of different people analysing the same data is that people come up with different perspectives. If I just did it myself, I might miss something important that someone else might say, ‘Oh did you notice that this had happened?’

**Issue Five: Benefit to Effort Ratio in Terms of Time**

There was a sense from some principals who were not currently planning to share data that they were already spending a great deal of time analysing data and that sharing it with other schools would simply increase the time involved with few obvious benefits. This was less of an issue for those who were intensively involved in analysing their own data and understanding the implications. As one deputy principal explained,
You'd have to do your own analysis first because it would give much more focus to what you wanted to find out. Rather than going to a meeting and soaking it all in, you would want to know the questions you want answers to and know what you need to look for.

**Issue Six: Benefit for Self or for Others**

Some of the principals who considered that sharing data was “the way we would be heading”, but had no specific plans to do so, described the benefits in terms of helping schools with transitioning students, “Because when you have got such a high transition of children here that move around schools, instead of having to start from scratch with every child that comes we would know where they were at and could start teaching straight away”. A potential concern with this “other” perspective is that while it may well help students settle in, those who expressed this view did not perceive the exercise as focusing on their learning about how to improve the teaching of their existing students. If shared data is only about assisting transitioning students, then much of the value of the exercise is likely to be lost. All that would be needed to satisfy the needs of transitioning students would be common assessment protocols, not data sharing ones.

**Conclusions**

This follow-up study, together with its predecessor (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002), strongly indicate that student achievement is associated with the extent to which schools analyse their achievement information in ways that impact on teaching practice. In the earlier study, student achievement was highest in those schools that regularly examined their achievement information for the implications for teaching practice. This follow-up study has shown that achievement improved in those schools with low to medium achievement when the schools began to analyse their data in the same way for the same purposes. Those for whom the process had become regular practice were enthusiastic about the professional learning benefits and could describe how the data-analysis process connected to their daily teaching activities.

The term “professional learning” is rarely used in either the research literature or everyday use. Learning seems to apply to students only. Teachers have “professional development”, a process often associated with a course outside of school that may or may not impact on either their cognition or their practice. At a leadership level, the learning becomes even more distant from the person and is typically associated with “ organisational learning”. The findings from this study indicate that if students are to learn, then teachers and their leaders must also learn how to teach them more effectively.

What more powerful professional learning situation can there be than one where problems are identified using student achievement data, and the expertise from members of a team of professionals comes together to solve them, with each solution subsequently tested for its effectiveness? Effective solutions are not defined in terms of affective responses on the part of teachers or students, but rather in terms of whether the achievement problem has been solved. If not, it is revisited. There are times when the development of an effective solution requires the assistance of an outside expert, because many achievement problems are extremely difficult to solve. Whether the expertise is internal or external, the essential ingredient is that the focus of the various efforts is based in the teachers’ and leaders’ own practice context and it is their learning that is targeted.
Whether the data-sharing and analysis activities occur within the school, or between schools, both personal and professional issues require attention if it is to be successful. The most important question becomes, “To what extent can I trust others to respect my efforts to this point and help me to learn to improve?” The greatest difficulty is getting started, so that fears of disrespect and skepticism about learning can be tested. How much is needed of what before getting started? Are schools able to realise the learning benefits, without first getting together to analyse their achievement data? Will they really trust one another until they have shared potentially threatening data and found the learning was worth the effort?

Working together on small tasks might be an easier way to test these issues, to build the trust and to understand the potential of the learning benefits. The learning benefits, however, are not likely to be realised if those involved begin the task for reasons tangential to, rather than central to, their own learning. Coming together to align assessments for transitioning students is one such example. While this may be a safer point at which to start, those involved may not perceive the effort to be worth the benefit and may not seek assistance to understand what can be learned from a data-sharing exercise, unless they are prepared to approach the task as learners. Many of those involved in these studies in Mangere and Otara actively seek and construct highly challenging situations from which they learn. Their student achievement is improving as a result.

References


Chapter Two: Running Records and the Time to Teach\footnote{The authors of this chapter are Helen Timperley, Sarah Mirams and Jeni Portway}

Running records provide rich diagnostic information on students' reading strategies and fluency. They were developed as an assessment strategy by Marie Clay (1993) to give teachers a tool to analyse young readers’ decoding strategies. In many New Zealand schools, administering running records at regular intervals is an established practice throughout the school. Indeed, their correct administration and use has become a key part of the Ministry of Education's recent literacy strategy (Ministry of Education, 2000). The diagnostic information is only gained, however, through individual assessment of oral reading. This situation inevitably means that the assessment process takes considerable time. If the record is correctly administered and the information used for both individual teacher and organisational learning, as described in other recent reports (e.g. Timperley and Lam, 2002; Timperley, Wiseman, 2002) this time may be justified. However, the potential exists for the administration of running records to become a routine practice, which takes up significant amounts of teacher time, but does not realise the full benefits. In this study, we examined the time involved in administering the running records and the uses that were made of the results by teachers and management staff in eight schools.

Two important publications provide advice for teachers and schools about the use of running records. These comprise Marie Clay's "Observation Survey" (1993), which draws on earlier publications by Clay since she developed this tool in 1972, and the Ministry of Education's recent resource, "Using Running Records" (2000). A brief summary of the main points in these publications relevant to this study are provided below and will set an appropriate context.

The procedures analysis was based on Clay's observations of children's literacy learning during the first year of school. Given this emphasis on early literacy, the Ministry, while not precluding their use at “… almost any stage of reading development” recommends that "… the information they provide is most useful to teachers of readers who are not yet fluent - who are still learning about what print is for and how to gain meaning from it. This includes most students in years 1 and 2 as well as many older readers." (Ministry of Education, 2000, p.4). The authors of this publication also note that, "For teachers of older, fluent readers, Running Records offer less useful information. Such readers usually read silently, and the errors they might make when reading aloud may not provide useful evidence of their actual reading process." (p.6).

Clay advises that even at junior levels, where schools have a large number of children in the age group, a systematic check of children falling in the lower half of the class at the end of the first year of instruction could be attained through testing a random sample of pupils. The purpose of this process, however, is not to guide the learning needs of individual pupils but to watch how learning from the beginning of one year changes over that year.

Advice on when to administer running records focuses on the time when a teacher is "… puzzled by the child's responses [and] a teacher needs more information" (Clay, 1993; p.21). Partly for this reason, Clay emphasises the use of flexible recording instruments, which comprise an appropriate text and a piece of paper. "With practice teachers can take a running record at any time, anywhere, on any text because the behaviour of the moment needs to be captured, and because the opportunity arises." (p.22). The purpose for administering the running record at this time is to fine tune teaching practice as described in the Ministry of Education (2000) publication,
"With the aid of the understandings they gain from the record and their interpretation of it, teachers can fine-tune the ways in which they monitor students' progress and plan further learning experiences for them". (p.4)

The reasons given for taking the running record and ways in which the running record can assist teachers, listed in the Ministry of Education publication (p.7), reflect this purpose.

The emphasis on flexibility of administration, however, is not intended to imply casualness about how the running record is completed. Clay emphasizes the importance of administering, recording and scoring the running recording in standardised ways and, indeed, the accurate and reliable administration of running records is the main focus of the Ministry's (2000) publication.

Clay (1993) does not recommend separate comprehension assessment after children have read the text because she suggests young readers need to understand the story before being asked to read. In addition, the analysis of the reading strategies is directed toward finding out the extent to which the children use meaning in decoding text and its integration with other reading strategies. The Ministry of Education publication (2000) suggests "when the reader is past the emergent stage, teachers usually ask for a retelling or question the child to check their comprehension of text" (p.31). The types of questions specifically recommended are open-ended ones that encourage a faltering child to retell the story more fully so they do not get the idea of only one "right" answer.

There is little reference in either of these publications to school-wide use of running records but a frequently used standardised "kit" (Randell, 2000) suggests that the information can be used for:

- planning programs;
- reporting to parents / caregivers;
- developing school policies for literacy learning;
- presenting data for class or school accountability;
- Purchasing resources. (p. 71).

Given the extensive information and advice on administering and using running records and their central place in school assessment, we sought in this study to find out how they were used in the schools.

**Method**

We invited eight Mangere and Otara schools that were participating in the AUSAD initiative to be involved in this study. In each school, the second and third authors observed a minimum of three teachers who, in most cases, administered two running records with the same child and followed each observation with an interview. Twenty-two of the teachers administered two running records with three teachers administering only one. In six of the schools the teachers taught different year levels in the school. In the seventh and eighth schools, only teachers teaching Years 1-4 were observed and interviewed. The principal and the literacy leader responsible for the junior and senior schools were also interviewed. The participants and their positions are listed in Table 8.
### Table 8
Participants involved in the running record study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy principals</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant principals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1-4 teachers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5-8 teachers</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

Teachers were asked to administer two running records "as they would normally do them". All observations were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The observations were analysed according to the procedures used, the types of prompts given by the teacher, whether comprehension was assessed, the type of feedback given to the child, the correctness of scoring notations and the analysis undertaken. Definitions used for the analysis follow:

**Prompting of text reading**
- Accepted prompts were coded as those accepted within running record guidelines, such as, telling a child a word when the child made an error and cannot correct it;
- Unaccepted prompts were coded when a child was provided with a strategy to work out a particular word and it was marked correct, such as asking a child how a particular word might start.

**Scoring and analysis**
- Correct notations were coded as those indicated in running record guidelines;
- The analysis was coded according to the correct or incorrect recording of meaning, structure or visual cues. Those records not scored by the teacher were excluded from the analysis;
- Accuracy of reading level was coded according to whether the child was appropriately placed within one of three groups on the basis of their word reading accuracy: <90%, 90-95%, or >95%.

**Feedback on completion of the running record**
- Specific feedback on progress included specific comments about the child's progress over a particular period of time;
- General feedback on progress was coded when comments were made on some aspect of the child's reading progress;
- Specific feedback on strategies was coded when errors and strategies to overcome them were discussed with the child;
- General feedback on strategies included comments made about some aspect of the strategies the child was using;
- Undefined feedback was coded when some general comment was made that did not specifically refer to the child's reading.
**Interviews**

The interview questions were designed to probe the teachers' reasons for decisions underlying their actions when administering the running records, how they used the information, how long it took them to complete it and other data relevant to the time involved. They were also asked about the information sent to senior management. Two rating scales were used. The first asked teachers about the usefulness of the running record, and the second asked about the usefulness of the feedback they received from their senior managers about the collated results. A 10-point scale was used, where 1 represented "Not at all useful" and 10 represented "Extremely useful". Questions asked of senior management were designed to parallel those of the teachers with a particular focus on the reasons underlying particular procedures and uses of the data. Managers were also asked to rate the usefulness of the data on the same 1 - 10 scale. The interviewer coded all questions at the time of the interview with 22 of the transcripts tape-recorded and transcribed.

A draft of the initial results of the study was returned to all participating schools for comment. Relevant comments from this feedback are included in this report.

**Results and Discussion**

The results are presented in seven sections. The sections include:

- Which students completed running records;
- The time involved in administering running records;
- Teacher use of running records;
- Management use of running records;
- Feedback to teachers;
- Accuracy of administration;
- Testing comprehension;
- Choice of text level;
- Feedback to students.

A brief discussion follows the presentation of each section of results.

**Which Students Completed Running Records**

Running records were administered at both senior and junior levels in all schools. With the exception on the junior department in one school, they were typically administered for all children in the class within a set period (approximately two weeks) of each school term. In all but one school, the teachers undertook the running records during their reading time while other students were engaged in independent activities, or they fitted them in at other times in the school day. In the remaining school, two teachers shared classes for reading instruction for a two-week period. One teacher supervised the whole class for a week while the other took running records. During the second week, the teachers reversed responsibilities.
Although both Clay (1993) and the Ministry of Education (2000) advise that running records can be undertaken at almost any stage of reading development, the emphasis is on readers who are not yet fluent, with a focus on Years One and Two. The reason underlying this recommendation is that oral reading for fluent silent readers may not provide useful evidence of their actual reading processes. It would be interesting to know why schools administer running records to these students.

**Time Involved in Administering Running Records**

Considerable resources in terms of time were allocated to the administration of the running records. The assessment is individualised, and participating teachers indicated that it took between 10 and 30 minutes to complete with each child in class time. Their time estimates averaged 17 minutes (see Table 9). Although not specifically asked, ten teachers also mentioned additional out-of-class time of between 5 and 10 minutes spent on scoring and administration. The average estimates of time given by managers for in-class administration of 19.5 minutes closely mirrored those of the teachers. When this time factor for individual children is multiplied by the number of times running records are completed each term and the number of children in the class (see Table 9), it can be seen that a considerable proportion of instructional reading time is spent in this activity. This time is probably an underestimation because we did not ask how many running records were typically completed with each child.

**Table 9**

**Reported time spent administering running records**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Running Record</th>
<th>Time / Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average time to complete each running record</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of running records administered per term per child</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of children per class</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time spent administering running records per teacher per term</td>
<td>10.2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participating teachers also reported that they usually spent approximately one hour per day on reading instruction. Our calculated average of 10.2 hours per term, therefore, indicates an average of almost two weeks or 20% of instructional reading time each term is spent completing running records. The feedback of this draft report indicated this amount of time was correct for most teachers.

The amount of class time involved in administering the running records is significant. In order to justify the amount of reading instruction time involved in this activity, we thought it important to examine the uses to which running records were put.

**Teachers’ Use of Running Records**

When asked to rate how useful teachers found the running records, they nominated an average rating of 8.4 on a scale of 1 - 10 where a rating of 1 represented "Not at all useful" and 10 represented "Extremely useful". Ten of the 25 teachers gave a rating of 10.

The first set of question relating to actual use involved asking teachers about their reasons for completing the running records. Their answers were coded according to the type of use articulated.
Many teachers gave more than one reason, which meant their answers were coded in more than one category. For example, four of the six teachers who stated they completed running records because they were told they had to, also gave answers that referred to finding out children's text levels or using them to group children in the class.

Table 10
Teachers' stated reasons for completing running records

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>No. of teachers (N= 25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because I have to.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing text level and class grouping of children.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of children's reading skills and next steps for teaching.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension of text.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 10, the most commonly stated reason for undertaking a running record was to establish an appropriate text level and / or for grouping of children (23 teachers). As one teacher explained,

"Junior was reading at 'Blue Two' level and now he has read a couple of books and I thought that he needs to read some different books. He needs to move up and I just wanted to test him if he was ready to move up or not - so that I can group him into another reading group."

In addition to text level / class grouping responses, 11 teachers gave an answer that suggested they undertook running records to analyse children's reading skills (6 teachers) and / or decide on the next steps for teaching (9 teachers). Four of these teachers mentioned both reasons, with one explaining,

"To see the skills and strategies that the child has already got and the ones that they are using and also to identify the ones that we want to develop. Just so that we can place them appropriately as well."

Two of these teachers also mentioned assessing comprehension as a reason for undertaking running records. For example, one teacher whose answers were coded as both analysis of children's reading skills and comprehension, explained;

"We do the running records to analyse the children's reading, get a reading age score, to analyse what types of cues and reading skills they use when they are confronted with an unfamiliar text. We also do the running record comprehension component to look at whether the children's fluency and decoding of the text is supported by their knowledge and understanding of what they have read."

Two other teachers mentioned comprehension but only in conjunction with finding out about appropriate text levels.

Later in the interview, when asked what they had learnt about the child and his / her programme, it appeared that some of the teachers who mentioned only text level and / or grouping in their earlier answers were analysing the running record in greater depth than these answers implied. For example, four of the teachers who originally gave text level and / or class grouping answers to the initial question about the reasons for doing the running record, mentioned instances of self-
correction and/or error patterns to the latter question. Three of these teachers, and two others also mentioned the child's reading strategies. These diagnostic analyses, however, appeared to be more for the purpose of establishing correct text levels, than for focusing teaching strategies. When these teachers were asked what changes they would make as a result of completing the running record, responses about changing or maintaining text levels dominated. Only three teachers mentioned specific strategies arising from the running record itself. Two were concerned about the child's oral reading and thought more practice would increase fluency,

"I think I would make Sam read more aloud to other children and to do a lot more oral reading. I think he would be very good at reading to himself and give meaning, but I think he needs to work on fluency and stopping at stops when he reads aloud."

One of these teachers also mentioned word solving activities and another talked about

"Doing some exercises on the initial and the middle and ending consonants, because he missed out the 's' in dinosaurs."

The responses of the 24 other teachers to the changes they would make either referred to changes or maintenance of text level, or the response did not appear to arise from the running record itself. For example, one teacher thought that she needed to

"Increase spelling activity levels and make them harder."

Information about the children's comprehension of the text similarly did not appear to impact on subsequent teaching emphases. Twenty-two teachers assessed the child's comprehension through asking pre-set questions and two through story retelling after the running record was taken. When asked what they found out about the child's understanding of what they were reading, all were able to comment on the adequacy of the child's comprehension although they did so in the form of a summary of the number of answers that were correct and whether they considered that number to be adequate. No reference was made in response to these questions about an analysis of the child's reading strategies. For example, one said,

"I think he had quite good comprehension, I think he got three out of five, so I think he comprehended quite well what he read."

Two teachers gave more detailed answers. For example one explained,

"'She likes to stay with her brother' is not really the right answer. She could say that and the real answer was that 'She wanted to stay and look at the trains' that was the real reason and the brother said he would stay and look after her... I think we will need to look at level ten to make sure she is getting the meaning, that's why I wouldn't push her up."

As illustrated in this quote, this teacher took the child's answers to comprehension questions into account when establishing whether the text was at the correct level. Only two others specifically mentioned comprehension in this respect in response to any question, and for one of these teachers, her concerns about comprehension did not arise from the running record itself. This teacher commented that the assessed child's comprehension was good, but

"Well at the moment I am having a binge on comprehension skills ... That whole group needs a lot of work on comprehension".
Given the time taken to administer running records, their predominant use to establish text levels and classroom groups appears to be difficult to justify. The concern applies particularly to those children who read silently and fluently. Once children have established fluency in silent reading, determining text levels through individual oral assessment appears to be a time consuming activity and may not measure competence in or comprehension of silent reading (Ministry of Education, 2000). We are not suggesting that running records are inappropriate for struggling older readers whose problems need close diagnosis if teaching is to be finely tuned to need. However, we are questioning the efficiency of routinely using running records to establish the appropriate text levels of fluent readers.

The emphasis the teachers placed on using the running records to establish text levels and grouping children is not surprising given the conditions under which most of these teachers typically undertook the assessment. In all of these schools, with the exception of one school at junior level, the running records were undertaken within a set period of time, in order to standardise the administration. Completing the running records was not motivated by a teacher being puzzled by a child's reading responses as recommended by Clay (1993). Typically, the timetable was focused in a two-week period of the school term, with the text level results for this period sent to the management team. It would be very difficult to diagnose individual reading needs and remember the particulars of the needs of 25 - 30 children after completing all the running records for the class.

**Management Use of Running Records**

In all schools, data on the children’s text levels were sent to the school’s management team. Management responses on the use of running records were divided into two categories. The first were responses related to teachers' use and the second to their own use (see Table 11). Of the 18 management staff interviewed, 12 mentioned teachers' use, and like the teachers, the most frequently cited reason (10 respondents) was to establish reading groups and / or identify text levels. As one principal explained,

"Well I think it is a relevant kind of assessment to determine the most appropriate reading instructional levels for students, and to check on the progress that they are making within the reading programme."

Three of these managers, together with the remaining two participants, talked about an additional reason, that of analysing children's reading skills and / or identifying the next steps for teaching. As one reported,

"... probably the thing that actually drives it is worry or concern that our teachers may not be skilled enough in picking out the children's reading needs and it is a handy tool to use."
Table 11
Stated reasons by management for completing running records (N=18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uses</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher use:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing text level / class grouping;</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of children's reading skills / needs / next steps for teaching.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management use:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide data for aggregation and developing profiles;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check reading levels (not aggregated);</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying children for special needs / abilities and appropriate assistance;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting to Board of Trustees;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying professional needs of teachers.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The uses management provided that related to themselves are also summarized in Table 11. Eleven of our 17 interviewees indicated such reasons, with one indicating more than one reason. The most common response (5) was that the running records provided management with data for aggregation from which they could develop benchmarked profiles of achievement. An additional three respondents talked about checking reading levels of individual students. In these schools, the managers were not referring to aggregated results, but rather to those of individual children. Two respondents also indicated that the reason for completing the assessment was to identify children for special programmes. Another two reported that they were undertaken for the purpose of obtaining aggregated results to report to the Board of Trustees.

When asked more specifically about use, the answers were almost as diverse as our respondents and included reporting to the board (4), and parents (2), checking school-wide trends (2), purchasing resources (2), looking at reading progress, (2) and compiling class lists for the following year (2). One respondent mentioned each of the following: looking at reading progress, identifying special needs students and giving feedback to children. Six answers came closer to our organisational learning framework in that the answers referred to an analysis of needs and / or professional development. As one respondent said,

"We use it to analyse where the needs are by seeing that a lot of these children are good at decoding but they are not so good at comprehension."

Another deputy principal described a more focused use,

"I'm interested in how the reading programmes are operating in the classroom and one or two teachers who are closest to being performance managed have been asked the question why their classes, in particular, have low results."

Management reasons for asking teachers to complete running records appeared to mirror those of the teachers in terms of teachers' main use. The reason given most frequently was for teachers to find out the children's text levels and / or establish classroom groups. The concerns we noted for the teachers related to the amount of class time involved to meet this purpose, especially for older fluent readers, is echoed in this section.

In addition, there is a tension between satisfying the teacher's need to know about a child's reading strategies if they are to respond to immediate classroom needs, and management's need to have
information that is standardised at a particular point in time so that it can be aggregated and school-wide profiles developed. There are several possible resolutions to this tension, all of which have potential associated problems. One may be to complete different running records for different purposes. This solution, however, would create the problem of yet more time spent administering running records. Another is for teachers to administer them on an "as needed" basis, with aggregated information collected in other ways. This process would reduce the time spent completing running records, especially for fluent readers, and provide management with data that is possibly more reliably aggregated than individually administered running records. The problem this solution poses is articulated in one of the earlier quotes, that what sometimes motivates management to insist on all children having running records is a concern that teachers may not be skilled enough in picking out the children's reading needs.

The junior department in one school, who did not routinely collect running records, satisfied the need for management to check school-wide trends by asking teachers to provide a list of the children and their instructional text levels at a particular point in time. The assistant principal made random checks throughout the term to ensure the text levels were accurate. This system both ensured that the children were taught at an appropriate level and provided managers with the school-wide data to determine overall trends throughout the junior school without the need for routine administration of running records for all children regardless of need. During the first year of the introduction of this system, the increase in a combined score of children's text levels and BURT scores showed an effect size of 0.76 (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002). The assistant principal partially attributed the rapid rise in the children's reading scores to the increased time spent teaching rather than assessing. This increase was undoubtedly also caused by the teachers' participation in professional development two years earlier, but the children's scores had not improved during the year after the professional development until the requirement for routine running records ceased. The teachers continued to complete running records when puzzled about a child's reading, but these records were determined by a need to respond to a particular child's reading responses, rather than a need for management to aggregate standardised data.

**Feedback to Teachers**

Only two management staff specifically mentioned feedback to teachers as a way of using the aggregated data when asked about purpose and use. When asked specifically about what data are returned to teachers, however, and whether the process involved discussing the data with them, the responses were very mixed.

In two schools either the principal or deputy principal was responsible for collating all the school's data and reported that they provided feedback to teachers on individual children. The teachers in both these schools were unaware of the collated results but reported discussing the progress of individual children with their managers. Their average rating of the usefulness of this feedback was 4 in one school and 8.3 in the other on a 10 point scale of usefulness. On this scale, a rating of 1 represented "Not useful" and a rating of 10 represented "Extremely useful".

In three other schools, the senior managers reported feeding back results to the teachers without discussion. The teachers in two of these cases confirmed this practice and gave ratings of 5 and 8.3 for usefulness. The teachers in the third school did not remember receiving any feedback.

In the sixth school and in the senior department of the seventh school, the senior managers reported that the results were collated and fed back to the teachers with the implications of the results discussed with them. These teachers’ ratings of usefulness were similar to those of others, with an
average of rating of 6.6 in one school and 7 in the other. In the junior department of the eighth school, the teachers themselves collated the data and did not discuss it with the senior management.

These diverse practices did not seem to be associated with any particular rating of usefulness by the teachers. An average rating of 5.9 for usefulness of the feedback indicated that teachers were relatively neutral about the process. On the other hand, their managers gave an average rating of 8.9 for usefulness of the data from the running record on the same 10-point scale.

The administration procedures for running records appear to be determined more by management purposes than by teachers' immediate classroom needs in some schools. In these schools it would seem important that maximum use be made of the information. Organisational and self-regulated learning depends on feedback mechanisms that allow all the key players to know about and be involved in what the data means for teaching and learning programmes. Giving teachers collated results without discussion, or discussing only low progress children, does not give the teachers a picture of how the effectiveness of their classroom programme fits with the whole. In our interviews, we did not ask for estimates of the time involved in the collation and feedback process. However, there is no doubt that it is considerable. If the process is to realise the potential professional learning benefits, greater focus on the purpose of the process for both teachers and their managers appears to be important.

**Accuracy of Administration**

Two of the management staff we interviewed expressed concern about the accuracy of the data they received for aggregation purposes. Both recognised that in order for the aggregated data to be meaningful, it was important that the running records were administered correctly. Table 12 indicates the number of teachers who completed the running records correctly for each of the items below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No reading prompts or prompts within guidelines</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct scoring notations for complete record</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self corrections correctly scored</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level correctly calculated in terms of percent words correct</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSM analysis correct</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all the teachers in six schools administered, scored and analysed the text-related aspects of the running records reasonably accurately. The most common problem with administration in the other two schools was the high number of unacceptable prompts given to the children while they were reading. For example, one teacher said to a child who had incorrectly read a word,

"Look very hard to see if there is an 's' at the end of the word."

Another prompted a child, who was stuck on a word,

"How does it start? It starts with 't'. "

31
The number of teachers correctly calculating the percentage of words correct and completing the VSM analysis is lower than might be expected because only 21 teachers undertook the first task and 19 teachers the second.

Considerable emphasis has been placed on the standardised administration of running records in the six schools where the running records were completed accurately. The accuracy of the process is a major credit to these schools because it is a process that depends on reasonably high levels of teacher skill. All the teachers said they had been trained formally to administer and score running records. In the two schools in which high levels of inaccuracy were evident, four teachers indicated they had been informally trained, with the remaining two formally trained. Both schools aggregated the information for school-wide purposes. These schools are aware of the problems inherent in this process.

Assessing Comprehension

In one of these schools and in two others, most of the teachers reworded the comprehension questions to make them easier for the children to answer (see Table 13). These teachers also prompted some of the answers to the questions but marked them as correct. These two problems were much more likely to occur when teachers were using externally developed instruments, such as PM Benchmarked kits or Probe. Of the 16 teachers using the comprehension questions from these more standardised instruments, only 6 asked the comprehension question as they were written, 2 reworded the question but it did not appear to the observer to make them easier. For example, the item was written as, “Explain why it is hard to make a decision when you are in a hurry or you are scared”. It was reworded by the teacher as, “Why is it hard to make that quick decision when you are in a hurry”? The remaining 8 teachers reworded questions to make them easier. For example, the question was written as, “Why did Jack seize the harp? The teacher reworded it as, “Why do you think he took the harp with him?” This pattern was not evident for the four teachers who used teacher-developed questions. In two of these four teacher-developed questioning contexts, however, only direct factual questions, as opposed to inferential questions, were asked.

Table 13
Administration of comprehension questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Number of teachers (N=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension questions used correct wording, or rewording did not make question easier</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No prompts for answers to questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The testing of comprehension through the use of set questions is somewhat controversial in that neither Clay (1993) nor the Ministry of Education (2000) recommends the use of standardised comprehension questions. Rather, Clay indicates that young children should be assisted to understand the story before being asked to read and that the use of meaning cues can be determined through the analysis of the running record itself. The Ministry publication indicates comprehension can be tested through retelling and open-ended questions. The concern about closed questions is that the child may come to believe there is only one right answer to a particular text. This perception creates difficulties when children are asked to provide interpretive answers beyond information explicitly presented in the text itself.
The testing of comprehension through set questions by the teachers involved in this study is not surprising, given the demands of standardisation of administration for data aggregation purposes and the reading level in many of the schools. When children are able to "read" beyond beginning text levels, they can become adept at correctly recognising words without necessarily comprehending what they are reading. Particular difficulties exist with inferring meaning from text. This problem is well recognised in Mangere and Otara, particularly with children whose first language is not English.

Given this situation, the use of set questions can be justified; however, the rewording of these questions to make them easier, asking direct questions only or scoring them inaccurately does not provide teachers or management staff with accurate information. Neither does it give children the message that responses to text may be individual and inferential.

**Choice of Text Level**

As can be seen from Table 14, most teachers are calculating correctly the percentage of words in the text that the child read correctly. However, we cannot conclude from this result that teaching occurs at the correct level. Much to our surprise, 15 teachers chose texts which the children read with greater than 95% accuracy, even though they gave the basis of their choice as "Instructional level" or "Harder than instructional level" (see Table 14). When children scored at these levels for the first text, and teachers were administering a second running record, the teacher invariably chose a second text at the next highest level. Two teachers did not administer a second text after a student read at greater than 95% accuracy. In nine cases the second texts were also read at greater than 95% accuracy. There were school-related differences in choice of text level. In three schools, all teachers began with a text that was read with greater than 95% accuracy. In another two schools, on the other hand, two of the three teachers began with a more difficult text, which the child read between 90% and 95% accuracy. In the remaining three schools, difficulty of text level was very mixed for the different teachers and included three instances of text on which the children read at less than 90% accuracy.

**Table 14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given for choosing text level</th>
<th>No. of instances where first text &gt;95% correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text chosen at instructional level (N=17)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text chosen at harder than instructional level (N=7)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to find out if teachers' choice of text level was determined by the child's comprehension level, rather than text accuracy, we examined their comments about the child's comprehension. Only two teachers gave poor comprehension as a reason for retaining students at an instructional level that appeared to be easy. One gave a need for "more consolidation" as the reason for level retention. For others, comments about the child's comprehension of the text were positive. These teachers indicated the child's comprehension of the text was adequate.

We find this pattern of choice of text level concerning. Given that the observations were all conducted in the second half of the year, it could be expected that the teachers knew the children well. One possible explanation for this choice of text level, with which those who have given feedback concur, arises from low expectations of student achievement. If teachers have low
expectations of these students and their reading progress, then it is likely that they would retain
students at particular reading levels longer than their skills would indicate because of a perceived
need to consolidate skills. Issues with low teacher expectations have been raised previously in
various reports and papers (Timperley, Robinson & Bullard, 1999; McNaughton, Phillips &
MacDonald, 2000).

While it could be argued consolidation at each level is desirable, it can equally well be argued that
many of these students achieve below national expectations and accelerating them rather than
slowing them down should be the aim. It is puzzling why so much attention is given to identifying
the correct text level from running records, yet chosen text levels are mostly below the children's
apparent ability to read and comprehend text. Regular administration of running records does not
appear to guarantee appropriate text level instruction.

Given this situation, the strategy described by the assistant principal mentioned above, of asking
teachers to submit text levels and randomly checking their accuracy, is more likely to ensure
children are reading at an appropriate instructional level than requiring the routine administration of
running records.

**Feedback to Students**

The primary purpose of running records is to assess young readers' decoding strategies to inform
future teaching (Clay, 1993; Ministry of Education, 2000). Using the running record as a teaching
tool on completion of the administration, through feedback, is not addressed in either of these
publications. It could be argued that giving a child feedback may influence success in future
running records and so invalidate these assessments. We find this argument difficult to sustain
because running records are a naturalistic observation of children's reading strategies and if those
strategies can be improved by giving feedback after the record has been taken, then improving those
strategies would appear useful. Recent research on formative feedback (Black & Wilam, 1998)
indicates that one of the most powerful ways in which assessment can be used to promote learning
is to provide students with feedback on their progress. Given the time it takes to administer the
running record and the rich diagnostic information that can be obtained, it would seem appropriate
to give feedback to the students on their reading progress and strategies, and what they need to
change in order to improve. We recorded three potential types of feedback - the child's progress, the
strategies used and undefined feedback such as "Wonderful" and "Thank you". As can be seen from
Table 15, most teachers complied with the guidelines and did not give students feedback on either
progress or strategies. The three teachers giving specific feedback on strategies were notable by
their exception to the norm of generalised undefined feedback, which provides no useful
information for the child to guide future reading behaviours. For example, one of these teachers
following the running record gave 10 separate instances of feedback on strategies. By way of
illustration, one example went like this,

*Teacher: Thank you very much Michael and I really like the way you were
reading here where you said, "Most players pass the ..."

*Michael: Ball

*Teacher: Yes, and you stopped for a minute and you went "b" and you went
back and fixed it up by yourself and then you said, "ball". You fixed up this
one here too when you said "A game of soccer let's for 90 minute" and then
you went back and fixed it up as soon as you said "lets". How did you know
that word wasn't "lets"?
It is doubtful whether those who gave general feedback on strategies helped to advance the children's knowledge of their reading due to the non-specificity of the comments. General feedback included comments such as,

"I liked the way you looked at some of these words really carefully."

No teacher gave specific feedback on the child's progress, although four made general comments, such as,

"You are doing better with your reading comprehension now. Are you trying hard?"

Table 15
Number of teachers giving feedback to students and average number of instances of feedback per teacher who gave feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of teachers (N=24)</th>
<th>Av. no. of instances per teacher who gave feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific feedback on progress</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General feedback on progress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific feedback on strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General feedback on strategies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undefined feedback</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although none of the teachers commented on the reasons for giving this highly generalised feedback, it probably arose from adherence to the accepted procedure for administering running records. If the benefits of the time involved in undertaking running records are to be realized, however, we suggest that feedback, of the kind quoted above, should be used to give students information that is likely to enhance their learning. Such feedback would be one way to enhance the use of the time taken to administer the running records. The most likely outcome of student involvement in the assessment process is to enhance their learning.

Conclusions

The teachers in most of the eight schools involved in this study completed the running records accurately and for this they should be commended. The administration takes a considerable amount of class time, with a conservative estimate approximating 20% of reading teaching time. In view of this time commitment, several issues have arisen from the data in this report. We have listed them below.

Firstly, the main use of establishing text levels and / or classroom groups appears to override the potentially rich diagnostic information that may be obtained from a running record. There is considerable tension between diagnostic uses for classroom teaching and the particular requirements for the aggregation of the data for school-wide purposes. When the data are to be used for the latter purpose, it is important that the teachers complete the running records with all students within a short time frame. This means that administering them is not motivated by a teacher's need to know about an individual child's reading strategies, but rather the need to complete the exercise within the time frame. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that establishing text level is the main use to which the running records were put.
Secondly, despite this focus on correct text level, there appears to be a systematic under-estimation of the students’ reading levels. Although the running records were focused on establishing text levels, these levels in most cases were set below the accepted levels for instructional reading. Our concern is that the teachers’ perceptions of the need for the children to consolidate their reading skills may reflect low expectations of student achievement rather than an accurate analysis of need and may serve to slow progress rather than accelerate it.

Thirdly, in view of the significant time commitment, there may be more efficient and effective assessment instruments for fluent silent readers. Oral reading is a particular skill and one of the few comments by teachers about future programme needs arising from the running records was to provide more oral reading practice for students who lacked fluency in this aspect of their reading. Oral reading, however, is only one of the many reading skills children need to acquire. Those involved in testing the reading skills of fluent readers through running records need to ask the question, "Does the assessment give sufficient information on these readers’ silent reading strategies and skills to justify the time involved?"

Finally, the limited feedback given to students and teachers reduces its usefulness in enhancing the learning of these two groups. Running records potentially provide information about the improvement of practice for students, teachers and managers. Students could learn about more effective reading strategies through feedback from their teachers. Teachers could learn how to better meet individual child needs through strategy diagnosis and how to improve their programmes through the analysis of aggregated data and comparison with benchmarks. Management could find out which programmes in the school needed to be adjusted or improved to better meet the learning needs of students. In no school was this data collection, aggregation of data and feedback evident at all levels.

We realise that some of the issues raised are controversial, but in raising them we hope to stimulate discussion of how best to use running records to raise the reading achievement of students in Mangere and Otara.

References


Chapter Three:
Reporting to Parents in Maori Bilingual Units³

This report focuses on reporting achievement data to parents in Maori Bilingual units in three South Auckland schools. The research was conducted as part of the AUSAD initiative. Eight teachers and 14 parents were interviewed and observations were conducted of parent-teacher interviews. This research has provided us with a glimpse of the reality for both teachers and parents involved in Maori language education.

Maori and non-Maori fare very differently in the New Zealand education system. Maori schooling underachievement can be mapped across a range of indices including the proportion of Maori who achieve school qualifications, the grades of qualifications, curriculum choices, school participation and retention rates, and suspension rates (Ministry of Education 2002). Understanding and addressing the complex causes of under-achievement has led to a considerable body of research (Hattie, 2003).

Educational under-achievement as an on-going process and as a set of outcomes has taken place in a time of educational change, referred to as “Tomorrows Schools”, that was designed to improve achievement, enable greater choice, engage in educationally meaningful ways with parents and provide for greater school community autonomy. Within these reforms Maori language education, specifically Kura Kaupapa Maori, was provided with the legislative and policy framework to develop as a unique approach to immersion and bilingual education.

Bilingual units of the type studied in this research are part of a complex picture of initiatives in Maori language education. The Ministry of Education currently distinguishes five different forms of Maori language education: Kura Kaupapa Maori; Kura Maori (also referred to as Other Immersion Schools); Bilingual Schools; Schools with Immersion Classes; and Schools with Bilingual Classes. Added to these forms of schooling type are also classifications of the level of Maori language being used in the school or classroom. In New Zealand, bilingual units are based within English medium schools. They have varying levels of instruction in Maori. The units are classified according to the percentage of instruction in Maori. These include Level 1: 81 to 100 percent; Level 2: 51 to 80 percent; and Level 3: 31 to 50 percent (Ministry of Education, 2002). Schools are funded according to the level of Maori language being used. In 2002 there were 172 schools with bilingual units.

In the context of addressing Maori educational under-achievement, what do Maori language educational programmes such as the bilingual units offer? Answering this question is somewhat difficult for while there have been major initiatives to improve schooling outcomes and significant research that suggests areas needing greater attention in school performance, there is in fact a great paucity of research about what happens in Maori language educational settings. There are some good reasons for this, such as the lack of educational researchers competent in the Maori language who could work in classrooms and schools. There is also the greater emphasis in Maori language education on developing resources and strengthening the curriculum. Recent studies show a glimmer of the potential and the intriguing difference that Maori language education offers. For example, the recently reported NEMP (National Education Monitoring Project) assessment in Te Reo Maori shows areas where performance by Maori in immersion classrooms were not significantly different from performance by Maori in English medium classrooms but it also pointed to areas where there were differences at the level of certain tasks and in general attitudes, with

³ The authors of this report are Suzanne Clarke, Helen Timperley, Linda Tuhiwai Smith
Maori in immersion classrooms expressing greater confidence in science (Ministry of Education, 2002).

It is difficult to apply research based on immersion programmes directly to bilingual units. The bilingual units fall betwixt and between full immersion in Maori and full immersion in English. Their purpose and individual histories would suggest that they are expected to meet parental expectations about offering Maori language instruction, provide more generalized support for Maori children in a mainstream school and demonstrate a school’s responsiveness to its Maori parents and community. Some bilingual units may also describe themselves as whanau units with greater emphasis placed on the values and sense of belonging being provided for Maori learners. Some bilingual units probably represent a compromise between parental expectations for immersion or bilingual instruction, school responsiveness and actual availability of Maori language resources including a qualified teacher who is fluent in the Maori language. In other words, supporting Maori language is one of many expectations that the bilingual units have to meet.

Internationally, bilingual education incorporates a range of responses to language needs, aspirations and cultural politics. Generally speaking bilingual education is a whole school approach. Bilingual education includes programmes that produce bilingual fluency either through immersion or dual medium instruction and bilingual education that in fact produces fluency in the dominant language only such as English-only programmes in California. Kura Kaupapa Maori is an example of a programme that aims to produce bilingual speakers through immersion in the minority language of instruction first before introducing the more dominant language into instruction. Bilingual schools in New Zealand tend towards a process of dual medium instruction where both languages are used in the programme although there is very little information about how dual medium instruction actually works in practice (Holmes, 1984, Keegan, 1996).

In this study bilingual units are characterized as units that aim for dual medium instruction. Recent New Zealand studies (Doug, 1996; Keegan, 1996; McKinley, 2000) show that Maori parents choose bilingual education as a dual instruction process rather than total immersion because they also want their children to be taught English simultaneously. These parents believe that bilingual education will provide their child with skill in both English and Maori, thus believing they are getting the best of both worlds for education. Bilingual education, however, is not only about language, it is also about parental attitudes and exposing children to the benefits of being bicultural where both cultures are modeled and valued (Tauevihi, 2000). The international research on bilingual education for indigenous peoples shows mixed outcomes for children’s academic progress. Some research shows that bilingualism can have cognitive benefits. For example, Keegan (1996) cites several international studies from Ireland, Wales, United States and Australia where findings showed indigenous children who are taught in a bilingual model are shown to be more successful than indigenous children taught in English-only classes. Cummins (1993) argues that the cognitive benefits include creative thinking, improved verbal and non-verbal skills and better metalinguistic abilities.

The extent to which assumptions about these benefits can be generalized to the New Zealand setting, however, need to be treated with caution for two reasons. The language, Te Reo Maori, is not necessarily the language of the home and the structural arrangements for Maori bilingual units are very different from those in which most of that research has been conducted.
The Whanau Basis of Bilingual Units

Whanau is an important concept that connects family, community and school. The term was acknowledged as significant in the Tomorrows Schools policy document although its specific application to policy was never made clear. Smith (1998) defines whanau as a ‘collective concept, which embraces all the descendants of a significant marriage usually over three or more generations’ (p. 23). Smith also argues that whanau is one of the most important elements of a Kaupapa Maori approach to education. In his view the whanau has a mediating role between school, child and parents and between socio-economic structures of society and Maori cultural values. Historically, the whanau system was the generic process of education for Maori but this was interrupted when colonisation took place and gained with the subsequent migration of Maori to the cities that occurred in the 1950’s and 1960’s (Doug, 1996). This movement extended the meaning of whanau beyond whakapapa or genealogical links to include everyone with vested interest and involvement in a particular activity, such as, Maori bilingual education. Bilingual units are also whanau units. They have been viewed by parents as a way of getting back what was familiar, comfortable and important for them, inclusive of Maori values (McKinley, 2000).

Maori bilingual units function from a cultural base of supporting Maori values. These values include caring for all and working from a whanau base where those involved (the teachers, parents and community) are responsible for the students’ learning (Crump, 1996; Doug, 1996). This validation of Maori values is purported to support students, encourage the sharing of educational decisions between whanau and school and raise student self esteem (Doug, 1996). By using this model of education it is believed that a holistic approach to education is developed where Maori cultural values connect with curriculum, teaching, social grouping and community. Some ways in which this whanau process might be evident in the reporting process in a Maori bilingual unit include kanohi ki te kanohi [face to face] consultation with whanau and school and raise student self esteem (Doug, 1996). Using marae as a meeting venue, respecting Maori tikanga, understanding Maori consultation and decision-making processes all lead to Maori feeling more comfortable in the school setting. Many bilingual units hold whanau hui, which is a process used by Maori bilingual units to consult with their school community.

A major assumption often being made is that what counts as whanau values, whanau relationships and whanau responsibilities are well understood and practiced in a consistent manner. However in the urban context where families have been disconnected from whanau and from iwi and from the Maori language itself, what counts as whanau can not be taken for granted. Bilingual units, like other Maori medium schools, also have an active role in constituting and supporting the whanau that has come together around this specific purpose. The socio-economic reality for many bilingual units and Maori medium schools is that whanau are not always as complete, healthy, employed and connected to Maori values as schools may want. Teachers in the bilingual units are expected through the whanau value system to understand and support parents and whanau. Ideally this would be reciprocated by parents and whanau also supporting the teachers.

Reporting and Assessment

The reporting process is a key part of involving parents in their child’s education and is linked typically to informing parents about their child’s academic achievement levels and strategies to continue the achievement. Reported achievement, however, is dependent on quality assessment information. This section explains what is known about the processes bilingual units use to gather assessment information for the purpose of reporting to parents.
Although Maori medium education can take its beginnings from the Education Amendment Act 1989 when the Tomorrows Schools framework was set in place and when Kura Kaupapa Maori were legislated, it would be fair to claim that the development of the infrastructure that would support Maori medium education has not kept up with demand. As just one example, assessment processes in Maori education are seriously under-developed. Assessment in a minority language such as Maori is more than just an educational assessment task as it involves complex issues of language, culture, intellectual development and translation. For example, care is required when designing assessments for bilingual education because translations of tests from one language to another do not always work. There is still inadequate understanding of the linguistic developmental stages in Te Reo Maori through which children progress and not all children have competency in the language of the assessment (Crombie & Johnson, 1998). This would be especially true in the bilingual units where dual medium instruction is delivered. Put simply, there is often a dilemma in the bilingual units about which language is the appropriate language for assessment in which curriculum area. It would also be fair to claim that many whanau are wary about assessment, possibly because of their personal educational experiences. Teachers, too, are cautious, often needing further training in the socio-linguistic issues and in assessment design to build their confidence in this area. It also takes time, expertise and funding to develop appropriate assessment protocols (Rau, 2001). When assessment is undertaken in bilingual settings the child’s competence in the language also needs to be taken into account.

With the limited availability of standardised assessment tools available for Maori, teachers are having to design and implement their own assessment tools (Rau, 2001). There have been adaptations of formal assessments from English to Maori but there is concern that they do not fit with Kaupapa Maori educational philosophies. For example, the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) is a standardised national assessment implemented in schools when the child turns six years (Rau, 2000; Hollings, 1992), but these translated assessments do not necessarily assess the skills that fit with Maori theories of learning and achievement. Informally designed teacher assessments are likely to continue to be used until the expertise, time and resources needed to ensure robust, standardised assessments, fitting with a Maori world-view, are available. As noted previously asTTle was not available at the time of this study.

An additional difficulty experienced by teachers in Maori bilingual units within a mainstream school setting is the pressure to administer both English and Maori assessments. English assessment schedules are based on the New Zealand curriculum framework but their use could overshadow the need for information on Maori-related aspects of the programme within the bilingual units. According to Kent (1996) a bilingual unit’s policy of assessment should be reflective of their philosophy of learning. This philosophy or kaupapa of the unit should be based on common Maori values with the assessment of the cognition and learning of Maori students compatible with this philosophy.

The Parents’ Perspective

McKinley’s (2000) study involving Maori parents found that parents play an important part in initiating the Maori child’s ability to achieve, be it academic or not. Parents provide the motivation and aspirations for their children, which encourages them to want to be at school. For Maori students, parental expectations and aspirations play an important role in giving education meaning.

McKinley’s (2000) study also found that Maori parents from bilingual units who were involved with schools in some way, prioritised parent-teacher reporting interviews over other forms of involvement because they felt they learned about their child’s academic achievement. However,
generally building confidence of the Maori community to become involved in the school was necessary to promote involvement in the reporting interviews and the more that schools worked on this involvement, the better the communication between the parents and school became.

It is important that what is reported to parents is not a public relations exercise but serves to promote better student achievement. It has been shown that many schools report what they think the parents want to hear, and this tends to be the positive aspects of the child’s learning (Timperley, Robinson & Bullard, 1999). Maori parents, as for any other parents, need accurate information from the teachers on their child if they are to make informed decisions about their child’s education and how to improve learning. The use of benchmarks to achieve this level of accuracy is controversial, but without them parents can develop inaccurate impressions of their child’s achievement. Local benchmarks developed alongside national benchmarks can create a double comparison that can help to contextualise local circumstances.

An additional issue is that the information needs to be understood by the parents. McKinley (2000) found that teacher language, such as the use of the terms ‘curriculum’ or ‘unit standard’. This can be unfamiliar to parents, and lead to misunderstanding of the information shared. McKinley (2000) also found that parents were interested in how teachers interacted with their child and how their child was coping socially. The parents viewed self-esteem and social interactions with teachers and peers to be of similar importance to that of academic achievement.

**The Current Study**

In this study we sought to answer three questions about the reporting process in three Maori bilingual units. These questions were, “What was reported and how was it reported?”, “What conditions determined the reporting process?” and “What conditions influenced parental involvement?” Answers to the questions were pursued by observing teacher-parent reporting interviews, followed by separate research interviews with the teachers and parents.

A summary of the findings in relation to each of these questions follows. Firstly, the reporting process consisted of a brief (5-15 minute) parent interview in two of the schools accompanied in both cases by written information focusing primarily on achievement in English. Nationally benchmarked information was provided, although this was sometimes difficult to understand and in one school parents had access to the written information only during the interview itself. Portfolios of student work were used in all schools. Reporting on the child’s achievement in Te Reo was rarely mentioned during the 21 interviews and when it was, the quality of the information depended primarily on the teachers’ personal judgments.

Secondly, a mix of conditions determined the reporting process. The type of written report and the structure of the teacher-parent interviews were determined by the mainstream school to which the bilingual unit was attached and was not always seen as appropriate by the unit staff.

The limited reporting of Te Reo Maori was related to the level of use of Te Reo in the bilingual units. This use depended on the child’s competence in the language rather than bearing a relationship to the unit’s classification of the percentage of language instruction because the teachers did not believe it to be in the children’s best interests to teach curriculum knowledge in a language in which the children were insufficiently competent to understand the content.

Formal assessments in Te Reo Maori were rare because few protocols were available and those that were available were considered inappropriate because of the differing amount of time devoted to Te
Reo in different Maori medium settings. The bilingual unit teachers believed that their children would be disadvantaged by comparisons with students who participated in Maori immersion programmes. The schools or teachers generally designed the assessment tools used to report Maori-related aspects of the instruction. Neither the participating parents nor their children were fluent in Te Reo Maori and there was some confusion about expectations of attaining fluency in Te Reo Maori. Some parents thought that by sending their children to a bilingual unit they would become fluent in Te Reo. In fact, students whose parents were involved in this study did not become fluent in Te Reo.

Thirdly, in relation to the question about the conditions influencing parental involvement in the reporting process, nearly all the parents reported that they very satisfied with the reporting process, but half indicated that they would have liked more information on their child’s competence in Te Reo Maori. All units held additional whanau hui during which parents were encouraged to find out about the programme and participate in their child’s education in various ways. In many cases, the teachers placed greater value on this process than did the parents. The interviewed parents all expressed a strong commitment to being involved in their children’s education irrespective of whether their own educational experiences were positive or negative, or whether their own parents had been involved in their education. Sometimes negative experiences and lack of parental involvement in the parents’ own schooling provided the incentive for these parents to ensure the pattern was not repeated.

**Method**

Eight teachers and 14 parents from three South Auckland schools took part in the research. All schools were classified as decile one, and two of the three were participating in the AUSAD initiative. Twenty-one parent-teacher interviews were observed in two schools (the third did not have parent teacher interviews in the middle of the year), followed by research interviews in all three schools of the teachers and parents separately. All interviews were undertaken by the first author who has iwi affiliations with Ngati Maniapoto, Ngati Mahuta and Waikato.

The research process involved three phases. As two of the schools were participating in AUSAD, the first phase involved contact and consultation with the AUSAD Maori coordinator to set protocols for this study. In the second phase the interviewer met with senior staff members from the schools and Maori bilingual units recommended by the AUSAD Maori coordinator. Relevant Maori hui were attended to seek consent of the participants. The interviewer continued to attend hui associated with the bilingual units to maintain contact with whanau and staff. The third phase of the research process involved audio-taping the parent-teacher interviews and subsequently interviewing the participating parents and teachers individually. Most parent interviews took place in whanau homes. In the final phase, feedback was given to the schools involved in the research.

**The Participating Schools**

The research was conducted within three co-educational, multi-cultural South Auckland schools including two primary schools and one intermediate school. All the Maori Bilingual Units were part of the mainstream school. School A is a primary school with classes catering for students from Year 0 – Year 6. The Maori bilingual unit consisted of two classes catering for different age levels from Year 0 to Year 6 and were categorized as level three (31 – 51% instructions in Maori) by the Ministry of Education. Two teachers and two parents participated in the research. This school held parent interviews early in term one before the study commenced and did not hold parent-teacher
interviews at mid-year. However, written reports and portfolios were sent home at this time so these were used as the basis for the interviews with the parents.

School B was not involved in the AUSAD initiative. It is a primary school catering for students from Year 0 to Year 6 and was also as categorized as level three (31 – 51% instruction in Maori). The unit consisted of three classrooms catering for different ages of students. Three teachers and nine parents agreed to participate.

School C was participating in the AUSAD project. It is an intermediate school with Y7 and Y8 students. The unit consisted of two classes, both catering for Year 7 and Year 8 and was categorized as level two (51 – 80% instruction in Maori). The interviewed parents were selected by the teachers who based their selection on parent-teacher interview timetable.

**Participants**

Eight teachers participated in the research, with two teachers from School A, three teachers from School B, and two teachers from School C. They comprised six women and two men, all of Maori descent, with ages ranging from twenty to fifty-five years. Of the seven teachers, three identified themselves as native speakers. Their teaching experience ranged from six months to seventeen years. Two teachers taught Year 0 to Year 3, three taught Year 4 to Year 6, and two taught at the intermediate Year 7 to Year 8 level. The teachers were all trained to teach in mainstream education. Some teachers began their bilingual careers immediately after training and some had taught in mainstream schools prior to moving to bilingual education.

Fourteen parents participated in total. Two processes were used to select the parents. The first involved parents volunteering at whanau hui meetings to participate in parent-teacher observations and follow up interviews. In the second, parents were nominated by teachers, because they had agreed to attend parent-teacher interviews. Teachers drew on their knowledge of parents, and their previous participation with the unit and school in the past. All but one parent were of Maori descent but spoke English, rather than Maori at home. The remaining parent was from the Cook Islands.

In School A, two parents nominated by the classroom teachers took part. In School B, seven parents chose to participate. They were approached at whanau hui meetings, and some were nominated by the bilingual teachers. In School C, five parents nominated by the teachers participated.

Most of the students in this study were educated from the beginning of their schooling within a Maori bilingual setting with three of the 14 attending Te Kohanga Reo before starting school. Details of the number of years in bilingual education are provided in Table 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years student in bilingual education (n= 14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time spent in Bilingual Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Kohanga reo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All their current school education [Y 0 – Y 8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O – 1 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years</td>
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</table>
Interviews
The parent-teacher interviews were observed and recorded at the school. The follow-up interviews of the teachers and parents individually occurred over a period of 12 weeks. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed at a later date.

Twenty-one teacher parent interviews were observed and audio taped (and later transcribed) in order to understand what information the teachers and parents shared about the student’s academic achievement and other aspects of development.

Initially 32 individual parent interviews were scheduled. However, there were many difficulties with completing all the interviews (see Table 17). Scheduling interviews was a time consuming part of the study, however it was believed to be important that the parents did not feel pressured into participating. Some parents worked, were studying, or volunteered at Te Kohanga Reo. Most of the parents indicated that they were unsure if they had enough to offer. However, reassurance from the researcher and teachers encouraged most of the parents to participate. Contact was made with parents by phone or a home visit. Fourteen parents were interviewed.

Table 17
Contacting Parents for the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times contact attempted before interview</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 times</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 times</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An additional time consuming activity was to obtain permission from parents to access their child’s written reporting material (such as portfolios and report cards) then collect them from the school at the time of the interview.

Of the parents interviewed, two parents admitted to not being able to understand the portfolio or the written report because they could not read sufficiently well.

The selection process inevitably biased the parent sample. However, the observations of twenty-one parent/teacher interviews and follow-up interviews of fourteen Maori parents and seven teachers in decile one Maori bilingual units are unique in Maori education in Aotearoa.

The parent interview schedule (Appendix A) asked for background information about the use of Te Reo in the home, the parents’ own experience of schooling and their beliefs about bilingual education. It also asked about the parents’ beliefs about and understanding of the schools’ reporting process of student achievement and the preferred form of reporting. The specific curriculum focus of the research undertaken was speaking and reading Te Reo Maori and English. It investigated parents’ understanding of the content and information provided by the teacher, and the parents’ expectations of the school.

The teacher’s interview explored similar themes (see Appendix B). First, background information was sought on the teachers’ backgrounds and the language classification of the unit. Inquiry was made into the assessments used for each of the four curricula (speaking and reading Te Reo Maori,
speaking and reading English) and how they were used to inform parents of the child’s academic achievement. Next, the teachers were asked about the reporting process itself and how it was determined. The final part of the teachers’ interview schedule explored the links between teachers, parents and community.

Results

This section is divided into three, each of which addresses a different research question. The first section examines what was reported and how it was reported with the second examining the conditions that determined the reporting process. The third analyses the background conditions that influenced parental participation in the reporting process.

What Was Reported and How It Was Reported

In this section, we first describe the format and content of the written reports, then the content of the parent-teacher interview.

Written reports

The three units used three main forms for reporting (a portfolio of student work, a written report and parent-teacher interviews) but the process of reporting was varied. Two of the three schools used written reports that were in the same format as those used in the mainstream part of the school. They presented grades and marks with space to write comments. Comments related to both academic achievement and social characteristics. Reporting achievement specific to Te Reo or Tikanga Maori was not part of these mainstream reports. One school had an attachment for this purpose but the teachers in the other school fitted the bilingual outcomes into the mainstream report if they could. All schools used portfolios that contained examples of student work, including written tasks in Te Reo Maori. Two schools also held parent-teacher interviews at mid-year lasting between 5 and 15 minutes.

In the remainder of this section, each school’s reporting process will be explained followed by a brief analysis of the written materials i.e. portfolio and written reports.

School A used portfolios and written reports. They were sent home, and return within a week was requested. Parents were invited to meet with teachers if they wished to, however, no formal interview evening was held at mid-year. The written report had three sections. The first section rated the student’s achievement on essential skills using the letters C for consistently, U for usually, and N for needs more effort. The second section reported essential learning areas of the curriculum. Teachers rated students on their achievement level and effort. The rating codes for the levels were letters representing A for advanced, B for middle of level and E for early stages of level. There was a diagram showing the continuum for levels one to three against year levels. The third section of the written report allowed teachers to make general comments.

The portfolios had examples of students’ work in most areas of the curriculum including examples of Te Reo Maori written tasks as well as examples of spelling tests, basic fact maths, written language and handwriting samples. Evidence was completed specifically for the portfolio.

School B held parent-teacher interviews and used portfolios as the basis for the interview. The portfolios were similar to those in School A and were sent home a week before the parent-teacher interviews then returned to the school. They contained examples of student work in most curriculum
areas including written Te Reo Maori. Assessments had been specifically designed to be completed for the portfolio.

School C combined the portfolio, written reports and parent/teacher interviews. The portfolio and written report were given to the parents when they attended the parent/teacher interview, although some of the material in the portfolio had been sent home at various stages throughout the year. The portfolios themselves were not taken home so the parents had to assimilate the relevant information during the interview itself. The bilingual unit teachers used the schools’ written report format for English and included an attached report to inform parents of the student achievements in Te Reo Maori. The general report had curriculum subject areas based on the New Zealand curriculum framework. For each subject, a list of skills was provided against which the teacher rated the student using a rating code of achievement of A for outstanding, B for average and C for needs attention and there were spaces for teachers to make a written comment on school activities. On the back of the report teachers rated the students’ development of skills using the same rating scale. A key explaining the meaning of the ratings was provided for the parents but the benchmark used for the ratings was not indicated. Finally boxes for teachers’ and principal’s comments were provided.

Te Reo Maori report was on a separate sheet. Teachers rated students using three levels and ticked the appropriate unbenchmarked ratings. Student achievements in Te Reo Maori were related to oral, writing and reading Te Reo Maori. In addition, four parts non-academic aspects of Maori culture and values were rated. The areas included Tikanga Maori, Tautoko me awhina (support and help each other), Manaakitanga me aroha (respect and love to others), whanaungatanga (working co-operatively with each other). There was an area for the teacher to make written comments.

The parent-teacher interview
The following analysis of the topics discussed during the parent-teacher interviews was based on observations and tape recordings of the 21 interviews in Schools B and C. Interviews lasted between five and fifteen minutes. A line count of the parent-teacher interviews indicated that the parents spoke only 30% of the time, with the teachers speaking for 70% of the time. Most of the time involved teachers informing parents of student progress and achievement.

Topics Discussed
The main categories of topics discussed are presented in Table 18. Academic related topics were discussed in 20 of the 21 interviews and included the child’s academic progress (16 interviews), homework (six interviews), discussion of class work (five interviews) and teaching strategies and programmes (four interviews). These discussions were typically supported by reference to the portfolios. In only five of these interviews did any discussion occur related to Te Reo Maori (reading or speaking), and only two of these related to the teacher reporting on the child’s use of Te Reo in school. In the other three, the parent talked about the child’s use of Te Reo outside of the school.

Discussions about homework involved six parents checking that they were supporting their child enough at home and teachers offering extra homework programmes for the holidays. Inquiries from parents about teaching strategies and programmes were related to explanations of programmes of work, current classroom projects, and the written language programme with the most popular being spelling. In two of the interviews, the teachers identified academic goals for the students and in two others, the parents identified their goals for the student. On none of these occasions were the goals discussed or the implications for the parent or teacher identified.
Table 18
Topic of discussion at Parent-Teacher Interviews (n=21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>No of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Reo Maori</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic related e.g. behaviour</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Typically, when teachers talked about a child’s achievement in a particular curriculum area, they made reference to the child’s portfolio (School B and C) or written report (School C). For parents, however, some aspects of this process were potentially confusing. For example, the term “levels”, a commonly referred to benchmark, was used in four different ways for different curriculum areas and by different teachers. The first reference related to the students’ chronological age as illustrated in the following quote: “She is working at an above average level for her age”. The second referred to the levels within the New Zealand curriculum framework: “Those ones at level two and level three at the top end of level two are very similar. If you have a look at the graph in the curriculum and actually they blend into each other.” The third referred to reading recovery levels: “I wrote down here because at the time she was at level 14, but I had suspicions then that was just too easy for her so I thought. ‘Oh, I’ll put her up another group to level 17’. I’ve just tested her again recently on 18; I think she’s come out too easy at that level as well. Yeah so she’s doing really well at reading.” The fourth was based on school standards, which were not nationally standardized, as in the following example, “Xx is one of our top students not only in the class but actually in the school, he is working at level three, at times he is at level two. Our levels range from minus two to level four. Level two means he is working at level two but they ought to do some things at level three. Level three is working at level three and is able to work at level four.”

The use of these different references to levels is potentially confusing for parents and arises from simultaneously using curriculum levels as assessment standards and assessments that are standardized in terms of levels, mixed with locally developed benchmarks.

Homework was also discussed in six of the interviews; however, none of these discussions included how the parents could support the child at home.

Non-academic related topics were also discussed. Impending field trips, sports trips and sporting events or activities already completed were included. The most popular non-academic topic that occurred in 14 of 16 interviews involved teachers and parents discussing student behaviour and attitudes at school.

Conditions Determining the Reporting Process
A mix of conditions determined the reporting process, including the position of the bilingual units within mainstream schools, the amount of Te Reo used in the units and the associated assessment processes.

The Organization of the Bilingual Units
The form of the written report did not appear to be particularly important to the teachers, but all stated that they would have preferred a style of reporting that incorporated a bilingual perspective. All interviewed bilingual unit teachers were required to use mainstream school reporting processes, and stated that the teachers had not been consulted about the special needs of the bilingual units.
regarding an appropriate reporting process as far as they knew. The process had been decided prior to their employment. As one teacher explained:

*I think they [senior management] have looked at various formats of reporting over the years and I’ve often said, “Why haven’t we got Maori or Te Reo or something in them?” I don’t know, it’s obviously to do with Board of Trustees once again and senior management perhaps. And we’ve had no input in terms of the bilingual unit otherwise we would have been in there.*

Others referred to “the boss” or “ERO’s” recommendations. However, one of the interviewed teachers believed that being Maori made it Maori reporting as she explained:

*I’m a fluent speaker, my Maoriness will always show through, even if I were in a high decile school you couldn’t hide that. And that is prominent when I’m speaking Maori with the Maori speakers or what we have with our parents when I switch to English it’s (Maoriness) still there.*

Most parents (12 of the 14), on the other hand, reported high levels of satisfaction with the process. The two who were unhappy complained about the complexity of information presented in the written reports and portfolios. Despite these high levels of satisfaction, 50% of the parents indicated that would like more information on achievement in Te Reo Maori.

Most teachers (6 of 7) and parents (7 of 14) valued the parent-teacher interview as the main reporting vehicle. The two teachers quoted gave different reasons for their preferences.

**Teacher One:** *Maori are better orally including us Maori teachers, we are better at oral than at writing and yet how can you put an oral thing in a portfolio.*

**Teacher Two:** *When I’m face to face with a parent I feel I can be honest, because it is not a record written.*

The next most popular reporting format was the portfolio, sometimes in combination with the interviews (6 of 14 teachers; 4 of 14 parents). Five parents, all from School C, preferred the school’s combination of interviews, portfolios and written reports as illustrated by the following response:

*I think all three together helped explain anything that I wasn’t sure of so when you are reading the portfolio you’re sort of not happy with something or you are over excited about something then the teachers were able to talk through with you on the level the kid’s at. Then the report I guess was the confirmation of the discussion with the teacher and looking at the portfolio.*

However, two of these five parents felt they did not get enough time to properly view the portfolio or written report, but were too shy to tell the teachers of this. No parents preferred the written report alone.

Nearly all parents (13 of the 14) and most of the teachers (4 of the 7) viewed the reporting process as an important part of building a relationship with the other. This difference between the parents and teachers can be accounted for partly by the teachers’ preference to build relationships through the whanau hui. All units held such hui on a regular basis as part of their identity as a bilingual unit. It was described as a time when all those interested in the bilingual unit are welcome to meet at the
school, discuss what was happening in the unit and raise any issues. All seven teachers viewed it as an important link with parents. These teachers’ responses are representative:

Parents are part of the kid’s education. It is a time where we can all get together.

To get parents actively involved. Build a relationship, to hear their ideas – when we listen it values parents.

This forum did not appear to be as highly valued by the parents as the teachers with only seven of the fourteen parents reporting that they attended their bilingual unit whanau hui. Even though these parents valued the interaction with teachers and other parents, two of the seven indicated that they found it frustrating at times because the same parents turned up, and sometimes the teachers did not listen to the parents’ ideas.

**Bilingual Education and Te Reo**

The second condition that influenced the reporting process, particularly of Te Reo Maori achievement, was the participants’ perceptions of bilingual education. There appeared to be a common understanding among the teachers that bilingual education involved teaching partly in English and partly in Maori across all the curriculum areas, together with incorporating tikanga Maori. However the extent to which teaching in Te Reo Maori occurred for individual children depended on the child’s competence in Te Reo.

Three of the seven teachers correctly identified the schools’ formal classification of the level of bilingualism, but for two of these teachers the classification was irrelevant because it did not impact on what they were teaching or the percentage of Te Reo Maori that was being taught. Rather, the percentage of Te Reo was influenced by the students’ ability in the language. Teachers taught in Te Reo Maori only if the child’s grasp of the language was sufficient to understand the concept being taught.

The other four teachers were not sure about the classification of their bilingual unit. These four teachers thought that it was possibly the lowest level of Maori usage. They thought of bilingualism as teaching the same topics as those taught in the mainstream but adapted to give them a Maori perspective. One teacher’s response illustrates this perspective:

Every curriculum area I do, I have a Maori focus in it. Our curriculum areas are often defined by our mainstream syndicate plan. Because for me bilingual is a bit of everything Maori, so no one said I could do it and no one said I could not do it, so I do it to what I think.

Bilingual units were described by one of the teachers more as a place where teaching had “Maoriness”, rather than a specific language focus, as was evident in her response:

Teaching bilingual education is about being Maori and teaching Maori and English together. It is about Maoriness. The use of voice, body language signals and the classroom tone.

At the time of the interviews, the teachers reported that none of the students in any of the bilingual units could speak Te Reo Maori fluently. This level of Te Reo competence was influenced partly by the limited amount of Te Reo spoken in the homes. The 14 parents reported that English was the predominant language and in five whanau Maori was never spoken. Seven other parents indicated
that Te Reo was used “a little”, mainly in song or when the parents asked the child to practice their mihi. There were only two of the 14 whanau where the child would use some Te Reo in conversation with their grandparents.

The parents’ perceptions of bilingual education showed a similar mix of ideas to those of the teachers. Eight of the 14 had thought it involved a mix of learning Maori and English, with one of these parents surprised that her child could not speak Te Reo by Year 8. Three parents’ responses illustrate the range of understandings.

Getting familiar with both languages – and getting familiar with Maori actually. English being his first language at the moment.

It is like half English and Maori.

The Maori would be the kapa haka, what happens on a marae, customs and traditions and Te Reo. The English half would be the school curriculum like English and maths.

Three of the others were unable or reluctant to give an opinion as illustrated by the following quotes:

Ahh... I never really thought about it, my husband wants them to do it.

I'm not too sure, I think I have an understanding but I would prefer not to tell you because I might be wrong.

The remaining three viewed bilingual education as the learning of the Maori culture.

Making our kids culturally aware of their own culture. As well as giving them a sense of identity.

The level of language instruction in Te Reo Maori seemed to be dependent on the child’s ability to comprehend the language. Tikanga Maori had a strong influence and this seemed to be a reason why parents put their children into the bilingual units. However, most parents had an expectation that Te Reo would also be taught. The reality, however, was that this occurred to a varying extent and was related to the child’s knowledge of the language before entering the unit. It appears that a spiral effect of not being fluent in Te Reo Maori prior to attending the unit led to little Te Reo Maori being used because the child could not understand the concepts in Maori. As a result, the concepts were taught in English, with the curriculum emphasis being more closely related to Tikanga Maori than to Te Reo Maori. It is understandable, therefore, that the reporting process on academic achievement focused primarily on achievement in English.

**Assessment and Te Reo Maori**

A number of different assessments were used to assess reading achievement in English and were evident in the reporting process. However, the limited availability of relevant assessments in reading and speaking Te Reo, or English oral language, meant that these assessments were primarily locally developed. The status of the units as being neither Kura Kaupapa Maori nor English mainstream presented special assessment challenges for the teachers.
Speaking Te Reo Maori

The lack of availability of national assessments in Te Reo meant that teachers were reliant on teacher-generated assessments comprising observations and anecdotal notes of students’ participation in class, formal speech making, whakapapa, mihi, and general conversation. The three teachers who were native speakers were confident that they could assess competencies in speaking Te Reo Maori, as evidenced by this teacher’s response.

*Conversationally at my level, I can assess them at any level and it is a native speaker assessment. The child can talk to me about what they did last night when they got home after school, because they can tell me about the sorts of programmes they watched, everything about them.*

*For speaking Te Reo Maori conversationally I can give them a level and the assessment is a native speaker assessment.*

Another two teachers believed that it was unrealistic to assess consistently because of the wide range of student competency in Te Reo because both students’ and teachers’ first language was English. One teacher’s response represents these sentiments:

*There’s no one way in terms of how you assess Te Reo Maori; everyone has got their own variations, depending on the teachers’ competencies. It also depends on the tamariki and what they know and understand.*

Reading Te Reo Maori

All teachers said they used school developed or teacher generated assessments to assess reading in Te Reo Maori. Three of the seven teachers reported that they were aware of some nationally standardised tests for reading in Te Reo Maori, but they believed that those tests were more suited to students being educated in total immersion Maori. They believed that the children in their bilingual units were not sufficiently fluent in Te Reo for these tests to be used as appropriate assessment tools.

The most popular assessment tool teachers used to assess reading Te Reo Maori was comprehension type activities, along with cloze activities. The teachers based the tools of assessment on those similar to assessing English. One teacher did not use any specific assessments but made a general comment on attitude to reading Te Reo Maori in class. It was evident by further probing that this teacher did not believe that he had the experience to develop Te Reo Maori assessments.

Speaking English assessment

Overall the teachers said they also used school-developed assessments for speaking English. These comprised observations and anecdotal notes of speeches, poetry recitals and the child’s general conversation during curriculum topics or conversation.

Influences on Parent Involvement

The final research question asked about the influences on parent involvement in the reporting process and their child’s schooling. Two aspects were examined, how confident the parents felt about going to the school and the influence of their own schooling experiences on their current participation.

Parents’ feelings about approaching the school

The majority of the parents indicated they were confident to be involved with their child’s school and could see the positive spin-offs for their children. All the Maori bilingual units involved in this
The study had open door policies and a whanau feeling, where they attempted to make parents feel valued and part of the bilingual unit. They encouraged the parents into the school, and made them feel very welcome when they were there. All the parents stated they were not afraid to go to the school to seek help, or visit their child’s teacher.

The interviewed parents all reported that being involved with their child’s education would lead to greater success with academic outcomes because schools need their (parents) support. As one parent’s response that represents other parents illustrates:

Because without the parents’ support the schools have got nothing to go on. We need each other to get to know the most about the child.

Twelve of the fourteen parents interviewed specifically stated that their role in the reporting process was to be supportive of their children and their schoolwork at school.

You’re the mother you can’t blame it on the system you know it is up to you to support the child

My role is to nurture and raise my child, physically, educationally, academically, emotionally, socially as they are growing up through their schooling years.

My son, he knows I am 100% involved in his learning, especially after I have been to report evening and we sit and talk about how things are going.

Others put greater emphasis on learning about their child’s achievement at school. However, one of these parents wanted only positive information about her child.

The influence of parents’ experience of own schooling
Parents’ experience of their own schooling, whether positive or negative, also influenced their attitudes towards their involvement in their children’s schooling. They were asked to rate how they felt about their own schooling on a scale of one to ten, with one indicating “bad experience” and ten indicating a “great experience” with five indicating a “neutral” stance.

The majority of the parents interviewed indicated that they enjoyed school with 12 of the 14 parents giving a rating between eight and ten indicating they had a great experience at school. Parents’ reasons for liking school included the teachers who understood them as children, the family support for their education and the fun they had experienced as students.

Lack of their own parents’ involvement and transient parents were linked with the bad experiences for two of the parents. Bad experiences were also linked with the transition from primary to secondary schooling. Although the interviewed parents reported that they enjoyed school as children, their parents typically had not been involved and they said that they would have liked this involvement. Even though the interviewed parent liked school they said that they wanted their parents’ involvement.

The two parents whose own parents had been involved were positively influenced by this experience. This involvement had acted as a role model for themselves as parents, as attested by their statements:

I watched my own parents being involved and just expected to do the same.
Another parent stated that her husband’s parents, who had taken an active role in their son’s schooling, had influenced her and there seemed to be an expectation that the same would occur for their grandchildren. However, the majority of the parents were influenced by a lack of support from their own parents as shown by the following response:

*My parents did not support me, so I make sure I support my child.*

Reasons given for lack of their parents’ involvement included; the parents were too busy working, too busy socialising, or did not speak English, so were shy to go to the school. One parent told how her grandparents raised her until she was old enough to attend high school, then she was sent to live with her parents:

*Primary school was great but secondary was the pits. I was living with my grandparents for primary who helped me and came to the school when they needed to, then I moved to Auckland to live with my parents who I didn’t get along with. My parents didn’t even know I was at school, mainly because they were alcoholic and not interested in my education. That is why I am making sure I am there for my daughter.*

For all these parents, being involved in their child’s education was important to them. Both positive and negative experiences during their own schooling had provided the motivation for their continuing commitment to involvement in their own child’s education.

**Discussion**

Most of the parents participating in this study were highly satisfied with the reporting process, felt confident to approach the school and believed that they were welcome once they arrived. All the bilingual units went to considerable trouble to involve parents, both through the reporting process and through unit-specific whanau hui.

The frequency with which the children’s academic achievement was discussed indicated that this aspect was important to both teachers and parents. Parents understood the importance of being involved in their child’s education, regardless of their own educational experiences as students, or the involvement of their own parents. McKinley (2000) found similar beliefs in her research, which identified that parents wanted to be involved in their child’s education.

What was most surprising to the researchers was the limited reporting of, or discussion about, the children’s competence in Te Reo Maori. A number of conditions influenced this limited discourse. In one school, the written reports did not have dedicated space for this curriculum area. A second issue in all the units was the varied understanding of the role of the bilingual units in teaching Te Reo Maori. Formal Ministry of Education classification of the units was considered irrelevant because the teachers faced a more immediate dilemma. If they taught in Te Reo when the children had limited understanding of the language, the children were likely to experience difficulty in understanding the concepts taught. If they did not teach in Te Reo, then the children’s competence in the language was likely to be compromised. Given that both parents and teachers wanted to ensure that the children did not get behind in either English language or curriculum content, most teachers used English as the language of instruction. At the same time, this set up a cycle of the students having limited opportunities to become competent in Te Reo, as a result of which none of
them were considered by their teachers to be fluent. The parents’ limited fluency in Te Reo did not allow them to be in a position to make an independent judgment of their children’s skills in the language. Some parents understood that the units were more about having instructional practices consistent with Tikanga Maori rather than speaking Te Reo Maori. On the other hand, some parents expected that their children would become fluent in Te Reo.

The use of assessment protocols was influenced by this emphasis on the use of English. Assessments in English were the same as those used in the mainstream school and reported in the same way. The few available assessments in Te Reo Maori were not considered suitable for the students in bilingual programmes because these assessments were developed for students in immersion programmes. The teachers believed that their students would be disadvantaged by the use of such assessments, as a result of which they mostly developed their own.

Given the parents’ commitment to be involved in their children’s education, and their choice of bilingual education for their students, discussing their aspirations for their children and the place of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori in instruction might help to clarify mutual expectations between the parents and teachers involved.

References


Appendix A

Parent Interview Schedule

A. Background
   1. What is the language spoken in the home?
   2. Does your child speak Maori at home?
   3. How long has your child been educated in a bilingual Maori setting?
   4. What does bilingual education mean to you?

B. The Reporting Process
   5. Do you like the way the parent-teacher interviews occur?
   6. At this school, this is how they report to parents, how do you find that?
   7. What would you prefer? Why would you prefer this way?
   8. Would you like to change this school’s reporting process? (How would they change it? What would they do differently? Why?)
   9. Do you feel you have enough information to be fully informed of your child’s academic achievement?

C. Parents’ understanding of child’s academic achievement from reported evidence
   10. Does the written material show you evidence of assessment for speaking Te Reo Maori?
   11. Does the written material show you evidence of assessment for speaking English?
   21. From this school’s reporting process do you understand your child’s achievement in speaking Te Reo Maori?
   22. From this school’s reporting process, do you understand your child’s achievement in speaking English?
   23. From this school’s reporting process, do you understand your child’s achievement in reading Te Reo Maori?
   24. From this school’s reporting process, do you understand your child’s achievement in reading English?

D. Personal School Experience
   25. When you were at school as a child – how would you rate your experience on a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being “a really bad experience” – 10 “a great experience”?
   26. What is your reason for rating this?
27. Does your personal experience of school or your parents’ experience with your schooling influence the way you interact with your child’s school? (How?, Why?)

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Schedule

Background Information
1. What is your understanding of bilingual education?
2. What level of language is this bilingual unit?

Reporting Process
3. Do you as the teacher report in English or Maori or both?
4. Can you tell me what lead the school to report to parents in this way?

Assessment Process
5. Does the unit’s classification level of Te Reo Maori impact on assessments you use for Speaking Te Reo, Reading Te Reo, Speaking English, Reading English?
6. Do you have specific assessments for assessing Speaking Te Reo Maori, Reading Te Reo Maori, Speaking English, Reading English?
7. What do you see as the differences between the Maori assessments you use and the English assessments you use?
8. Do you use this assessment information in any way to inform parents?
14. Is the achievement of speaking Maori, reading Maori, speaking English, reading English related or compared to:

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Reporting to Parents
9. Is there anything that constrains the way you report to parents?
10. Are there any changes you would make to the parent-teacher interview process?
11. If you could is there anything you would change in the reporting format of this unit?
12. In your opinion is this the best way of reporting?

Parent / Community
13. Do you get any information from parents or the community about the special strengths of the children in your class in speaking Te Reo Maori?
14. Do you find this information relevant to the child’s classroom assessment process?
15. What do you see as key things to building relationships with parents?
Chapter Four: Assessment and its Impact on Teaching Practice in Written Language

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the assessment information used by a group of teachers of Year Two students to guide their writing programmes. Assessment was once thought of as a summative activity that was undertaken at the end of teaching a topic or unit of work and used to judge the achievement of a student in a specific topic at a specific time (Johnston et. al., 1995; and Wiggins, 1990). Recent research into the nature of assessment as a more formative process that is designed to promote learning (Black, 1998; Hattie et. al., 1996; and Zessoules & Gardner, 1991) has reframed the notion for researchers, administrators, and practitioners. Teachers are now encouraged to evaluate student learning on an ongoing basis and to use the information to promote that learning.

Assessment policy in New Zealand reflects this shift in thinking. The Curriculum Update recently issued by the Ministry of Education in 2001 states that “The primary purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students’ learning and the quality of learning programmes.” (www.TKI.org.nz). The document goes on to provide more specific advice to teachers, for example,

“At the classroom level, the purpose of gathering assessment information is to provide the most appropriate learning opportunities for students; provide feedback to students and identify their next learning steps; develop partnerships with parents; modify teaching programmes; ensure continuity of education for individual students” (n.p.).

A key assumption underlying this reconceptualisation is that assessment should provide teachers with information about how to improve the quality of learning to achieve better outcomes for students (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1996; Husen, 1994; and Wiggins, 1990). The New Zealand Assessment Policy (2001) encourages teachers to assess the knowledge and experience students bring to the learning task and to plan and/or refine teaching and learning programmes to meet individual or group needs. Teachers are advised to do this through setting specific and challenging goals, selecting assessment tools and procedures that will provide the most useful information in relation to the goals, and provide students with descriptive feedback about their achievement.

Various researchers (e.g. Brualdi, 1998; Butler & Winne, 1995; Wiggins, 1990; and Wiliam & Black, 1996) have claimed that the advantages arising from this assessment approach arise from several associated processes and outcomes. Teachers come to know their students in relation to the student’s own previous performances without comparison to others and, therefore, focus on creating an instructional match between students’ current knowledge and their teaching activities (Ryba, 1995). Both teachers and students are more likely to focus on learning process knowledge when the constraints of having to assign a final grade are removed. In addition, the formative process is more likely to lead to teachers giving specific feedback to students during the instructional process, rather than focusing on assigning a grade at the end of a unit of work about which neither can do anything (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Finally, teachers and students are more likely to become risk takers in terms of asking questions, having a go at something that appears to be difficult or using strategies and activities that appear complicated and time consuming.

4 The authors of this report are Mali Allen, Helen Timperley and Judy Parr
A variety of reasons for ineffective assessment practice have been identified. These reasons include time constraints, requirements placed on teachers by others, and personal and professional beliefs about the value of the assessment process. Time constraints walk hand-in-hand with student numbers and school requirements, such as demands for wide curriculum coverage as well as the extra curricula requirements placed on teachers and students (Aitken, 2000). This problem of time can lead to negative connotations being associated with assessment if teachers perceive it as yet another increase in their workload.

Additional complications arise when assessment is used for both summative and formative purposes. If summative, assessments are likely to be grade or mark oriented rather than informing the learning process and the understanding of how the taught skills and knowledge are being used by students (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1988). The accountability overtones of summative assessment may also lead to teachers dwelling on the deficiencies of the students rather than thinking about how to develop further the students’ current achievement levels (Carver & Scheier, 1990).

**Assessment and Instruction**

If assessment is to enhance student learning, it needs to be consistent with and integrated into the instructional process, so that instruction can be adapted accordingly (Calfee & Hiebert, 1991; Perrone, 1991; Stiggins, 1999). Such integration demands several types of knowledge, the first of which is an in-depth knowledge of curriculum content and associated processes so that the assessment criteria reflect deep, rather than superficial constructs associated with the content area. Knowledge of the developmental progression involved in acquiring that content knowledge serves to facilitate the formation of assessment rubrics sensitive to the progress being made towards its acquisition. In addition, more specific knowledge related to individual students, their current understanding of the curriculum content together with appropriate short and long-term goals (or targets) allows teachers to use assessment information more precisely for individual students and to judge the adequacy of progress they are making towards achieving them.

Given these complex demands for assessment to be effective, it is not surprising that various problems with teachers’ assessment practice have been identified (Crooks, 1988; Black, 1993). The first of these is the frequent focus of teachers on rote learning and, therefore, regurgitation of isolated facts of little worth in the associated assessment exercise. Hall et al. (1997) identified a similar problem in their research in which they found that teacher-developed assessments tended to focus on low-level aims such as recall rather than speculation and critical reflection.

These difficulties can be exacerbated when the assessment tools are developed by individual teachers without consultation or critique by colleagues (Black, 1993; Crooks, 1988). Even when the assessments were discussed with colleagues, however, Crooks found that teachers rarely spoke about their justifications for using particular items but rather focused on actions taken. They were able to describe what they had done and when asked to qualify the answers, responded by going into detail about how they had done it. Other studies (e.g. Bachor & Anderson, 1994; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Kansanen, 1981; Radnor, 1994) have supported these findings by showing that many teachers had not thought beyond the ‘what’ of the material they taught and assessed because they had an insufficient theoretical base or interpretive framework on which to build their opinions to guide their work. Many held negative views about the use of assessment data and felt that it was a task done for ritualised reasons, such as, “we have always done it”. But there the reasoning stopped. Carver & Scheier (1990) found that the need to discuss and pull apart assessment data to question
its purposes was discouraged, especially by more experienced teachers, with the explanation, “This is how we do it here”.

**Schools of Thought about Written Language Assessment**

Written language provides many assessment challenges because of the complexity of the activity. Not surprisingly, there are many suggested frameworks for assessing the progress of instruction that are aligned with different conceptions of effective written language instruction. Given this complexity, combined with the variety of demands of most classrooms, it is not surprising that the most significant assessment record has been described as a “log in the head” whereby the teachers gather assessment information anecdotally and informally throughout the school day.

Calfee and Hiebert (1991) similarly identified that teachers generally interpreted and acted on assessment information as they gathered it, rather than waiting for the results of more formal assessments. Typically, the teachers looked at a child’s daily writing to see what improvements had been made from the day before, such as an increased number of different words, closer approximations of spelling, more words accurately spelt, or better use of punctuation. Teachers used these on-the-spot assessments to change the activities set or questions asked. These reflective opportunities were rarely formal, but rather were caught in bits and pieces throughout the school day.

The nature of what is attended to by teachers throughout this process is crucial to the quality of the assessment information gathered in the log and is inevitably influenced by what is considered to be an appropriate writing process and product. New Zealand schools have been strongly influenced by Graves' (1983) process writing theory. This theory views the writing process as a schematic series of actions leading to the composition of text. It is viewed as a process involving idea generation, drafting, proof-reading, editing or revising, and publishing. A regular time for writing is allocated to allow for planning, writing, and editing stages. Beard (2001), similarly, describes a process focus with the justification that writing is not a single phenomenon, but rather an integration of interrelated processes. These processes, illustrated in Figure 4, included composing, writing and re-reading (also referred to as reviewing). Beard also differentiated between small scale tasks that directly related to spelling, punctuation and word choice or order, and large-scale tasks including redrafting where the content or structure of a piece of writing is changed.
Consistent with this process focus, Atwell (1987) suggested that an effective way to assess students’ writing was to note student progress in terms of first draft, second draft, editing, rewriting final copy, revision, etc. which would allow the teacher to judge each student’s progress at any one point of time.

An alternative instructional perspective focuses on the extent of independence in the writing process. Mooney (1990) devised a ‘to’, ‘with’ and ‘by’ continuum as an indicator of support and guidance teachers need to give students at various stages of writing with the aim of transferring responsibility for the process and product from the teacher to the learner. Presumably assessment under this construction of the process would focus on the extent of support needed or independence achieved in a particular writing situation.

An alternative way to think about writing is to take a sociolinguistic perspective which considers effective writing to be responsive to social purposes (Berkenkotter, 1993). This school of thought emphasises the strong link between language and social contexts. It emphasises the communicative purpose of a text, which then determines the appropriate structure, grammar, layout, typeface, language, and vocabulary to achieve that purpose. Rubrics developed for project asTTLe (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning) (Glasswell, Parr and Aikman, 2001), were based on this sociolinguistic perspective. Writing is conceived of as serving several distinct social purposes and rubrics were developed to assist teachers to assess writing that functioned in order to persuade, to instruct, or to narrate, etc. Criteria were consequently developed where aspects of text were clearly specified when associated with the purpose of a particular piece of writing. Each rubric developed had a common framework of seven dimensions of text but the criteria within each dimension were different. Criteria for each writing form/type show a developmental progression, which allow teachers to chart the student’s strengths and weaknesses. The rubrics were designed to clarify features of writing dependent on its purpose.

**The Current Study**

In this study, the analysis of the teachers’ assessment “logs-in-the-head” (as they reported them) is drawn from the various viewpoints about writing discussed above. Given the interwoven nature of goals and targets, instruction and assessment, we probed the teachers’ “logs-in-the-head” in various ways, including their long and short-term aims for their students, the assessment information on which they based these aims and judged progress and the criteria used to judge the success of their writing programme as a whole.
Method

The study took the form of interviews with and observations of ten teachers in three schools. The interviews were conducted both prior to the observation and following it. The observation was performed as the teachers instructed their classes during a writing session and also recorded the interactions during independent work including using classroom resources and teacher-child conferencing.

Schools

This study took place in three decile 1b schools in Mangere with roll sizes from 450 – 700 students. The three schools Xanado, Yanel and Zempo were chosen as the teachers had all participated in the professional development in literacy, including writing, as part of the ECPL initiative over the previous year. Two of the three schools were also involved in the AUSAD initiative.

Participants

Nine teachers of Year two students participated. The teachers varied in teaching experience. One was a beginning teacher, two had between 3 and 5 years experience and six had more than 10 years experience. Details of country of training and class sizes are listed in Table 19.

Table 19
Teachers, class sizes, years of experience and country of training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Where trained as a teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Niue/New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Fiji/New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Fiji/New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

The interview questions were piloted at a South Auckland school with a beginning teacher before contacting the target schools. After consent to participate was obtained from the participating principals and teachers, the teachers were subsequently interviewed, a writing lesson observed and followed with a second interview. The first author undertook all interviews and observations.

Interviews. The interview questions asked about “assessments” used in writing in general and then probed the teachers’ “logs-in-the-head” about specific children in a number of different ways (see Appendix 1). The three children around whom the questions were focused were selected on the basis of a range of achievement levels to ensure that the possibility of differential aims and assessments for different children, resulting in different “logs”, was covered.

Given the inter-related nature of assessment with instructional purpose, two of the questions about assessment were preceded by a question relating to aims. The first set probed the teachers’ aims for the forthcoming lesson for each of the three children, followed by a question about the information on which those aims were selected. The second set took a longer-term view and asked about aims
for the children at the end of the following term, then probed how the teacher would decide if the three children had achieved those aims. The final question relating to the three children, asked the teacher to describe the children as writers.

Two additional questions were asked about the most and least successful aspects of the writing programme in order to understand what criteria were salient for the teachers when making this judgment. Did the teacher nominate activity-focused criteria, or were they more concerned about the impact of those activities on student achievement?

Observations. The observations were conducted to examine the relationships between what the teachers had described to the interviewer in terms of aims and assessment protocols and their classroom practice. Only one observation of each teacher’s written language session was undertaken due to the time constraints. During the observation anecdotal notes were taken and six lessons were tape-recorded. Permission to tape-record in three classes was not given so field notes were taken instead.

Data Analysis

Four different analysis protocols were used. The first related to the assessments that teachers described using, and were classified according to whether they were independent writing samples, checklists, or anecdotal notes.

The second involved examining the criteria teachers used to identify the lesson aims and longer-term aims for the children and their descriptions of children as writers. The analysis protocol was designed initially to capture the different theories of writing instruction and assessment and was then modified during the coding process to ensure that the intent of the teachers’ answers was captured. The first category related to child affect or attitude, such as confidence in writing and willingness to write. The second related to writing production. At times, production related to the child writing something on the paper, at others, it referred to the length of what was written. The third category focused on the content or topic that the children wrote about. To be recorded in this category, a specific topic was nominated as the aim for the three children, such as, writing about an experience or event, or the child was encouraged to generate the topic. The fourth category related to the level of independence in writing as this was a commonly nominated aim by the teachers.

The fifth category related to the level of skill complexity and purpose. It ranged from using conventions in writing, such as full stops and capital letters and word level skills to organization at the sentence and text level. The highest level was rhetorical or communicative purpose, where the students were learning to write for a particular purpose. The term “rhetorical” is used in the sense of writing that is appropriate to the situation and audience. The analysis protocol is described in Appendix B.

Each teacher’s response was coded only once for each criterion nominated for an individual child. For example, if several aims for a child were nominated at the word level, only one was recorded. If the same criterion was mentioned for each child separately, however, the responses were coded for each child. The coding, therefore, allowed us to count the number of teachers who gave a response (or responses) consistent with the criterion and total number of times the criterion was mentioned for all three children.

The third analysis protocol involved the methods teachers used to obtain information to make judgments about the child. These included types of teacher actions, such as observations, writing
samples and checklists, and the type of information used to make the judgments, such as attention to specific skills or students’ attitudes. For this analysis, each teacher’s responses were coded only once in each category. All but one teacher used only one category.

The fourth analysis protocol involved coding of answers to the questions about most and least successful aspects of their programme. Answers were coded according to whether the teacher referred to student attitude, some kind of activity focus or student outcomes.

The coding was undertaken by the second and third author working together to decide on the coding categories for each teacher’s responses.

**Results**

The results are presented in four sections. The first examines the assessments identified by the teachers in response to the direct question about assessment. The second looks at the short and longer-term aims for the students, the criteria on which the aims were based and how progress would be judged. The third section analyses the teachers’ description of the children as writers with the final section focusing on the teachers criteria for judging the most and least successful aspects of their programme.

**Assessments Identified**

When asked what assessments were used in writing for the three students, the teachers were not particularly forthcoming. The most commonly nominated assessment (4 teachers) were independent writing samples but two of these teachers indicated that the samples were primarily for inclusion in the children’s portfolio for the benefit of the parents and the two others were vague about how the samples were used.

Two of the four teachers who reported that they used independent writing samples indicated that they found the recently developed checklists in association with the AUSAD initiative in their school more useful. As one explained,

> “Once a term we do a portfolio sample unmarked that goes home to the parents. It’s an assessment tool I guess, to show the parents what the kids are doing…. The checklist, I think it is quite good, it does make you think, ‘Oh, where is this child at?’”

Another teacher also used the checklist, but was more equivocal because she found a checklist of “full-stops and capital letters” did not necessarily capture “the creative side of writing.”

The other two teachers who collected independent writing samples supplemented them with anecdotal notes that they found more useful. A fifth teacher indicated that she also used a writing sample for the portfolio but the children had copied it from the board rather than completing it independently. She did not find it gave her any useful information.

Three teachers indicated that they did not use any assessments in writing.

A very different picture emerged, however, when teachers were asked what led them to select particular aims for the children’s writing lesson for that day, and how they would judge if children were on track to achieve identified aims at the end of the following term. Their responses to these
questions revealed a much richer picture of observation, talking to children and looking at the children’s work. Details of these responses are discussed below in relation to the specific lesson aims and longer term aims for the students.

**Aims for the Students and Related Assessments**

Both short-term aims, related to the lesson, and longer-term aims, related to the children’s achievement at the end of the following term were probed. The information on which the short term aims were based and the criteria used to judge success of the long terms aims are also analysed for this section.

**Short term aims**

The first two columns of data in Table 20 indicate the aims nominated by the teacher for that day’s lesson. Both the number of teachers who nominated each category and the number of responses given for the three children are listed because some teachers nominated one category for more than one of the three children.

**Table 20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Aims for lesson</th>
<th>Longer term aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of teachers</td>
<td>No. of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect / attitude</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production / quantity of writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content / topic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills complexity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word / sentence conventions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter / word level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of production</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation: Sentence level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation: Text level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical conventions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical / communicative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers’ answers were coded according to the categories of affect, production, content and independence, and then according to the complexity of skill nominated.

The most frequently nominated aim for the lesson in the more general categories were focused on the content or topic that the children were to write about. For some teachers, the topic was nominated by the teacher because of a particular event or experience as one explained, “Today they are writing about assembly, we had a special assembly today”. For the others the topics were primarily child-generated and the associated aim was to get the child to generate a topic. As one described, “I want them to start relating to it on a personal level so they can say, ‘Well this is what I think so this is what I am going to write’. Just to make it personal to them.”

The second most frequently nominated aim was for the child to become an independent writer. Understandably, at this level, independence would make management of the writing process easier for the teacher, as one described, “A lot more independence in their writing. Like not needing to come to me and wanting ‘tent’ and ‘went’ and asking, ‘Miss, how do you spell tent?’ when they can...”
just sit there and go ‘Went, do I know any words that sound like went?’ and actually work through those things themselves.”

Another aim nominated by three teachers was related to production or quantity of writing. For some children this was to actually produce something as this teacher described, “To have an idea of what he wants to get down on the paper and to get it down is the main thing for him”. For others, it was to increase the amount produced, “He is starting to write longer stories now using the letter-sound knowledge that he has got.”

Identified skills were primarily at the lexical or word level. Within this coding category, some teachers alluded to word quality, such as, “A. is focusing on locating parts of his writing that needs to be improved and that can be putting in a better word”, while others talked more about forming words, “With the other children it would be still basic words and using letter/sound relationships”.

Three teachers moved beyond the word level of skill complexity when describing aims. They did this in different ways. Two included text level comments, as illustrated in the following quote, “I need him to identify the characters correctly and sequence correctly.” The other text-level response made reference to the process of production in the sense of a sequence of generating ideas, proof reading and possibly editing, “Just to get them to start using language, so start relating to it on a personal level so they can say, ‘Well this is what I think so this is what I am going to write’… and for S. the focus is publishing, so she is just publishing a previous story that she has written.”

The third teacher was different in that she contextualised these comments within a communicative / rhetorical purpose for the writing. She explained,

“We are writing to the weather man to complain about the weather. So now we actually want to write a letter to somebody who is going to receive it and hopefully respond. I expect them to be able to plan a letter because we always start off with a plan ... and then we do a draft.... The higher child, I would expect her to basically to be able to work quite independently. She should be able to format her letter and she should have a fair idea of what to write in it. So basically I will be looking for things like punctuation, the spelling, in the letter....[For my lower child] I expect him to do a plan but he will probably be working with me or one of my teacher aides because he will need a lot of scaffolding. So they will all be doing the same thing but it would just be different levels of input and I would be more concerned with the lower person not so much whether he has got the conventions right, but whether he can actually put down his ideas.

The lesson observations revealed that the tasks for the day were contextualised within the frames identified by the teachers. The teacher, who emphasised a communicative purpose in her discussion of aims, shared this function with the students and contextualised her skills teaching in this framework. Those who emphasised word level skills independently of a higher level of organisation when nominating aims, similarly acted in ways that reflected that level of organisation.

**How the aims were selected**

Eight of the nine teachers reported that they selected the aims for the day’s lesson on the basis of observing the children or talking to them (see Table 21, first column). Two representative quotes follow:

*When I have finished working with the instructional groups, I try to have some time to quickly whip over to see what they are doing in their independent*
writing .... If I don’t get out to the independent writing, I still have to look at what they are doing in their books.

My sort of assessment would be on a day-to-day basis … They have already started doing letters and I have seen what they are struggling with. It works pretty much continuously … an assessment and re-assessment of what they can do.

One of these teachers also referred to the child’s place on benchmarked levels. “I have them grouped together because that is just the arrangement in my class and I have the children who are just a bit below that wedge.” The ninth teacher referred to the use of the checklist. “Well all of my children have got checklists in the back of their book and they all know at least two things in their checklists that they have to do independently.”

When talking about what they focused on in their observations, four teachers referred to specific skills they had observed, with another three giving more general answers. One teacher focused on monitoring students’ attitudes to writing, with the other talking about the topic the children were to write about based on the children’s recent experience.

Table 21
Number of teachers nominating particular assessment strategies on which they established the aims for the lesson and progress towards a longer-term goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of teacher actions</th>
<th>Basis of lesson’s aims</th>
<th>Basis for judging progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations / talking to children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing samples</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarked levels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Longer term aims**

Not surprisingly, the longer-term aims for the students were similar to the short term aims with a particular emphasis on establishing independence for students using word-level skills (see Table 21). As one described, “At the end of the term she will be writing more sentences by herself in the stories than she was doing last term and she will be using more words, vocabulary, new ones.”

Another category nominated by three teachers was to conventions, such as word spacing, full stops and capital letters.

Three teachers referred to more complex skills at text-level organisation. One of these teachers had previously described the lesson’s aims in terms of communicative purpose. An excerpt from her answer to the longer-term aims included,

“I want him to write a more comprehensive plan and draft, structure ideas, maybe start looking at paragraphing ideas…. And looking more towards the ‘when’ and the ‘why’.”

**Assessing Progress towards the Longer-Term Aims**

Observations and talking to students was the nominated method by which eight of the nine teachers said how they would determine student progress towards the longer-term aims. Six additionally mentioned using writing samples but, as noted above, many were equivocal about how useful they found them to be. As one described, “I’ll do the sample at the end of the year. I don’t rely heavily on samples, I tend to, sort of, that’s really the sort of thing that goes in their folder. You know, yes, I
Six of the teachers indicated that they would be attending to specific aspects of writing behaviour when judging progress towards these nominated aims, and the skills they selected reflected their aims. For example, those concerned with independence, monitored independence. One teacher was more concerned with monitoring student attitudes than skills because she believed that, ultimately, it was attitude that determined the students’ writing competence.

Benchmarks were rarely mentioned, and when they were it was in relation to their not being used, as one teacher told us, “I wouldn’t compare it to a benchmark or anything, just what they have been doing.” Long term planning was also a casualty for some within the immediate context of the classroom, as a teacher explained, “I make notes in my day book sometimes about certain children that need specific help, that sort of thing. And I’ve got my planning folder... but to be honest, I don’t actually refer to my long term planning for writing that much. It’s more of a day-to-day thing.”

**Describing Children as Writers**

We coded the teachers’ descriptions of the three children as writers by using the same coding structure as the lesson and longer-term aims. The results are presented in Table 22. The responses typically began with an affective or attitudinal description (8 teachers; 18 responses) including references to confidence, motivation, and interest. The next most frequently mentioned characteristic was related to production, such as the ease with which they produced some writing or how much they wrote (8 teachers; 13 responses). The following teacher combined the affective and length dimensions in her response, “T. initially did not even complete a sentence, did not want to write, just got distracted, hating the whole bit. Now he will write two or three sentences. He is much more settled but he still needs a good eye kept on him. If he is not interested in it he will not do much of a job at all.” The students’ level of independence also featured frequently in the descriptions (4 teachers), which was consistent with the short and long-term aims nominated by the teachers, “… he is able to write independently all by himself”. The ability to identify relevant content was nominated by two teachers.
Table 22
Criteria used to describe children as writers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>No. of Teachers</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affect / attitude</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production / quantity of writing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content / topic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Skills complexity
- Word / sentence conventions: 0
- Letter / word level: 7
- Process of production: 1
- Organisation: Sentence level: 1
- Organisation: Text level: 2
- Rhetorical conventions: 2
- Rhetorical / communicative: 0

Compared with Table 20 which identified the short and long term aims for the students, Table 22 shows a much greater frequency of response in the “affect / attitude” category. Not surprisingly, when teachers talked about children, they were more focused on the children’s confidence and willingness to write. However, the use of other categories was reasonably consistent in the two tables. Whether talking about aims, or describing the children as writers, teachers made frequent reference to quantity of writing, mostly at the letter or word level of complexity. Proportionately more teachers nominated independence when talking about the aims, than they did when describing the children.

More complex descriptions were provided of the children as writers by the same two teachers who nominated more complex aims directed at the sentence and text level organisational features of the children’s writing. Excerpts from their descriptions are quoted below:

“He basically writes as he is thinking and I think he finds it difficult to sort of plan. I mean he can write a plan but he finds it quite difficult to actually stick to the plan. He is getting better and he is willing to take risks, which is good.”

“He is able to sequence stories, he is able to work independently, and underline spelling mistakes and reread his writing to make sure it makes sense. So now he is working on making his writing more interesting.”

Consistency of Responses for Individual Teachers and Schools
Not surprisingly, teachers were relatively consistent in their answers across questions (see Table 23). Teachers who provided more complex answers when describing their selection of aims for the lesson were more likely to provide more complex answers when asked what they hoped to achieve by the end of the term. For example, the teacher who identified rhetorical / communicative aims for the lesson referred to text level organisation as her aim for the end of the next term. She held similar aims for all the children and described how she provided scaffolding for the less skilled ones to achieve similar aims.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School / teacher</th>
<th>Short term aims</th>
<th>Longer term aims</th>
<th>Description of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1 1</td>
<td>7 aims encompassing most including rhetorical purpose</td>
<td>5 aims up to text level organisation</td>
<td>5 descriptors to text level organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic, Independence, Conventions skills</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Topic, Independence, Word level skills</td>
<td>Independence, Conventions, Word level skills</td>
<td>Attitude, Production, Topic, Word level skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Topic, Organisation, Sentence &amp; text level organisation</td>
<td>Independence, Conventions, Word level skills, Text level organisation</td>
<td>Attitude, Production, Independence, Word &amp; letter/sound level skills, Sentence &amp; text level organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independence, Word level skills</td>
<td>Word level skills</td>
<td>Attitude, Production, Independence, Word &amp; letter/sound level skills, Sentence level organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Independence, Word level skills</td>
<td>Word level skills</td>
<td>Attitude, Production, Conventions, Word &amp; letter/sound skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3 8</td>
<td>Production, Topic</td>
<td>Production, Word level skills</td>
<td>Production, Independence, Word &amp; letter/sound level skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Not codeable</td>
<td>Topic, Independence, Conventions, Word level skills</td>
<td>Attitude, Independence, Conventions, Word &amp; letter/sound level skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The consistency for individual teachers was not as evident at the school level which is surprising given that all teachers had participated in the same professional development and held meetings to discuss their writing programme. This inconsistency could be explained by the teacher-specific nature of the assessment process. As one explained,

“We plan our genre together but no-one says “I want you to assess this and that.” Some things simply happen like one teacher got into things and she got into poetry and her children did wonderful poems. My children are well below her in that, so we have done poems as a class but they have not been able to achieve writing a poem by themselves. I have nothing to assess because we write poems together.”

A teacher from another school explained that she did not want to “lock them into assessment because if I have a child like ‘S’, he isn’t attending in a process way to full-stops and capitals.”

Most and Least Successful Aspects of the Programmes

As can be seen from Table 24, the most frequently nominated successful features were activity focused and the least successful features were management focused. What is of particular interest is the low number of teachers who nominated either general or specific skills when considering success. Given the rare use of achievement benchmarks or the use of standards, it appears that writing instruction is focused on processes rather than being driven by urgency for students to reach particular achievement levels.

Table 24
Number of teachers nominating most and least successful aspects of the programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most successful</th>
<th>Least successful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student attitude</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity focused (teacher or children)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of programme / children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving particular writing skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving general outcomes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Although teachers were limited in what they nominated as “assessment strategies”, they clearly used a number of informal assessments to shape their daily teaching practice. The nomination of assessment strategies equating to the “log-in-the-head” was fairly consistent across questions suggesting that the same aspects of the writing process determined the lesson’s aims, the longer-term aims and how the teachers thought about the children as writers.

The concern we wish to raise, however, is the knowledge the teachers had of the writing process on which the “log-in-the-head” template was based. For most teachers, their descriptions and their teaching practice were focused at a relatively low level of skills and suggested the decontextualisation of writing from its rhetorical or communicative purpose. Writing was about producing something independently with a focus on word-level skills. A minority held aims beyond the word-level skills to include organisation at the sentence or text level. Only one teacher, however, contextualised these skills in terms of a communicative purpose. While some writing
should be personally expressive largely for self, writing is designed to communicate, so the rhetorical situation and needs of an audience should be brought to the fore.

It is increasingly recognised that reluctant writers are often reluctant because writing is a skill-based exercise devoid of communicative meaning (Glasswell, Parr & MacNaughton, 2003). Writing is something that has been completed for the benefit of teachers or parents. A parallel may be drawn with reading as a process of developing skills to decode words, rather than a set of skills designed to enable one to understand the author’s intent (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald, 2002). The risk of this orientation to either writing or reading is the training of children who can decode and encode but do not understand the communicative purpose and its associated language resources.

A second concern is the activity and management focus that formed the basis of most teachers’ judgements of success of their programmes. In the relative absence of student achievement as a judgement criterion, it is unlikely that teachers will be focused on accelerating that achievement in the same way as many have in reading (Timperley & Wiseman, 2002). The activity focus nominated by teachers may be the result of the limited number of assessment tools available to teachers against which to judge writing progress at this level. In the absence of such tools, teachers are unlikely to make sophisticated judgements based on rhetorical purpose in the writing process. It is not surprising that the more obvious surface features have become more salient.

References


Appendix A

Interview Questions

Please select three children - above average for the class (not the top - but a child who is doing well), average, and below average for the class (not the bottom - but a child who is not doing so well).

1. Do you have any assessments in writing for students x, y & z that you have recorded?
   1.a. If yes - Why did you do them?
   1.b. Have you found them useful in any way?
   1.c. If yes to 1.b. - How have you used them?
2. Repeat for unrecorded assessments
3. Please tell me what you intend to cover in writing today with x, y & z? (used to establish context)
4. What are your aims for these 3 children in writing?
5. What lead you to select these aims?
6. Do you have an idea of what you hope x, y, z might be achieving in writing by the end of term 2 for the selected aspects?
7. What did you base this on?
8. How would you decide if x, y, and z were on-track at the end of this term to achieve those aims?
9. Can you tell me a bit about these three children as writers - their attitudes, abilities, strengths and needs
10. What do you think is the most successful aspect of your writing programme?
11. What leads you to consider it the most successful?
12. What do you think is the least successful aspect of your writing programme?
13. What leads you to consider it the least successful?
Appendix B

Coding Schedule for Aims and Descriptions of Students as Writers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Affect / attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Production / quantity of writing. Includes responses such as “write something” but content of what is written is unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Content / topic – include choosing a topic, generating content around topic when no further process described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Independence – include responses such as “use of resources” when indicated for independence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5      | Levels of complexity  
|       | a. Conventions – includes reference to punctuation  
|       | b. Letter / sound relationships  
|       | c. Lexical / word level – includes proof reading at word level  
|       | d. Process of production – brainstorming, 1st draft, editing etc. Reference must be to the process of production e.g. include “ideas” if described as a part of the process  
|       | e. Organisational / structure: Sentence level – includes reference to sentence beginnings  
|       | F. Organisation / structure: Text level – includes editing for organisational features  
|       | g. Rhetorical language / conventions – includes use of language or conventions / editing for particular audiences or purposes  
|       | Rhetorical – includes responses indicating crafting writing for audience or Purpose |
Chapter Five: Governance Understandings and Student Achievement

Recent legislative changes relating to governance responsibilities have demonstrated an increasing emphasis on understanding the impact of educational practice. Revisions to the National Administration Guidelines in 1999 highlighted the need for school boards of trustees to ensure balanced programmes and, through their professional staff to:

“(i) Develop and implement teaching and learning programmes;
(ii) Gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable progress and achievement of students to be evaluated …
(iii) On the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students:
Who are not achieving;
Who are at risk of not achieving
Who have special needs;
and
(iv) Aspects of the curriculum which require special attention
Identify students and develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of students and aspects of the curriculum identified …”

National Administration Guideline 2 required more specific planning and rigorous review of effectiveness. It required each Board, with its principal and teaching staff to:

“(i) Develop a strategic plan which documents how they are giving effect to the National Education Guidelines through their policies, plans and programmes …
Maintain an ongoing programme of self-review in relation to the above policies, plans and programmes including evaluation of information on student achievement;
Report to students and their parents on the achievement of individual students, and to the school’s community on the achievement of students as a whole and of groups …”

In addition, changes to school charters and charter obligations, as outlined in the Education Standards Act (2001), required information to be included within a school’s strategic plan which supported a focus on student achievement. The objective was to develop a culture of continuous improvement through setting expectations of student achievement and to engage in data-driven review primarily directed at understanding and improving it. In particular, this reporting and review process involved: identifying goals for improved student achievement over the next three to five years; an annual up-date that specifies a school’s improvements for the year; and details about programmes a school plans to implement in order to attain its strategic goals (School Trustees Association, 2002).

In summary, it is the board’s responsibility to monitor student achievement against expectations for that achievement, and to review the effectiveness of the teaching and learning programmes in relation to the expectations. Given that the board does not have direct involvement with students and programmes at the classroom level, these responsibilities are inevitably exercised through an

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5 The authors of this chapter are Jill Page and Helen Timperley
accountability relationship with the professionals. In this next section, therefore, we examine what accountability might mean in this context.

The Concept of Accountability

Leithwood, Edge & Jantzi (1999) have developed a model of educational accountability that involves responding to five issues. They have framed these issues through a series of questions:

- What level of accountability is to be provided?
- What is to be accounted for?
- Who is expected to provide the account?
- To whom is the account owed?
- What are the consequences of providing the account?

The level of accountability depends on the degree of difficulty of implementation. A description of purposes and activities is considered to be the most basic level of accountability. Offering an explanation of events is more complex with justification seen as the most difficult. Clearly, the higher the level of accountability the more knowledge of the activity is required. Given the Boards of Trustees’ responsibilities, this highest level of accountability would seem most appropriate, with student achievement explained in terms of the targets set with justification provided for the selection of teaching and learning programmes. The professionals would be expected to provide the account to the board with the consequences ranging from board involvement in further decisions such as the allocation of resources, to ultimately decisions about employment.

Wagner (1995) identifies a number of issues that can limit the extent to which someone is held accountable. These include expected performances that are impossible to satisfy (e.g., ensuring all students learn to high standards); inconsistencies with role parameters (e.g., being held responsible for students’ use of illegal substances); factors beyond a person or group’s control (e.g., responsibility for improving student achievement with highly transient student populations); and, sole accountability for matters involving shared influence (e.g., responsibility for teaching quality).

In the school context, boards and professionals would need to agree on the responsibilities for which they could reasonably be held accountable.

The Implementation of Accountability Practices

The call for increased accountability in public education has always been controversial in terms of the ideological differences about the purposes of education, so accountability and controversy are inexorably linked (Kuchapski, 1998). Although there is greater acceptance of the need to hold public education more responsible for its effectiveness, there is still strong debate surrounding the way in which it is possible to hold those involved accountable. The potential harm of accountability procedures is at the forefront of the discussion. In particular, there is controversy about the validity of the assumptions underlying accountability reforms (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree & Fernandez, 1994), the legitimacy of such reforms at school level (Macpherson, 1996b) and the perceived anti-educational pressures of accountability (Sykes & Elmore, 1988). In addition, Ginsberg & Berry (1998) maintain that many of the key educational determinants appear to be outside the scope of educational policy making alone. These authors suggest that externally driven demands for greater accountability have yet to prove useful and internal accountability models tend to rely on organisational competencies that are non-existent.
What accountability practices should be considered worthwhile? Darling-Hammond & Ascher (1992) maintain that effective accountability practices need to address three aspects: firstly, increase the likelihood that best practice will occur; secondly, decrease the likelihood of “harmful” practices; and thirdly, promote internal means for identifying and altering practices that are ineffective.

Clearly, the concept of accountability has many facets to take into consideration. Explicit understandings are necessary if being accountable is to have validity of purpose and to be an authentic activity for all stakeholders (Wagner, 1995). It is how these understandings translate into practice that will determine its effectiveness. Within the New Zealand educational structure, where parent boards have undertaken the role of school governance for the past thirteen years, lies an opportunity to explore the degree to which these various processes and tensions are evident.

**Participatory Issues**

There is a substantial literature (e.g. Malen, 1999) documenting the limited participatory role typically played by lay governors in educational matters. Malen distinguishes between two types of participation. On the one hand, there is “authentic participation” involving collaborative decision-making whereby individual members can speak their minds and address key issues - the process reflects democratic governance principles and hopefully leads to significant educational improvements for students. Malen argues that the positive effects of participatory decision-making may empower individuals, stimulate organisational change and redefine the patterns of power and privilege (Conway, 1984; Sashkin, 1986; Whitty, 1996).

On the other hand, there are barriers that limit participation or, conversely, encourage “non-participation” (Malen, 1999). Conflicts arising from anxieties associated with parental participation have set the stage for protective politics (Hempel, 1986). Lewis and Nakagawa (1995) maintain that these tensions reinforce patterns of professional power play and may involve principals controlling school policy, teachers controlling instruction and parents merely providing support. Many studies have been undertaken which support this view and point to an obvious discrepancy between token and authentic participation (Herr, 1999; Lewis & Nakagawa; 1995; Malen, 1994). Parental input can often be confined to the traditional roles of “listeners and learners”, “ratifiers” of prior decisions and “supporters” of existing arrangements. In the school context, Malen (1994) suggests that collaborations between parents and school managers are generally confined to fiscal matters and, at best, stimulate adjustments in school operations.

Outcomes of participatory interactions provide an interesting mix of dynamics for both managers and governors alike. The literature identifies dissatisfaction from both perspectives (Ryan, Bryck, Lopez, Williams, Hall & Luppescu, 1997; Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995; Malen, 1994). These studies have identified that participation can generate stress for school managers when consultatively making decisions. Professionals expressed appreciation for parental support but disquiet about time lost. Alternatively, parents conveyed gratitude for a sense of belonging and importance. They appreciated the gains in knowledge about school programming that were achieved and yet were concerned about the time and energy involved in their role. There was also a measure of frustration expressed at what was perceived to be token involvement.

**Governance Role Understandings**

There is very little literature available that clearly indicates what a governance role in education actually entails. Board accountability in New Zealand was not based on student achievement outcomes until recently. Rather, responsibility focused on legislative compliance to act as a good
employer, be fiscally prudent, provide safe workplaces and deliver the curriculum (New Zealand Government, 1989).

Robinson, Ward and Timperley (2002) suggest two patterns are emerging from empirical research on governance in New Zealand schools and that these encompass different perceptions of performance and expertise. On the one hand, participants in governance reported moderate to high levels of role satisfaction and confidence. On the other, studies that were not self-evaluative suggest a much more uneven picture, particularly in relation to boards in small or poor communities. These groups were more likely to be judged as less than satisfactory in terms of governance role performance. The authors emphasised two issues in this regard. The first relates to policy setting and implementation in that governance practice relies on the assumption that it is reasonable to set targets without any knowledge about what is involved in achieving them. The potential difficulty is that school governors could be seen as unreasonable in their expectations. The second issue is in relation to monitoring programme effectiveness. It is suggested that substantial expertise is required in interpreting relevant achievement data and for formulating independent assessment of levels of performance. There is considerable evidence that lay governors do not have adequate levels of such expertise.

Limited expertise has meant that both understandings of the governance role and the development of robust management systems have been somewhat restricted. A proposed solution to this problem is in explicit board of trustee training and stronger local and nationally co-ordinated infrastructure (Robinson, et al., 2002).

The outcomes of the shift towards a greater focus on accountability in education are not clear (Macpherson, Cibulka, Monk & Wong, 1998). Given the lack of literature surrounding governance understandings, more research is required to unpick and ultimately improve the contribution of educational policy making through accountability. More specifically, there is a need to understand what is meant by accountability in the educational setting and how this translates into the governance role. A number of important questions remain unanswered. Do stakeholders in the governance process understand their respective roles? What degree of governance skill and knowledge is required for effective lay governance? How is lay governance expertise reflected in authentic participation? Where does this place accountability?

Furthermore, if there is to be accountability for boards with regard to student achievement, then cognizance must be taken of the considerations that impact on meeting such obligations (Education Review Office, 1998; Creese, 1999). The reporting of student achievement alone raises some key issues for board members. Firstly, a need for boards to have a working knowledge of school assessment procedures and, secondly, an understanding of the way in which boards may ensure programme quality (Education Review Office, 1996).

This study seeks to examine boards of trustees’ understandings of their governance role in relation to these issues and ascertain how these understandings are evident in practice.

**Research Context**

The schools involved have been part of a schooling improvement initiative since 1997. The original initiative to strengthen education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) has since evolved into one that is focused on the analysis and use of student achievement data (AUSAD) and involves a cluster of schools in the Mangere/Otara area. AUSAD seeks to extend skills at both management and
governance levels by developing effective teaching, management and governance practices through an analysis of student achievement information. It involved sixteen schools working in nine clusters and included eighty parent board members. In order to support governance activities, the Ministry of Education provided assistance in two ways: firstly, in contracting consultant services to facilitate the cluster; and secondly, in arranging a number of learning meetings for board members with the broad purpose of promoting better understandings of professional reports that contain student achievement data.

The purpose of the training involved learning about a number of key areas with regard to student achievement from a governance perspective. These included discussion about student achievement; how student achievement can become part of a board’s decision-making; analysing results (by sharing, critically discussing, asking questions and seeking further information) and making data-based decisions; and measuring the effectiveness of board decision-making. At the time the interviews were conducted, the topics of the training undertaken included the board’s role and responsibilities in relation to student achievement and curriculum reporting. Specific reference was made to the national assessment strategy; national assessments available; the board’s role and responsibilities in relation to assessment and the implications of the Education Standards Act (2002) in relation to assessment requirements.

Research Considerations

Given the Ministry’s focus on requiring the explicit identification, evaluation and future provision for student achievement, it was important to examine the extent to which parent board members understood their role in this regard. The following questions guided the research – “What were parent board members’ understandings of their role with regard to the analysis and use of student achievement information?” and “To what extent were those understandings evident in practice during the board of trustee meetings?”

Methodological Overview

Ten interviews were conducted with selected parent board members, teachers and Ministry of Education officials. Nine briefing meetings and training sessions were also observed, together with three observations of board of trustees meetings.

Participating Schools

The schools were located in Mangere and ranged in roll size from 430 to 582 students. The majority of students were Pasifika (64 - 75%) but also included a substantial proportion of Maori (20-30%). A mix of other ethnicities made up the remainder of the roll. The ethnic composition of the boards reflected that of their schools. School A had seven parent representatives – two Maori, one Pakeha, one Tongan, one Niuean, one Cook Island Maori and one Samoan. School B had five parent representatives – one Maori, two Pakeha, one Cook Island Maori and one Samoan. School C had seven parent representatives – two Maori, two Pakeha and three Samoan.

Participants

Initially it was intended to interview all those who attended the training sessions, with subsequent observation of their board meetings to find out the extent to which the skills and understandings covered in the training were evident in school-based board meetings. Unfortunately, attendance at the training was highly erratic, so only three schools were involved in the research. These three schools were selected on the basis that the board chairs had attended most of the briefing meetings and training sessions up until the time of the interviews. The board chair from School A had
attended 5.5 hours; school B - 13 hours and School C - 10.5 hours of briefing meetings and training sessions. Board members from each of these schools were also interviewed. The board member from School B had attended 2.5 hours and the member from School C attended 6.5 hours of briefing meetings and training.

The board chairperson and one member were interviewed from each school. It was intended that the board member be relatively new to the role to provide a balance of experience. However, in School B the newer board members were reluctant to be interviewed. This reticence was perceived by the board chair to be a lack of confidence in their governance role. In this instance the researcher interviewed the only other board member willing to participate in the research. This participant had more than five years experience as a board member.

One teacher was also interviewed from each of the selected schools – these teachers were selected because of their direct involvement in the AUSAD initiative. Part of their role was to report back to the boards of their schools about student achievement on a regular basis. The teachers were interviewed in order to ascertain their views about their school board’s role within the context of student achievement.

Observations

Three sets of observations were undertaken – briefing meetings, training sessions and board of trustee meetings. For this study, only the data on board of trustee meetings has been reported but a brief overview of the training is provided for contextual reasons.

Briefing meetings. A series of three briefing meetings were undertaken in November and December 2001 and February 2002. These meetings were called by the trainers and invited parent board representatives from the thirteen participating schools. Ministry of Education and AUSAD officials (SEMO Co-ordinator; Early Childhood Primary Link Co-ordinator; Problem Analyst for Mangere) also attended. The organisation and methodology of the AUSAD project for board of trustee professional development were discussed. These meetings also clarified the purpose of the board-training contract; that is, supporting the parent board of trustees members from the participating schools to learn how to use student achievement data for governance decisions. The identification of what work would be done before June 2002 was also discussed. Seven schools were represented at the first meeting, six at the second, and six at the final one. Only two schools (B and C) were represented at all meetings.

Training Sessions. All parent board representatives from the thirteen participating schools were invited to the first training session but only six schools were represented. These sessions focused on the board’s role and responsibilities in relation to student achievement and curriculum reporting. Topics included the national assessment strategy; national assessment; the board’s role and responsibilities in relation to assessment; and the implications of the Education Standards Act (2002) in relation to assessment requirements. Due to the poor attendance, the same content was repeated at the second training session where three additional schools were represented. All the interviewed board chairpersons and two of the three board members attended these training sessions prior to the interviews.

Additional training took place before the observations of the Board meetings themselves. A third session discussed the national assessment strategy; national assessment tools; and reporting on student achievement. The two board chairs from the case study schools, together with representatives from another three schools attended this training session. Additional training took
place both with the cluster of schools and individual schools, but this occurred after the completion of data collection for this study so did not influence the results of this research.

**Board of Trustee Meeting Observations.** One board meeting was also attended at each of the three selected schools. It was understood by the observer that student achievement information would be presented during the meeting but this occurred in School A only. In the other two meetings the chairperson reported on the group board training. In one school an additional meeting was observed which involved specific training by two consultants. This meeting, however, is not included in the data presented in this report because it was not typical of a regular board meeting.

**Data Collection**

The data was gathered in two ways – through interviews and observations. Part of the interviews involved responses to a hypothetical scenario but these responses are not reported here for reasons of space and coherence. The details of the scenario and participants’ responses can be found in Page (2003). Table 25 summarises the data collection strategies and timetable.
Table 25
Timetable of Research Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and Training sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Briefing Meeting (1)</td>
<td>28/11/01</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Briefing Meeting (2)</td>
<td>12/12/01</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Briefing Meeting (3)</td>
<td>09/02/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Sessions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Session 1</td>
<td>23/02/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Session 2 (repeat)</td>
<td>14/03/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Session 3</td>
<td>18/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Session 4</td>
<td>13/06/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School B board chair</td>
<td>08/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School C board chair</td>
<td>10/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School A board chair</td>
<td>11/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School A board member</td>
<td>11/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School B board member</td>
<td>15/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School C board member</td>
<td>18/04/02</td>
<td>Field notes &amp; transcript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SEMO Co-coordinator</td>
<td>04/06/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School A teacher</td>
<td>05/08/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School C teacher</td>
<td>07/08/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School B teacher</td>
<td>12/08/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based Meetings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School B Board of Trustees meeting</td>
<td>14/05/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School A Board of Trustees meeting</td>
<td>15/05/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School C Board of Trustees meeting</td>
<td>23/05/02</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School C BoT training sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews
The interviews included a series of questions around the areas of governance practice in relation to board members’ own boards. The participants’ perceptions were ascertained in two ways: responses to an open-ended question about the board’s role in relation to student achievement and the rating of different aspects of the role and the perceived difficulties in undertaking it. All interviews were undertaken by the first author.

The rating scales involved five key areas of governance participation namely: looking at achievement results; questioning the principal; monitoring programme effectiveness; setting expectations for student achievement; and staff accountability which were assumed by the authors to be the boards’ responsibility under current legislation. The participants ranked the importance of these areas using a seven-point scale (always - never). Reasons were sought for their responses. Participants then specified difficulty levels in personally carrying out the same tasks on a seven-point scale (easy – hard). They further explained reasons for their choices.

Interviews with the teachers responsible for the AUSAD initiative also involved the same semi-structured question format. The teachers were asked for their perceptions about how they saw their boards operating with regard to board understandings related to student achievement.
Observations
All training sessions presented in the first half of the year were observed by the first author. Observations of the selected school board meetings were also undertaken to ascertain the level of participation by boards in school settings. Field notes were taken when the teacher responsible for AUSAD in the school was presenting a report and the designated parent representatives were sharing their AUSAD training. Particular attention was paid to the quality of board members’ questions and statements and these were recorded verbatim as far as possible. In most cases the questions or statements were sufficiently brief for an accurate record to be obtained. It was decided not to request permission to tape-record at these meetings, given the sensitive nature of board discussions.

Results
The research methods involved interviews about understandings related to the governance role and observations to assess the extent to which these understandings were evident in practice during board meetings. The results are presented in two sections reflecting these different data types.

Interview Responses
The responses to the open-ended question about the board’s role with regard to student achievement are presented first, followed by those from the rating scales.

Board role in relation to student achievement; Four themes emerged from the responses to the open-ended question which asked, “With regard to student achievement in this school, what do you consider the board’s role to be?” These themes included:

- Understanding the achievement data
- Working with the staff to improve achievement
- Allocating resources
- Maintaining board/staff relationships while exercising their accountability role.

Table 26 presents the frequency with which these four themes were mentioned by the three groups. Some responses referred to more than one of the themes in Table 26 and so were coded more than once.

Table 26
Governance role in response to open-ended question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding student achievement information</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising student achievement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocating Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board / staff relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding student achievement information. There was a difference between the respondent groups to this question regarding the governance role in relation to student achievement. Board chairs and teachers both mentioned the need to understand the achievement data but board members did not refer to this aspect of governance practice. A typical response from a board chair follows:

Board Chair B: **See really you need to understand a little bit about how they get that data otherwise from what you have learnt over this data, [it] can represent all sorts can’t it?**

Teachers, on the other hand, were more specific about what this might involve.

Teacher A: **To look at the trends in the school... to be aware of the national achievement levels... to be knowledgeable about the type of data we collect.**

In addition, all the teachers made reference to the need to make reports about student achievement understandable to those not as familiar with the data and the language of assessment as they were themselves. For example, Teacher B explained, “[The board’s] role is to question but as professionals we have to be careful not to overwhelm them in an effort to impress.” The teacher in School A also believed that part of her role in reporting to the board was in “coaching” them to ask questions. “The onus is back on me to ask [the board]. I’m always anticipating what they should ask. I’m critiquing my own report for them but I’m never sure they are getting the message I want them to get.”

Raising student achievement. Two of the three chairs who responded that understanding the achievement information was a board role, went on to explain that the role involved more than simply understanding but also involved taking some kind of action in relation to trying to raise student achievement. They made contrasting points in their answers with one more confident than the other about what this might involve.

Board Chair C: **And it is our job to... try to ensure those gaps are met so that the children’s achievement will increase.**

Board Chair B: **That’s really hard you see...because you worry more about the nuts and bolts as a board that the taps are leaking or the electricity, they are easier aren’t they because they are right there whereas student achievement is such a fuzzy concept.**

In contrast, no teachers mentioned board involvement in raising student achievement levels specifically as being a part of the board’s role.

Allocating Resources. Allocating resources, on the other hand, was mentioned more frequently than any other aspect of governance in relation to the board’s role with respect to student achievement, with two chairs, all board members and two teachers making reference to it. The board chair who mentioned analyzing gaps in achievement linked the resourcing decisions to filling those gaps:

Board Chair C: **That gaps are filled by resources whether they are material resources, personnel resources or time resources.**
This chairperson was the only person to link resourcing decisions to the achievement analysis. Others were less specific as illustrated by this board member’s response;

Board Member B:  
_Sorting our budgets .... To spend in that area if we have to. That is always a major one._

Board / staff relationships. Two board chairs and one board member also mentioned supporting staff in relation to the board’s role with regard to student achievement, as illustrated by this board member’s response:

Board Member B:  
_My main role would really be to support my senior management ....seeing you do things around the school gives [the staff] moral support I suppose._

**The Rating Scales.** Possible board responsibilities in relation to student achievement information were then probed through asking boards to rate the appropriateness of various role responsibilities and how difficult they found them to be. These ratings included two items related to looking at the achievement information, two about specific responsibilities that might arise from looking at the information and one about accountability role exercised by the board.

**Understanding Achievement Information.** The data presented in Table 27 summarises the participants’ ratings of the two items that related to the presentation and understanding of achievement information, specifically, “Looking at Achievement Results” and “Questioning the Principal”. The responses from each group are reported separately.

Looking at student achievement results was perceived to be part of the governance role by all board chairs and teachers who gave ratings of 1 or 2.

Board Chair C:  
_[My role is to] make sure we know where we are [and] we are informed of the gaps._

Responses from the board members were more varied. Two (Schools A and C) agreed that looking at student achievement results was a role of governance whilst one board member (School B) gave a rating of 5 towards the “never” end of the scale. His / her concern was more with staff performance than student achievement.
Table 27
Understanding Student Achievement Information

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<th>Interviewee</th>
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*A rating of 1 represents “always” or “extremely easy” and a rating 7 represents “never” or “extremely hard”*

Board chairs reported the least amount of difficulty in looking at the results (average rating 2.3), the board members next (average rating 4) with the teachers perceiving that their boards experienced the greatest level difficulty (average rating 5.3). A range of ratings is evident within each group which makes the selection of representative quotes difficult, so individual ratings are provided after each quote.

The chairperson in school B indicated that s/he experienced more difficulties in undertaking this task than her counterparts in Schools A and C but believed that progress was being made.

Board Chair C:  *Actually we are getting really good at it. (rating 4)*

The School C board member reported the process of looking at student achievement data to be “extremely hard” and preferred a more personal approach to assist in understanding data.

Board Member C:  *Yes [I find it hard to read]. I think it is most appreciated if all the teachers were included in the meeting and then they each say what they think. (rating 7)*

There were differences in the teachers’ perceptions of their own boards to manage the task. Two teachers from Schools A and B clearly indicated that their respective boards experienced difficulty in this regard.

Teacher A:  *It’s a quick fix mentality: “They [the children] are not doing well!”  “O.K.” There needs to be a big change in [the board’s] understanding of reports.*

In contrast, School C’s teacher indicated her board found it “moderately easy” to look at achievement results.
Teacher C: \textit{We work really hard to help them [to] understand from a format so they don’t find it difficult.}

It was the School C board member, however, who reported this task to be “extremely hard” indicating a difference in perception between the board and staff member about levels of data understanding for the board members.

The participants were also asked to rate to what extent they felt it was their job to ask the principal questions about student achievement data and how hard they found it to do so. All respondents agreed that questioning was a governance role, because they needed to understand data, giving ratings of either 1 or 2 (see Table 27).

The ease with which board members asked questions was rated differently by board chairs and members on the one hand, and the teachers on the other. None of the board respondents expressed difficulty in asking the principal questions. In contrast, the teachers in Schools A and B indicated that their boards experienced considerable difficulty. The following quotes show differences in how they perceived the difficulty of this task.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Board Chair B:} \textit{Because when you are not understanding things, I don’t care if I make myself look silly, I ask. (rating 1)}
  \item \textbf{Board Chair C:} \textit{We are asking questions now and I think because [staff] are getting trained [the principal] is less threatened... Maybe we are asking them in a less personal way and [the principal] is being informed about why we are asking. And he knows we are being trained to ask. So it’s not a personal attack...We just want to know and we are being told by the Ministry to ask. So its not a ‘let’s not all gang up on you’. (rating 3)}
  \item \textbf{Teacher B:} \textit{There is not much questioning at this stage. It is a lack of knowledge about [student achievement] and a lack of confidence. [The board] are not quite sure about what you should be questioning about. (rating 5)}
\end{itemize}

The responses to the open-ended question and the two rating scales give a slightly different picture but overall it appears that all board chairs and teachers, together with two of the board members believe that it is important that teachers present achievement information in ways that boards are able to understand. Responses to the open-ended questions suggest that this issue is more to the forefront of the minds of the teachers and board chairs than board members.

There appears to be a different appreciation of the difficulties in achieving an adequate understanding of the data, with two of the three teachers responding relatively consistently that boards experienced difficulty in both understanding the achievement information and asking questions of the professionals for clarification. In all but one case, the board responses did not confirm this perception.

\textbf{Potential implications arising from looking at achievement data}

Simply understanding the achievement information and asking questions can be consistent with a minimal level of accountability – that is to provide a description. However, if giving such an account is to serve an educational purpose, we consider that it is important to link the examination of the achievement information to some decision or action. Responses to the open-ended question reported above indicated that two of the board chairs thought that raising achievement was one such
purpose. Allocating resources was also mentioned as an action associated with the boards’ role in relation to student achievement, but it was less clear whether this action was directly associated with understanding the achievement information. In the rating scales, we asked more directly in the interviews about the board’s role in programme monitoring and setting expectations of student achievement as two potential actions through which boards might have further involvement.

Most respondents expressed agreement that monitoring programme effectiveness was a board role (Table 28). Two board chairs (Schools A and B), all board members and two teachers (Schools A and C) gave ratings of 1 or 2. There was less agreement about the perceived difficulties in undertaking that role (Table 28). Whether rated easy or hard, the issues for board chairpersons and teachers were related to governance / management role distinctions. For example, the board chair who gave a rating at the “easy” end of the scale explained

**Board Chair A:**
*I think monitoring is governance... I think to monitor the effectiveness. I think to be informed. I don’t know whether monitoring is actually managing. I don’t think it is my job to manage the effectiveness of changes in programmes, but I think I should be informed whether it is good or bad or indifferent, then that information should come back to us. And then we decide.*

**Table 28**
**Rating of potential implications from examining achievement information**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Programme monitoring</th>
<th>Setting expectations</th>
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<td>Role</td>
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*Note: A rating of 1 represents “always” or “easy” and a rating 7 represents “never” or “difficult”*

Teachers as a group considered that the board experienced much higher levels of difficulty, all giving ratings at the difficult end of the scale. Their reasons were also related to role ambiguity, as one expressed,

**Teacher B:**
*[The board] have difficulty in monitoring programme effectiveness because they are not quite aware of what the role is. They lack the confidence of having a strong knowledge base. It’s not the board’s fault at all – it’s a joint responsibility.*
The two board members (Schools A and C) who considered programme monitoring to be at the easy end of the scale did not raise these complex issues however.

Board Member C: I just ask to clarify and specify what are these changes and I want to understand if those changes will improve the [students’ achievement].

The basis of the high difficulty ratings by one board chair and one teacher were concerns about the issues of staff trust;

Board Member B: I guess we kind of put our trust in the teachers because they are there doing the job that we expect them to do. To monitor that I guess reporting to the board, I guess without seeing any evidence of it being achieved, we know its there. We know its happening but I think that is where I run into difficulty there.

Teacher C: [The board] is relying on what was said by management and the principal. It is difficult to make an informed decision because it depends on what they were told.

None of these respondents appeared to link the examination of achievement information to programme monitoring activities and appeared dependent on staff reports to tell them about programmes, rather than using the achievement data to make their own assessment.

A second potential implication of looking at achievement information is to set expectations of student achievement, so we asked respondents if they believed this to be a board role and the difficulties they anticipated in exercising it. The ratings on the appropriateness of this role were similar for all respondent groups, with no ratings less than 3 (Table 28). The interpretations of this role by the different groups, however, appeared to be very different. For example, all board chairs agreed that setting achievement expectations for student achievement was a part of governance role, with one considering it to be an area-wide issue.

Board Chair A: I think it is a work in progress…I think because the whole face of education in the Mangere and Otara area is at a time of change. I think there is a realization that the whole area suffers from … an associated stigmatism that we are underachievers.

A second board chair (School C) highlighted issues around the trust involved in effecting this task at a governance level and the knowledge required to bring about change.

Board Chair C: Like I had an argument with [a teacher] … Our report said it is our aim that every child at this school reaches Level 2 in the curriculum areas. And I pointed out to [the teacher] that the national norm was Level 3 and that is where we should be aiming. And she said, “Oh well, our children can’t reach that”… And I said I’m not happy because I know and you are telling our teachers, you are telling our parents, that if their kids are on Level 2 that they are great. They go to their next school and they are told, “Well, your child is failing”. So we are setting them up for failure…For me that wasn’t even good enough for my own kids because I had the knowledge about where they should be and I wasn’t happy. But if I hadn’t had that knowledge we would have been misinformed.
The teacher from this school, together with the other teachers, believed setting expectations was a
task that the board should delegate to the staff.

Teacher C: \textit{It’s the board’s responsibility through delegation.}

Given these different interpretations of the role, it is not surprising that there were differences
between the groups with regard to the difficulties involved in undertaking the task, with board
members perceiving it to be relatively easy (ratings of 1, 2 and 4), board chairpersons considering it
to be somewhat more difficult (ratings 4, 5 and 5) and teachers believing it to be most difficult of all
(ratings of 5, 6 and 7) (Table 28).

Board Chair B: \textit{I find it very hard. Expectations are very hard, as you have to set
realistic ones.}

Responses from board members suggested that their ratings at the “easy” end of the scale may have
been based on a limited understanding of what the role might entail.

Board Member C: \textit{It’s easy.}
Interviewer: \textit{What do you do?}
Board Member C: \textit{I help out with how to improve things and just give them some other
ideas that I know will help with those achievements.}

Another board member (School A) reported that setting achievement expectations was primarily
associated with resource provision.

Board Member A: \textit{Well if I’m going to facilitate [setting expectations] then I will
always support whatever programme the teachers come up with…
Because boards of trustees are for controlling the cash.}
Interviewer: \textit{How hard do you find it to [set expectations]?}
Board Member C: \textit{[Neither easy nor hard] … because I don’t have time to go in there
and talk with the teachers and like discuss what they need.}

In contrast to board members, all teachers reported that their boards experienced difficulty in
undertaking the task giving ratings from five (School B) to seven (School A). They indicated that
this was due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of what setting achievement expectations
involved and the board’s role within it.

Teacher A: \textit{It would be good if some [of the boards] were involved but they are
not interested in being a part of it. Their idea is to rubber stamp
them.}
Teacher B: \textit{We are struggling with that now. I think [the board] should have an
input into setting expectations but they haven’t got that real solid
knowledge base at their level.}
Teacher C: \textit{It’s a big ask. The only ones they would understand are national
standards. They don’t always understand how standards are set ...
or why it is done.}
If the board’s accountability role is to impact on student achievement, the achievement information needs to be linked to some other board responsibility. Responses to the open-ended question indicated that allocating resources was the most frequently mentioned responsibility, but in only one case was this specifically linked to understanding achievement information.

There appeared to be general agreement that programme monitoring and setting expectations was a board role. However, the ease with which some board members felt these tasks could be accomplished indicated a limited understanding of what this might involve. The complex management / governance distinctions and issues of trust expressed by board chairs and teachers indicate a more in-depth understanding of the difficulties in fulfilling it.

**Board/Staff Relationships: Staff Accountability for Quality Teaching and Learning**

The accountability role in governance involves not only looking at data but also holding to account those who present the data, so respondents were asked, “I think it is the board’s job to hold the principal and teachers in my school accountable for quality teaching and learning” and “How hard do I find it to hold the principal and teachers in my school accountable for quality teaching and learning?” (Table 29).

**Table 29**

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<th>Interviewee</th>
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Note: A rating of 1 represents “always” or “easy” and a rating 7 represents “never” or “difficult”

All board chairs, two board members and all teachers reported that staff accountability for quality teaching and learning was clearly a governance role.

Board Chair C:  
*So we are accountable and that is our job to make sure our teachers ... are teaching right and the children are learning as best as they can.*

The board member (School B) who was less sure it was a governance role put the principal in the driving seat:

Board Member B:  
*We, as a board and teachers alike, should be accountable for teaching levels; I think there has got to be balance in that....What’s so good about our principal is that he knows his role and he knows what the board expects. He knows how to set standards for his teachers and staff.*
Two board chairs (School B and School C) gave ratings of 4 for the difficulty involved in this task indicating that it was one that they found moderately difficult (Table 29). One chair (School B) gave the following explanation:

**Board Chair B:** *It is not as if you have trouble relating to the principal or even the teachers, it’s, “Are you doing your job properly?” It is how you go about ensuring that they’re professional and ... how you [deal] with the ones that are not performing. How do you get them to perform without being insensitive?*

Two of the teachers indicated that their boards would find it very hard to hold staff accountable, giving ratings of 6 and 7. One (School B) was aware of the resulting implications of a lack of task understanding and alluded to the associated role trust plays in this regard between management and governance. She reported:

**Teacher B:** *Our board would find accountability a daunting prospect. Sometimes our board are too accepting and don’t question enough. We have to be careful we don’t take advantage of that.*

However, one teacher (School C) indicated her board found the task “reasonably easy”.

**Teacher C:** *[The board] don’t find it hard. [It relates to] NAG 2 “maintain an ongoing programme of self review” and NAG 1.*

None of the teachers mentioned the complex relationship in this accountability role, that is, the teachers were concerned to make the achievement data understandable to those who were then going to hold them to account.

Accountability roles involve task-related dimensions, but also inevitably are determined by relationships between the two parties. Respondents indicated clearly that relationships involved providing support, making board members feel sufficiently comfortable to ask questions and the more difficult side of holding staff to account for the data they have to assist boards to interpret. Trusting the information given to the board and sensitivity to the delicate issues involved in performance issues were concerns for board chairs. It is interesting however that it was the teachers, rather than the board respondents who believed that holding the professionals to account was likely to be a daunting prospect.

**General discussion of interview data**

There appeared to be general agreement that boards should exercise their accountability role with regard to student achievement through understanding the achievement information, asking questions of clarification, monitoring programmes, setting achievement expectations and allocating resources. At times, direct involvement was seen to be appropriate, at other times, the responsibility was to be undertaken via the principals.
This general finding, however, should not obscure the dissenting voices. One board member did not consider that looking at achievement information or holding staff accountable was a board role. One board chair and one teacher did not consider programme monitoring to be a board role and several expressed some ambivalence about being involved in setting expectations of student achievement.

All thought it appropriate, however, to question the principal about student achievement and board respondents expressed little difficulty in doing so. The teachers, on the other hand, all expressed at some point in the interview the need to encourage their boards to ask questions and to assist them to understand by referring to “a coaching role”, “working hard to help them understand”, and the “lack of confidence” in asking questions. In this next section, we turn to an actual board meeting when achievement information was presented to understand the interactions at the board meetings.

Observation Results and Discussion

All schools had invested a large amount of time in this initiative that had as its explicit focus the understanding and use of student achievement information to raise student achievement. Although the boards often had an “AUSAD” slot at the board meetings, this usually took the form of keeping the board informed of staff professional development, rather than involving the board in the actual analysis and use of student achievement information. In School A the meeting observed involved the presentation of student achievement information, and at Schools B and C the observed meeting was a report on the board training. In none of the meetings did the “AUSAD” slot take more than 15 minutes.

School A’s Board Meeting

The AUSAD lead teacher first explained the milestone report to the Ministry compiled by the school on the use of the additional funding. Results from the Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) were then presented, showing comparisons with national norms. Consistent with reports during the interviews, the AUSAD lead teacher asked if there was anything further the board wanted to know. The chairperson then summarised the information:

> It’s important to have heard this information. These are the real facts of where our children are. It’s a fair benchmark. We are tailoring and dovetailing programmes and professional development of teachers. We are meeting milestones [for reporting]. Achievement is being raised and we are monitoring it as a board and we will benefit our children. Are we starting to see improvements? Is it beginning to pay off?

Given that the achievement information did not include historical data, we assume that the statement about improved achievement was not intended as such, but rather the questions posed at the end were more reflective of his intended summary. The AUSAD lead teacher responded to the questions by assuring the board of the reliability of the data, but that the staff had found it was not sufficient to get an accurate picture so intended to do further testing. Once again she invited questions. The only question came from a board member who asked how much funding was available for AUSAD work and was assured by the board chairperson that it did not cost them anything.

School B’s Meeting

Once again, the AUSAD lead teacher presented the milestone report of activities undertaken by the staff in relation to the AUSAD initiative. The board was informed that the teachers were drafting expectations but a potential role for the board in this activity was not mentioned. The board chair responded, “It is good to see we are moving ahead”, with a board member commenting, “We’ve
talked about it for such a long time and the report proves we are getting there.” The board chair also commented that “There is still a lot of verbiage, but we can’t get away from that.” The board chair then reported briefly on the board training, in relation to three themes. The first was the key question the board needs to ask, which is, “Are we getting results?”. The second related to the board role in terms of the focus on the classrooms and how that related to the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs), especially NAG 1. The third related to the training process and included board representation at the training, the number of meetings and restrictive nature of time frames involved in contracts.

School C’s meeting

The board chair presented a history of SEMO and its evolution into AUSAD and explained the membership of the cluster in which the school had been working for the past year and that the purpose was to provide consistency. The principal added that the AUSAD initiative was also to enhance student achievement. The chairperson then outlined the board role including asking questions, allocating resources and the board’s responsibilities. She emphasized the importance of asking questions by saying, “Our job is to ask these sorts of questions ... You should never be satisfied and continue to question what you are doing.”

She also mentioned the board’s representative role with regard to the community and posed the question, “What does the community expect?” She then gave the board members an AUSAD case study activity sheet with the request that they take it away and think about it for the next board meeting. The activity sheet included questions related to the school’s vision, understanding the nature of assessment and the related testing. The chairperson finished her presentation by asking for questions, but none were forthcoming either then, or at any other time during this part of the meeting.

Discussion

There appeared to be somewhat of a discrepancy between the boards’ reported role understandings and ease with which they undertook them and the processes observed at the board meetings. Questions and comments were invited, but few responses were elicited. In the one school where achievement information was presented, the implications of that information were not discussed beyond a general summary that various things were happening with the staff.

These observations need to be put in context, in that only three training sessions had taken place prior to the observed meetings. At the time, the chairpersons from Schools A, B and C had attended 5.5, 13 and 10.5 hours of training (excluding the briefing sessions) respectively. Board members from schools B and C had also attended 2.5 and 6.5 hours of training respectively. On the other hand, Schools A and C had been intensively involved in the AUSAD initiative for 16 months and School B for 8 months. In none of the meetings did the process convey a sense that these boards were involved in exercising an accountability role with regard to student achievement in any significant way. Governance in silence in relation to student achievement appeared to be more the norm.

Conclusions

This study has shown that the link between accountability and governance with regard to student achievement is a tenuous one for parent board members. The board responsibilities outlined in the legislation and nominated by our respondents implied that boards should have knowledge of student achievement, involvement in setting expectations for that achievement and monitoring likely
contributions to it, such as the effectiveness of programmes. The reality of what happened in the board meetings, however, seemed a long way from this description. In terms of the level of accountability in Leithwood et al.’s (1999) terms, a description of achievement in one of the three schools, with an accompanying description of activities at a very general level formed the basis of the accountability process. In the other two schools, the activities were described in the absence of the achievement information. It was also an activity that did not involve much participation of board members, but rather, they adopted a listening role.

Traditionally, silence on the part of Board members has been attributed to patterns of professional power play that excludes lay members of boards (Malen, 1999). In this study, the teachers indicated that they were very aware of this possibility and took steps to try to avoid it. Board members themselves confirmed that they felt free to ask questions of the professionals.

We think the problem lies more within the complexities of the task, rather than with any “failings” on either side. The professionals themselves were undertaking intensive training as part of the AUSAD initiative to describe and analyse achievement information, set appropriate expectations, and work out the implications for teaching and learning programmes. These are demanding tasks in themselves. It is challenging to expect boards of trustees to have adequate knowledge of the highly contentious areas of achievement, target setting and monitoring of programmes to the extent that they can hold the professional to account. Perhaps the only surprising aspect of this study is the low difficulty ratings given by many board respondents in relation to these complex tasks.

These findings need to be set in context in the sense that the board training was in its early stages. The list of training topics (described on pages 117-118) provides an indication of the complexity of the task being undertaken. A different picture might be evident after more training has been completed. In the meantime, the accountability aspects of governance with regard to student achievement appears to be enacted by the professionals going to considerable lengths to make their reports understandable to their boards who are then responsible for holding the professionals to account. The activity is primarily a professional one, while their boards listen to their descriptions and explanations in relative silence.

We do not wish to imply that the complexity of the task means it should not be undertaken. At this time, rather than framing the board – professional relationships in accountability terms, it may be more useful for both boards and staff to see themselves participating in a shared endeavour (Todd & Higgins, 1998) through the AUSAD initiative. If the task were to be framed in these terms, boards would be learning alongside the professionals in the activities they were undertaking in relation to AUSAD in their schools through all its phases. This would mean that professional learning on issues such as setting achievement expectations would be paralleled by board learning on the same issues. Boards would participate in the process rather than be recipients of the information. Board training undertaken after the data was collected for this report has become more focused on school-based issues and a more shared endeavour is likely to emerge.

References


