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**How Primary Principals view and respond to  
Curriculum Manageability in their schools**

**A research report presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Education  
at Massey University**

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**2006**

## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that the research project entitled 'How primary principals view and respond to Curriculum Manageability in their schools', and submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research project (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed .....

Date .....

## ABSTRACT

In this research an exploration was conducted into how primary school principals viewed curriculum manageability under the New Zealand Curriculum Framework, how they responded to it in their schools and how they perceived the proposed future curriculum changes in terms of manageability. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from sixty-five out of seventy-eight eligible principals giving a response rate of 82%, thus providing a sound basis for analysis and discussion.

My research revealed six themes on curriculum and manageability issues. Ninety-five percent of the principals agreed that the *curriculum* (what is taught from the curriculum documents) was crowded and 89% agreed that there were manageability problems under the present framework. Findings also showed that *Curriculum* issues (the wider issues at schools beyond the curriculum documents) also affected manageability. Shared leadership was a strategy many principals and schools used for curriculum implementation and planning to cope with the many demands placed upon them since "Tomorrows Schools." A combination of curriculum strategies including curriculum integration and themes has evolved in schools to cope with managing the demands of the curriculum documents.

One-third of the principals did not follow the progress of the Curriculum Stocktake review and the Curriculum Project from 2002-2006. Over 85% of the principals are satisfied with the future curriculum proposals, although a number of them are sceptical about the likely outcomes. School ownership of the curriculum and the need for the Ministry of Education to support and fund the changes were two key issues the principals identified relating to the new document that will enable curriculum manageability to be a reality in the future. I conclude that there is a greater need for attention by the Ministry into *Curriculum* issues in order to assist principals to respond to the demanding and complex issues they are faced with.

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# CONTENTS

<b>CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT</b>	i
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	iii
<b>CONTENTS</b>	iv
<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</b>	vi
<b>CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	3
<b>2.0 Introduction</b>	3
<b>2.1 Brief history of the primary school curriculum</b>	3
1987 Curriculum Review	5
1987 Task force to review education administration	6
1990 National Government is elected	6
The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa)	7
Ministry changes to N.E.G.S and N.A.G.s	7
Curriculum Stocktake (2000-2002)	8
Curriculum Project (2003-2006)	9
<b>2.2 The crowded curriculum and curriculum manageability</b>	9
<i>curriculum</i> issues	12
<i>Curriculum</i> issues	13
<b>2.3 Themes from the literature</b>	14
<i>curriculum</i> issues	14
Time	14
Curriculum documents: requirements and objectives	17
<i>Curriculum</i> issues	22
<b>2.4 Summary</b>	23
<b>CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	25
<b>3.0 Introduction</b>	25
<b>3.1 Research process</b>	25
Research purpose	25
Survey research	26
Gaining consent and making contact	27
Distribution and return of questionnaires	27
<b>3.2 The Questionnaire</b>	28
Ethics Approval	29
Confidentiality	29
<b>CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS</b>	31
<b>4.0 Introduction</b>	31

4.1	<b>Respondent information</b>	31
	Gender and experience	32
	Sizes, deciles and types of schools	32
	Situations and Special Character of Schools	34
4.2	<b>Curriculum manageability</b>	35
4.3	<b>Curriculum manageability in schools</b>	38
4.4	<b>Responses to proposed curriculum changes</b>	41
4.5	<b>Summary</b>	47
<b>CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION</b>		48
5.0	<b>Introduction</b>	48
5.1	<b>How principals perceive curriculum manageability</b>	49
	<i>Curriculum</i> manageability under the present framework	49
	<i>Curriculum</i> manageability	50
5.2	<b>How principals respond to curriculum manageability issues in their schools</b>	53
	Strategies used to achieve <i>curriculum</i> manageability	53
	<i>Curriculum</i> leadership and planning to achieve curriculum manageability	55
5.3	<b>Principals' perceptions of proposed curriculum changes and manageability</b>	57
	Following the Stocktake Review and the Curriculum Project	57
	Both reviews took too long and principals lost interest	58
	A wait-and-see attitude	58
	Can future proposals achieve manageability?	59
	Creating a workable framework	59
	School ownership	60
	Supporting role from the Ministry and E.R.O.	60
5.4	<b>Summary</b>	61
<b>CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		63
6.0	<b>Summary so far</b>	63
6.1	<b>Did the research answer the questions?</b>	64
6.2	<b>Key findings</b>	65
6.3	<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	66
	Draft Curriculum Document	66
	Design	66
	Implementation	67
	Support	67
	<i>Curriculum</i> research	67
6.4	<b>Summary</b>	68
<b>REFERENCES</b>		69
<b>APPENDICES</b>		72

# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

## Chapter 4: List of Tables

Table 4.1	Gender of the principals in the sample	32
Table 4.2	Years of principals' experience	32
Table 4.3	School size	32
Table 4.4	School decile ratings	33
Table 4.5	School type	34
Table 4.6	School location	34
Table 4.7	School character	34
Table 4.8	Principals' perceptions of the N.Z.C.F.	35
Table 4.9	Principals' perceptions of Ministry initiatives	36
Table 4.10	How schools of different deciles viewed wider issues affecting curriculum manageability	37
Table 4.11	Strategies to manage the curriculum in schools	38
Table 4.12	Curriculum leadership and implementation	39
Table 4.13	Long-term curriculum planning	40
Table 4.14	Support for the aims of the Curriculum Project and its Key Competencies	44
Table 4.15	Prioritising for future curriculum planning and delivery	45
Table 4.16	If you had the ear of the Minister, what would you advise in relation to proposed curriculum directions?	46

## Chapter 4: List of Figures

Figure 4.1	Managerial/administration demands on the principal	38
Figure 4.2	Curriculum budgets	41
Figure 4.3	Keeping track of the Curriculum Stocktake and its recommendations	42
Figure 4.4	How involved were principals with the Curriculum Project?	43

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

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*“To cover the old N.Z.C.F. was impossible.” (Principal of religious special character school)*

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In 2000 the Ministry of Education (M.O.E.) began a stocktake of the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (N.Z.C.F.). This followed two decades of curriculum development which began in the early 1980s with a review of our core curriculum. In 1987 a nationwide curriculum review, which had started in 1984, was published. Five years later, in 1991, the draft National Curriculum of New Zealand was published for discussions which led to the N.Z.C.F. being launched in 1993. From 1992-2003 seven Essential Learning Areas (E.L.A.) or Curriculum Statements were implemented. Over this period (1992-2003) schools were still coming to terms with their self-governing roles and responsibilities of “Tomorrow’s Schools” which had been initiated in 1988.

The Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2003) acknowledged that the curriculum was crowded and there were problems of curriculum manageability. In the light of this assertion this researcher set out to explore the ways in which primary principals view, and respond to, the challenges of implementing this apparently crowded curriculum in their schools, and how they view the manageability difficulties in the proposed curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006), posing three questions:

- How do primary school principals perceive curriculum manageability issues and demands within their schools?
- How do principals respond to curriculum manageability in their schools?



- How do principals view the proposed curriculum changes and manageability issues that are implicit within the New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project?  
(Curriculum Project)

In reporting on this research, I begin this project begins by exploring the literature on the curriculum in New Zealand from 1981 up to the Stocktake report in 2003 in which the concerns of a crowded curriculum are officially recognised. The Curriculum Project's proposed aims are also mentioned in the light of curriculum manageability issues central to the research. Research on curriculum manageability is also explored and this material is summarised in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 the details of the research process and methods are described. Central to this is the development of a questionnaire to elicit the views of primary school principals related to the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the questionnaire. In Chapter 5 these results are reviewed and six central themes that emerged from the data concerning curriculum management are presented. The results of the research are summarised in Chapter 6 which incorporates some concluding recommendations made in the light of the new draft curriculum document and the consultation process initiated in it.

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*"The new curriculum proposals will assist in curriculum manageability, however our schools struggle to have Whanau involvement and participation now. I do not believe this will change under new proposals." (Principal of Kura Kaupapa School).*

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## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

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*"I believe the words have changed for new directions but the workload expectations remain the same."  
(Principal of a Special School).*

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### 2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by looking at the history of the Primary School Curriculum since 1981 as it underwent enormous changes of direction, structure and philosophy. I also look at the political influences on the curriculum, particularly how each change of government has initiated a new flurry of curricular activity, and how the control and development of the national curriculum has come under the ministerial umbrella, creating greater centralisation than ever before. This period also led to an increase in the curriculum content to be taught and learnt.

In the second section I look at the crowded curriculum, or, as it is also called, the "overloaded curriculum." As there are different interpretations of the word *curriculum* this term "crowded curriculum" can cause considerable confusion as also can "curriculum manageability." In this section, I will explain how I will view the different interpretations of *curriculum* and *curriculum manageability* throughout the report.

In the final section I look at New Zealand and overseas research literature on issues related to curriculum crowding, and review a wider curriculum critique.

### 2.1 Brief history of the primary school curriculum

Prior to the 1980s the New Zealand school curriculum was structured subject by subject. The subject syllabi were set out in a uniform style and format which did give some unity to the

whole primary curriculum (Department of Education, 1987). School programmes required that each subject was accorded its due time. This led to a curricular of language, mathematics, social studies, nature study and science, music, art and crafts and physical education which each reflected a curriculum tradition common to many other countries (Ewing, 1970).

In the late 1960s and 1970s primary schools increasingly organised their curricular around themes and matters of interest to the children (Bell, Jones, & Carr, 1995). This enabled schools to both unify the curriculum and also manage it, and there was a belief that this helped children to gain a better understanding of the purposes of education. However, critics of this approach such as Murdoch and Hornsby (1997) argue that the content of “themes” was fine-but the process of understanding was ignored, and as a result, this approach often lacked purpose and direction. They maintained that the thematic approach did little to overcome the concerns of separate subjects or to make management more effective.

By the 1980s the school curriculum was seen as being slow to respond to the many changes taking place throughout the world. Calls were being made for schooling to be responsive to the country’s need for people highly skilled in science and technology, with additional skills in other languages and cultural sensitivity. The curriculum was seen as not being relevant to many students-particularly to Maori, Pacific Islanders and girls (Bell et al., 1995). Directions and purposes of the school curriculum were a topic for public debate and a target for lobbyists for change (McCulloch, 1992). In 1981 the Director-General of Education gave an address entitled “Reconstituting the Core Curriculum.” This moved the focus of attention from single subjects to objectives which the curriculum as a whole should be serving (Department of Education, 1987). This led to a review of the core curriculum which was undertaken by the

Department of Education under Merv Wellington, the Minister of Education, and published in 1984.

### **1987 Curriculum Review**

1984 saw the election of the fourth Labour Government and the beginnings of a massive restructuring of education in New Zealand (Peters & Marshall, 1996). The new Minister of Education, Russell Marshall, instigated a comprehensive curriculum review process inviting community consultation about schooling. It was held in schools throughout the country and produced 23,000 submissions (Bell et al., 1995). The report arising from this process was presented in 1987 (Department of Education, 1987). It contained recommendations as to what children should learn and experience in schools. This included having multicultural opportunities and being fair and equitable. The report also detailed what personnel and resources were needed. It stressed that the subject syllabi were only one part of the curriculum that also included all the teaching experiences, events, evaluation, in short all the experiences occurring in schools. In reality there were still numerous separate syllabi documents (McCulloch, 1992). Another 10,000 submissions were generated in response to the 1987 Review. In 1988 a Draft National Curriculum statement was published (Department of Education, 1988). While educationalists were positive about this statement there were criticisms that it did not encompass the economic, management and consumer needs of our society. It must be remembered that these criticisms were made in the context of immense social and economic changes being implemented by the Labour Government at this time (Bell et al., 1995).

This massive public consultation was intended to update the school curriculum for twentieth century needs, but in reality none of these ideas were ever implemented because they were

overtaken by other reforms, particularly “Tomorrow’s Schools” which moved the focus from curriculum to the organisation and administration of education (Gilbert, 2005).

### **1987 Task force to review education administration**

In 1987 the Labour Prime Minister David Lange, who had taken on the Education portfolio, commissioned a task force that resulted in the “Tomorrow’s Schools” initiative. When the National government came to power in 1990 they continued the new right reform of educational administration, begun by “Tomorrow’s Schools,” including new structures and accountability mechanisms. This administrative push continued right through until the ongoing debate over “bulk funding” of schools was resolved in 1999. With the dismantling of the curriculum development structure that had existed within the old Department of Education, the curriculum had by this time, come under the control of the minister rather than the “end users”, educationalists and schools (Peters & Marshall, 1996).

### **1990 National Government is elected**

The new Minister of Education, Lockwood Smith, embarked on a project to revise the curricular in primary and secondary schools called the *Achievement Initiative 1991* (National Party Manifesto, 1991). His rationale, mode of operation and curriculum ideas were heavily influenced by those of the new right government in Britain. Education administration under the Education Act 1989 had been changed radically and now the focus moved to the curriculum. But despite the curriculum consultation of the 1980s the process and shape of the curriculum development in the 1990s bore little resemblance to what was envisaged in the late 1980s (Bell et al., 1995). The new Government believed that they had a clear mandate to enhance educational achievement and skill development in order to meet the needs of a highly competitive, modern, international economy. They redesigned the curriculum in an attempt to

meet the needs of business and industry (Peters & Marshall, 1996). This led to a burgeoning of the content of the official curriculum in the form of multiple objectives developed in the seven Curriculum Statements that emerged through the 1990s and early 2000s (McGee & Penlington, 2001).

The starting point for this series of events was the draft National Curriculum of New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1991) which was published for discussion and led to the creation of the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993). This document provided an overarching policy statement under which the following statements of the seven E.L.A. were to be read.

#### **The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa)**

This overarching framework defined seven broad E.L.A. rather than subject areas. Schools were to ensure that all children undertook continued study in all learning areas in the first ten years of schooling. Schools had flexibility as to how this was achieved and the responsibility for making the implementation decisions (Ministry of Education, 1993). Curriculum policy had shifted from a focus on content and activities to one of outcomes. Schools had to show what outcomes, set out in the achievement objectives, the students achieved as a result of their programmes. Curriculum Statements now replaced the old curriculum syllabus. The seven E.L.A. were to be implemented over a ten-year period at the end of which there was to be time for consolidation and reflection (Ministry of Education, 1993). Amazingly, this document, that was to have such a huge influence on curriculum in schools, and which created enormous pressure on schools to implement its provisions over the ten years was never gazetted—that is it was not an official document and had no official status. However, despite not being gazetted, this document was still seen as the overarching curricular policy statement according to Ministry of Education officer, Francis Kelly (Chapman, 2004).

### **Ministry changes to N.E.G.s and N.A.G.s**

In 1993 the Government revised their National Education Guidelines (N.E.G.s) and National Administration Guidelines (N.A.G.s) to accommodate the implementation of the new Curriculum Framework (N.Z.C.F.). Guideline 1 of the N.A.G.s stated that school Boards of Trustees must foster student achievement by providing a balanced curriculum in accordance with the national curriculum statements (i.e. N.Z.C.F.) and other documents based upon it. Guideline 5 of the N.E.G.s added to the balanced curriculum by specifying high levels of competence in basic Literacy and Numeracy, Science and Technology.

In November 1999 the Education Minister, Nick Smith, announced changes to the N.E.G.s giving schools a clear direction that Literacy and Numeracy skills must be the priorities in the first four years of schooling. Mr Smith added that the government had created a complex menu of subject material through the new national curriculum and the seven areas of learning. While the government wished to maintain that broad approach it was clear that achievement in Literacy and Numeracy must have the highest priority. There was thus, an official shift in emphasis, from balance in 1993 to depth in 1999 (Ministry of Education, 1993 & 1999).

The Labour party was re-elected in late 1999. In keeping with the political nature of the curriculum, they undertook, in November 2000, to initiate a “stocktake” of the curriculum. This reflected the ongoing pattern of changes that the national curriculum underwent from 1984-2006 with every change of government.

### **Curriculum Stocktake (2000-2002)**

The Curriculum Stocktake Report was intended to reflect on the previous ten years of curriculum development. It considered the implications for teaching and learning and for

future policy. The previous curriculum reform was analysed under a series of headings including; the appropriateness to the current educational, social and economic climate, the purposes of the curriculum and the quality of the curriculum in terms of improved student outcomes. The report also sought to make international comparisons and to review whether or not the curriculum was meeting the expectations of stakeholders (Ministry of Education, 2002).

### **Curriculum Project (2003-2006)**

In September 2002, the Curriculum Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2002), was presented to the Minister. The Curriculum Project was then initiated to enable discussion of the recommendations of the report and to revise and draft a new curriculum document which, with due consultation, was to be implemented around 2006-2007.

In August 2006 a draft document containing the new curriculum proposal was published by the M.O.E. Consultation and review of these directions will continue during the remainder of 2006 and early 2007. The final document should have its official release some time in late 2007.

This research was undertaken at the time when the new draft document had just been published and circulated.

## **2.2 The crowded curriculum and curriculum manageability**

The field of curriculum is very complex and the term *curriculum* means different things to different people (McGee, 1997). The Curriculum Review team (Department of Education, 1987) interpreted curriculum as meaning all the activities, events and experiences that take



place in schools' learning programmes-which include the syllabus, teaching and evaluations (Department of Education, 1987). It also includes what the children should do in a school and the teachers and resources that are needed to facilitate this. Use of this interpretation meant that curriculum syllabi and what is expected to be taught were viewed as only one aspect within the wider school setting. Within the N.Z.C.F. (Ministry of Education, 1993) however, the meaning of *curriculum* is limited to "the official policy for teaching, learning and assessment in New Zealand schools" (Ministry of Education, 1993; p. 3).

In the Curriculum Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2002) there is an attempt to clarify this curriculum confusion. The Report states that the "curriculum encompasses all learning, both formal and informal, occurring in educational settings, including social values, attitudes and norms of behaviour as well as a body of knowledge" (Ministry of Education, 2002; p.1). In practice, however, the *curriculum* is commonly construed as a plan for teaching, in which knowledge and procedures are isolated from the sociocultural context of the school and classroom (Cornbleth, 1990, cited in *Stocktake Report*, 2002; p.1). The report goes on to interpret curriculum development as a dynamic and interactive process. The wider school setting, and the extracurricular commitments as well as the contents of the curriculum documents and their objectives are, from the Ministry's viewpoint, part of the curriculum.

Yet when one looks at the recommendations of the *Curriculum Stocktake Report* it appears to focus on the official policy of teaching, learning and assessment. It includes recommendations for redevelopment of the curriculum statements. It includes revising and modifying essential skills, attitudes and values. It contains suggestions about greater guidance in assessment. There is also a suggestion concerning a reduction in the achievement objectives. Two points arise from this. The first is that while the wider view of curriculum is often acknowledged, the

discussion then tends to revert to the narrow and more concrete view. The second point is that there is seldom any discussion about how schools go about enacting this narrower view of curriculum within the wider context. This is the manageability issue.

The view within the Curriculum Project team is of the wider picture. Mary Anne Mills, Senior Advisor with this team, made this absolutely clear when explaining the new Draft Curriculum to principals and teachers in August 2006. She likened the curriculum to a human body. The curriculum documents, she explained, are just “the bones” of the body. The “curriculum” means everything about the school, the child as well as the learning. Curriculum manageability, she said, was all about prioritising what is important to each school (Mills, 2006).

As there are different interpretations of the word *curriculum*, the term *crowded curriculum* can cause considerable confusion as can the notion of *curriculum manageability*. To avoid confusion, three definitions are provided below. These terms will be used throughout this report with the meanings contained in these definitions.

- *curriculum* (small c) will be used for discussing issues concerning the curriculum documents. In essence these are the teaching and learning issues in the classroom, the narrow view of curriculum.
- *Curriculum* (Capital C) will be used for discussing the wider issues in schools including those beyond the curriculum documents. Some of these issues include implementation pressures of the E.L.A.s, Planning and Reporting requirements, social issues, community expectations, funding, behaviour management, property maintenance, staffing problems and so on. In essence, these are all things that contribute to the complete range of experiences children have at school.

- manageability will be used for discussing tasks schools and principals have to do to manage these two interpretations of the word “curriculum.” Some of these key tasks are prioritising, resourcing and training.

When the word curriculum is not italicised it takes on a general meaning that should be clear from the content of its usage. These issues will be explained further as required.

### ***curriculum issues***

As a teacher and principal of a large urban primary school my understanding of the way teachers and principals talk of the “crowded curriculum” is about the demands of the curriculum documents and attempting to fit these within the daily timeframe. Each curriculum subject is made up of several strands. In English for example, there are three strands: Oral, Written and Visual. Inside these strands are yet more complex clusters of skills, attitudes and values to be mastered, and these are expressed as multiple achievement objectives expected to be met. Science is made up of six major strands which require the teacher to have a huge range of knowledge. In addition to the material condensed within the seven curriculum statements, Te Reo Maori knowledge and usage is a further requirement. Computing skills and knowledge form another additional priority for schools. The majority of New Zealand primary teachers each have to teach his/her class in all seven curriculum subjects. This would allow less than three hours per week on each area were they all be given equal weight.

However, there is a required emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy which diminishes the time for other subjects (Carr et al., 2005). Meeting all these requirements is a demanding, if not impossible, task. Decision making on how and what to plan to cover the official curriculum requirements is devolved to each school to grapple with. This needed to be reworked when Ministry focus shifted from breadth to depth (Ministry of Education, 1999).

There is also the additional issue that the views of some teachers and principals about the overcrowded curriculum were clouded by the pressure to learn and implement seven E.L.A. over a ten-year period. Teachers had to read and understand each new curriculum document as it was released, and then implement it while still teaching and coping with the everyday school pressures (Mills, 2006). This included the management and reporting of reforms, deferred maintenance of school property through the '90s, and policy writing that were required by the ongoing changes associated with "Tomorrow's Schools." There can be no doubt that these contributed to the sense of curriculum "overcrowding."

### ● *Curriculum issues*

These issues are sometimes known as the extra-curricular issues at school, but they are more than that. There is an examining review of each school every three years conducted by the Educational Review Office (E.R.O.) which has changed its nature and approach to reporting several times. There are the demands of providing the Planning and Reporting goals that are required each year by the Ministry. There are the constant financial and time pressures for support materials and professional development. Societal problems of health, child care and behaviour add to the load. Schools also have to cope with unrealistically high expectations from some parents and lack of concern by others. The school's roll is always a concern for funding and staffing, and parent views within an educational market in which children can be moved to another school on a whim heighten this pressure. There are sporting and cultural expectations that form part of this picture. *Curriculum* issues have thus a significant effect on *curriculum* issues because of the time and resourcing demands they create for schools.

The use of the definitions provided on page 11, and an understanding of the complexity of the management tasks that schools face, provide a background for a review of recent International and New Zealand research literature relating to the curriculum.

In conducting this review the “ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and INNZ,” databases were searched using the key words in various combinations: curriculum, principals, research, management, overcrowding, overloading and schools.

## **2.3 Themes from the literature**

The definitions provided in the previous section have been used as themes for reviewing the curriculum literature.

### ***curriculum issues***

Related issues arising within the literature focus on two key areas: time restraints and the objectives and requirements of the curriculum documents.

#### **Time**

Having the time to teach and assess all the requirements of the curriculum documents is the first focus in this set of curriculum issues. McGee and Penlington (2001) found little research in New Zealand on time allocation and the curriculum before the Curriculum Stocktake.

There was a review in 1999 on the school day and school year. The review covered the time spent on each E.L.A. finding that language dominated. It was very difficult to calculate, particularly because many schools take an “integrated” approach to the curriculum.

Irwin (1996) believed that a major weakness of the N.Z.C.F. was the lack of time indication for each E.L.A. (in its various stages) and that this omission would lead to problems in implementation within an overcrowded curriculum. The recommendation in the Stocktake

Report (Ministry of Education, 2002) confirmed his views on the issue of overcrowdedness.

Other researchers such as Carr et al. (2005) believed that it was the documents rather than the lack of time that caused the problems of manageability because the seven curriculum subjects and their strands represent a far greater array of content than was present in previous curricula, yet school hours are still the same.

From a United Kingdom perspective, Campbell (1993) suggested that time allocation is a critical problem for managing the curriculum. He discusses how each subject area is devised by experts in that subject but there is little detail provided as to how much time is needed for that subject and how it is connected within the whole curriculum. Teachers are required to teach less in each subject in order to fit the expanded breadth required. Campbell also reported that in every school there were problems related to too much planned prescription, too much content in every subject, not enough flexibility for evaporated time (time that is just lost through planned or unplanned happenings in a school day), and an assumption that more time is available for the nonbasic subjects (such as art or social studies). Campbell and Neill (1994), however, found that time was only one of a number of factors that teachers had to juggle as they made decisions about how much time to devote to various subjects.

Research in the 1990s by McGee and Penlington (2001) focussing on teaching, learning and curriculum, both in New Zealand and overseas, also highlighted the fact that one of the important structural decision that all teachers must make is about how much time to spend on each subject. This task of apportioning time to different subjects has been complicated by the burgeoning content of the official curriculum in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Research in the United Kingdom following the implementation of the national curriculum in 1988, clearly showed that teachers were united in their assertion

that it was impossible to teach the entire national curriculum because of its comprehensive demands and the lack of time in the school day (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996, cited in McGhee & Penlington, 2001).

In the three countries mentioned, teachers found curriculum management frustrating because they were always left with a feeling that they had never quite completed the task of teaching and there was always more curriculum material than there was time to teach (Murdoch & Hornsby, 1997). Conclusions from Australian research were that teachers faced enormous challenges relating to time and content coverage. Teachers found it difficult to reconcile content coverage and student understanding. Teachers were forced to leave some topics out as there was no time to cover them properly and make allowances for the learning needs of each child. Teachers also pleaded that when new curricula were being planned they needed time to study the new content before implementation (McGee, 1997). Research in the United States on contemporary issues in the curriculum again showed that teachers felt considerable pressure about the amount there was to teach and that it was considered impossible to do it all (Martin, 2003).

Thus, shortage of time is a recurring theme here. Within New Zealand, Carr et al. (2005) suggests that the work of teachers in New Zealand and the consequences for childrens' learning need to be set against what teachers are required to teach and the available time. It is interesting to see that there are no time allocations for each E.L.A. in the Draft New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006).

### Curriculum documents: requirements and objectives

The Curriculum Stocktake 2000-2002 (Ministry of Education, 2002) constituted a major curriculum research project undertaken by the New Zealand M.O.E. to review the curriculum under the N.Z.C.F. that was launched in 1993. The Report highlighted the crowded curriculum in several sections. In Section 1 *Quality of the New Zealand Curriculum* the report notes the need to revise and reduce learning objectives and essential skills. The request for two languages needed a great deal more consideration in order to avoid increasing the perception of curriculum overcrowding. Consultation with schools showed that while most schools felt they had implemented the N.Z.C.F. effectively they knew their workload had increased considerably. The Education Review Office (E.R.O.) also believed the scale and spread of curriculum change may have resulted in pressure on teachers that was very onerous for some (E.R.O., cited in Ministry of Education, 2002; p.32) In Section 3 entitled *The Nature of the New Zealand Curriculum*, the report records the “widespread sector concern of the overcrowded curriculum and curriculum needs have to be reduced” (Ministry of Education, 2002; p. 4).

In Recommendation 5 of *The Recommendations of the Stocktake Report* it is stated that the E.L.A.s in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework are to be revised (Ministry of Education, 2002). The rationale for this recommendation is to address the concerns about the curriculum’s manageability, crowdedness and a need to prioritise learning in the national curriculum. The recommendation includes the observation that to overcome this problem the E.L.A.s do not have to be taught as separate subjects and

- That the outcomes for each E.L.A. should be interrelated.
- That the learning should be holistic.



- The curriculum should emphasise the value of developing connections between the outcomes within and across each E.L.A.

Checking the purposes of the curriculum, developing future-focused themes and curriculum integration were suggestions for attention to overcome these problems (Ministry of Education, 2002).

These admissions and recommendations appear to be a major realisation by the Ministry that curriculum manageability has been a major problem under the N.Z.C.F. and that this is a concern that needs to be addressed within the Curriculum Project. One of the key areas for attention was how workload issues might be solved. The Ministry had, since 2000, been advocating depth of curriculum coverage rather than breadth, quality not quantity. “It’s not about doing more but doing things differently” (Chamberlain, 2003). How to achieve curriculum manageability and flexibility as well as strengthen school ownership of the curriculum was one of the key focuses for the Curriculum Project Team. The Ministry would need to take a central role in supporting this new direction (Chamberlain, 2003).

In his review of the N.Z.C.F., Donnelly (2002) provided an international perspective when he compared New Zealand with international best practice. He found the New Zealand Curriculum structure to be substandard and flawed. The outcomes-based approach of the New Zealand curriculum had been largely abandoned by Australia and The United States. The time for reflection and consolidation in the 1990s that might have allowed resolution of some management issues had not been used for these purposes. New Zealand had gone to an outcomes-based curriculum, yet there had been no research as to whether or not our previous content-based curriculum had been problematic. In Donnelly’s view all the talk focussed on how to learn, yet effective learning requires a balance between the content and the process

and a carefully selected knowledge base. His insinuation was that curriculum manageability for effective learning could not happen with the present structure.

Research conducted for the M.O.E. on “Effects of Curricula and Assessment on Pedagogical Approaches and on Educational Outcomes” (Carr et al., 2005) reviewed research and other studies in this area carried out in the five years immediately preceding publication, both internationally and in New Zealand. They found few research investigations that focussed on curriculum alone. The research was mainly on interplay between curriculum and assessment or curriculum and pedagogy. They found no research-based conclusions that dealt with the question of the curriculum delivery (being taught as separate subject areas or involving an integrated approach). The report contains an acknowledgement of the difficulties in attempting to make comparisons however. New Zealand had developed Technology as a separate subject area (Ministry of Education, 1995). The fact that many other countries have integrated curriculum subjects such as Technology in different combinations made it difficult to compare. It was also difficult to make comparisons between the past (when curriculum demand was less) and the present.

The literature search by Carr et al. (2005) revealed little research evidence to provide robust answers to questions about the nature of the curriculum and the appropriate mix of knowledge and skills that the curriculum should contain. They found that assessment is a theme that dominates almost all curriculum research. Classroom observations show that English and Mathematics have come to dominate the curriculum at the expense of other subjects. All O.E.C.D. countries are now revising curricular strands to emphasise more practical work, student relevance and motivation to learn. In their summary of the curriculum the authors comment “no matter what is included in a curriculum at the national level it is the classroom

curriculum that impacts on student achievement and there are few classroom studies that provide insights into this” (Carr et. al., 2005; p. 37).

Co-ordinators of New Zealand National Educational Monitoring Project (N.E.M.P.), Crooks and Finch, believe that ten years of monitoring curriculum data have shown that the current treadmill of curriculum demands cuts across all the literature about quality student learning where depth is crucial. Teachers, they say, are rushing from one topic to the next rather than having time to stimulate and deepen learning (Crooks & Finch, cited in Walsh, 2003).

This leads to the conclusion that a system must be set up that offers robust criteria for making rational decisions about what curriculum content to include to avoid the overcrowded curriculum (Clarke, 2005). The New Zealand curriculum, Clarke believes, is overcrowded with content and there is too much taught and learnt superficially. He suggests that schools should “not teach more increasingly poorly” but “teach less increasingly better” (Clarke, 2005; p. 13).

Campbell (1993) argues that primary schools in Britain have an overcrowded and unmanageable curriculum. The problem stemmed from curriculum principles which stated that all children are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum and that assessment and attainment standards had to be raised. Further, the curriculum had to be modernised to include such subjects as Technology. But these principles, once stated and mandated, became unmanageable. The manageability problems were aggravated by the mismanagement of implementation which occurred when too many changes were made too quickly. This seems remarkably similar to the New Zealand situation throughout the 1990s.

Another problem in Britain was the task demands placed on the teachers (Campbell, 1993). The primary teacher is attempting to deliver the whole curriculum in which each subject includes multiple achievement objectives and levels, with the added requirement of assessing and reporting on student progress. Teachers are also expected to know and use appropriate pedagogical approaches for each age group. Campbell's (1993) research showed that the task demands on teachers were impossible to fulfil. Furthermore, resourcing was hopelessly inadequate because of an inadequate funding formula.

Martin (2003) found that similar problems occurred in the United States. Curriculum and school funding, she says, were at opposite ends of the spectrum; school funding was never enough and was always asked to go further, whereas the curriculum was already too much and more was always required. Campbell's (1993) view, however, was that even with adequate resourcing, there still would have been constraints facing the satisfactory implementation of the new curriculum. Schools were failing to meet the statutory requirements because it was impossible to meet them. Campbell suggested a number of ways that schools could attempt to overcome manageability problems within the curriculum framework but believed, like Clarke (2005; p. 13), that there was only one solution that could practically work which was "to teach less better."

It is thus an international trend throughout the 1990s that teachers have been asked to cover increasing content which is often impossible, and, to add to the burden, there have repeatedly been problems with a lack of support and resourcing.

Ruth Sutton, a British educational consultant who has worked in educational institutions in a number of countries, reports that the curriculum is 'overstuffed' in every country she has been

to. She believes that all curriculum designers want to keep everything that has been taught before, but acknowledge the expansion of the knowledge base by stuffing more into it. Her view is that curriculum designers need to decide what is essential and then compromise. Sutton was positive about the New Zealand Curriculum Stocktake process and that it has targeted the issue of overcrowding. However, she believes it will be very unlikely that we will end up with a curriculum that is manageable (Sutton, cited in Walsh, 2003).

### ***Curriculum issues***

Information and research are very scarce in relation to the wider view of curricula. The 1987 Curriculum Review (Department of Education, 1987) reports a community submission that suggests no one school could meet all the demands being made of it. However, there is no response within the recommendations as to how to overcome this problem.

Lindberg's (2005) research on the roles of the principal and the Board of Trustees (B.O.T.) found some principals spending disproportionate amounts of time on certain tasks related to management, finance and school governance. Only in one case did a principal spend the same amount of time on curriculum. Thus it appears that principals see a major part of their role as being that of managers rather than as that of curriculum leaders. *Curriculum* impacts on their ability to lead *curriculum*.

The research by Carr et al. (2005) reported that many of the pressures now felt by all school staff members could be argued to result in an overcrowded curriculum. They found that there were also many other extracurricular demands on the available teaching time, such as responding to pupils' social needs and increasing activities outside school time, particularly in sports and cultural activities. Schools, they said, are certainly different from those in

previous decades and the consequences of this pressure are not well researched (Carr et al., 2005).

It must be mentioned here that a great deal of time was spent trying to find research on the issues of curriculum and manageability. Despite using a variety of keywords and combinations in my data-based searches I could not find any research that specifically focussed on *Curriculum* issues. The small number of examples that I have used were sections from research on *curriculum* issues which completely dominates curriculum research.

## 2.4 Summary

In this section I have outlined the history of the New Zealand curriculum, particularly from 1984, up to the present day. I have focussed on the key developments that led to the implementation of the N.Z.C.F. The compilers of the Curriculum Stocktake Report and the Curriculum Project have reviewed the effectiveness of this framework and have proposed new directions for the future. Both *Curriculum* issues and *curriculum* issues have been discussed and interpreted in the light of this project.

While the literature shows that a body of research on issues that centre on the *curriculum* and also suggests that the overcrowded curriculum is a widespread problem, there is considerably less discussion about *Curriculum* issues. What is absent from the literature is any significant discussion about how schools, in general, and principals in particular, actually go about prioritising the multiple and apparently unreasonable demands placed upon them.

The absence of a significant discussion on how schools implement the multiple demands of *curriculum* and the lack of data on the impact of *Curriculum* issues on this process sets the

scene for the research undertaken in this project and provide the focus for the three key research questions:

1. How do principals perceive curriculum manageability under the New Zealand Curriculum Framework?
2. How do principals respond to curriculum manageability in their schools?
3. How do principals' perceive proposed curriculum changes and manageability?

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*"Trust schools to get on with the job. Don't tinker, stop producing 'B.E.S.T.' documents for a while and let us get on and enjoy what we know we have to do." (Experienced U5/6 principal)*

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## CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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*“Keep it flexible-keep it simple-keep it realistic.” (U3-U4 principal on the new curriculum directions)*

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### 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methods and the research sample used in the project. I also outline procedures adopted throughout the study for processing the data. In Section 1 I look at the research purpose and the probability sample. Participant consent is discussed, followed by details concerning the distribution and return of questionnaires. A justification for the approach taken is also provided. In Section 2 I look at the questionnaire construction and ethics approvals associated with this research.

### 3.1 Research process

#### Research purpose

Motivated by the gap in the literature (Chapter 2) I set out to explore the issues of “curriculum manageability” through a questionnaire (Appendix 1) addressed to primary school principals. I picked a geographical area that had a mix of school sizes, rural and urban schools and decile ratings. I anticipated that it would give a wide range of principal experience in curriculum leadership. This approach provides a snapshot (regarding curriculum) at a specific time at which the data were collected (Denscombe, 2003). The principals of these schools became my probability sample because I believed they mirrored the population of New Zealand principals. The sample should mirror the population (De Vaus, 2002; Scott & Ussher, 2004; Strauss, 2001). To protect the confidentiality of the participants this area is not identified throughout the report.



Distributing the questionnaire through the local Principals' Association was seen as an efficient method of recruiting a significant number of principals from a range of schools as mentioned above. The timing of this research coincided with the intended publication of the draft New Zealand Curriculum (August, 2006) and the planned consultation to follow.

### **Survey research**

It was decided that a survey in the form of a mail questionnaire to these primary school principals would be the best way to address the purpose of my research. As Davidson and Tolich (2003; p. 189) argue "survey research is an effective way to learn about people, their attitudes, opinions and preferences" and it provided a sound way to collect data from a population too large to speak to and observe directly (Babbie, 2004; Scott & Usher, 2004).

There were other advantages in the use of a mail questionnaire survey. A questionnaire survey allowed me to reach a relatively large number of primary principals in the chosen area and to maximise the collection of responses. A survey allowed me to gather data efficiently, widely and at minimal cost (Cresswell, 2002). Predetermined questions and standardisation of responses allowed the same experience for everyone (Scott & Usher, 2004). A questionnaire provided participants with a mechanism for expressing their views confidentially on issues that all principals have to grapple with.

There are limitations to this approach that need to be considered, however. Survey approaches tend to yield a poor level of response. A well administered survey can get a 65-70% response, but many do not (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). There are also the dangers that arise from poorly phrased questions. Questions that are too complex or ambiguous or leading questions can limit the value of the data. From the principals' point of view, time is precious and a research

questionnaire could be seen as just another paperwork demand. This could contribute to a low response rate. In the event, the approaches taken in administering the questionnaire resulted in an 82% return rate which is high in terms of the discussion by Davidson and Tolich.

### **Gaining consent and making contact**

The Principals' Association committee approved and supported my request to use their members for a questionnaire, allowed the use of their mailing list and the opportunity to speak for twenty minutes during their Term 1 meeting. In April 2006, I addressed the principals to explain my research topic and seek their support. At the meeting I stressed the importance of the principals' voice in M.O.E. deliberations, such as the Curriculum Project, and how their views in this research would be sent to the Project team as part of their draft consultation. I believe this personal request was a key factor in the response return rate.

### **Distribution and return of questionnaires**

Questionnaires were mailed on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006. The Introduction Letter outlined my reasons and objectives for my study, while the Information Sheet outlined Massey University research requirements and the necessary information on ethics and participants' rights. There was an addressed stamped envelope in the package.

I allowed two weeks for the questionnaire returns. A reminder letter was then sent by my research administrator to those principals who had not replied. A further two weeks were given for the reminder returns. The closing date was 26 August. I had a 52% return rate from the first return, which went up to 82% when the second returns came in.

The data were processed, and the results are discussed in Chapter 4.

### 3.2 The Questionnaire

I designed the questionnaire as a deliberate mix of both quantitative and qualitative questions (Appendix 1). The quantitative questions took up 80% of the questionnaire and contained several questions of a closed nature. Closed questions are popular in survey research because they generate a greater uniformity of responses, are more easily processed and are strongly reliable (Babbie, 2004). However I also had some open-ended questions to enable the questionnaire to provide both quantitative and qualitative data in the same project (Scott & Ussher, 2004).

In Section 1 of the questionnaire I needed to find out school size, decile rating and school type in order to look for possible patterns and differences between the schools regarding how the curriculum is planned and delivered and whether problems of manageability reflected school character to any degree. The length of each principal's experience was also crucial in order to see if experienced principals saw the manageability issue differently from newer principals. I also wanted to see if a school's location had a noticeable effect on the results, and in this regard the views of the smaller country principals, many of whom have to teach the curriculum as well as perform their leadership and administrative roles, were particularly important. I also wanted to compare views and demands generated in schools of different socioeconomic status. School character such as Bilingual and Kura Kaupapa schools might also provide insights into manageability issues.

A Likert scale was used in Section 2 to seek quantitative information in responses to manageability issues and to gauge the strength of principals' perceptions of the issues canvassed. In this section I allowed for qualitative additional comments in order to provide opportunities for participants to respond in their own ways. In Section 3, I sought responses to

how each school dealt with curriculum manageability so it contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions. Principals were questioned in Section 4 on the Curriculum Stocktake and Curriculum Project reviews and I also sought their views on future curriculum directions. It contained qualitative questions that also allowed for open-ended responses.

The questionnaire was trialled and refined by piloting it with two principals who were not involved in the research. Both had had research and questionnaire experience. Their feedback and further consultation with my supervisors helped reshape the format and refine questions that could have been ambiguous. Pretesting the questionnaire is recommended in the literature (Babbie, 2004). A key focus in this process was to develop a questionnaire that was easy to follow, relevant and could be answered in approximately fifteen minutes. Babbie (2004) emphasises the importance of these issues in questionnaire construction. Positive feedback from participating principals and the high return rate may be reflections of the trialling process.

### **Ethics approval**

The research proposal, including the refined questionnaire, an Introductory Letter to Principals (Appendix 2) and an Information Sheet (Appendix 3) were reviewed by my supervisors who submitted them to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee as a low risk project. The explanation of the low risk ethics status was included on the Information Sheet.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality and the ethical conduct of the research were key considerations at all times during this stage of the research. Questionnaires were mailed out and returned through an

administrator to ensure confidentiality. Questionnaires were assigned a number which was covered when returned. This enabled the administrator to send out the reminder letter to those principals who had not returned the questionnaire. Confidentiality was thus maintained throughout the questionnaire collection, data analysis and subsequent research reporting.

The questionnaire's return was taken as evidence of the participant's informed consent. The data were kept secure in a locked cabinet and used only for the purposes intended as explained in the material sent out with the questionnaire.

In this research I canvassed the views of principals, many of whom would have held leadership positions over the period of the introduction and implementation of the N.Z.C.F. By giving the participants an opportunity to share their experiences I hope for a heightened profile of these curriculum issues in order to stimulate further informed debate and provide feedback to the Curriculum Project Team before the final decisions are made on future curriculum construction. Debate and feedback are the necessary precursors to positive change.

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*"The new aims can't achieve manageability on their own. We need high quality P.D. or the new document will just be another document that puts pressure on us." (Principal of decile 6 school)*

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## CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

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*“The new document will go a long way to lessen the over crowdedness and I believe will allow/enable each school to develop its own character.” (Decile 1 principal)*

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### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the results from the questionnaire to principals. I present the findings of the questionnaire, described in Chapter 3 and included as Appendix 1, which are prescribed in the order that the groups of questions occurred. The questionnaire was designed to investigate how primary school principals perceive, and respond to, curriculum manageability in their schools as well as their perceptions of the proposed curriculum changes.

In Section 1 I provide a profile of the 65 principals who completed my questionnaire. This includes the length of the principals’ experience plus their school size, decile rating and school character. There is limited interpretive comment in this section. In Section 2 I review and discuss the quantitative data that come from Section 2 relating to the topics of the “overloaded curriculum” and “curriculum manageability.” In Section 3 I present data on how principals respond to, and plan for, the schools’ curriculum delivery and the strategies used. Finally, in Section 4 I describe how principals responded to the Curriculum Stocktake process and how they view the proposed curriculum changes, the Curriculum Project and its implications for their work.

### 4.1 Respondent information

In this section I present data on the background of the sixty-five principals who completed the questionnaire and the status of the schools they lead.

## Gender and experience

Table 4.1 Gender of the Principals in the Sample

Male	Female
78%	22 %

National figures reveal that 43% of New Zealand primary school principals are women, while men total 57% (Ministry of Education, 2005). The high percentage of male principals in this sample is historic for this area and may reflect a conservative nature. A male perspective therefore dominates these data.

Table 4.2 Years of Principals' Experience.

0-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	10+ yrs
18%	18%	63%

There is a high percentage of principals who have been principals for 10 years or longer. The area of the sample surveyed is seen as a desirable area in which to work. Principals from other areas apply for positions and very few leave to go on to other areas. Local principals tend to stay on in their schools for long periods. The high percentage in the 10 years plus group is useful in terms of this study because a significant number of principals have experienced the regime of change reviewed in Chapter 2 and should be able to report on this should they see it as a significant factor in curriculum enactment.

## Sizes, deciles and types of schools

Table 4.3 School Size.

U1 – U2	U3 – U4	U5 – U6
20%	45%	35%

School size classification comes from the number of children on the school roll taken on 1 July each year. The relevant numbers for the grade and size in this survey are

- U1 1-50 pupils.
- U2 51-100 pupils
- U3 101-150 pupils
- U4 151-300 pupils
- U5 300-500 pupils
- U6 501-675 pupils ((Ministry of Education, 2005).

There are no primary schools bigger than a U6 in this district. The sample contains thirteen small schools, twenty-nine medium and twenty-two large schools. This is a useful spread that provides for sufficient information to identify issues related to school size should they arise.

Table 4.4 School Decile Ratings.

<b>Decile 1-2</b>	<b>Decile 3-5</b>	<b>Decile 6-10</b>
31%	35%	34%

A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from lower socioeconomic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socioeconomic communities. Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. The decile 2-9 schools fit inbetween. The decile rating is based on census information from the school's catchment area. The lower the decile rating the greater the amount of funding the school receives from the M.O.E. (Ministry of Education, 2005). The three decile groups in Table 4.4 were selected from Ministry figures (Ministry of Education, 2005) to represent "low," "middle" and "high" decile rating schools. In this survey there is an even spread across the ratings.



Table 4.5 School Type.

<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Full Primary</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Other</b>
46%	43%	8%	3%

The following types of schools are classified according to the year levels of students taught at the school.

- **Contributing** Yr1-Yr 6. (These are schools where pupils go on to other schools, usually an intermediate after Year 6.)
- **Full Primary** Yr1-Yr 8.
- **Intermediate** Yr7-Yr 8.
- **Other** (Year levels will depend on the school's special character).

Contributing and Full Primary schools dominate the sample. The "other" schools were a Special school (I.H.C.) with ages from 5-21 years and a Bilingual school which identified itself as "other."

### Situation and Special Character of schools

Table 4.6 School Location.

<b>Town</b>	<b>Semi-Rural</b>	<b>Rural</b>
66%	15%	18%

Principals identified the situation of their schools from a choice of town, semirural and rural.

Semirural schools are close to a town or city but that have a rural flavour. The sample shows a strong urban bias.

Table 4.7 School character.

<b>No Special Character</b>	<b>Religious Character</b>	<b>Bi-Lingual/ Kura Kaupapa</b>	<b>Other</b>
77%	9%	11%	3%

From these figures over three-quarters of the schools do not identify themselves as special character- that is, they are state run schools with no significant religious, race, or educational philosophy character. Schools with special character have a strong focus in their curriculum and learning relating to their special character. These include schools with a Maori focus or religious character. These schools have to both manage curriculum demands from the state and meet their special character obligations.

In summary the background of principals presents a male-dominated group with relatively long principal experience. There is a pleasing spread of schools in size, type and decile ratings. Town schools dominate, but there are a small number of special character schools.

## 4.2 Curriculum manageability

This section is focused on the question of how principals perceive curriculum manageability under the curriculum framework. Questions involved a five-point scale ranged from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (0). Nine statements on manageability issues were canvassed.

Extra comments could be added if the respondent wished.

Table 4.8 Principals' perceptions of the N.Z.C.F.

(N=65) Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The Curriculum is overcrowded.	46 (n=30)	49 (n=32)	2 (n=1)	3 (n=2)	0 (n=0)
Curriculum Manageability is a problem.	35 (n=23)	54 (n=35)	6 (n=4)	5 (n=3)	0 (n=0)
Seven Curriculum Statements under the umbrella of the N.Z.C.F. are unwieldy and lack coherence.	32 (n=21)	45 (n=45)	22 (n=14)	2 (n=1)	0 (n=0)

Clearly there is substantial agreement that the curriculum is crowded (95%) and that manageability is a problem (89%). This is less marked regarding “coherence,” where over three-quarters agree that the curriculum is unwieldy while nearly one-quarter are neutral. What is striking is that while overall, six principals in total disagree with any of the three statements.

Table 4.9 Principals’ Perceptions of Ministry Initiatives.

<b>(N=65) Statement</b>	<b>Agreement (%)</b>	<b>Neutral (%)</b>	<b>Disagreement (%)</b>
<b>Curriculum and Professional Development Contracts have helped in the delivery of the Curriculum.</b>	<b>70 (n=46)</b>	<b>14 (n=9)</b>	<b>16 (n=10)</b>
<b>The recent emphasis on Numeracy and Literacy is a positive Ministry initiative.</b>	<b>94 (n=61)</b>	<b>6 (n=4)</b>	<b>0 (n=0)</b>

Not one principal has perceived these Ministry initiatives negatively, although four were neutral or undecided. The curriculum contracts and the professional development that went with them were also viewed positively, although there was some disagreement on their value. These contracts and professional development were first undertaken in the times of the rapid implementation of the seven E.L.A. in the 1990s. Numeracy and Literacy projects helped provide in-depth support for the Ministry’s call for emphasis on Numeracy and Literacy. It appears that recent Ministry funded support for schools has been well received by principals.

Table 4.10 How Principals of Different Deciles Viewed Wider Issues Affecting Curriculum Manageability

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Decile 1-2 (n=20) Agreement %</b>	<b>Decile 3-5 (n=23) Agreement %</b>	<b>Decile 6-10 (n=22) Agreement %</b>
<b>Social issues (concerning individual children and the wider issues such as exercise/obesity) make it difficult for schools to implement the Curriculum.</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Meeting community expectations (e.g. extra curricular activities) is compromised by the demands of the Ministry.</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Accountability and reporting requirements distract from Curriculum Development and Planning</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>77</b>

In Table 4.10 the majority of school principals of schools of all decile ratings agree that social issues are impacting on their time for the curriculum. There is less agreement by principals of lower decile schools than by those of higher decile schools on this matter. Principals of the decile 6-10 schools had the highest agreement (82%) on social issues causing difficulties with curriculum implementation as opposed to lower decile schools (60%). In contrast principals of higher decile schools were less concerned with dealing with community expectations compared to those of lower decile schools. Principals of all schools are showing concern about Planning and Reporting requirements but this concern too, seems higher in low decile schools.

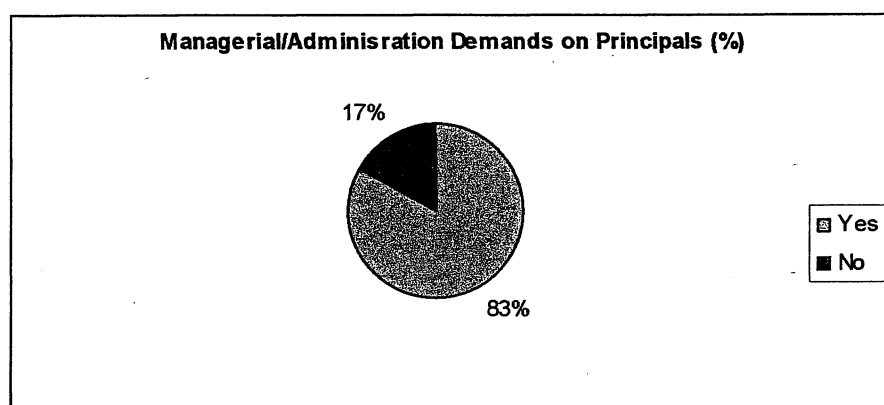


Figure 4.1 Managerial / administration demands on principals

Figure 4.1 shows that 83% of all the principals surveyed believe that the managerial and administration demands on principals make it difficult for them to be fully involved in curriculum leadership.

### 4.3 Curriculum manageability in schools

In this section data on principals' responses to curriculum manageability in their schools are presented. Further information on the ways in which the curriculum is planned and budgeted for in each school is given, and the strategies each school uses to manage or cover the curriculum are examined.

Table 4.11 Strategies to Manage the Curriculum in Schools

Experience of Principal	Plan to cover each E.L.A. %	Use of Themes %	Curriculum Integration (C.I.) %	A mixture of Themes and C.I. %	A mixture of Themes, C.I. and each E.L.A. %
0-5 yrs (n=12)	0	8	17	25	50
6-10 yrs (n=12)	8	0	33	0	58
10 + yrs (n=41)	7	5	10	12	66

Very few principals by themselves treat the E.L.A. documents separately. Also, very few identify that they use themes to guide curriculum implementation. The majority of principals use a mixture of approaches. The data on curriculum integration are interesting and no suggestions can be made as to why this is relatively popular as an approach for those principals of “6-10 years” experience. Further exploration is needed on these issues. Principal experience was used to structure this data to see if the length of experience influenced the type of strategies used. The table shows that experience did not have a significant impact as principals from all three categories of experience favoured the mixed approach.

Table 4.12 Curriculum Leadership and Implementation

Size of school	Principal %	Principal and Senior Management %	Whole Staff %	Other %
<b>U1 – U2</b> (n=13)	<b>54</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>U3 – U4</b> (n=29)	<b>7</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>U5 – U6</b> (n=23)	<b>0</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 4.12 displays major roles in curriculum leadership and implementation. The size of school was used as a frame for analysing this data. Smaller schools probably have teaching principals and no real senior management group. All the larger schools will have a senior management composed of the principal, deputy principal, assistant or associate principal, senior teachers and teachers with management units depending on size. There is a clear split between principal/senior management curriculum leadership and whole staff approaches. It is

noticeable that the split changes from approximately 50/50 in U1-U4 schools but is 2:1 in larger schools.

Smaller schools probably have up to four teachers so whole staff planning is logical. In larger schools, curriculum leadership may be undertaken at syndicate level. The survey did not explore this possibility. What is clear though is that the involvement of senior management teams increases with school size.

Table 4.13 shows that central organisation is perhaps more efficient in larger schools. The principal/senior management data are very similar to those in Table 4.12. It is clear from this data that some “whole staff” planning is delegated to syndicates in the larger schools rather than to literally, the whole staff.

Table 4.13 Long-Term Curriculum Planning

<b>Size of school</b>	<b>P/Pal and Senior Management</b>	<b>Whole Staff</b>	<b>Syndicate</b>	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Other</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>U1 – U2</b> (n=13)	<b>54</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>U3 – U4</b> (n=29)	<b>48</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>U5 – U6</b> (n=23)	<b>61</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

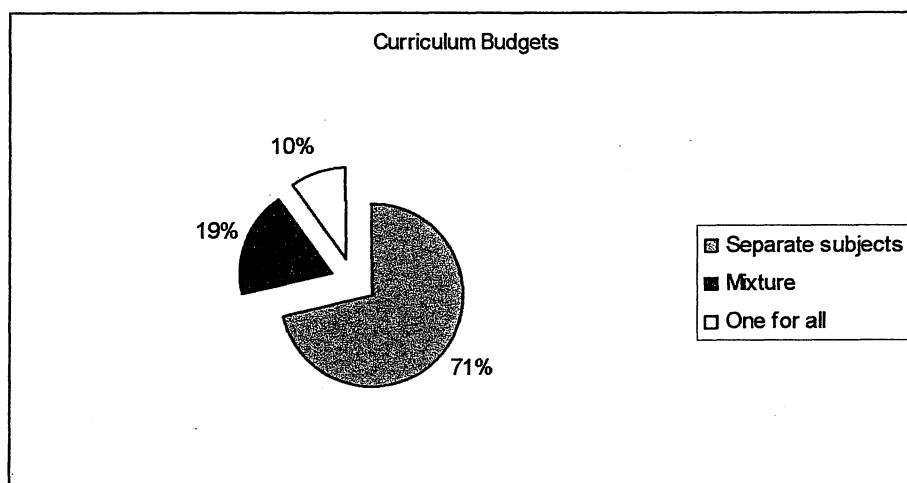


Figure 4.2 Curriculum budgets

Despite Table 4.11 showing that very few schools plan and teach based on the seven E.L.A., Figure 4.2 shows, however, that 71% of them still develop their curriculum budgets based on these headings. While a mixture of curriculum strategies was evident in the data only 19% of the schools budgeted on this basis. Curriculum integration is used widely, yet only 10 % of the schools had one curriculum budget. A number of schools included syndicate or team curriculum budgets in the mixture category.

#### 4.4 Responses to proposed curriculum changes

In this section I look at the proposed curriculum changes (the Curriculum Project) and their manageability implementation. I consider how well principals followed the Curriculum Stocktake progress and the recommendations it proposed. I review the way principals followed the Curriculum Project and whether or not they kept their B.O.T. informed. Principals were asked their opinions on the aims of the Curriculum Project and the introduction of Key Competencies. They were asked to prioritise the key focus areas for future planning and delivery, and finally, for the advice they would give the Minister of Education regarding the proposed curriculum directions.



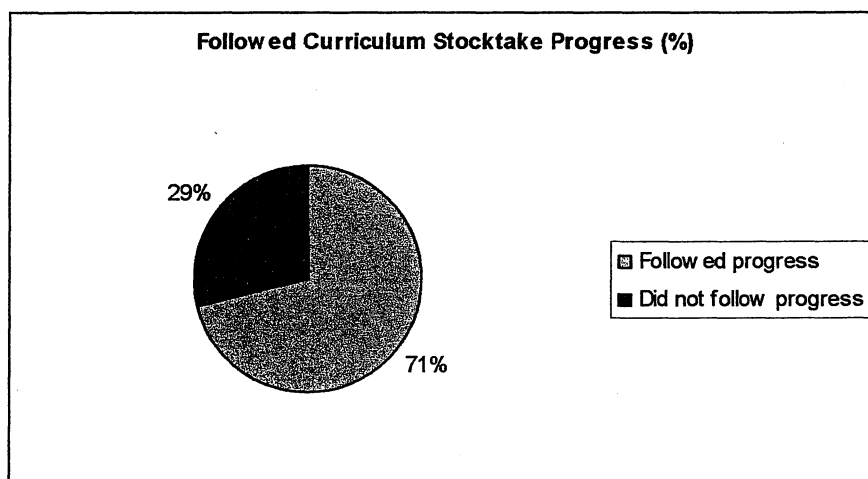


Figure 4.3 Keeping track of the Curriculum Stocktake and its recommendations

Only 71% of the principals had read the findings of the Curriculum Stocktake and the recommendations it proposed. In other words, nearly one-third had not! However, it must be remembered that a number of those surveyed may not have been principals at this time (Table 4.2; shows 18% have only 0-5 years experience).

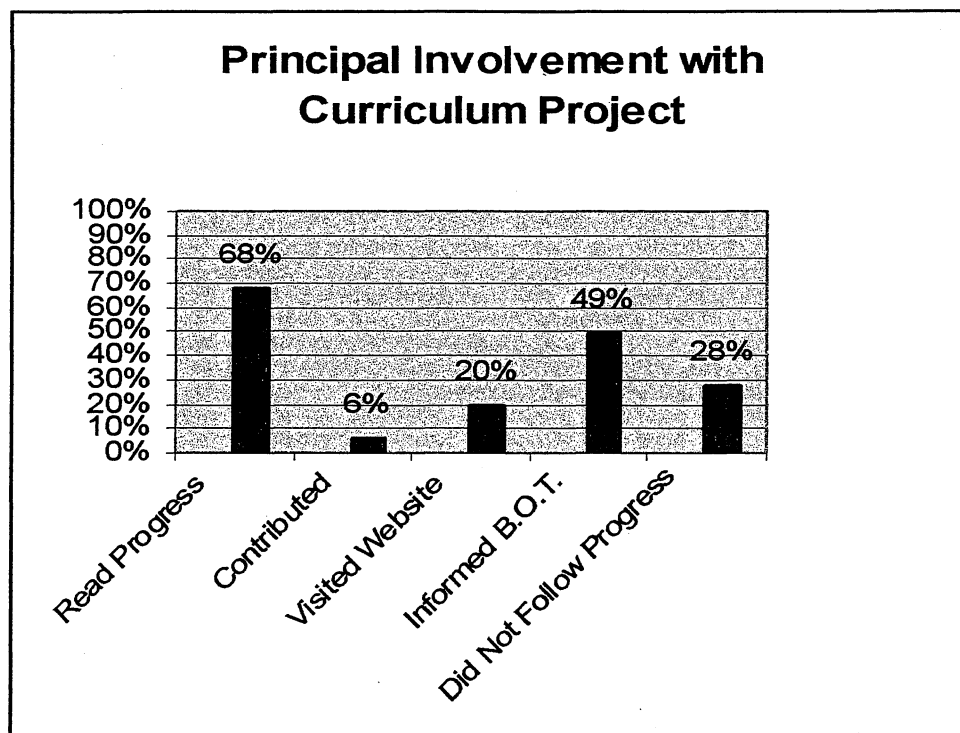


Figure 4.4 How involved were principals with the Curriculum Project?

In keeping with the results from Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4 showed that 68% of principals reported that they had kept up with Curriculum Project progress, while 28% said they had not. There were only 6% who had made a contribution to the Project which had involved a nationwide consultation. Despite the ability to follow and respond to the Curriculum Project through the Ministry's website only 20% had taken the trouble to do this. Less than 50% of principals informed their B.O.T. of the Curriculum Project.

Table 4.14 Support for the Aims of the Curriculum Project and its Key Competencies

<b>Aims:</b>	<b>Yes (82%)</b>	<b>No (12%)</b>	<b>Neutral (6%)</b>
	<p>"Documents since 1988 have turned teaching upside down and caused a lot of disillusionment. This document attempts to rectify this and concentrates on what is important."</p> <p>"It will help us unclutter the current curriculum and respond better to individual and community need-to cover what was before was impossible."</p> <p>"If it can achieve the aims and keep the document concise-it will be a winner and manageability will be achieved."</p> <p>"Yes, provided it is implemented with support, training and resources."</p> <p>"Great-it is no longer acceptable to try and cover everything."</p>	<p>"It doesn't lessen the overcrowded curriculum or alter the workload on the principal or teachers."</p> <p>"We don't have real ownership with the Ministry and E.R.O. watchdogs directing us."</p> <p>"This will assist in curriculum manageability but will not improve Whanau involvement which is needed."</p> <p>"Schools are too busy to read them and B.O.T. and community show little interest."</p> <p>"Past performances suggest it will just add to a greater workload and greater accountability."</p>	<p>"I am not in a position to make to make a valid comment."</p> <p>"Refining the curriculum outcomes will narrow the focus of what will be taught but will inhibit the individual teacher."</p> <p>"Curriculum manageability with the new aims will only happen if support is provided."</p> <p>"Aims can't help manageability particularly if it is wholly M.O.E. intentions. It will only create more pressure."</p> <p>"Words have changed but will the workload expectations for management remain the same?"</p>
<b>Key Competencies:</b>	<b>Yes (83%)</b>	<b>No (4%)</b>	<b>Neutral (13%)</b>
	<p>"Sits well with our school approach to curriculum and assessment."</p> <p>"It's more encompassing, relevant and designed to meet the world."</p> <p>"The essential skills were too many with too much confusion of where they fitted in. This looks more focussed and manageable."</p> <p>"It streamlines the essential skills and provides the focus for schools to relook at this aspect of the school curriculum and life."</p> <p>"If they enhance our children's learning-great. If they make children want to learn, look after others and think for themselves-great."</p> <p>"They seem more relevant to today's world and schools."</p>	<p>"It doesn't make the workload any easier and the current essential skills and attitudes should be included in the key competencies."</p> <p>"It is not specific enough."</p>	<p>"It is hard to make a judgement until I have seen them in action."</p> <p>"I am not sure about them. I was a strong believer in the essential skills, attitudes and values."</p> <p>"Yes and no-one size fits all?"</p> <p>"Could be good but maybe only semantics. What support will be given?"</p> <p>"May be a great idea but we will wait and see."</p> <p>"Looks like just rewording."</p> <p>"We do key competencies now!"</p>

The quotations in Table 4.14 speak for themselves. The 82% support for the Curriculum Project aims and recommendations would be very pleasing for the Project Team and the Ministry. The “yes” quotations give the message that the recommendations find favour with the principals. It is still interesting to read the “neutral” and “no” option responses where principals are still sceptical or want to wait further before making a comment. Manageability is still a key question for those who remain neutral. While there is also overwhelming support for the Key Competencies, there is still a question of “wait and see” attitude from some of those who gave support. There were only two principals who did not support Key Competencies. Again, those who chose to be neutral made sceptical comments and are yet to be convinced.

Table 4.15 Prioritising for Future Curriculum Planning and Delivery

<b>School Situated</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Priority</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Priority</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Priority</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Priority</b>
<b>Town Schools</b> (n=43)	Childrens Needs	School Needs	Community Needs	Ministry Needs
<b>Semi-rural Schools</b> (n=10)	Childrens Needs	School Needs	Community Needs	Ministry Needs
<b>Rural Schools</b> (n=12)	Childrens Needs	School Needs	Community Needs	Ministry Needs

Table 4.14 shows that all principals, regardless of whether their schools are town or country or in between, all give strong messages about their priorities for future curriculum planning. All principals believe that children’s needs are the first priority, followed by their school’s needs, their community need’s, and finally the Ministry’s needs. It is interesting to see that principals of rural schools, which are usually very involved with their community, still rated their needs as the third priority in the same way as did those of the Town schools. Ministry

needs were clearly rated fourth priority. It must be remembered that this is how principals wish to see priorities; it may not reflect what happens in reality.

Table 4.16 If you had the ear of the Minister, what would you advise in relation to proposed curriculum directions?

1. Schools will need funding, resources, professional development and ongoing support if the new directions and proposals are to be successful.
2. You are going down the right path. There are lots of positive signs.
3. K.I.S.S. Be flexible and allow schools the freedom to choose what is important to them and their communities
4. Make haste slowly. Don't keep changing and interfering. We have had too many changes forced upon us since 1988.
5. Have faith in the schools. Don't let outside agencies impact negatively on us.
6. Allow for innovation and deeper learning. Let the enjoyment factor return.

While there were many different and varied comments and advice for the Minister of Education from the principals, the six points in Table 4.16 reflect the general feelings about future curriculum directions. The majority believe that the curriculum is now going in the "right direction" but that the Ministry (and its agencies) need to make sure that they support and fund these directions while allowing schools the flexibility and freedom to choose what they believe is best for their pupils and school, and to let the enjoyment factor return.

These comments seem to sum up the beliefs of principals as they view future curriculum directions. They consider that schools need freedom to choose how they plan and deliver the

curriculum, and for the Ministry to support them rather than hinder them. Many principals remain sceptical but hopeful.

## 4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have presented the results of this research. I have given the background information about the principals who replied, regarding the type, decile rating and situation of each school. The principals have overwhelmingly reported that the present curriculum framework has caused the curriculum to be overcrowded and that curriculum manageability is a problem. They approve of the Ministry initiatives, but point out that there are many other demands and issues that hinder their curriculum teaching and implementation. The majority of principals use a variety of strategies to manage the curriculum in their schools such as using curriculum integration and themes in their delivery. Principal and senior management teams, and whole staff approaches dominate in curriculum leadership, implementation and planning. Nearly a third of the principals had not followed the progress and findings of the Curriculum Stocktake and the Curriculum Project. However, the majority support the new proposed curriculum document and its directions despite a certain amount of scepticism. They have advice for the Minister of Education that focuses on giving schools the freedom, flexibility and support to manage the new curriculum directions in order to meet the needs of the children and their schools. All principals see this as their highest priority.

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*"Minister- the changes are a move in the right direction, however I sometimes wonder about the bureaucracy that goes with the change-can't we be trusted? (Experienced U3-U4 principal)"*

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## CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

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*"The new curriculum directions are fine as long as it doesn't add up to curriculum overload." (U5-U6 principal)*

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### 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the results provided in Chapter 4. As previously explained, the questionnaire was designed to find out how primary principals perceived and responded to curriculum manageability in their schools. It also sought principals' views on manageability issues implicit within the Curriculum Project. In reviewing the data, six themes emerged as listed below and these provide a framework for discussing the results.

#### Key themes:

How principals perceive curriculum manageability under the N.Z.C.F.

- *curriculum* manageability under the present framework.
- Manageability issues taking the wider view of *Curriculum*.

How principals respond to *curriculum* manageability in their schools.

- *curriculum* strategies used to achieve manageability.
- *curriculum* leadership and planning to achieve manageability.

Principals' perceptions of the proposed curriculum changes and manageability.

- Following the Curriculum Stocktake and Curriculum Project.
- Can implementation of the future proposals enable principals to achieve manageability?

## **5.1 How principals perceive curriculum manageability**

### ***curriculum manageability under the present framework***

The data in Table 4.8 show overwhelmingly that principals consider it was not possible to achieve manageability of the whole curricular under the N.Z.C.F. Ninety-five percent of them “agreed” that the curriculum was overcrowded and 89% agreed there were manageability problems. It is interesting that the numbers who “agreed” and those who “strongly agreed” are very similar. This indicates that around half of those who agree with these statements feel very strongly about these issues. While 79% of them felt the framework was unwieldy, this view was slightly less strongly held. These results suggest that there is a very widely held view among principals that the demands of the curriculum are difficult to manage.

There has however, been an acceptance by the M.O.E. through the Curriculum Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2002) and Curriculum Project that there are curriculum crowding problems. It should be kept in mind, though, that while the Curriculum Stocktake began in 2000, schools are unlikely to have the new official Curriculum Document until late 2007. The pressure for schools to implement seven E.L.A.s over the ten-year period in which they were introduced (the main pressure period being 1992-1997), and learn the new documents, along with other pressures, was also mentioned by principals. Comments such as “does the Ministry realise how much pressure they put on us during the ‘90s?” were common. Mills (2006) acknowledges this pressure as a paradigm shift. A change from thinking of teaching under a framework rather than to a syllabus, from content to outcomes and of creating new methods of planning and assessment are all issues that have impacted on manageability.



This admission, (Mills, 2006) supported by the research data, raises questions that the philosophy behind the N.Z.C.F. was flawed from the start. This view has support in the literature. Beane (1997) argued that the idea of a fully prescribed detailed national curriculum is unworkable no matter what framework is used. He thus became a leader in Curriculum Integration (C.I.) where the curriculum is integrated around a problem. Donnelly (1996) considered that the N.Z.C.F. structure was substandard and flawed from the start. Campbell (1993) believed that schools had been attempting to include far too much material with the result being superficial understandings. Clarke's (2005) also asserted that our curriculum is overcrowded, that there is too much to be taught and that the learning is superficial. The comment by one principal "the framework is a mile long and an inch thick" encapsulates this view.

This raises questions about principals' ability to achieve "*curriculum* manageability" in the future? Will the new recommendations and revised framework enable them to achieve it? These issues are discussed in the last theme, "Can future proposals help principals achieve manageability?" The draft document focuses on the issue of prioritising what is important to each school (Ministry of Education, 2006). However, many principals remain sceptical. As an experienced principal commented "past history of the Ministry suggests that any new structure they advocate will just add to a greater workload and accountability." What is interesting in all the material is that while all involved appear to be talking about *curriculum*, the issues involved sit within a wider context created by the *Curriculum*.

### ***Curriculum* manageability**

Table 4.10 illustrates how principals of schools from a range of decile levels viewed the *Curriculum* pressures created by social issues, community expectations and the

managerial/administration demands on the principal. The data were analysed against school decile status under the assumption that decile ratings and social problems are linked. This assumption is recognised by the Ministry, which funds low decile schools at a higher level in response. As one principal from a decile 1 school said “on many days we are just social workers.” Another principal from a decile 1 school commented “social worker time is huge for both teachers and principals.”

Despite this assumption, and comments from principals, it is noticeable that principals of higher decile schools were stronger in their views about the impact of social issues on the *curriculum*. One of these higher decile principals stated “instant demands are placed on schools as soon as social concerns are raised.” The principal gave the example of child care before and after school now becoming an issue that schools have to resolve. While the questionnaire did mention (in Section 2) wider issues such as obesity and children’s lack of exercise (which would affect all decile schools) the question may have lacked clarity about what was meant by social issues. Nonetheless 60% of all principals agreed that social issues affect their *curriculum*. Social issues, however defined, are an aspect of *Curriculum* that impacts on the ability of schools to implement the *curriculum* and this contributes to *curriculum* crowding.

The data in Table 4.10 raise questions about this assumption. Higher decile schools are generally believed to have higher parental and community expectations of their schools relating to extracurricular activities such as sport, culture and extra-academic pursuits. The data here show that principals of lower decile schools viewed these expectations as having a greater influence on the *curriculum* than did higher decile school principals. There is, however, 80% agreement by principals from all decile level schools that these expectations

affect their *curriculum* implementation. One principal summed it up: “we don’t mind doing it but it places more pressure on our time and energy and general curriculum demands.”

Accountability requirements from the Ministry including annual planning and reporting expectations, were also viewed as demands that diverted attention from *curriculum* development and planning. Eighty-two percent of principals agreed that the demands were distracting.

It is not, therefore, surprising to see 83 % of principals holding the view that managerial and administration demands make it difficult for them to be fully involved in the school *curriculum* leadership. As one intermediate principal stated, “it is essential for the principal to be fully involved in school *curriculum* leadership, but other demands are making this more and more difficult.” A small rural school principal added “real teaching principals are further disadvantaged with managerial demands.” These are insights which might explain why there were no principals in the larger schools who took a curriculum leadership role (Table 4.12). The data also support the commonly held belief that deputy and associate principals lead their school curriculum implementation. As Knight (1993) suggests, principals of large schools must delegate this role in order to avoid overload.

The data here suggests that *Curriculum* demands including social issues, extracurricular demands, and Ministerial demands-along with the other organisational tasks demanded of principals-do impact on their ability to focus on *curriculum* planning and enactment. This is consistent with the findings of Carr et al. (2005), Clarke (2005) and Donnelly (2002).

## 5.2 How principals respond to curriculum manageability issues in their schools

### Strategies used to achieve *curriculum* manageability

If the New Zealand curriculum is overcrowded and unmanageable as Clarke (2005) and Donnelly (2002) suggest, then principals and schools have to achieve “manageability” by adaptation and by careful prioritising the multiple demands they face. Principals and schools have clearly experimented and trialled various strategies and the data here reflect a mixture of strategies as shown in Table 4.11.

The Curriculum Stocktake (Ministry of Education, 2002; p. 13) recommended that “schools develop strategies to overcome the overcrowded *curriculum*.” It recommended developing “connections” between the E.L.A.s and encouraged schools to use strategies such as themes and curriculum integration to overcome the problem. Noting that one-third of principals did not follow the stocktake process it seems clear that schools have developed these strategies out of necessity.

As Table 4.11 shows, very few principals (5 out of 65) are attempting to cover the individual E.L.A.s. From their comments it is clear that principals have prioritised, adapted and created approaches to curriculum organisation that work for them. One experienced decile 1 principal said “we have gone through the different subjects and created a school scheme that works for us. Come and have a look at it!” Another wrote “We adapted the curriculum to meet our student needs.” Despite this it is interesting to see (Figure 4.2) that most schools (71%) still budgeted their *curriculum* under the separate subjects. The now eight E.L.A.s are still part of the Draft Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006) recommendations. Mills (2006) calls

them the “eight lenses to view the world.” This raises the point of further *curriculum* crowding in the future although the new language area only affects pupils from Year 7-10.

The themes approach to *curriculum* organisation is, as Bell et al. (1995) stated, a curriculum management strategy, which was popular in the 70s and 80s. Table 4.11 shows that very few principals use this method on its own. However, it is obvious from the high percentage (over 60%) of principals still using themes within their “mixture of strategies” and that it continues to be a useful strategy for many schools. As one principal said “themes-integration, what is the difference and what does it matter?” There are undoubtedly multiple uses of these labels/concepts and further research would be required to understand the detail of curricular organisation.

What is clear is that schools use a mixture of approaches to *curriculum* planning. Over 60% (Table 4.11) use a mixture of the three common approaches (E.L.A. coverage, themes, curriculum integration). One experienced principal explained how manageability was achieved by “doing Literacy and Numeracy separately and the rest of the subjects are integrated around a concept or a theme.” This would satisfy the requirements of the 1999 N.E.G.s and N.A.G.s (Ministry of Education, 1999). This appears to be a common approach. There is still variation, however. One principal (of a special character school) said “we plan and assess essential skills, not the curriculum.” The N.Z.C.F. does allow for a variety of approaches and this school is presumably able to convince the E.R.O. that they are covering the curriculum using this approach.

In summary, schools take a variety of approaches to the Curriculum Documents in order to meet their children’s needs. In doing so they have developed *curriculum* management

approaches that work for them. If they 'teach less better' then educationalists such as Campbell (1993) and Clarke (2005) would applaud their strategy and philosophy.

### ***curriculum* leadership and planning to achieve curriculum manageability**

The data in Table 4.12 showed that only principals of U1-U2 schools commonly take sole leadership of the *curriculum* and its implementation in the school. In contrast there was not one principal of a U5-U6 school and there were only three in smaller U3-U4 schools who lead the curriculum and its implementation. Principal/senior management and whole staff contributions are very significant in larger schools.

The principal of a primary school is the professional leader of the teaching staff and usually has experience in all facets of the *curriculum*. Two of the principal's roles in a school are to ensure the *curriculum* is planned and implemented well, and to monitor long-term planning and teaching. The issue in this theme is to explore whether the principal's curriculum involvement is now a supporting role rather than a leading role. This supporting role could be a response to the managerial /administrative demands discussed in the previous theme or perhaps because shared leadership has a significant emphasis in today's leadership roles. Both factors may be at work.

The stress and demands on principals since "Tomorrow's Schools" (1988), the implementation of the N.Z.C.F. (1993) and other pressures have been well documented in the study by Hodgen and Wylie (2005). Their research shows that up to 42% of principals work in excess of seventy hours per week, 39% rated their stress levels as high or extremely high, and 44% are constantly tired or worn out. This study also revealed that 57% of principals estimated that 70% of their time is spent in management. A comment from a principal (U5-U6

school) in my research is indicative of the principals' frustration; "let the principals lead rather than deal with the compliance/management demands." Smaller schools have no choice here. The principal has to take a leading role, but it is logical that all of a small staff be involved. Principals of small schools cannot delegate and Hodgen and Wylie (2005) found stress levels much higher in small rural schools compared to larger urban schools. The data here (Table 4.12) show that as school size increases, there is a move toward *curriculum* leadership delegation by principals. There was a 50/50 split between principal and senior management in U3-U4 schools, while 65% of U5-U6 principals delegate to senior management.

Hodgen and Wylie's (2005) research showed that principals in larger urban schools have larger teams and find the demands less stressful. Whole staff involvement in curricular organisation changes to 35% in larger schools. As schools get larger the efficiency of whole staff planning falls. In larger schools the deputy principals and associate principals' release time allows them to take on greater roles in *curriculum* leadership and implementation. As one U3-U4 principal said "no principal was capable of leading and implementing on his own through the 90s. If he did he wouldn't be here now."

It is interesting to note that since the late 1990s Ministry contracts for *curriculum* in schools now insist that principals have to play a significant role. The reasoning is that unless the principal is involved, the contract's effectiveness is often limited. This necessity and new leadership philosophies may have resulted in the shared leadership roles shown up in the data.

The data regarding long-term planning follow logically from the responses to curriculum leadership. In smaller schools about half have principal/senior management in this role and

the other half involve the whole staff. As discussed previously, as schools get larger there is a greater role for the principal/senior management and a lesser role for the whole staff.

Syndicate planning did not feature strongly in the larger schools and there were no responses indicating that individual teachers do their own long-term planning. This is another area where further research is needed and a variety of approaches is hinted at in comments from principals.

“Our C.I. [Curriculum Integration] mode allows our whole staff to plan easily together.” (U3-U4 principal)

“As a whole staff we can plan for learning needs rather than assessment.” (U1-U2 principal)

“Our whole staff has turns about as curriculum leaders and curriculum teams. Staff have to plan with different members. This has many benefits.” (U5-U6 principal)

### **5.3 Principals’ perceptions of proposed curriculum changes and manageability**

#### **Following the Stocktake Review and the Curriculum Project**

Only 71% of the principals followed the progress of the Curriculum Stocktake process and 68% followed the Curriculum Project (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). If these figures are indicative of nationwide commitment then approximately one-third of principals in New Zealand have not followed the progress of either. This would equate to approximately 800 principals. Similarly, based on these data, around 50% of the B.O.T. have not been informed of these processes.

Progress reports, particularly for the Project, were well presented and easy to follow-as are the Ministry and Projects’ websites. The reasons for this apparent “apathy” are the issues for this theme. Two significant points arise from the principals’ comments. One was that both reviews took far too long and principals lost interest, and the second one is that some principals adopted a wait and see attitude.



### Both reviews took too long and principals lost interest

The Stocktake started in 2000 and finished in 2002. Recommendations were written up and the Curriculum Project Team started in 2004. Consultation with educational stakeholders then restarted and was directed towards responding to the issues raised by the Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2002). In August 2006 the Draft Curriculum Document (Ministry of Education, 2006) was presented. All schools have the opportunity to review this draft document and submissions are due back by the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006. A new document will appear sometime around mid-2007. The whole process will have taken around eight years. In that time schools could have had three different Boards of Trustees and changed principals. Comments show many principals did lose interest over this period of time or felt it they were better off focussing on day to day issues.

“I got sick of waiting for the Ministry.” “We just got on and decided what was best for us.” “You can get all worked up about it but it is a waste of time and energy unless you feel strongly about supporting or opposing some concept.” “Schools principals are far too busy to read these documents and the B.O.T. and community show little interest.” These were some of the comments that reflected the reaction of some principals to the process.

### A wait and see attitude

Comments that emerged here included:

“We will wait and make changes when we have to.” “We will inform the B.O.T. once the draft gets here.” “We are not jumping in too quickly.”

Overall there was overwhelming support by principals for the Draft Document (Ministry of Education, 2006). Even supportive principals showed some scepticism, however, and expressed a concern that the final document may not reduce the pressure they feel from the

multiple demands placed on them. Throughout the responses to the questionnaire the notion that *Curriculum* issues place pressure on schools that detract from their ability to implement the *curriculum* is implicit rather than explicit.

### **Can future proposals help principals achieve manageability?**

Table 4.13 shows the overwhelming principal support for the Project's aims and the role of Key Competencies (82%). This is a vote of confidence by the principals for future proposals. There is the scepticism shown by some principals, and manageability still seems to be an issue in question. In this section I look at issues of "curriculum manageability" in the future.

The key factors that arise from the data include:

- Whether or not a workable framework that provides guidance with freedom to respond to local issues emerges?
- Whether or not the school is able to take ownership of the curriculum?
- The degree of support provided by the Ministry in implementing the new curriculum.

It is interesting to note that *Curriculum* issues are not mentioned by principals when they are asked about future proposals. Perhaps they feel that if they get the future *curriculum* issues sorted, then *Curriculum* issues will be more manageable.

### **Creating a workable framework**

A workable framework needs manageable objectives (McGee, 1997) and a workable implementation strategy (Campbell, 1993). Mills (2006), as a Project spokesperson, agrees that schools should be shaping the curriculum to fit the needs of children. Thus, it appears, schools can create their own framework under "Centralised" *curriculum* guidelines.

Comments by principals indicate that they are divided on whether the Ministry should be

guiding them on the new directions or whether schools should be allowed the freedom to create their *curriculum* under broad guidelines. Principals comment:

“Provide guidance that hopefully allows for a thinner curriculum.” “Help schools set their own directions.” “Give the schools greater freedom to design their own curriculum framework. We need a broad flexible national coherence of curriculum to work to.” “The draft design should lessen overcrowdedness and allow schools to develop their own character.”

### School ownership

The overwhelming message from comments was to give ownership of the *curriculum* to the schools. Three of many comments in this regard were;

“Allow schools to realise they own the curriculum and allow professional freedom to meet our children’s needs.” “Schools can decide on areas that meet the needs of their school and community.” “Let schools have the power to choose which direction they go.”

Principals gave a clear indication in Table 4.14 that their children’s and their schools’ needs are of top priority followed by their communities’ needs. There seems little doubt that principals believe that if they are given school ownership in *curriculum* then manageability and effective teaching and learning can be achieved.

### Supporting role from the Ministry and E.R.O.

Principals give a united message to the Ministry and E.R.O. in regard to enacting the curriculum. Much of the scepticism of principals towards the future proposals is driven by the belief that the E.R.O. will struggle to work with a school ownership model and the Ministry will not give the time, support and resources necessary. Comments that show this scepticism are:

“Accountability from E.R.O. and the Ministry is often at odds with what is best for us.”

“Rethink E.R.O.-they undermine. Better to employ a local advisory who are able to work with the schools continuously.” “Is the Minister prepared to show confidence in the new document by fully funding the implementation?”

Many of the other comments support Campbell’s (1993) view that the government and the Ministry must support and fund resources and allow time for professional development if the new directions are to be successful. One succinct comment from one principal to the Ministry was “make haste slowly-learn from the N.Z.C.F. lessons and don’t keep changing and interfering.”

However, some questions and issues remain. Schools and the Ministry seem to be in agreement that children’s learning needs take first priority. Although there is some confusion of terms, it appears that principals favour a “framework” that allows them to develop a “local” curriculum. Whether or not this provides coherence is problematic. What principals do not seem to acknowledge is that developing a local curriculum is an extremely demanding task. The current curriculum sets objectives but provides little support (such as materials) for achieving these objectives. This issue has not surfaced in the data. It appears that principals are extremely protective of their own local autonomy and do not see the implications of these objectives for workload/manageability issues.

## 5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have presented responses to the six themes that have arisen from the data collected from this research. The responses on *curriculum* manageability under the N.Z.C.F. show a united belief that this was unachievable and that the *Curriculum* pressures in schools do affect teaching time and principal involvement. Responses linked to the way principals

respond to *curriculum* manageability in their schools showed that a variety of strategies are used and shared leadership plays a strong role in *curriculum* and planning. Finally the responses on future *curriculum* proposals showed that many principals developed a “wait and see” attitude over the eight years of review and consultation. Many just got on with managing their schools. The factors of school “ownership”, positive support from the Ministry and E.R.O., and the balance between designing their own curriculum and the provision of a Ministerial framework were prominent in the principals’ comments about the future curriculum directions.

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*“The draft document will help us unclutter the current curriculum and respond better to individual and community needs.” (Decile 9 principal)*

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## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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*"Get a curriculum that is easy to follow and has a minimum of educational jargon and p.c. mumbo-jumbo. One that gives clear direction to teachers about what children should be able to do and broad guidelines about how it can be done." (U1-U2 principal)*

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### 6.0 Summary so far

In this research I have looked at how sixty-five New Zealand primary school principals perceived curriculum manageability under the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993) and its supporting documents and how they responded to curriculum manageability issues in their schools. They were also asked how they perceived manageability within the proposed Curriculum Project (2003-2006) changes.

In Chapter 1 I introduced the research in the light of the assertion that the curriculum is overcrowded made in the Curriculum Stocktake (Ministry of Education, 2002). In Chapter 2, in reviewing the literature, I have given a brief history of the curriculum in New Zealand from the early 1980s until the present. The meaning of the term "overcrowded curriculum" was considered in terms of how different people viewed the word "curriculum." Some usage definitions were then established for use in the report. These focus on the word *curriculum* to encapsulate the taught curriculum arising from the official Ministry of Education documents and statements, while the term *Curriculum* refers to all of the events that children experience at school. The concept of manageability was viewed as the task of organising and prioritising the tasks schools face. Previous curriculum research arising in New Zealand and internationally was discussed. The majority of that research was on *curriculum* issues. There was very little research on *Curriculum* issues or manageability.

The methodology was explained in Chapter 3. This included the research design and the procedures that were used. I covered how the participants-the principals-were identified, how the questionnaire was framed, and how ethical consideration was undertaken. Eighty-two percent of questionnaires, a high rate for this kind of survey, were returned. Results were discussed in Chapter 4 where the data were presented in tables and graphs. The principals surveyed showed overwhelming agreement that the curriculum is crowded and that manageability is a problem. They also described how they manage the *curriculum* in their schools, considered *Curriculum* issues, and shared their perceptions of the proposed curriculum changes.

The six themes that arose from the data were discussed in Chapter 5 and several key conclusions were drawn. Manageability of the *curriculum* under the N.Z.C.F. is a challenge and *Curriculum* issues-such as social issues-compound the difficulties. Principals have, in general, learnt to share *curriculum* leadership, implementation and long-term planning. A mixture of strategies is used to manage the *curriculum*. A third of principals did not follow the Curriculum Review but while the majority of principals were positive about the proposed curriculum directions many remain cautious until the process is complete. School ownership, support from the Ministry and E.R.O. and optional guidance for individual schools were key factors principals saw as important for the new Curriculum Document and its implications.

### **6.1 Did the research answer the questions?**

The data provided valuable insights in response to the three research questions. The data showed that curriculum manageability has been a challenge since the N.Z.C.F. was established in 1993. Ninety-five percent of the responding principals believe that the curriculum is overcrowded and 89% believe curriculum manageability is a problem.

The data showed that principals have responded to curriculum manageability in their schools by developing a mixture of strategies to implement the *curriculum* and showed also that shared leadership in schools helps in the management of *curriculum* planning. In response to the proposed curriculum changes 82% of the principals believe that the future directions are positive. The data also showed that the principals are divided over how the Ministry and E.R.O. can support them.

## 6.2 Key Findings

A summary of the key findings is as follows:

- There has been an ongoing pattern of changes in the national curriculum from 1984-2006 with every change of government.
- Discussion of *curriculum* issues dominates the curriculum research literature and there is an absence of discussion about how principals go about prioritising the multiple and apparently unreasonable demands placed upon them.
- A high percentage of principals perceive the demands of the N.Z.C.F. to be excessive and difficult to manage.
- *Curriculum* issues do affect principals' abilities to manage the *curriculum*.
- Principals and schools adapt a mixture of strategies to achieve curriculum manageability and this includes shared curriculum leadership to overcome the demands of *curriculum* implementation and planning.
- Nearly one-third of principals and half of the Boards of Trustees did not closely follow the curriculum review process from 2000-2006.
- Principals believe that the future curriculum directions are positive but are divided in their views on framework design, implementation and support needed.



## **6.3 Conclusions and recommendations**

### **The Draft Curriculum Document**

At 2 p.m. on Monday 31 July 2006, the New Zealand Curriculum Draft for Consultation was launched at Karori Normal School. After six years of curriculum reviews and consultation the Draft Curriculum Document (Ministry of Education, 2006) had finally arrived for consultation. It has been sent to all who are involved in education at all levels in New Zealand. All teachers and principals in schools have been given a “teacher only” day to discuss the draft and to give feedback by the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006. The proposed release of The New Zealand Curriculum is set down for September 2007.

While there are pleasing signs in the document such as: “It aims to make curriculum more manageable for teachers by clarifying expectation” (Ministry of Education, 2006; p. 3) and “each school will design and implement its own curriculum in ways that will engage and motivate its particular students. Schools will have considerable freedom in deciding exactly how to do this” (Ministry of Education, 2006; p. 26) there are significant conclusions and recommendations regarding the draft curriculum that arise from the views of the principals expressed in this research.

### **Design**

Principals made it very clear that the present framework caused the curriculum to be overcrowded so a more manageable framework or guidelines must be designed. The principals want the new document to be concise and manageable. Principals also made it very clear that children’s needs followed by the schools’ and communities needs are their priorities for the future design. School autonomy is very important to principals. Finally, as a rural principal said, “K.I.S.S. Be flexible and allow schools the freedom to choose what is

important to them and their community.” The design must allow teachers to “teach less better” (Clarke, 2005).

### **Implementation**

“Make haste slowly. Don’t keep changing and interfering. We have had too many changes forced on us since 1989.” This comment came from an experienced U3/4 principal who has led his school through the changes and pressures of curriculum and management over the last twenty years. Many principals commented that the new directions are positive and heading in the right direction provided the curriculum is implemented with support, training, resources and time. They must strive to make haste slowly.

The Ministry does have a central role in overseeing education. A careful line needs to be walked between central control and local autonomy if schools are to genuinely take ownership of the curriculum.

### **Support**

All principals were adamant that the Ministry must provide the support, guidance and funding that is necessary for the future curriculum changes. As one principal said “Schools will need funding, resources, professional development and ongoing support if the new directions and proposals are to be successful.”

### **Curriculum research**

The results from this research showed clearly that *Curriculum* issues do affect *curriculum* manageability. A recommendation is for the Ministry to initiate, fund, or support, a research study that focuses solely on the effects of *Curriculum* issues on curriculum manageability in

schools. In doing so, greater help and support to help manage the complex demands placed on schools would be instigated. One possibility is the provision of school administrators, funded by the Ministry, who could help with many of the managerial/administrative demands (Figure 4.1), that 83% of the principals believe affect their curriculum leadership role. Funding health nurses linked to schools to help deal with the social issues of children and parents is another. Any research findings that can help ease the burden of *Curriculum* issues and allow the principal greater opportunities to focus on their professional leadership role at school would support schools in focussing on the key roles of teaching and learning.

## 6.4 Summary

This research focussed on how primary principals perceived and responded to curriculum manageability. It has shown that curriculum manageability has been a major challenge for principals from 1993 to the present time. Principals and schools have coped remarkably well. However, the Ministry, must provide the guidance and support that will be needed to assist school ownership and manageability when the new curriculum directions emerge in late 2007.

What ever we do to manage the curriculum it is important to remember;

“an understanding heart is everything in a teacher, and cannot be esteemed highly enough. One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feeling. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.” (Carl Jung: 1875-1961)

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **A Research Survey of How Primary Principals view and respond to Curriculum Manageability in their schools.**

School Survey No. \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Further information can be found on the attached Information Sheet. Please complete all sections of this survey. I am interested in honest feedback on Curriculum Manageability in your school. This information will be valuable in providing an understanding of how principals have adapted to the N.Z.C.F. since 1993 and how the recommended changes in the Curriculum Project are viewed.

#### **Section 1: Respondent Information**

Some general information about the sample of principals participating is sought. Survey data will be presented in aggregate form and individuals will not be identified.

Are you: ☐ Male ☐ Female

How many years have you been a principal?

- ☐ 0-5 yrs
- ☐ 6-10 yrs
- ☐ greater than 10 yrs

What size is your current school?

- ☐ U1-U2
- ☐ U3-U4
- ☐ U5-U6

What decile rating is your school?

Type of school.

- ☐ Contributing
- ☐ Full Primary
- ☐ Intermediate
- ☐ Other (please state)

Where is your school situated?

- ☐ Town
- ☐ Semi Rural
- ☐ Rural

Are you a Special Character school?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Bi-lingual or Kura Kaupapa
- ☐ Other (please state)

Please feel free to make any comments on any questions during the questionnaire. Add comments on the lines provided or on the reverse side if you wish.

Your completion of this questionnaire implies informed consent.

## Section 2: How Principals perceive Curriculum Manageability under the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (N.Z.C.F.)

Please circle a response on the scale for each comment and make further comment if you wish.

a) The Curriculum is overcrowded.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

b) Curriculum Manageability is a problem.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

c) Seven Curriculum Statements under the umbrella of the N.Z.C.F. is unwieldy and lacks coherence.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

d) Accountability and reporting requirements distract from Curriculum Development and Planning.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

e) Curriculum and Professional Development Contracts have helped in the delivery of the Curriculum.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

f) The recent emphasis on Numeracy and Literacy is a positive Ministry Initiative.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

g) Meeting community expectations (e.g. extra curricular activities) is compromised by the demands of the Ministry.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

h) Social issues (concerning individual children and the wider issues such as exercise/obesity) make it difficult for schools to implement the Curriculum.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

i) Managerial/Administration demands make it difficult for the Principal to be fully involved in the School Curriculum Leadership.

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree



### Section 3: How Principals respond to Curriculum Manageability in their schools

1. What strategies do you use to manage your School Curriculum?

☐ Plan to cover each Essential Learning Area (E.L.A.)

☐ Use Themes.

☐ Curriculum Integration.

☐ A mixture of all 3 above.

☐ Other (please  
explain) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Explain the strategies that you use? (e.g. Curriculum Integration using an 'Inquiry Learning' approach)

3. Who leads your School's Curriculum Development and Implementation?

☐ Principal

☐ Senior Management

☐ Whole staff

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Long Term Curriculum Planning is initiated by

☐ Principal and Senior Management

☐ Syndicate Team

☐ Individual Teachers

☐ Whole staff

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Curriculum Budgeting provides for

☐ A Separate budget for each E.L.A.

☐ One curriculum budget to cover all E.L.A.

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What Curriculum Documentation does your school provide to a new teacher to assist them in their classroom planning and organisation?

## Section 4: Principals perceptions of proposed Curriculum Changes and Manageability

1. Did you read the findings of the Curriculum Stocktake 2000-2003 and the recommendations it proposed?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

2. In regard to the New Zealand Curriculum/ Marautanga Project (on future Curriculum directions) please tick the options that you have followed

- ☐ I read each newsletter/progress report.  
☐ I have contributed to it.  
☐ I follow the progress on the Curriculum Project website.  
☐ I keep my B.O.T. and staff informed on the Project's aims and progress.  
☐ I don't follow it closely and will wait until the recommendations become policy.

Other (please comment)

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3. The aims of The New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project are:

- To clarify and refine Curriculum Outcomes
- To focus on Effective Teaching.
- To strengthen School Ownership of the Curriculum.
- To support communication and strengthen partnerships between Schools, Parents/Whanau and Communities.

Do you believe these aims will help in the Curriculum Manageability for your school?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Please explain your answer?

4. A core proposal of the Project is that 5 Key Competencies (Thinking, Making Meaning, Relating to others, Managing self, Participating and contributing) should replace the current essential skills and attitudes.

Do you favour this approach?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Why?

5. In making decisions on future Curriculum Planning and Delivery how would you prioritise the following? (1 being most important, 2 being 2<sup>nd</sup> most important, 3 being 3<sup>rd</sup> most important, 4 being 4<sup>th</sup> most important).

\_\_\_ Ministry requirements.

\_\_\_ Childrens learning needs.

\_\_\_ School/Staff ownership.

\_\_\_ Community considerations.

6. If you had the ear of the Minister, what would you advise in relation to proposed curriculum directions?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

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**Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.  
Please send back in the stamped addressed envelope  
by  
Friday 4 August.**



# Massey University

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## APPENDIX 2 – LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

17 July 2006

P.O. Box 390  
Hastings.

Dear Principal

My name is Evan Robson and I am the I have been granted  
a year's study leave in 2006 to carry out a research report to complete my M.Ed qualification at  
Massey University.

I have chosen to explore the manageability of the curriculum using the following focus questions:

How do primary school principals perceive "curriculum manageability" within their schools?

How do principals respond to "curriculum manageability" within their schools?

How do principals view the proposed curriculum changes and manageability that are being developed  
by the New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project?

My research is being supervised by Dr David Chapman and Dr Mark Brown who can be contacted at  
Massey University (06-35869099 extn 8602).

As I mentioned at the March Meeting of the my research is based on a questionnaire to  
principals exploring the questions above. A good response to my questionnaire will ensure that I have  
a broad sample on which to base my work. I hope you will be able to help by returning the completed  
questionnaire. Your help is greatly appreciated and I look forward to being able to report on my  
research at a future meeting of the Association.

Please read the Information Sheet before completing the questionnaire. It covers the research ethical  
details and assures participants of confidentiality and anonymity.

I appreciate your participation knowing your busy work schedule. I have constructed the  
questionnaire to be quick and practical and should not take you any longer than 15-20 minutes.  
Please return the survey within 2 weeks by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August in the enclosed self addressed  
stamped envelope.

Thank you for your time and your contribution.

Yours Sincerely

Evan Robson

## APPENDIX 3 – INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

### Information Sheet

This research is being undertaken after careful consideration of any possible ethical issues involved. The key principles in research of this kind are to avoid any possible harm to participants and to ensure that participation is on the basis of informed consent, that is, having full understanding of the purposes of the research and the way it is being conducted.

The research questions, repeated below, have been included on the covering letter, namely:  
How do primary school principals perceive “curriculum manageability” within their schools?  
How do principals respond to “curriculum manageability” in their schools?  
How do principals view the proposed curriculum changes that are being developed under the New Zealand Curriculum Marautanga Project?

It is not anticipated that answering these questions should be in anyway ‘harmful’ to participants. None the less, the identity of all participants will be protected as follows. All correspondence with schools will be handled an administrator who will remove any forms of identification, including the ‘school survey number’, from questionnaires before they are handed on for analysis. Thus every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. This confidentiality serves to protect research participants.

At the completion of the research the findings will be available to a wider audience. I would hope to have the opportunity to share my findings with participants and local principals through the Hawkes Bay Principal’s Association, and may also seek to publish the results.

The questionnaires will be retained in secure storage at Massey University in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy. They will only be accessible to persons (staff or other researchers) who have a serious interest in the work. For example, someone may wish to duplicate the research at some time in the future when the new curriculum has ‘settled in.’

It is normally a condition of participation in research that you have the right to withdraw from a project at any time. Because of the steps taken to ensure confidentiality, it will not be possible to link a questionnaire with the person who submitted it so it will not be possible to withdraw material.

Finally, and also linked to the way I have attempted to ensure confidentiality, completion and return of the questionnaire will be taken as confirmation that you have read this information sheet and are giving informed consent to be involved in the research.

*“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail [humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz)”.*

Once again, thank you for taking the time to read this material and for participating in the project.

Evan Robson.