

Corporate Managerialism in a Rural Setting: A Contextualised Case Study

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It is now commonplace to find in Australia two modes of school management deriving from corporate modes of management: devolution of authority and responsibility, and strategic or school-development planning. This case study provides an interpretive account of the process of strategic planning in devolved structures in a small, rural primary school in northern New South Wales, Australia. It documents and analyses how the school sets about the process of strategic planning. While student outcomes have been enhanced as a result of policies and programs devised and implemented by staff through strategic planning, the case study reveals distinctive difficulties in implementing corporate modes of management in a working class, racially- and gender-divided, small, rural school.

This case study provides an interpretive account of the process of school development, henceforth strategic planning, in a small, rural primary school in northern New South Wales (NSW), Australia. It aims both to document and analyse how one school sets about the process of strategic planning under recently devolved structures. The case study reveals that the corporate managerialism of the Schools Renewal Strategy in NSW is insensitive to the working class, racially- and gender-divided, small rural community in which the case study school is located. All of these factors limit the usefulness of the corporate managerial approach.

Managerial Policy and the State

Until recently, state education systems in Australia were highly centralised, with control almost entirely in the hands of State Department of Education bureaucracies. These bureaucracies were located in the various state capitals, which in Australia are also the largest cities in each state. Individual schools had little discretionary power; instead, they were required to follow largely uniform state mandated policies, regardless of local context. Moreover, except for funds earned by parent bodies and funds available through various federally and state funded social justice programs (e.g., the federally funded Disadvantaged Schools program and the state funded Isolated Schools Program), school finances were tightly controlled by the relevant State Education Department.

Over the past decade, there has been a policy-driven move to increased "local control over means and processes" (Logan, Sachs, & Dempster, 1994, p. 5). At the same time, "central control over direction and quality assurance" has been maintained (Logan et al., 1994, p. 5). The organisational modes through which this mixture of centralised control and local autonomy is supposed to be achieved are taken from the management of corporations. These modes, which constitute corporate managerialism, are (a) devolution of authority and responsibility (i.e., the movement of decision-making and budget control from centralised management to individual schools) to make each school a self-managing unit and (b) strategic planning, often known as school development planning (i.e., planning which is typified by the identification of long-term goals and objectives and strategies to achieve them within set budgetary constraints). They are said to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and public accountability.

The NSW government recently implemented its Schools Renewal Strategy to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in the delivery of education. Corporate managerialism underpins this initiative. A 2-year management review of education found that "the efficiency and effectiveness of public education in New South Wales was being seriously undermined by the existing structures and burdensome operational and administrative procedures" (External Council of Review [ECOR], 1994, p. 1). Moreover, principals and teachers "were delegated very little power to manage for the best outcomes, and received few opportunities to initiate significant and constructive change" (ECOR, 1994, p. 1). Behind Schools Renewal is the idea that "the process of renewal must begin at the school, the place where learning takes place" (ECOR, 1989, p. 6). The Schools Renewal Strategy was devised to increase the capacity of the state school system to meet diverse educa-

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tional needs, and to "place schools directly at the centre of education by giving them the means to respond readily to the educational needs of their students and their communities" (ECOR, 1994, p. 1). Thus Schools Renewal is claimed to be a "downside-up" (ECOR, 1994, p. 1) approach to educational management. This approach has brought changes in roles for schools, regions, and the state office. It has also introduced organisational changes, such as school councils to "require the system to become totally committed to supporting the school" rather than *vice versa* (ECOR, 1994, p. 1). It is envisaged that schools should:

Plan educational goals and priorities which reflect the needs of students and the intentions of their executives, staff, parents and community; allocate financial resources in ways which can best achieve their educational goals; select staff whose knowledge and skills best meet the needs of their school; support staff through systems of performance management and staff development aimed at maximising achievement of the schools educational goals; encourage increasing community participation in educational decision-making through establishing school councils; and, evaluate and report on the achievement of educational goals. (ECOR, 1994, pp. 1-2)

Two basic approaches give "schools the power to bring about dynamic grassroots change, to take the necessary educational and administrative decisions to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to assist teachers to reach a much greater degree of professional achievement": first, "giving schools much greater control over their own resources"; and, second, "providing system support for school-based development" (ECOR, 1989, p. 7). Each school, within the framework of overall departmental goals, is required to "develop its own Renewal Plan as the basis for its on-going program of school improvement and professional development" (ECOR, 1989, p. 10). The Renewal Plan should be

a simple document outlining a program of action for achieving the school's agreed goals and priorities over five years, [including] indicative resourcing levels, both financial and staffing, together with a yearly evaluation program. While the principal would clearly have responsibility for development and execution, the Renewal Plan should reflect the aspirations and intentions of executive, teaching, and other support staff as well as parents and the community. (ECOR, 1989, p. 10)

Currently, the statement of purpose and direction found in Education 2000 (NSW Department of School Education

[NSWDOSE], 1992, p. 29) provides the framework and focus for planning activities at the local level. The finer detail is found in the strategic plans of schools, regions, and management units in state office (NSWDOSE, 1993a).

Quality Assurance (QA) reviews are a state office initiative, announced in 1992 and implemented in February 1993, "aimed at increasing its capacity to evaluate the performance of the education system as a whole" (ECOR, 1994, p. 55). QA reviews are the mechanism that "unites two distinct functions of the school system: school development and accountability" (NSWDOSE, 1993b, p. 1). For its school development function, the reviews consider the effectiveness of the way in which the school is providing for its community's educational needs support structures and processes required for student learning and community participation (NSWDOSE, 1993b, p. 1). The accountability function is served by "providing the community and the Department of School Education with information about the success of programs and initiatives of schools" (NSWDOSE, 1993b, p. 1). Moreover, they make recommendations to which individual schools must give priority in future plans. The process of school review is conducted by teams that "gather their information through structured meetings with a cross-section of students, school staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the parent community. They also observe throughout the school and analyse documents, such as school plans, budgets and reports" (NSWDOSE, 1993b, p. 1).

Methodology

This case study sought both to document and analyse the process of strategic planning in the school and to elucidate rural teachers' and community members' cultural perspectives on this process. Cultural perspectives derive from cultural knowledge: "the knowledge people use to generate and interpret social behaviour" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1981, p. 8). This social knowledge is learned from, and shared with, others through social interaction. It provides "standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it" (Goodenough, 1970, pp. 258-259). This conceptualisation recognises the subjects of social research as cultural and social beings.

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are drawn from symbolic interactionism, an approach to the study of human conduct focussing on the meaning of events to people in everyday settings. Central to symbolic interactionism is the Meadian conception of self (Mead, 1973, p. 144), in which the self is viewed as a social product that develops through the process of socialisation (Berger & Berger, 1977). Communication, particularly through language, is crucial in developing the self, because it is through

dialogue with others that the individual becomes aware of the views and attitudes of others (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1992). What is crucial is how situations are perceived and interpreted, since perception, not reality in itself, influences behaviour (Thomas, 1928). The major methodological implication is that "if human beings are, indeed, organisms with selves, and if their action is, indeed, an outcome of a process of self-interaction, schemes that purport to study action should respect and accommodate these features" (Blumer, 1966 cited in D. Hargreaves, 1975, p. 16). It is for this reason that an interpretive methodology is employed in this study.

As Jacob (1988) points out, such methodology involves the use of a range of data collection strategies, including the three major approaches utilised here: nonparticipant observation, documentary analysis, and informant interviewing. Nonparticipant observation was used in lesson observations in classrooms and in meetings of teachers, the Parents and Citizens Committee (P&C) and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), and for observation of a school Quality Assurance (QA) process. Documentary analysis involved collection and analysis of system and school-level documents, strategic plans, Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) submissions,¹ school policy documents, and the like, and was used to compare official views with actual practice. Informant interviewing involving a standard unstructured ethnographic approach (grand tour questions followed by appropriate probes) was utilised to explore the cultural perspectives of teachers and community members (Spradley, 1979). The school was visited on average once a week for a year. Data analysis proceeded through grounded theorising which has its roots in symbolic interactionism (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1986).

The Local Context Described

The Town

Meiki² is a small rural town on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range in northern NSW. The town has a population of 850 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (mainly Anglo Australian) people. Aborigines, who constitute approximately one third of the town's population, originally lived out of town on a mission (a settlement controlled by a church to which Aboriginal people were confined). Those who were among the first group to come to Meiki School

after the closure of the mission school in 1950 recall it as a frightening and traumatic event, given their former isolation from non-Aboriginal people.

The community is impoverished. Approximately 75% of Meiki's population is unemployed. However, among the Aboriginal population, the unemployment rate is as high as 95%. Furthermore, the two communities are racially divided. According to many parents, there is a discriminating attitude evident in both black and white communities. However, the discrimination exercised by non-Aboriginal seems to be significant in shaping life in Meiki. As one non-Aboriginal parent said, "a lot of whites take the attitude they don't want anything to do with the Aboriginal community, they don't want anything to do with anything that's bought by 'black money.' To me, [it's] archaic attitudes like that which just keep making the trouble."

The town has not always been as small or impoverished. It was once a thriving mining town, with tin as its main resource. Meiki suffered a serious setback when it was no longer economical to mine in the area. There has been no alternative source of work for the community since the shut-down of mining operations 7 years ago.

The School

Meiki School is a small primary school in the state school system established in 1874. It is the only school in town and serving about 140 children. Meiki School was previously a central school, serving students from kindergarten, the first year of compulsory schooling, to Year 10, the last year of compulsory secondary schooling. In 1974, Meiki School became exclusively primary. Students travel 25 kms by bus to attend secondary school.

Reputation. The school has an unenviable reputation with respect to children's behaviour and academic results, which does not correspond to the present reality. The town and the school are stigmatised largely because of its Aboriginal population. So negative is the school's reputation that staff encounter adverse reactions from their peers. This negative view of the school and the town itself is particularly strong in Dangar, the nearest neighbouring town where the local newspaper is based. The school has appointed one teacher "publicity officer" to promote the school through the newspaper because positive items about the school rarely appear. Compared to other schools that "get page features, and photographs—the lot," the Meiki principal believes that his school doesn't "seem to get a fair go." Moreover, he adds, "they tend to focus on the negative things all the time, because it fits their image of Meiki. Anything that we put in that can be taken negatively, they take it that way."

School environment. First impressions of the school are that it is smart and well kept (an impression that is heightened by the poverty of some of the housing in town).

¹The DSP has been a longstanding Australian federal response to issues of poverty, class, and education. This targeted poverty and education program reaches the poorest 14% of the school population (Connell, White, & Johnston, 1991).

²Pseudonyms have been employed for places, schools, and the like.

There are a number of signs indicative of the school's developing relationship with its Aboriginal community, including an Aboriginal flag which flies with the Australian flag, Aboriginal paintings on the front path leading to the school, and a billboard proclaiming the school's status as a Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Education.

Classrooms, with one exception, are spacious; all are attractive. Children's work is displayed throughout the school. The school has a comfortable staffroom, a large library, and a small, but pleasant, Resource Room for the Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher (AERT) and the Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA).

The only major lack is a school hall. The principal is now working with community groups to attempt to get one built.

Size and complexity. The school is classified as a small school. Demands on principals of schools in this category vary dramatically, depending on the size and complexity of the school. The principal of Meiki School illustrates this point by making comparisons between his current and former situation. His former school was located at the lower end of the small schools range, whereas "we're towards the upper end of the band, so I've still got a full time class and doing the administration side of the school as well."

Moreover, while he previously had a total of four staff to supervise, he now has 15. Consequently, time is an issue. Racial divisions in the town's population also make demands on the principal's time. Instead of merely having one parent group to relate to,

in a place like Meiki, you've got an AECG and a P&C, and both of those tend to operate independently of each other, so you need to work with both. And they're both very sensitive. You need to be seen to be spending time with both groups, socialising, and getting on side with them, if you like. A little bit of genuine interest shown. If you do that, you get a much better response from them. But that entails time.

The fact that the school is also classified as a disadvantaged school also adds to staffing and budgeting complexity. Consider, for example, the requirements of the DSP:

That involves submission writing, meetings, getting parents together, staff together, and coming up with programs we want to run in the school for the 12 months. Then once you've got the money, then you've got to organise the spending of it. Then you need to report on it each 12 months. And every 12 months you need to reapply for the money. So there's a lot involved in DSP. It's a big, big workload.

Not surprisingly, the principal works long hours before school and at least four nights a week. In addition, he devotes Saturdays to a weekend sports program.

Budgeting. Budgeting is complex and time consuming. As well as the base operating grant supplied by the state department, the school receives the following "tied" (to be spent as per submission) social justice funding: (a) federal funding under the Aboriginal Students Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program, (b) Priority School funding for a Pupil Parent Support (Aboriginal) teachers aide, and (c) DSP federal funding. In addition, the school also benefits from non-tied state Isolated Schools social justice funding.

The base grant from the regional office needs careful monitoring. Although the school supposedly is self managing and "the regional office assures you that they're not going to take money off you if it's not spent," the principal suspects that, in time, unspent allocations will be used to justify giving less money to schools. "It's important that you spend the money you've got, spend it well, and don't waste it—but also don't have a lot sitting in a bank account, because they'll want to know why it's there." Although no schools have yet lost a surplus, the principal drew attention in 1994 to recent publicity in a Sydney paper in which the Director General of Education³ expressed concern about "schools hoarding money and the kids not getting the benefit of it."

Funds beyond the base grant, such as tied social justice grants, add to the complexity of budgeting and planning, since "there's only certain things you can spend that on. But then you've got to fit that in to your overall management plan of the school as well. So you've got all this tied money that's fitting in the big mesh." The principal estimates budgeting and monitoring of budgets alone takes him about 20 days a year. His official classroom release time, however, amounts to a mere 16 days a year.⁴

Staffing. Few of the staff have been in the school long. The secretary and one teacher, who have been at Meiki School roughly 20 years are the exceptions. The school is classified as the second least desirable type of location to which teachers can be transferred in NSW. Teachers are only required to stay in the school for 3 years before they are eligible for incentive transfers; principals are required to stay for 5 years. Few principals last longer. As the advanced skills teacher (AST) notes, "It's not the school that you retire in—it's a stepping stone to somewhere better."

Although a number of staff are currently eligible to take up incentive transfers, none has. The executive teacher

³The Director General is the leading bureaucrat in elementary and secondary education.

⁴Teaching principals are given funding to employ supply teachers to allow them to attend to management tasks without also having to attend to their class.

(ET) says, "I think the stable staffing has occurred because of the nature of the principal." Stability, however, is a recent phenomenon. Prior to the current principal's arrival, the ET says, "there was quite a considerable turnover of staff" because staff found the incumbent principal difficult to work with.

Although the school is small, there is a teaching staff of nine, including a teaching principal who teaches Years 5/6,⁵ an AST who teaches Years 4/5, an ET who teaches Years 2/3, two teachers who take the morning and afternoon sessions of Year 1 and also perform other teaching tasks, a kindergarten teacher, a teacher who works in the morning with eight students who integrate in regular classrooms each afternoon, and an AERT who is responsible for the Aboriginal Early Language Development Program (AELDP). There is another teacher who comes into the school one day a week. There are also three aides: (a) a Teacher Aide Special who accompanies a severely intellectually handicapped child; (b) an AEA who works with the AERT in Kindergarten, Years 1 and 2, in resource making and in community liaison; and (c) a Pupil Parent Support (PPS) aide who works with Years 3, 4/5, and 5/6 for 3 hours per day and who also provides help with speech problems. This aide is currently doing a preservice teacher education course.

The relatively large staff size is a result of extra staff made available by the state through social justice programs. For example, the AERT's position is provided on a short-term basis by the Department of School Education to assist in developing the literacy skills of Aboriginal students in K-2 through the Aboriginal Early Language Development Program (AELDP). The PPS (Aboriginal) aide position is funded by Priority Schools Funding which, according to the principal, is "Special funding because they consider we're a school in need of extra attention because of our low achievement levels. So they give us money to catch up the academic deficiencies in the school."⁶

Community input. Given the racial divisions in the community, two groups contribute to the affairs of the school: the P&C, which tends to be exclusively non-Aboriginal, and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), which the principal relates to as though it were a P&C. Some of the non-Aboriginal community see the P&C as an ineffective body because few people attend regularly. Those who are involved suggest apathy is a factor in poor attendance. However, it seems that poor atten-

dance partially occurs because the P&C is perceived by some parents as being for professional and business people who are "top knobs [or] who think they're the top knobs [with whom some parents] don't want to mix." This is consonant with Arfwedson's (1979) view that "there is a 'steering group' [of parents] in each school consisting of the most active and influential parents who have higher status than the average status of the parental group as a whole" (in Hatton, 1985, p. 263).

Moreover, some of the women say family commitments make participation in evening meetings difficult. There used to be a daytime Mothers' Club in the school. This organisation, attended exclusively by the non-Aboriginal community, appears to have served to recruit new helpers for school-related functions. There is some regret that a previous principal closed down this group since those that do contribute feel "pushed to the limit."

Consonant with the Schools Renewal Strategy, a School Council will soon be functioning in the school. A constitution has been drawn up, a joint meeting of the P&C and the AECG has been held to ratify the constitution, and elections are likely to take place soon. While the constitution has been written to ensure Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal representation, the three Aboriginal representatives will be a numerical minority.

School culture and climate. Relations between staff in the school are characterised by mutual respect and cooperation. Staffroom atmosphere is characterised by relaxed good humour. Relations between the teachers and students are generally characterised by warmth and good humour. Many of the children seek affection from their teachers. While three children were suspended in 1993, severe discipline problems are less frequent than they were in the past.

A major problem facing the school is the failure of the discipline policy to ameliorate male aggression in the classroom and violent aggression in the classroom (see Hatton, 1994a). Aggressive, insolent behaviour is disproportionately played out on female staff. Male staff are automatically accorded more respect than female staff.

Home-school relations. In a small town, home-school relations can be complicated by community politics, including racial politics, which are exceedingly difficult for the school to resolve. Nevertheless, relations between home and school seem to be positive. There is, however, considerable variation among parents. There are parents who are thoroughly intimidated by the school, who rarely visit, and who see the school as a hostile environment. Teachers are treated with suspicion by these parents. Parents do not name the relation between them and teachers as a class relation, but it is clear that many experience it as that.

By contrast, those parents who are actively involved in the life of the school claim that "you're always welcome

⁵Classes which, of necessity, combine more than one year/age group are called composite classes.

⁶Aboriginal students' levels of achievement in schooling have historically been very depressed (Malin, 1994). Meiki School, like many others, has staffing and social justice funding targeted at Aboriginal students in an attempt to redress this situation within mainstream schooling.

here." Social distance, it would seem, may be breached by contact. One parent, who had been intimidated by the school, now says: "I mean, I come here of a morning and they say, 'Come in and have a cup of tea.' It makes you feel they're not higher than you—[that] you're the same as them."

The school has a history in which the quality of home-school relations varies with the incumbent principal. The current principal is well regarded by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. Several factors seem to be involved, including the principal's decision to live in town and the principal's informal, open, and unpretentious personal style. One parent sums up a view held by many: "I think [the principal] is a wonderful fellow. Before, you couldn't go and talk to a principal here. If you had a problem in the school with your kid, you couldn't go and talk to [him] about it. He knew everything. Your kid was a bad kid. Your kid wasn't right."

One aspect of home-school relations that appears to be problematic is gender relations. Female teachers are not only spoken to disrespectfully by pupils, but are sometimes treated impolitely by male adults. The principal says, "The thing is, in working class communities such as this the view towards women is not the best. I mean, they don't see women in the best light."

The gender issue is of sufficient force that it shapes important decisions. For example, the female ET had been approached by the Regional Director to assess her interest in being the new principal before the current principal applied for the position. Her response was, "if I'd had some male teachers on the staff and I had a guarantee of a male executive teacher, I would have considered it." The need for males to "stand up to" males in the community was a recurring theme. When the principal's wife was asked to speculate how the town would have responded if she had been appointed principal and her husband as class teacher, she said she would "have been in for a very hard time because women in authority don't seem to carry any weight." She adds that when the ET was acting principal, "she did a fabulous job, but the community didn't see her as in charge because she wasn't perceived to be as powerful [as a man]." The principal's wife says of her husband, "I think just the size of him is a good deterrent in a town like this. It is fairly rough and tumble. And, you know, they know he's the front rower and they sort of think twice." Community members and parents also claimed that a male, preferably a large male, is the only appropriate choice for a principal: "If there is a fight or anything, it's better to have a man around than a woman." The principal is concerned, though, that "in this sort of community, you don't get a lot of feedback; you're not sure whether you've got their support or not . . . They don't come out and say 'Oh they're doing a wonderful job.' They wouldn't say that."

School Strategic Planning Processes Described

Doing Strategic Planning

Strategic planning at Meiki School has been undertaken in two distinctive ways under two principals. The former principal required curriculum committees to produce copious documentation. However, he took sole responsibility for the strategic plan. It was detailed and complex, whereas *Schools Renewal* calls for a "simple document" (ECOR, 1989, p. 10). Staff claim they did not understand the document. Moreover, teachers felt it to be so far removed from their realities that very little of it was implemented. Ironically, this Strategic Plan was proclaimed by regional authorities as a model to which schools in local area and beyond should conform. After the arrival of the present principal in 1992, strategic planning took on a more collaborative nature.

Planning of the 1994 Strategic and Management Plan began in 1993 and extended into 1994. Priority initiatives were derived from the principal's performance management statement. They included devising a new report form, addressing the issue of the school's stigmatised reputation, implementing the School Council, and attempting to gain a multipurpose hall for school and community use. These were subsequently discussed at staff meetings. In late 1993, a pupil-free School Development Day (SDD) was held to which parents were invited. Child care was made available to enhance parental participation. Sessions held on that day included designing a new report card, options for class allocations for 1994, and budget allocations for 1994.

The program and curriculum committees, including co-opted parents, met early in 1994 to write their sections of the strategic plan. The ET worked out a complicated timetable to allow committees release time of one to one and a half hours, to do their strategic planning. Using this time, the committees extended their long-term plan to cover the period 1994-1998, and they developed and wrote a detailed plan for 1994. The process began with a review of the 1993 detailed year plan and a review of the Program plan for 1994 to generate the current year's program.

Committee responsibility for plans is so total that when they are written, there is no further debate. Plans are taken to a staff meeting merely to familiarise staff with the contents, since to do otherwise would involve "chasing your tail forever," as the principal said. The principal simply collects finished planning from each committee and "puts [it] into a booklet." From that point on, the committees are "responsible for making sure that they do what they said they were going to do."

The extent of teacher involvement in strategic planning at Meiki School is captured in this remark from a teacher who was an executive teacher at her previous school. Asked if she missed being part of the executive, she said,

“No, because everything that I was involved in as an executive I do here. In fact, I think I do more here: We’re involved with budget, we’re involved with discipline. [The principal] puts everything at a staff meeting that we ever had [put] at an executive meeting.”

A major innovation was the involvement of parents in strategic planning both on the SDD in 1993 and on the committees in 1994. A group of approximately eight parents attended the whole school development day; others came for one or two sessions. The school is conscious that this aspect of the Schools Renewal Strategy, which is currently being emphasised at regional level, poses special difficulties:

It’s a community-based school and we’ve really tried to [involve parents], but we’ve got very reluctant parents because they feel inadequate. School to them is a horrible place. They’ve got horrible memories of schools. The only time that parents ever get involved in schools is when the kids are in trouble.

Differences in class and ethnic resources and dispositions showed clearly on the SDD as the principal pointed out: “You get some that are very confident. We had a [professional person who] was very confident. He got up and expressed his opinions. Of course, there were several there who you hardly heard boo out of for the whole day.” The two Aboriginal parents present, according to the principal, were very quiet: “They tend to be. If you do get a comment out of them, it’s something you’ve got to go and seek out. It’s a rare Aboriginal person who will stand up and make a speech.”

Most discussion from parents concerned the class size, class composition, and report cards. The class issue was contentious because teachers say parents looked at arrangements “from their child’s point of view.” Indeed, teachers now believe that one of the skills parents need for participating effectively is to learn to “think for all, not just their own.”

The report card issue was more productive. Teachers who are also parents try to provide a parent’s perspective on school matters. However, they feel “to get information from people who are not teachers but just parents [is useful, because] you may be on different paths.” According to teachers, the day left parents feeling daunted: “a lot of the things we were doing they didn’t feel comfortable with. It was very new. The strategic planning is foreign to parents, so they didn’t have a lot of say in that.”

During the first semester of 1994, the school underwent a 4-day Quality Assurance Review in three key areas of the strategic plan which it had nominated for review: Reading/Writing, Community Involvement, and the Disci-

pline Policy. The team of six reviewers, which included two co-opted parents, observed classrooms, analysed documents, and conducted interviews with teaching and ancillary staff, parents, and students. Preparation at school level for the review is demanding. For example, in the 52-page document containing School Review Guidelines (NSWDOSE, 1993c), principals are given a four-page checklist of tasks to complete prior to, during, and after the review. Despite the intensive 4-day review, the process did not reveal any surprises or areas of oversight. The school received a report which closely reflected their own evaluation of their endeavours.

Staff Perceptions

The time-cost dimension of strategic planning is of concern to the staff. As one teacher said, “A lot of times we’d wish that [the principal] would do it in the office—just go in and tell us what we’ve got to do and get it over and done with.” In addition to SDD staff meetings fully or partially devoted to strategic planning issues, the principal estimates that

it took 3 full days of meetings to actually nut out what was done (then, of course, you’ve got your clerical hours). I suppose, on average, each person would have probably put 4 working days into it—probably 40 working days total. That’s just for the curriculum areas. A lot of time.

Despite the fact that some staff members were reluctant and, to some degree, remain reluctant, to be involved in strategic planning, they concede that involvement in strategic planning is a positive feature of their work: “I think the ownership that it gives is really worthwhile. People feel that they’re not having it done ‘to’ them. It’s a decision that we’re all making and we’re all having a say.”

There is little doubt that the teachers are responding positively to ownership of, and involvement in, the planning process. One teacher claims that compared to what was happening in the school under the previous principal, there are now “huge differences in the whole feeling within the staff. Everyone is more relaxed, but, at the same time, more supportive of their principal.” The teachers’ support is partly due to appreciation of the principal’s emphasis on streamlined planning compared to the previous principal, who allegedly was preoccupied with

making everything look good on paper (but often what was happening wasn’t nearly as impressive as what was on paper). Whereas now, what’s happening is impressive. There’s none of this spend-week-after-week presenting, binding, and [so on].

Teachers claim that in the former situation “you sort of just got told,” whereas currently, “everyone has a better idea of what we are supposed to be achieving this year.” While being on many committees means “everyone has got lots of hats to wear,” and that it is “exhausting,” it’s also “good because everyone knows what’s going on because you’re involved in most things.”

The principal, like his staff, also questions the time-cost dimension of strategic planning involving the staff and the community, and acknowledges the positive outcomes of staff and community ownership of school-wide planning. He says wide ownership, at a practical level, “slows it down. It would be much easier for me to sit down in the office and write it. I reckon I could knock that up in probably a week, which is a lot less than 40 days.” He concedes, however, the plan is unlikely to “mean as much” if written by him. “You’re weighing the two things. The advantage is that, yes, it’s more likely to be done. And the disadvantage is it takes a long time to actually get it done.”

Another concern is that there are aspects of planning under devolved structures, which the principal perceives as uneconomical:

I think it’s window dressing. I really do. I think a lot of the things that I’m saying in [it] would be very similar to things that have been said in other schools, and a lot of it’s put there to fill up space, if you like. I think that the process could be shortened a great deal without having any real influence in what’s going on in schools. I would imagine a lot of the programs—the administration programs, student welfare, human resources—would have common elements so that you could be sharing in time and effort.

These concerns are serious given the rhetoric of efficiency and effectiveness, which provides the justification for the Schools Renewal Strategy. It is clear that doing strategic planning within devolved structures has created a context that has significantly intensified the principal’s work. Significantly, much of the new work is trivial and, he says, diverts him from more important work:

Like the budget business. A lot of principals have said it: They *feel like a bill-paying service for the Department*. I’m now paying the electricity bill that used to be paid by regional office. And yet I’ve got to sit down and come up with these plans. Let’s go down the list: energy (should be looked after by regional office), maintenance (regional office), equipment service (regional office), postage (regional office), short term relief (regional office), phone (regional office), waste disposal—all that stuff [was done] by regional office. So they

cleaned out regional office and put the work load onto us, and we’re not getting the compensation for it in time. They’ve saved quite small wages when you think of the clerks and so on who used to do that stuff, and then they’re squeezing more, for the same amount of money, out of principals—*and taking away from what we’re actually meant to be doing*. (emphasis added)

In this small school, the principal and the ET are the first to feel the impact of intensification of their work arising from strategic planning under devolved structures.⁷ Intensification, however, is evident for all members of the staff. Consider the AST, who not only heads up both the English and the Library Curriculum committees but is also a member of the Creative and Practical Arts and the Computer curriculum committees. Additionally, she is the teacher who takes responsibility for school publicity.

Part of the difficulty both the teachers and the principal are experiencing is, as Watkins (1993) points out, a product of the inherent contradictions in imposing the time/space considerations of representative committee structures on top of the traditional, timetabled nature of teachers’ work. This contradiction is exacerbated in rural schools, which tend to have few teachers to service the committees. Teachers cannot, as is possible in larger urban schools, decline to participate (see, e.g., Watkins, 1993).

Of course, the distinctive nature of Meiki School makes its own contribution to intensification. Even without devolution and strategic planning, it would be a busy place. Moreover, there rarely seems to be a week in which something out of the ordinary, such as hosting events as a direct result of the school’s status as a Centre of Excellence, is not happening. Given the uniqueness of the school and its clientele, which makes it eligible for many sources of funds, its obligations as a designated Centre of Excellence, and the fact that the principal is a teaching principal with time-consuming planning and management responsibilities, it is not surprising that strategic planning is seen as a mixed blessing by the principal and the staff.

There are significant negative costs arising from the intensification of teachers’ work. For example, the principal expresses concern that one result of the demands on him is that his classroom preparation suffers—that he often has to cut corners in classroom planning. Some teachers also admit that at busy times, attention and energy may be reluctantly displaced from teaching children to planning. Children might have to be set a task while teachers do paperwork.

⁷Larson (1980), in the context of a discussion of the proletarianisation of educated labour, describes intensification as the process in which the quantity of work increases, often at the expense of its quality.

There are other costs. Take, for example, the case of the principal and his wife, a teacher. They have three children under the age of six. The principal's wife finds her personal and professional life is shaped by her husband's work. There is no possibility of a division of labour at home:

He's [at school] quite often till midnight. He'll come home and have tea at about six—half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and then he's back over again. Which means I look after the kids, which is difficult because I've always got [school-related work] that I have to do at home. So I'm sort of juggling housework while they're awake and then when they're in bed I can finally settle down about ten and do something.

The principal's participation in his family life is affected. Other teachers also feel the effects of intensification on their personal lives. It is plausible to assume that hidden, personal costs such as these were not taken into account when Schools Renewal was devised. Efficiency and effectiveness it seems are being achieved at considerable personal cost at Meiki School (see Hatton, 1994b).

Parents' Perceptions

Parents who participated in the SDD offered some explanations of what they saw as poor attendance. One parent claims that the written invitation is ineffective in Meiki: "If you put out a general notice, you'll get the same few that always turn up. If you want people to come, you have to go and knock on their door and give them a personal invitation to come—tell parents that it is okay to come to the school and to have their say." Another parent notes that the size of the town creates particular difficulties:

There's 850 people in the town. When you cut out all the kids, you reduce the number of [available people], then you break it down further and you largely find that it's always the same people at the main committee meetings.

Parents who did attend allegedly had difficulty with "teacher talk." One parent's view was that teachers could gain "a misrepresentation of what really is going on," since rather than speak up in an intimidating situation, "most parents just sit in the back and say, 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, I've got nothing to say, you're doing a fine job, blah, blah, blah.'" This, he suggests, is "the problem of Meiki being Meiki," where to understand what people think,

you've personally got to go and sit down with that person in their house. Even if you got them to come to a meeting, they still wouldn't say anything.

You've got to sit down there with your problems, over their table, and say, "Now listen, Joey is having a bit of trouble at school, what do you reckon it is?" I realise there's no way [the principal] can do it.

Personal invitation was used to co-opt parents on to planning committees. One parent explains, "I brought the kids to school one day and [the ET] came out and said, 'We're having a planning day about computers and things. Just come in and have a sit and listen.' That's how we got to come into that one." Another says that if the invitation had come through an open letter, she "probably wouldn't have come." Because of the personal approach, however, she did.

The parents were initially nervous, even "terrified," about participating in committees: "We didn't know what was going on when we first came in. It was the first time we'd ever been to one."

Language was again an issue. In this context, though, teachers offered explanations in layperson's language. In small groups, the teachers were perceived as very supportive. Similarly, when parents attended an inservice program on networking, they found teachers helpful. Despite their initial nervousness, the parents were excited about the access to new knowledge the inservice program gave them.

One parent says she has changed her perception of teachers as a consequence of being involved. She says now, contrary to a common community perception, she sees "teachers as human people, not stuck ups":

When I first come up, because I was one of them people—sit back in the thing and think, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," And you don't like getting up and making a fool out of yourself because if you say something they're down your throat and you think, "what did I say?" Now I can come and talk to any of them.

She adds that she knows that many parents refuse to even approach the staffroom:

You can go and talk to a parent and it's, "I'm not going over there to the staff room. No way am I going in there." Like that's a place for them awful people sitting in there. It's just the way Meiki is really, the way they were brought up. There'd be parents who just would not come in here and face the teachers and say, "Well, my child's unhappy."

Obviously, class-based perception of status differences have implications for community involvement in schooling. While it is obviously not impossible to change parents nega-

tive perceptions of teachers, it will again make considerable time demands on teachers to do so since one-to-one approaches seem to be required.

Analysis

Impacts and Effects of Strategic Planning at Meiki

Rural location, combined with factors such as poverty and historically entrenched racism, make Meiki a site in which educational disadvantage is likely. However, according to the rhetoric of the Schools Renewal Strategy, teachers have the potential to address educational disadvantage, given the control they now exercise over educational decision-making and planning under devolved structure. There are signs that this is happening at Meiki School. Achievement results provide a useful benchmark: The 1993 and 1994 state-wide Basic Skills results are the best achieved to date, with results on or above the state average. Significantly, the school's results have historically been well below the state average.

Despite the fact that Meiki's students are among those whose academic results are usually poor, these results provide some indication that the school is effectively working towards meeting the educational needs of its client group. Its effective use of social justice funding and state provided extra staff, together with its capacity to plan in ways which harnesses the support of teachers for policy and meets the educational needs of students, seems central to its success.

Perhaps one of the most beneficial effects of involvement in strategic planning has been a major change in teachers' perceptions of their work. Teachers have shed a narrow conception of their work in which "You taught your class without any concept of what might be down the road in 2 years time. You don't really think about that. You just look at that narrow little classroom and say, 'Well right, I've got to get them from A to B'" (ET). They now have a broader, long-term view of their work. As one ET said:

Because staff here are all actively involved in the planning, you need to look so much further and you need to look wider. You really have to get in and say, "Well that's my class, but what about the whole of the school?" And it makes you really consider the whole school, and then the whole school in the long-term process.

It is this broader and longer term view that has facilitated staff commitment to having two Reading Recovery specialists despite costs to themselves. The ET says, "They were prepared to give up time that should have been theirs. But they could see that it was a long term process, that everyone would benefit. The school certainly benefits."

Corporate Managerialism in a Rural, Working Class Setting

Strategic planning under devolved structures is currently, at Meiki School, a fulfilling process that enhances the functioning of a school by making teachers feel they have a stake in and ownership of developments in the school. In these circumstances, teachers cease to feel they are mere functionaries, and feel they have a say in the progress of the school. The school, as an organisational unit, clearly benefits from the teachers' willingness to commit wholeheartedly to policies. This has been achieved even when staff have concerns about the time involved in strategic planning; when they believed it easier and less demanding simply to do what others say they should. If, as in this case, appropriate policies are devised, enhanced educational outcomes for students can and do result.

Obviously, there must be some doubts about the overall appropriateness of Schools Renewal Strategy. Certainly, the staff in this school are making the strategy work, but they are doing so at considerable cost. Of course, it could be argued that it is not that teachers at Meiki are exploited by the demands of Schools Renewal. Rather, it could be that they make a personal choice to work as hard as they do. Aside from the sheer demands of strategic planning at Meiki, there is a complex dynamic at work that cannot be explained by personal choice. The staff and the executive alike have responded positively to the challenge of school development work. This response has given them all a greater sense of control and achievement in their work than they had previously. This has created its own dynamic. As a consequence, there has been an obvious generation of commitment and a desire to work hard. Moreover, the feeling of being appreciated and respected, which is evident between the staff and the executive, motivates both parties to "put out" for each other. This, too, adds to the momentum within the school. So, the coincidence of these circumstances encourages the staff at Meiki to participate willingly in the intensification of their work and thereby in that of their own exploitation.

Arguably, features of the Schools Renewal Strategy are class-biased and better suited to some contexts than to others. Many of its features are much easier to realise in middle-class urban contexts in which parents have class-based resources that facilitate confident involvement in the governance of schools. Consider, for example, the effort a principal at Meiki School would have to expend to make the personal approaches to parents to secure adequate parental involvement in schooling. And consider this in the context of a principal's already highly demanding life. It is clear that if the Schools Renewal Strategy is to be effective, contexts like Meiki require extra permanent resources to achieve this. If, for example, the principal's position was

a non-teaching one, he might make time to visit families and encourage participation and involvement. Without this level of attention, it is hard to see how a school in a small, rural community, which battles to get adequate participation in P&C and AECG meetings, will also manage to achieve adequate participation in a School Council. A recent combined meeting of the AECG and the P&C called to ratify the School Council constitution yielded only 14 community members, six of whom are also employed in the school.

Again, the lack of context sensitivity of the Schools Renewal Strategy is evident. Recall the way in which one community member drew attention to the small size of the community and the regular attendance of a small group of parents at committee meetings. This same man claimed that if committee attenders in the town were marshalled into one room, the name of the meeting could be changed every half hour without anyone entering or leaving. It is likely that issues of class, gender and race are intersecting with the small size of the town to produce this outcome.

Nevertheless, it is likely that a School Council will be difficult to sustain in this context. During the course of this case study, another smaller rural community in the north west of NSW abandoned its School Council because the P&C Committee and the School Council membership included all but one family. This family felt seriously aggrieved and excluded, and the problems and tensions that resulted in the community persuaded the principal to conclude that the School Council was not workable in this context.

It is obvious that the inclusion of parents in planning, particularly in curriculum committees, has had some positive effects. For example, some parents come to see teachers in less status-differentiated ways, which, in turn, results in a more productive relationship between teachers and parents. However, it is appropriate to ask whether this, and indeed, wider, involvement in school governance through a school council, is the best form of involvement in schooling for these parents. While parents in middle-class communities might bring knowledge and skills to share on, say, a computer committee, few parents at Meiki come into curriculum and program committees with ready-made resources.

To facilitate their effective involvement, the school is sponsoring the involvement of parents in inservice programs. However, the school's base grant is not differentiated to take account of the greater difficulty of making corporate modes of management work in small, rural, working class settings, so the costs involved in inservicing parents are necessarily diverted from other uses. It is worth asking whether this allows the school to make the most efficient and effective use of limited resources. Rather than place the school under pressure to demonstrate community involvement of the kind consonant with the Schools Re-

newal Strategy, it might have been appropriate to consider the context and to encourage it to continue to foster the involvement of parents in classrooms for Reading, its Health and Hygiene Days, its extensive clubs program, the Aboriginal Studies curriculum, and the like. Many of these activities allow parents to participate in areas in which they feel comfortable and skilled.

Just as many parents are not well placed to advise on curriculum, it similarly is hard to see how the School Council will be well-placed to advise fairly on matters of staffing. Consider the issue of community prejudices about females. Given widespread sexism, it is possible that female applicants for a principal's position interviewed by the school council could encounter gatekeeping tactics as bad, if not worse, than those many would have encountered prior to the 1980s in the centralised system. And imagine the difficulty an Aboriginal female applicant might have (see also Deem, Brehony, & Hemmings, 1992).

As is the case in New Zealand, the notion of the *community* on which the reforms rest suggests that residence in a particular area "implies both a commonality of interests and a consequent unity of purpose" (Moss, 1990, p. 140). Communities are treated as "harmonious wholes" as though there are no divisions by class, gender, or ethnicity. "Power is regarded as equally distributed, or at least potentially so, amongst members of the community, and the commonality of their interests ensures that they can come together to articulate uniform and coherent views" (Moss, 1990, pp. 140-141). Certainly, as in the New Zealand case, there is complete oversight of the fact that Australian society is structured by a capitalist economy that is constituted by unequal class, race, and gender relations (Jones, 1990).

[I]f groups of people are left alone to administer their affairs they will reach "optimal solutions." . . . [this] stands in contradiction with the vast body of scholarly research and argument [showing] that, without intervention, the most powerful groups are invariably enabled to reproduce a situation which benefits them. This might be optimal for dominant groups, but hardly for anyone else whose interests do not coincide. (Jones, 1990, p. 98)

This is a flawed utopian view of community. Far from there being a commonality of interest and uniformity of purpose, the data demonstrate the divided nature of interests and purposes in the Meiki community. Far from being a "harmonious whole," the community is a site of significant conflict in which power is not shared equally. Despite stratification within the non-Aboriginal community, it was evident that this community has more social power to have its needs met within the school than the Aboriginal population. And given that Aborigines will always be a numerical minority on the School Council, this situation is unlikely

to change. Moreover, given the fact that particular kinds of skills and competencies are unevenly distributed among individuals within a community like Meiki, representatives on a School Council are again likely to be confined to a steering group. Those with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) are likely to capture the positions available on the School Council, since these are the people who are most likely to see themselves, and be seen by others as having appropriate skills, knowledge, and capacities.

Implications for Rural Schools

This case study shows that there are genuine problems with the imposition of corporate managerialism in this small, rural, working-class community, problems that go beyond a reluctance by the teachers and the community to comply with devolved management structures. Indeed, this case study documents ways in which local context, here a specific rural context, is insufficiently accommodated by the central imposition of corporate managerialism. There is some irony here since the imposition of corporate managerialism is intended to "improve the responsiveness of the public school system to diverse educational needs" (ECOR, 1994, p. 1). The move to corporate managerialism disadvantages schools such as Meiki because of its class bias, which is exacerbated in this case by a bias against small, relatively isolated communities. The picture is further complicated by the racial and gender division that characterises the local context. Working class, rural schools, such as Meiki, are given no specific funding to meet the special demands of introducing corporate managerialism. If the overall move to corporate managerialism in New South Wales is to be fair and defensible, then carefully crafted supplementary policies must be introduced to accommodate the distinctive features of the local context.

There is a broader issue to which this case study also directs attention.⁸ That is, how might policies be evaluated prior to implementation in order that in-built biases such as those revealed by this study are detected? Such an approach would have the virtue of obviating the need for compensatory supplementary policies such as are now necessary in New South Wales. This case study reveals some useful parameters by which to gauge the impact of policy. Consider, for example, the usefulness of examining policy for implicit class bias. An examination of the role parents are expected to play in any policy would quickly reveal if there is bias of the kind evident in the modes of management associated with corporate managerialism. A supplementary way of looking at this issue would be to consider whether there are likely to be differential demands placed on teachers in different contexts to foster the involvement of par-

ents. Likewise the impact on small schools and small communities, which are frequently rural, can be revealed by an examination of the demands of any policy on human resources (e.g., teachers and parents). Finally, an examination of the concept of *community* on which any policy is premised would usefully reveal whether or not the reality of unequal class, race, and gender relations in countries like Australia is taken adequately into account. If bias is revealed prior to implementation, then it can be addressed before creating situations in which those already disadvantaged by such factors as geographical location, social class, race, and gender are further disadvantaged by well-intended, but inadequately scrutinised, policies.

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