At a time when there is a high demand for capacity building in schools, many administrators and practitioners find little if any empirical studies on how this can be achieved in practice. Through the eyes of an experienced researcher, schoolteacher, senior administrator and university lecturer, this book captures how a low decile school in New Zealand successfully built its capacity for improvement. Dr. Patricia Stringer allows the reader, who could be anyone with an interest in education, leadership and school development, to identify contextual problems and difficulties that limit capacity building and suggests pathways to overcome them. This is an easy to read and enjoyable book, but, one that digs deep into practice. The researcher spent over a year working with the staff, board and parents of this school discovering and recording authentic information about this school's successful journey to success. For the researcher, this was an exciting experience; one that needs to be shared with the wider educational community. A must read book.
CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO RESEARCH
IN LEARNING INNOVATIONS

Volume 6

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Rationale:
Learning today is no longer confined to schools and classrooms. Modern information and communication technologies make the learning possible any where, any time. The emerging and evolving technologies are creating a knowledge era, changing the educational landscape, and facilitating the learning innovations. In recent years educators find ways to cultivate curiosity, nurture creativity and engage the mind of the learners by using innovative approaches.

Contemporary Approaches to Research in Learning Innovations explores approaches to research in learning innovations from the learning sciences view. Learning sciences is an interdisciplinary field that draws on multiple theoretical perspectives and research with the goal of advancing knowledge about how people learn. The field includes cognitive science, educational psychology, anthropology, computer and information science and explore pedagogical, technological, sociological and psychological aspects of human learning. Research in this approaches examine the social, organizational and cultural dynamics of learning environments, construct scientific models of cognitive development, and conduct design-based experiments.

Contemporary Approaches to Research in Learning Innovations covers research in developed and developing countries and scalable projects which will benefit everyday learning and universal education. Recent research includes improving social presence and interaction in collaborative learning, using epistemic games to foster new learning, and pedagogy and praxis of ICT integration in school curricula.
Capacity Building for School Improvement

Revisited

By

Patricia Stringer
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I gave serious consideration to writing this book, the school which was at the centre of this research on capacity building for school improvement became the focus. I was part of this school’s journey towards improvement both prior to and during the research process. This gave me the much needed insight to construct the model on capacity building for school improvement portrayed in this book. Recording the journey this group of school stakeholders took towards improving their school meant that I am able to share their practices on capacity building with educators from around the world. The book captures this school’s journey from the viewpoint of attributes, practices and themes that underpin capacity building. Working with this school’s stakeholders has been a privilege, not just for the insights they gave me on building capacity for school improvement, and why, but also for the opportunity to meet, talk and pursue their views on improvement aligned to improving outcomes for students. This book is very much their story. With this in mind, my grateful thanks are extended to all stakeholders who have generously welcomed me into their school, made time to talk to me and allowed me to observe their practices. To the most committed and dedicated educators I have had the good fortune to meet, I wish to express my deepest thanks.

I wish to thank Dr. Myint Swe Khine, associate professor and head of Science, Mathematics and ICT Academic Group at Bahrain Teachers College who encouraged me to write this book. I’m not sure how these things work out but I suspect that talking to Myint set off a chain of reactions that culminated in the writing of this book.

I wish to thank my colleagues for their encouragement and support. In particular, my sincere thanks to Samia who helped in the formatting of this book.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my family who have always supported me. I would like to thank my mum Doris for her encouragement. I would like to thank my husband Geoff who contributed significantly to this effort in his own talented way. I also want to thank my son John for his contributions and for all that he does by way of support.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Stringer received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Auckland University and her Master of Education Administration and Education Doctorate degrees at Massey University Auckland, New Zealand. She has had over 25 years of teaching experience in the New Zealand primary school and tertiary sector. As a senior manager in several schools, she has had the privilege of working alongside principals, education authorities and community groups initiating school improvement. She has had first-hand experience in turning around a school categorised as ‘failing’. In her educational advisory capacity, she worked with schools implementing The New Zealand Curriculum Framework. Her professional background extends to lecturing in graduate and post graduate courses at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, Auckland College of Education and Massey University. Patricia is currently working in a tertiary institution in the Middle East as assistant professor, head of education studies and curriculum coordinator.
INTRODUCTION

Throughout my career I have been fascinated with the notion of reform and the drive to improve schools. I have witnessed successive waves of government reform policies initiate responses to act and change systems, processes and structures. The notion of school improvement is captivating. I ask myself how practitioners embrace and pursue improvement. How do they manage the inevitability of change that follows? Additional questions pertain to sustaining the improvement drive given the daily demands of life in schools. Progressively my thoughts are drawn towards understanding what happens in school environments that create and sustain an improvement culture. I find myself drawn to an examination of practice and, in this respect, the building of capacity for improvement.

Understanding the concept of capacity building for school improvement has held my attention for nearly two decades. Indeed, as a senior manager of various primary schools, I have often found myself at the centre of not only initiating change for improvement but, also, reflecting and questioning if improvements have become embedded and form part of ‘how things are done around here’. My reflections in this regard focus on school systems, processes and structures that allow for effective introduction, implementation and sustainment of improvement measures in practice. My thoughts also extend to members of the school community who act as catalysts for change. As change agents, what do their actions involve? I am forever mindful that internal and external determinants of context influence practice and strategies employed to initiate, manage and sustain change over time. Questions and thoughts such as these motivated me to undertake research in the area of capacity building for school improvement. I felt compelled to undertake this study in a school categorised as ‘underperforming’. Schools in such environments have compounding issues and challenges to deal with over and above the improvement journey. The case study school to which I will refer and draw examples from has, over a two year period, successfully implemented capacity building strategies which enabled its shift from being labelled ‘underperforming’ to having attained a remarkable turnaround for the better.

My association with the school in question has been progressive extending over a period of 7 years. In October 2001, I received an invitation to attend the newly appointed principal’s powhiri. In June 2002, I received an invitation to attend an advisory meeting with Ministry of Education officials, outside agency representatives, cluster school principals and school staff to brainstorm ideas on improvement that could draw a halt to and reverse a dysfunctional school ethos prevalent at the time. At this meeting, barriers to school change were identified and action plans for improvement discussed. Barriers included a negative school culture, low student academic levels, non-productive (verging on violent) in and out of class student behaviour, and community and property issues such as vandalism and dilapidated environmental conditions. Combined, these factors generated a negative school image, falling roll and low staff morale.
INTRODUCTION

In January 2003, I received a further invitation to attend a ‘teachers only’ professional development day where action plans to counteract academic, behavioural and environmental concerns were discussed. At the meeting, opportunities to review progress made since the arrival of the new principal were undertaken. Information revealed that the school had initiated system and structural changes which were making a positive difference to student learning. Ministry officials and outside agency representatives acknowledged site-based factors leading to improvements in pedagogy and student behaviour.

By mid-2003, the school showed signs of being a moving\textsuperscript{iii} school (Stoll & Fink, 1996). It displayed: a strong drive for organisational change based on the school’s vision; professional leadership exercised at all levels and by different stakeholders; an emphasis on improving student academic achievement, teaching and learning; a supportive school culture; and continuous professional development for all stakeholders. It was at this time that I approached the school authorities – the principal and board of trustees\textsuperscript{iv} – and sought their permission to conduct a study on how this school built its capacity to improve.

PURPOSE AND FOCUS

The purpose of this book is to help promote an understanding of attributes, practices and themes related to capacity building for school improvement. Many questions related to this phenomenon have, as yet, gone unanswered or unexplained by the literature. This book examines capacity building for school improvement at the level of practice where school stakeholders’ craft and sustain the improvement process. Using this school as a case in point, the book explains, describes and analyses the following:

– Capacity building embedded in external (macro) and internal (micro) contexts of reform and change;
– Attributes and practices which underpin the phenomenon; and
– Attributes, practices and emerging themes that contribute to a model of capacity building for school improvement.

The book addresses concerns and questions related to capacity building as seen through the eyes of a variety of school stakeholders: the principal; senior managers; teachers; auxiliary staff; and parents directly engaged in improvement efforts. In practice, it determines and makes recommendations on what policy makers, reform developers and school stakeholders can do to enhance the building of capacity for improvement. The book features vignettes that exemplify successful practice. Recommendations, summarised in Chapter 10, may be of assistance in future development of policies and policy implementation measures that build capacity for school improvement.
INTRODUCTION

CHANGE AND LINKS TO CAPACITY BUILDING

The future ain’t what it used to be. (Yogi Berra, 2001)

In response to this statement, Smylie (2010) notes the preponderance of three arguments related to improving schools and schooling. First, these are rapidly changing and unpredictable times and with a future characterised by rapid change, systemic uncertainty and even chaos, schools appear unprepared. Smylie notes, “Most of today’s schools are yesterday schools built for purposes and contexts disappearing or gone. They are oriented toward the past not the future” (p. 2).

Second, schools are built to promote stability and to be stable. They do not change on their own nor are they easily changed by others. Third, schools must change in basic ways to perform effectively in the future. “They must become more flexible and adaptable, better able to deal with increasing complexity and ambiguity, more proactive than reactive and reoriented towards different objectives” (ibid.). All three arguments purport a call for change that is future orientated and which builds capacity for improvement. This call may mean that existing norms, structures and processes need replacing to establish ‘fit’ with an evolving school ethos and the values and ethical purposes symbolic of context. Reframing what happens in schools requires school authorities, outside agencies and government officials working together in new ways to achieve: meaningful communication across all levels of schooling; appropriate capacity building practices; problem solving mindsets; and leadership that initiates, manages and sustains change. The call to build capacity seems central to any debate on school improvement and emphasised is the need to combine internal and external agendas in initiating and implementing change (Day, 2007).

Accompanying this is the urgency for action underpinned by clear theory (Harris, 2010).

Capacity building is, by its very nature, a public enterprise to which many definitions are accorded. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) state capacity building results from single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning occurs within existing structural arrangements influenced by a shared organisational memory of prior events and existing ways of knowing (Marks & Louis, 1999). Double-loop learning generates new rather than adaptive learning by collaboratively examining the root causes of issues and questioning the basic assumptions that underlie existing professional attitudes and behaviours (Senge 2000). Over time, double-loop learning builds up sufficient personal and interpersonal capacities to sustain a mutually accountable community of learners where shared norms and values focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, de-privatisation of practice and collaboration. Darling Hammond (1996) notes that such a shift represents a move away from enforcing procedures to building capacity and from managing compliance to managing improvement.

In a study on primary schools in Wales by Harris (2010), the notion of collective capacity building was emphasised. Collective capacity building relates to ‘interdependent practice’ (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009) explained as collaboration of professionals within schools and across local authorities with the purpose of
transforming learning and teaching. Harris (2010) claims this encourages the
development of professional learning communities with potential to improve and
raise student performance. Although professional learning communities are
powerful vehicles for change, detailed studies of how this occurs in practice are not
well represented in the literature (Giles, 2007).

ORGANISATION
This book presents a model of capacity building for school improvement grounded
in everyday practice. It highlights organisational attributes and capacity building
practices that facilitate improvement. Though patterns may vary across schools, the
attributes, practices and themes identified in this book based on a case study of one
school are considered applicable to other sites. Taken together, attributes, practices
and themes provide a sound basis to discuss the hallmarks of a model on capacity
building for school improvement.

Chapter 1 sets the scene. It sheds light on the challenges of implementing and
sustaining capacity given an evolving, rapidly changing educational landscape. The
focus of this chapter on the New Zealand educational scene provides an overview
of government reform policies designed to promote improvement. Against this
backdrop, hidden paradoxes inherent in policy and policy implementation
measures are discussed from the viewpoint of what builds and, simultaneously,
detracts from capacity building for school improvement. This chapter proceeds to
define components of the capacity building for school improvement model which
is subsequently unpacked in the chapters that follow.

Chapters 2 to 5 draw attention to attributes underpinning the phenomenon. Here,
the importance of vision, stakeholders as change agents, school culture and
professional development are highlighted and explained. The discussion of each
attribute is embedded in an improving school context with established links to
practice. Chapter 2 highlights the importance of vision as providing the blueprint
or map for all capacity building for school improvement efforts. Chapter 3
considers the importance of stakeholders as change agents in building capacity.
Chapter 4 highlights important cultural hallmarks of a school’s culture that
provides a suitable environment from which to build capacity. Chapter 5 details the
importance of professional development that leads to professional learning
considered an important contributor to practices that build capacity for
improvement.

The next three chapters, Chapters 6, 7 and 8, identify and discuss key practices
inherent in capacity building. Practices identified are: knowledge production and
utilisation, a ‘switching on’ mentality and division of labour: roles and
responsibilities. Key characteristics of each are explained in relation to what
happens in this setting connected to capacity building. Actions of school
stakeholders are highlighted. Chapter 6 argues that processes for knowledge
production and utilisation are critical in creating a learning culture, improving
pedagogy and lifting outcomes for students. Chapter 7 captures the notion of a
‘switching on’ mentality as a motivational force driving change for improvement.
Chapter 8 explains the roles and responsibilities school stakeholders play in building capacity for improvement. Of concern is division of labour: roles and responsibilities.

In Chapter 9, the theoretical framework that explains capacity building for school improvement is explicated utilising the four themes of situated activity; connectedness; governance, leadership and management; and capacity outcomes. The theoretical model draws on attributes and practices previously discussed.

The final chapter, Chapter 10, reflects on policy/practice related implications highlighted by the study. It presents recommendations for policy makers and school personnel that can be used as a guide to maximise efforts in the building of capacity for improvement.

NOTES

1 A powhiri is a Maori welcoming ceremony involving speeches, dancing, singing and finally the hongi (pressing one’s nose and forehead with that of another person during an encounter) Retrieved from: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powhiri.

2 Outside agency representatives can refer to one of many groups of people involved in school support.

3 Rosenholtz’s (1989) explains that the ‘moving’ school displays positive work conditions and produces much higher outcomes for students. Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994) note the moving school displays “a healthy balance of change and stability, and balanced development and maintenance … as it adapts successfully to an often rapidly changing environment” (p. 91).

4 All New Zealand’s state and state-integrated schools have a board of trustees. The board of trustees is the Crown entity responsible for the governance and the control of the management of the school. The board is the employer of all staff in the school, is responsible for setting the school’s strategic direction in consultation with parents, staff and students, and ensuring that its school provides a safe environment and quality education for all its students. Boards are also responsible for overseeing the management of personnel, curriculum, property, finance and administration. Trustees are elected by the parent community, staff members and, in the case of schools with students above Year 9, the students. The principal is also a board member. Retrieved from: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/data-collections/boards_of_trustees.

5 School stakeholders in this case include: the principal, senior managers, teachers, auxiliary staff, and parents.
CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE

An examination of practice with a view to improve it necessitates a consideration of context within which the interplay of external (macro) and internal (micro) determinants account for particular site-based characteristics. From a position of understanding context, it is possible to determine not only type and trajectory of improvement needed but, also, capacity building attributes and practices unique to the site that works towards it. This chapter begins with a brief review of the New Zealand government’s reform policies by way of providing a contextual backdrop within which to raise the argument that reform policies are simultaneously responsible for generating and limiting efforts to build capacity. Government policies not only affect the direction school improvement takes but, also, its trajectory. Establishing ‘fit’ within externally imposed government policy and internal determinants of context is what drives a school to construct its own unique brand of what it means to improve and build capacity. In this chapter, capacity building and school improvement terms are defined in relation to contemporary literature and findings from this study. Hidden paradoxes embedded in government policy are discussed. The model for capacity building is introduced in this chapter and deconstructed in the chapters that follow.

REFORMS LINKED TO CAPACITY BUILDING AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In New Zealand, much emphasis has and continues to be directed towards school improvement in pursuit of raising student achievement and reducing disparity (Ministry of Education, 1999a, 2004; Alton-Lee, 2003). Over the last decade, action in this area is traceable to key policy statements. The 1999 briefing paper, for example, prepared for the incoming Minister of Education by the Ministry of Education (MOE) stressed the importance of increasing achievement levels and reducing disparity to enhance New Zealand’s social and economic well-being and adaptation to growing international and technological influences, ethnic diversity and calls for lifelong education (MOE, 1999a). The Ministry of Education’s first Statement of Intent for the period 2003-2008 promoted education as a lifelong process to keep pace with a changing world (MOE, 2004). Underpinning elements emphasised: the need to be more responsive to diverse cultures and a wide range of needs and aspirations; globalisation; the impact of technology and information; and development of a knowledge-based economy. To ensure this, high standards and clear expectations at all levels in the education system were stressed. Attention was given to developing a schools’ sector strategy focused on raising achievement and reducing disparity. Implied in the Statement of Intent was the Ministry’s
involvement to influence and improve system-wide learning outcomes from a substantial knowledge-base and increased systems capabilities. In the Statement of Intent 2005-2010, the Ministry reasserted its mission of raising achievement and reducing disparity (MOE, 2006). Three outcomes to be covered were: effective teaching for all students; family and community engagement in education; and development of quality providers. To ensure these overarching goals were met, a wide range of legislative mandates, official documentation and research were promoted. Mandates contained in *The National Education Guidelines*vi (MOE, 1993a) and *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993b) indicated commitment to improving schools. Changes to *The National Administration Guidelines* (NAGs) (MOE, 1993a) and the 2001 amendment to the 1989 Education Act placed planning for and reporting on student achievement at the top of schools’ agendas. The amendments legislated that schools’ charters must indicate plans for ongoing improvement (MOE, 2000). Legislative changes to governance roles increased board responsibility in monitoring student achievement and reviewing effectiveness of teaching and learning in relation to expectations set by the school. Work undertaken by the Ministry included building relationships with other educational agenciesvii to ensure system coherence and develop interagency cooperation and integration in implementing strategies, activities and services that promote better outcomes for students (MOE, 2004). The focus was on addressing the needs of at-risk children, young people and families; providing second-chance opportunities; building a knowledge base; and working with agencies to ensure pastoral and health needs of learners were supported (MOE, 2004).

Government goals, strategies and Ministry outcomes have seen a range of projects initiated to raise school effectiveness, enhance professional capabilities of educators and support student learning. The following are a few examples of Ministry (Research Division) projects under the headings of Assessment, Curriculum, Schools, and Special Needs:

- **Assessment:** Assessment Resource Banks for Classroom Teachers; National Education Monitoring Project; Programme for International Student Achievement 2006 (PISA-06) – Third Cycle; Science Study 2006/2007 (TIMSS-06/07)
- **Curriculum:** Monitoring of Reading Recovery Data; Resource Teachers of Literacy: Annual Monitoring; Evaluation of the professional development strategy to improve literacy in secondary schools
- **Schools:** A study of Students’ Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling
- **Special Needs:** Enhanced Programme Funding (EPF) Evaluation.

The Ministry of Education with teacher unions, educational leaders, researchers and teacher educators has been proactive in managing the development of a series of Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) reports that exemplify the practice of teachers.viii The purpose is to develop a, “shared, constantly updated knowledge base to inform dialogue and improve the work of teacher educators, practitioners, researchers and policy development” (Alton-Lee, 2005, pp. 6-7). Alton-Lee claims that this approach to effect improvement is not about prescribing practice from the past but drawing out, “principles and characteristics underpinning effective practice in
recognition of the importance of context and the complexity and creativity of any teaching endeavour” (ibid., p. 7). In addition to the BES reports, Ministry convened reviews inform evaluations of certain programmes and these have added to an increasing knowledge base focused on improving schools.

Supplementing the Ministry of Education’s national knowledge base, the Education Review Office (ERO) provides reviews on schools and early childhood providers and national and cluster reports. Reviews are public documents available from ERO or downloaded from their website (ERO, 2006a). National and cluster reports are also easily accessible, designed to give parents, boards of trustees, teachers, government officials and other interested parties information on improvement and opportunities for debate on what counts as quality in education policy and practice.

Such evidence confirms a national push to raise achievement levels and reduce disparity with focused attention on school improvement. Despite this mass of legislation, policies and research, challenges persist and affect what it means to improve schools and build capacity for improvement. In this chapter I start by defining school improvement and capacity building. Following this, I will discuss macro level government policies traceable to the initiation of Tomorrow’s Schools in lieu of tensions and implications for school stakeholders involved in building capacity for improvement.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING: TERMS DEFINED

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993) and various curriculum documents link school improvement to social, academic and cognitive growth and development of students. School improvement is, however, a complex and difficult concept to define in simple terms as it is constantly evolving with differentiated calls for action over time (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002).

The late 1970’s to early 1980s, exemplified by the OECD’s International School Improvement Project (ISIP) (Hopkins, 1987), defined school improvement as, “systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively” (van Valzen et al., 1985, p. 48). Although careful planning, management and implementation were emphasised, many initiatives of the period were, “free floating, rather than representing a systematic, programmatic and coherent approach to school change …” (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002, p. 244). Organisational change, school self-evaluation and stakeholder ‘buy-in’ (Fullan, 1991) were loosely connected to student learning outcomes (Potter, Reynolds, & Chapman, 2002) and had little impact on classroom practice (Reynolds, 1999; Hopkins, 2001).

The early 1990s heralded support for a merged school improvement and effectiveness perspective (Reynolds, Hopkins, & Stoll, 1993). School effectiveness was said to contribute value-added methodologies for judging and explaining what works to raise student achievement (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). School improvement was defined as a, “distinct approach to educational change that
enhances student achievement as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change seriously” (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994, p. 3). In an era of burgeoning decentralisation, inclusion of the term ‘capacity’ called for: self-management, taking charge of change, developing ownership, setting own directions and adapting mandates to fit organisational vision. In reality, Barth (1990) notes such arguments proved unconvincing and presented an oversimplified picture which Hopkins, Beresford and West (1998) caution, “tells us little about how one affects the other” (p. 116).

Over the last five or six years, researchers have relied on findings from large scale projects to define improvement. Such projects include: Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) in England, The Manitoba School Improvement (MSIP) in Canada and Success For All (SFA) in the United States. IQEA, MSIP and SFA projects maintain a focus on what happens in classrooms and the importance of learning. The emphasis is on specifying learning outcomes rather than general learning goals. There is clear articulation of an instructional framework that guides developmental activity and provides teachers with a shared pedagogical focus to try new strategies and share new experiences. In all projects, teacher professional development and professional learning communities are given high priority. The importance of reflection is emphasised. Providing teachers with opportunities to work together and enquire into pedagogical practice is seen to foster positive collegial relationships, shared values, norms, agreed goals, group trust and respect. Underlying principles and practices from all projects prove particularly relevant in defining school improvement as it currently exists. Indeed, findings from the case study school confirm that aforementioned principles and practices are crucial in establishing a culture within which capacity building for improvement can flourish.

A review of contemporary New Zealand research also confirms a focus on organisational and pedagogical change to advance school improvement. In the New Zealand study Sustaining school improvement: Ten primary school’s journeys (2002), Mitchell, Cameron and Wylie identify three approaches. First, school improvement as ‘development’ adopts an institutional perspective generated by those in schools within local contexts, relationships and national and international frameworks. Improvement is defined as a continuous and evolving process, ‘the way things are around here’ (Mitchell et al., 2002). Schools are considered learning communities with active stakeholder engagement in learning and problem-solving. Second, school improvement as lifting performance is endorsed mainly by Ministry of Education and Treasury officials (Mitchell et al., 2002). Government assistance is linked to policy interventions in support of change and provision of safety net mechanisms to assist individual at risk schools meet their legal obligations – a more serious intervention. The role of school culture, values, needs analysis and goals continue to be emphasised as fundamental to any change attempt. Improvement through external incentives (Mitchell et al., 2002), the third approach, emphasises meeting national or international academic standards within a competitive setting. In today’s climate of neo liberalism, this
discourse appears unavoidable; part of the educational landscape schools and school leaders confront daily.

No singular definition aptly captures school improvement. As a social construct, it is time and context specific which leads researchers such as Annan, Faamoe-Timoteo, Carpenter, Hucker and Warren (2004) to suggest that, “A one-size fits all approach to schooling improvement is not going to cater for the development needs of all schools” (p. 36). Regardless of definition type, factors that lead to improvement are identifiable and McCauley and Roddick (2001) in An Evaluation of Schools Support, identify the following:

– Identification of shared goals and strategies based on a thorough needs analysis and ongoing development and renewal cycle;
– Establishment of external connections for expertise and guidance;
– Development of strong school-wide leadership;
– Expansion of teachers’ knowledge in and use of student achievement data to improve teaching and learning; and
– Change that occurs at multiple levels within a school.

The term capacity building implies a deeper understanding of school change, more than, “just translating school level characteristics into ‘doing words’” (Hopkins et al., 1998, p. 117). Maden (2001) notes capacity is, “the single most important matter in trying to identify how and why some schools maintain and sustain improvement” (p. 320). Fullan (2005) describes the concept as, “developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources – to act together to bring about positive change” (p. 4). Stoll, Bolman, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) suggest the concept links best to sustainable school improvement achieved in professional learning communities. Professional learning communities is defined as a group of people sharing and evaluating practice in ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive and learning-oriented ways.

An expanded perspective of school capacity building, as advanced by Goodman, Baron and Myers (2005), relates to building community capacity. Based on empowerment or enhancement theory, these authors advocate that parents can change conditions provided they have access to appropriate knowledge. In this respect, productive home-school partnerships are linked to school improvement. Underpinning reasons for this, as purported by Gold, Simon and Brown (2005), suggest parent communities with self-efficacy are better able to combat the demands placed on them by those in positions of power; parents capacity adds value and sustains the school’s vision and momentum for change over time; and community capacity creates political will that motivates officials to take action. In an era of decentralisation and self-managing schools, such arguments hold appeal. However, research in this area is limited and the literature that is available pursues a rather narrow conception of parental involvement in, for example, voluntary assistance (Driscoll & Goldring, 2005).

Any inquiry into capacity building must consider factors that negate and/or serve as limitations to the improvement process. In this regard, Hadfield, Chapman, Curryer and Barrett in Building Capacity Developing Your School (2004) identify the following:
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– Improvement policies with unrealistic expectations and pressures that damage chances of sustaining improvement by mismanaging the external environment;
– Inability to sustain individual development over longer periods;
– Lack of a common language around teaching and learning; and
– Challenges surrounding traditional notions of leadership versus delegated responsibilities. Findings from Hadfield et al.’s study suggest that leadership which is less hierarchical and traditional is more suited to building capacity. Capacity building, like school improvement, is difficult to conceptualise and generalise. The results from this study indicate that it is a process embedded in context and with an ever present fragility especially if processes that account for its initial conception are ill-conceived. They also suggest that external (macro) and internal (micro) factors are influential determinants. In this book, I suggest that capacity building for improvement is a response to meeting individual, collective and systemic needs so as to maintain school equilibrium while pursuing advancement in the direction of improvement. The focus must be on lifting outcomes for students. The concept is time and context dependent.

ISSUES AFFECTING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Many issues of an external, macro political nature present themselves as challenges affecting the school improvement and capacity building process. Like many OECD countries, New Zealand has encountered public service reform driven by economic rationalism (Dalin, 2005). As Dalin (2005) notes, “Programmes are being introduced that seek to decentralise services, simplify regulations, and develop expertise and new management” (p. 4). In New Zealand, privatisation of schools, democratisation of school systems, enhanced parent participation and administrative and financial reforms were designed to: increase system productivity by devolving ownership to those closest to the action, increase democratic decision making by situating processes closer to service users and increase relevance and quality of educational delivery by ensuring, “well-informed, well-educated and experienced teachers draw on theory and practice to reflect over the dilemmas of teaching” (Dalin, 2005, p. 22, italics in the original). Such changes in the political scene exert powerful influences on what happens in schools. In this chapter, I examine New Zealand’s neo-liberal reforms of the 1990’s from the viewpoint of recurring tensions, constraints and opportunities schools and school leaders’ face in building capacity for improvement. Furthermore, I suggest that variations of school contexts impose their own unique challenges which suggest a differentiated, situated take on capacity building and school improvement.

Neo-liberal Reforms of the 1990s in New Zealand

Changes heralded by the Tomorrow’s Schools policy (Lange, 1988) placed administration of education in New Zealand, “within the orbit of economic policy” (Codd, 2005, p. 193). Prior to Tomorrow’s Schools, New Zealand’s education
system was dominated by a Keynesian progressive-liberal ideology which Boyd (1998) suggests, served three main functions: integrative (integration of youth into mainstream society), egalitarian (equalisation of the skills gap and reduction of extremes of wealth and poverty) and developmental (personal and moral development). The 1990s saw this liberal democratic ideology subsumed by neo-liberal ideas advancing individual freedom and choice through market forces where “the market becomes the regulatory mechanism, and government intervention can be reduced to a minimum” (Boyd, 1998, p. 5). Calls for reforms were backed by arguments that, “parents, teachers, students and local communities (needed) more say in educational decision making and school government” (Barrington, 1981, p. 68) and, “instead of uniformity there may be an appropriate diversity, reflecting variations in local needs and circumstances” (p. 68).

*Tomorrow’s Schools* policies were claimed to be a response to alleviate heavily centralised, rule-bound, inflexible, central and regional administrative structures (Dalin, 2005), combined with worsening economic conditions (Codd, 2005; Dalin, 2005; Boyd, 1998; Whitty, Power & Haplin, 1998). They were also a reaction to assertions that schools were unresponsive to parental concerns (MOE, 2005). The Taskforce to Review Education Administration (*Administering for Excellence*, 1988) proposed increasing educational administration efficiency by decreasing government operational involvement in schools. This led to the ‘direct resourcing experiment’ (Whitty, Power & Haplin, 1998) initiated in 1988 to give school leaders freedom to respond to local community needs while satisfying government policy requirements for accountability (Leithwood, 2001) and efficiency (MOE, 2005). The policy promoted self-managing and self-governing schools charged with acting within legislative guidelines driven by an accountability-focused political framework (Leithwood, 2001).

The current situation that exists in New Zealand stipulates boards of trustees’ governance over state and integrated schools. Boards are comprised of elected parents, the principal and a staff representative. Boards have legal authority for school governance and management (ERO, 1999). Each state school has its own distinctive charter based on *The National Educational Guidelines*. The charter, approved by the Ministry and signed by the Minister, is a contract between the school and the Ministry. It ensures compliance to government mandates. Regular school reviews conducted by ERO officials ensure board compliance to legislative guidelines. Governance is meant to be a reflective mix of democratic and managerial ideals aimed at increasing administrative efficiency and parental responsiveness in the way schools are run (MOE, 2005).

The situation that unfolded with the advent of *Tomorrow’s Schools* has raised critique among educators. For example, Robinson, Ward, Timperley and Tuioti (2005) suggest that freedom to manage does not imply reduced accountability to the government. Rather, government priorities remain prominent but with a shift from accountability of inputs and procedures (money spent and processes employed) to outputs (services) and outcomes (results). They add that results-oriented accountability is difficult to achieve because boards of trustees’ attention is continually diverted to compliance and legislative requirements, fiscal
responsibilities, health and safety matters and delivery of the curriculum. Further, self-managing schools, designed to increase efficiency, has proven inefficient in responding to local community needs; abolishment of enrolment zones has established a competitive market place in education; and site-based democratic school governance has induced school level bureaucracy (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Although there is acceptance of Tomorrow’s Schools policies, a climate of paradoxes where ideas espoused seem to be at odds with one another continues to prevail. Tensions revolve around: encouragement of local decision-making but within strict legislative guidelines; high expectations of school improvement yet inadequate resourcing to successfully implement new innovations and parental involvement in governance/decision-making without thought of compromising professional autonomy (Dalin, 2005). The sections that follow elaborate on how tensions of funding, decentralisation and accountability, governance and low decile socio economic factors negate efforts to build capacity for improvement.

**Funding**

In a context of reform, funding is generally considered an essential contributor to school improvement. The situation that currently exists in New Zealand is that state and integrated schools receive an operations grant from the Ministry of Education calculated on student numbers. This operations grant covers every expense, excluding teaching staff salaries (except in the few schools that are fully funded). Schools are allocated further monies according to decile ranking: Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement (TFEA), Special Education Grant (SEG), Careers Information Grant (CIG) and Decile Discretionary Funding. Fundraising, school donations, foreign fee paying students and the like attract other monies. The argument voiced by proponents calling for a change in the funding formula (Codd, 2005; Hawk & Hill, 1997) suggest that this situation encourages interschool competition for students in educational environments best described as ‘enterprise cultures’ (Codd, 2005). As funding per school follows a pro-rata student enrolment formula, roll reduction leads to cutbacks of funds which negatively affect staffing, resources and teacher professional development. The ‘ripple effect’ created (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006) is said to impede the building of capacity for school improvement.

While much is said in support of funding to initiate change and improvement, an emerging body of empirical research (New Zealand and overseas) indicates that financial input has only marginal impact on improving the quality of classroom learning (Raudenbush, 2005). Annan, Fa’amo-Timoteo, Carpenter, Hucker and Warren’s (2004) report, *Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara Outcomes Report July 1999-June 2002 A Three-Way Partnership to Raise Student Achievement*, points out that two schools in the Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) project demonstrated improvement disconnected from additional government funding but related, instead, to strong professional and trustee leadership, effective supervision of classroom teaching and educational links among schools, staff and parents. Similar findings were reported by Earl and
Lee (1998) in their eight-year evaluation of a school improvement project in Manitoba. Findings from this study revealed little direct relationship between additional funding and success of individual schools. Rather, funding proved a catalyst for additional pressure and support. As an alternative, Earl and Lee identify the importance of a critical friend for ongoing knowledge and advice in the facilitation of school improvement. These findings offer an alternative perspective to the funding/school improvement debate and support Raudenbush’s (2005) assertions that, “resources, by themselves, do not improve teaching and learning. Knowledge about how to use resources in instruction is the key, yet woefully lacking” and, “Given the current weakness in knowledge about how best to organise, coordinate, and enact effective instruction, it is hardly surprising that simply investing in new resources would have, at best, marginal effects on student outcomes” (p. 26).

Decentralisation and Accountability

Decentralisation that followed the launching of Tomorrow’s Schools in New Zealand shifted accountability for student learning and school improvement from government to schools (Leithwood, 2001; Codd, 2005). Schools’ ability to exercise flexibility, modify practice in line with community needs, democratisate systems and build capacity was heralded as promoting improvement. However, as Dalin (2005), Robinson et al. (2005), Codd (2005), Rae (2005), Thrupp and Willmott (2003) and Thrupp (2001) note, transference of decision making from the state to schools is accompanied by strengthening government accountability over curriculum, assessment of learning and teaching and professional development. Freedom to manage does not imply reduced accountability (Robinson et al., 2005) rather, as Leithwood (2001) claims, it “increases administrators’ accountability to the central district or board office for the efficient expenditure of resources” (p. 223). In addition, school leaders may not be well placed to deal with such huge task expectations; that is, success is heavily dependent on individual attributes that may be severely compromised in settings where a lack of knowledge, skills and experience of school personnel fail to promote professionalism or improvement. Compliance demands and calls for increased professionalism inform policies directed at raising teachers’ and principals’ competencies to “stay abreast of best professional practices” (Leithwood, 2001, p. 225). These add to complexities school leaders face in the quest for improvement. Self-management and lay governance promote tensions that can, if not managed, negate efforts to build capacity for improvement.

Governance

In the years that have followed Tomorrow’s Schools, a number of criticisms and challenges have been raised related to board performance in governance. The third and final ministerial evaluation report on SEMO, by Robinson et al. (2005), confirmed board ineffectiveness to three ‘big’ ideas the first of which revolved
around definitions of ‘governance’. Governance, by boards of trustees, was and to an extent continues to be considered a highly formalised activity with conformity to school-based and national policy requirements and guidelines (Robinson et al., 2005). Emphasis on formal positions of responsibilities and role demarcation of board members to perform tasks does not necessarily equate to shared understandings of role requirements. Indeed, Robinson et al. (2005) found conflicting views related to particular governance tasks. The commonly agreed notion was that ‘good’ governance equates to compliance and standardised ways of operating (Robinson et al., 2005) not critical inquiry of teaching and dialogue on ways to improve schools or build capacity.

Second, ‘good’ governance was understood as acting in accord with internalised understandings of what counts as good practice. However, as the report indicates, trustees:

have little, if any, first hand experience of the tasks and activities which they are governing … they struggled to explain how boards should monitor student achievement and how principal’s appraisal should be conducted. Without direct experience of these activities, they are forced to rely on conceptions of good practice grounded in procedural rules rather than in their own experience of the activities. (Robinson et al., 2005, p. 19)

Third, conceptions of good governance were concerned with quality of relationships and communication. The report suggested that governance was an interpersonal activity with staff appreciation and minimisation of conflict underpinning decision making and action and “such cordiality may come at the price of mutual accountability, challenge and capacity building” (Robinson et al., 2005, p. 19).

In terms of board accountability, Robinson et al. (2005) claim that lay governance appears neither educational nor democratically beneficial. Furthermore, there appears to be little effect on improving teaching, learning and achievement. The absence of educational discourse in governance was a noted area of concern. While trustees acknowledged that they represented local community interests, such representation failed to be clearly articulated or discussed in relation to governance. Possible explications for this were trustees’ limited educational knowledge, difficulty in appreciating or serving local community needs and absence of legislative information to help them understand the democratic nature of their roles and responsibilities. Swamped with legislative task requirements, there appeared to be neither time nor inclination for trustees to pursue educational purpose or engage in dialogue pertaining to improving learning or teaching and the tensions this created had detrimental implications for capacity building for improvement. In other words, overtly managerialist tendencies and limited knowledge of school systems limited trustees’ involvement in capacity building practices with a view to promoting school improvement. *Tomorrow’s Schools* policies have had an impact on how schools are run. The scope for building capacity is very much dependent on stakeholders with knowledge of how best to
craft practice (within government policy guidelines) to initiate and sustain improvement.

**The Varied Nature of Low Socio-economic Contexts**

Adding to the milieu of tensions affecting stakeholders’ ability to build capacity are challenges a multi-cultural, low socio-economic location presents. In today’s society, schools are increasingly multicultural (Alton Lee, 2003; ERO, 2000; MOE, 2004) required to respond to immediate needs of diverse student/community populations. However, as ERO (2000) explains, respective legislative guidelines appear nebulous with schools experiencing difficulty interpreting goals and ascertaining if equity targets are being met in practice. Problems associated with multiculturalism extend beyond that of culture (ERO, 2000). Multicultural schools, generally located in poor socio-economic areas, may experience limited parental involvement and, in some cases, poor governance and management and weak or failed teaching provisions (ERO, 1996, 2006b). Robinson et al. (2005), reporting on governance issues in low decile schools, question the ability of boards to contribute to capacity building for improvement based on their limited understanding of role requirements and ‘good’ governance, lack of first-hand experience of tasks and activities over which they are governing and conceptions of ‘good’ governance related to communicating appreciation and minimisation of conflict rather than mutual accountability, challenge and capacity building talk.

Hawk and Hill (1997), in their AIMHI study, identified selected policies, differing home-school expectations and “low incomes, high unemployment or high over-employment, large families, dysfunctional families, poor housing, overcrowding, poor health, lack of private space and lack of furnishings and household equipment” (p. 4) as generating learning, health, social, economic and welfare needs. Hawk and Hill conclude that low socio-economic factors have implications on schools and their capacity to improve student learning outcomes. The varied nature of schools means that a one size fits all approach to building capacity and demarcating what this means for improvement will not work. What is needed is an understanding of context and school stakeholders’ drive, commitment and capabilities to initiate practices that build capacity for improvement.

**THEORETICAL MODEL OF CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

Capacity building for school improvement is difficult to define. The definitions provided earlier do not fully explain the concept in context. Context in itself is a multi-dimensional concept that requires deconstruction. Schools are embedded in external (macro) and internal (micro) contexts within which capacity building for improvement eventuates. Both external and internal determinants of context influence how the construct is conceived. For example, values, beliefs and norms of an external context, coupled with those of an internal context influence the development of a particular mindset and specific improvement outcomes. These determinants influence the making and taking of decisions to build capacity
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responsive of situated need. Decision making in a landscape filled with competing accountability, compliance and reform agendas requires commitment to doing what is right for the school and its stakeholders within legislative guidelines.

Capacity building for school improvement is a time and context dependent construct. Its conceptualisation is unique to setting. Findings from this case study suggest that the ability to respond to the varied tensions of context (internal and external) in ways that meet individual, collective and systemic need not only sustains equilibrium but, also, initiates the drive to build capacity for improvement. The focus is always on change and the management of change. Capacity building is a crafted activity undertaken by school stakeholders in response to context and driven by a desire for improvement.

The capacity building for school improvement model (see Figure 9.1) places school vision at the core of all activity. Vision is considered an attribute along with stakeholders as change agents, school culture and professional development to determine the nature of practice. All four attributes account for three key capacity building practices: knowledge production and utilisation, a ‘switching on’ mentality; and division of labour: roles and responsibilities. The interplay of attributes and practices produces four interconnected themes that underscore the capacity building for improvement model. These include: situated activity; connectedness; governance, leadership and management; and outcomes. Capacity building for improvement is a situated activity, embedded in context. It requires connectedness explained as meaningful relationships in support of activities that ‘promote student learning’. Stakeholders govern, lead and manage their schools. Their attributes, skills, roles and responsibilities are crucial in informing practice. Outcomes are a response to the situated needs of context. Reflection on outcomes, fed back into practice, promote ongoing cycles of capacity building for school improvement. Figure 9.1 captures the complexity of the construct and the interconnection among its components within the parameters of an external/internal interface.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set the scene within which capacity building for school improvement is embedded. It provides a glimpse of an external macro level context riddled with complexities and tensions that impact on the work of school leaders and educators in building capacity for improvement. The model portrayed in this chapter is deconstructed in the chapters that follow starting with attributes and progressing to practices. Chapter 2 examines the importance of vision in capacity building. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore the other attributes of stakeholders as change agents, school culture and professional development and the contributions each make to capacity building for school improvement. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 capture the nature of practice namely: knowledge production and utilisation; ‘switching on’ mentality; and division of labour: roles and responsibilities. Theorising about capacity building for school improvement occurs in Chapter 9.
The National Education Guidelines were established in 1990 and were revised in 1993 and again in 1996. They are given effect by sections 60A and 61 of the Education Act 1989: Every charter and proposed charter shall be deemed to contain the aim of achieving, meeting, and following (as the case may be) the National Education Guidelines (section 61 (2)). The National Education Guidelines have three components: National Education Goals (NEGs), National Curriculum Statements and the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs).

The education review Office (ERO), Career Services (ECD), New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), Learning Media, Group Special Education (GSE), Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Teachers Council.

Best evidence syntheses cover, for example:
- Quality Teaching: Early Foundations (Farquhar, 2003)
- Professional Development in Early Childhood Settings (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003)
- The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children’s Achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence Synthesis (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003).

Examples include: Review of Future-focused Research on Teaching and Learning (Codd, Brown, Clark, McPherson, O’Neill, O’Neill, Waitere-Ang, & Zepke, 2005); The Impact of Family and Community Resources on Student Outcomes: An assessment of the International Literature with Implications for New Zealand (Nechyba, McEwan, & Older-Aguilar, 2005); and Literature Review on the Effective Engagement of Pasifika Parents & Communities in Education (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

The role of ERO is “The purpose of ERO reviews is to contribute to improved student achievement. When ERO reviews schools it has a key interest in information that the school has about student achievement and also looks at the way in which school programmes and processes contribute to this achievement” (ERO, 2006a, p. 1).