TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP:

HOW THREE SUCCESSFUL LEADERS TURNED AROUND THEIR SCHOOLS

By

Bill Barker

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to identify the leadership characteristics that enable a principal to ‘beat the odds’ in turning around a declining school. No school is immune to the possibility of failure, more often found in already disadvantaged communities, as the cost to children and the wider community of such failure is high.

Three primary schools were selected through purposive sampling as representing schools that had overcome a period of decline. Hawk’s predictors of decline (2008) and Education Review Office reports were used to confirm the eligibility of each school for this study. Multi-case study methodology was selected as appropriate for qualitative data collection and analysis. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with three stakeholders (a staff and board member and the school principal) from each school.

The findings indicated that failed schools followed a continuum from success through to declining to failure. Decline began because principals failed to recognise and address ever increasing problems. The most important internal intervention that was implemented in all three schools to move from failure and/or decline to improvement was ensuring that the right leadership was in place. Turnaround principals in this research could be differentiated by the combination of their focus, specific actions and by the complex environment in which they worked. They had no singular leadership style but demonstrated a capacity to make the right decision at the right time and therefore progressed through each critical phase of turnaround. Their job demanded resilience, expertise and unselfish dedication. These principals believed that all children can learn and succeed and that joint efforts increase the power of positive interactions and are necessary for success. Sadly, all three principals in this research spoke of an unwillingness to tackle turnaround again. Future reforms have much to learn from their achievements.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research considers the nature of school decline and the leadership interventions required to successfully turn around a failing school. The case study research involved ‘listening’ to the voices of principals, their staff and the board chair in three low decile schools in Auckland that had experienced turnaround. Through an in-depth study of these schools, their leaders, and the relevant current literature, a model that describes the process of school turnaround is presented in chapter 6, along with data that considers the practices, characteristics and theories of principal leaders within these schools.

RATIONALE

Communities should not have to endure school decline leading to failure or wait for rescue and a definitive remedy. Both strategies are drawn out and costly. This research project considered school ‘decline’, school ‘failure’ and school ‘turnaround’ in the primary school sector in New Zealand. It sought to describe the leadership practices of three school principals who have been successful in their efforts to ‘turnaround’ schools that had failed.

In this research ‘decline’ has been defined as a loss of strength, “deterioration in an organisation’s adaptation to its micro niche and the associated reduction of resources within the organisation” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b, p. 13). Decline is seen as a continuum from effective to ineffective (Stoll & Myers, 1998) and, in a New Zealand context, as the inability of schools to recognise, accept and resolve increasing and escalating problems (Hawk, 2008). School ‘failure’ is usually defined as the inability of a school to remain viable, a school that has lost all sense of direction and hope, a school requiring external support or face the possibility of closure (Hawk, 2008; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). For the purposes of this research, school failure is defined as the point at which the Education Review Office (ERO) or Ministry of Education intervention has occurred outside the normal monitoring process (McCauley & Roddick, 2001; Spreng, 2005) and/or the school meets Hawk’s (2008) predictors of decline. School ‘turnaround’ has been defined by Wang (2007) as the improvement in a declining or failed school over a short period of time, normally within two years.
Educational turnaround is an example of a top down policy intervention approach, at scale, applied to initiatives that represent attempts to promote a broad systemic turnaround process across schools, rather than a turnaround of individual schools. The turnaround principal is required to function within an education environment variably affected by such efforts (McCauley & Roddick, 2001). Decline, failure and turnaround are closely linked and inform each other.

In New Zealand, the Education Act of 1989 enabled communities, through the guidance of an elected Board of Trustees, to self-manage and provide education opportunities for students which best reflected local aspirations. Fundamental to this undertaking is the requirement that certain educational standards are met. Treasury supported this non-government intervention in education through fiscal policy and ERO replaced the evaluation arm of the Ministry of Education (Spreng, 2005). These parameters continue today. In New Zealand schools are ranked on a decile rating based on a range of socio economic factors including income and the numbers of people living within a dwelling (Spreng, 2005). Schools are rated one to ten, with one representing schools from the lowest socioeconomic communities. Low decile schools receive additional financial resourcing to support learning and teaching programmes. This ‘decile’ funding is an external government intervention strategy that goes some way towards bridging the poverty gap between rich and poor communities (Spreng, 2005). Decile 10 schools in the highest socio-economic communities receive no additional targeted government decile funding. This targeted funding for educational achievement is used by principals to address the learning barriers faced by students (Hawk, 2008; McCauley & Roddick, 2001). The three schools considered in this research are rated decile one schools.

Through cycles of external review schools were judged against National Education Guidelines (Hawk, 2008). These guidelines represent a range of criteria (Hawk, 2008) based on a consensus from education research as to what an effective and an ineffective school might look like (Stoll & Myers, 1998). School decline and failure is most often identified in New Zealand through ERO evaluation and review (Spreng, 2005). A school deemed by ERO to be performing poorly would receive a critical report with recommendations and reassessment would follow at a shorter reporting interval. As the responsibility for solutions to problems lay with the school itself, no Government intervention was offered, even for schools in the most difficult circumstances. While critical ERO reports are widely accepted by the media and the local and educational community as an indicator of decline or
failure (Spreng, 2005), less agreement exists in education as to how a failing or declining school might become an effective or high performing school.

School decline, leading to school failure, more often affects communities that are already disadvantaged (Hopkins, 2001; Wrigley, 2003). However no school is immune to the possibility of failure. Failure is costly for students, teachers and their communities. The more extensive the damage to a school’s reputation and the longer the period of decline, the more difficult, more expensive and more time-consuming it is to turnaround the school (Hawk, 2008). Society has a moral obligation to identify and reverse school decline and failure, as all children, and their communities, have a right to high quality education (Harold, Burbach, Alfred & Butler, 2005).

Decline, leading to failure, is normally associated with a complex range of factors including an inability to self-review or effectively implement reforms (Hawk, 2008). Such schools require intervention and this is often imposed on a school through external means (Spreng, 2005). In New Zealand external interventions for failing schools often result in the Ministry of Education appointing a Statutory Manager or Commissioner (Spreng, 2005) who then becomes responsible for part or all of the governance of a school. A number of authors have recognised the limitations of external interventions. The vulnerability of external change exists with the introduction of interventions that go from problems to solutions without fully understanding the context in which the problem occurs (Duke, 2006; Wang, 2007). While small improvements may be noted in the school, in the absence of a wider understanding such attempts to problem solve are seldom collectively sufficient to stop the process of decline. Conversely, understanding the reasons for decline or failure provides an opportunity to examine the causes and more appropriately select the most effective intervention strategies to turnaround declining or failing schools (Duke, 2006). When considering attempts to reverse school failure the apparent efficiencies of external intervention are balanced by significant risk. In an attempt to identify those practices that would lead to successful and sustained change following school failure the United States of America Department of Education concluded:

While the research is clear on what an effective school should look like, there is considerably less research, let alone consensus, on the process by which a low –
performing school becomes a high performing school (cited in Murphy & Meyers, 2008b, p. 252).

Schools in England, United States of America, Canada and New Zealand are having limited success at school turnaround in low socioeconomic areas (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007; Fullan, 2005; Haynes, 2009; Spreng, 2005; Stoll & Myers, 1998). There is, however, evidence that some schools in low decile areas, that receive the same resources as their neighbouring ineffective schools and are subjected to the same external interventions, are ‘beating the odds’ (Brady, 2003; Calkins, 2008; Wang, 2007). It is these schools that can provide some insight into factors that make a crucial difference in defining success or failure, when all else appears equal.

It is widely agreed that leadership is a central factor in school success (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006, 2006a; Robinson, 2007). The fact that school failure continues highlights a leadership capacity gap within current models applied to managing school failure in New Zealand. When considering principal leadership alone it is evident that not all principals will successfully manage the process of turnaround (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). The right turnaround principal makes a difference (Calkins, 2008; Harold et al., 2005; Harris, 2002; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Stoll & Myers, 1998) to what has been described as a ‘wicked problem’ (Harris, Leithwood & Strauss, 2010). Turnaround is a ‘wicked problem’ as it has the potential to return unless the school is successfully led through turnaround (Duke, 2010) ultimately to one characterised by a culture that ensures sustainability, (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Fullan (2006) asserts “Turnaround Schools is about getting off the road to perdition, and on the road to precision” (p. 2). There is clear benefit in considering who is best placed to lead school turnaround and what actions are most likely to result in school success. This research attempts some understanding of the quality of leadership in three low decile New Zealand schools that have overcome decline and failure through school turnaround.

**AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

The aim of this research was to identify the characteristics that enable a principal to ‘beat the odds’ and turnaround a declining or failed school.
The objectives of this research were:

- To outline the process of turnaround in three primary schools;
- To describe the leadership characteristics that were important for successful turnaround; and
- To develop a model that describes the process of successful turnaround and the actions and leadership characteristics of principals within this process.

The research questions were:

- What process of turnaround can be identified?
- How do principals address decline and failure through turnaround?
- What leadership characteristics are viewed as effective by principals and school leaders in the process of turnaround? and
- What theories do the principals hold about effective leadership in turnaround schools?

**THESIS ORGANISATION**

Chapter One presents the rationale for this study and outlines the aims, objectives and research questions which guided the study.

Chapter Two provides a detailed summary of school decline, failure and turnaround literature. The literature review addresses three underlying themes - leadership as a key determinant of change, that education tends to go from problems to solutions without understanding the reasons and that all stakeholders have a responsibility to support the turnaround process.

Chapter Three provides a rationale and justification for choosing a qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis for this study. It describes the methodology and strategies employed for the semi-structured and focus group interviews. Data management and analytical procedures are also explained. The chapter concludes by identifying and addressing
ethical issues and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four details the findings gathered from the ERO reports and nine semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Five discusses the findings of this research alongside insights gained from the literature review such as a leadership capacity gap and shoulder tapping for leadership positions.

Chapter Six provides three conceptual models. These models highlight the main findings of this research. Recommendations and suggestions for further inquiry are made.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW

School failure is costly and most often seen in communities that are already disadvantaged (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Wrigley, 2003). The need for intervention is absolute and two options are available — school closure or turnaround (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007). Most attempts at school turnaround fail (United States Department of Education, 2001) and this trend is echoed in other organisational settings (Collins, 2009; Kanter, 2003). The quality of leadership is seen as a key factor in determining success through turnaround in all settings (Berg, Meier, Shore & Orr, 2008; Dean & Galloway, 2008; Haynes, 2009; Herman et al., 2008).

This literature review examines material relevant to the underlying intent of this thesis: that is, to determine the leadership characteristics that enable a primary school principal to ‘beat the odds’ and lead a low decile low-performing school in a high poverty area through a period of recovery to become a high performing school. The discussion will broadly follow the objectives of this research. The first section considers the process of turnaround and its wider context. The characteristics of the phases of school decline, failure, turnaround and success are discussed, along with the relevance of the school’s effectiveness, ineffectiveness and improvement constructs. The second section reviews the leadership and change theory and the constructs most relevant to the leadership role, both within and on the process of school turnaround, and the third section considers the characteristics of leaders within this role. This discussion draws on material from the education, not-for-profit and business sectors.

Clarification of the terminology commonly used in this area of education interest is included in an effort to promote an understanding of both the intent of this research and the difficulties that arise due to lack of consensus. The importance of understanding the impact of local and national influences on schools during the period of turnaround, and the limitations of the models currently used to evaluate failing and turnaround schools, will be outlined. Comment will be made as to the scope of the academic and research base that supports policy development and intervention planning in this area.
‘TURNAROUND’ DEFINED

Turnaround can be presented through a number of frames; it can be defined as a situation, process, consequence (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b) or condition (Scott, 1999), and the associated intervention strategies by type, level and intensity (Wolk, 1998). All are relevant to the process but provide a different perspective. Before this discussion considers leadership specifically, a summary of the process of turnaround from a temporal and contextual perspective is provided. This understanding is important as it provides insight into the requirements of the task at hand and the context within which failure has occurred and must be remedied. Failure is defined later in this chapter. Calkins et al. (2007) defines turnaround as the “integrated, comprehensive combination of fundamental change in programme, people, conditions, and (sometimes, but not necessarily) management and governance, required to interrupt the status quo and put a school on a new track towards high performance” (p. 71), while Wang (2007) defines turnaround, as a “dramatic improvement in performance created by various changes in the organisation; organisations that go from bad to great in a short period of time” (p. 309).

For the purposes of this research, turnaround is defined as the period where the failed school moves to reverse the effects of failure through a period of dramatic and comprehensive positive intervention that produces significant gains over a short period of time. Herein factors that contribute to failure are stopped and new standards and aspirations are established and reflected within the school (Ansell, 2004; Boyle, 2007; Boyne, Martin & Reid, 2004; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; McRel, 2005; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005).

All definitions of turnaround include a time frame of rapid, dramatic change followed by incremental improvement; within two years (Fullan, 2007; Kowal & Hassel, 2005). This period is necessary for organisational survival, creates motivation and hope, and requires leadership credibility (Wrigley, 2003). As school leaders drive for organisational results, the sense of urgency created enables both dramatic change and an environment that permits action around the rules (Hassel, Hassel & Steiner, 2008). Success in accomplishing core objectives quickly provides a significant lever towards changing school culture (Kanter, 2003). Success through this phase provides a platform for recovery, rebuilding organisational capacity, including system renewal (Fullan, 2007), rallying and mobilising people, growing people and creating productive cultures (Berg et al., 2008; Fullan & Levin, 2008; Herman et
It is widely agreed that within the period of school turnaround there are ‘quick wins’ but there are no ‘quick fixes’ (Stoll & Myers, 1998). It is with this understanding that the inclusion of a period of sustained school improvement following rapid change enter into definitions of turnaround (and therein turnaround’s endpoint) is variably argued (Calkins, 2008). Many authors recognise the tenuous nature of improvement following periods of rapid change and the implementation of practices outside the norm (Herman et al., 2008) and support the view that school turnaround must include a period that functions to embed and sustain improvements. In addition sustainability is most likely to be achieved if the initiatives of turnaround leaders are anchored in school improvement practices and strategies (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The capacity to balance school resources with rising expectations and the consequences of ‘even more’ change, sits at the centre of this consideration. The process of turnaround is defined herein to include both a period of rapid initial change followed by the periods of school recovery and incremental and sustainable improvement.

**Turnaround in context**

When considering turnaround in context a number of perspectives are valid. The first considers the relevance of inter-sector research specific to turnaround and the second outlines the context of school success, failure and decline, within which the process of turnaround sits.

**Inter-sector research**

There is a lack of historical interest and research specific to school turnaround. This has resulted from a number of factors. Firstly, that moves to emulate characteristics of a ‘successful’ school would provide a universal solution to failure meant there was little motivation to look further. Secondly, there was little capacity to formally identify failing schools in the period prior to the introduction of government performance-based assessment and accountability measures (Spreng, 2005), and thirdly, access to turnaround schools was assumed to be difficult (Hawk, 2008; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Stoll & Myers, 1998).

However, opportunities exist to increase our understanding of turnaround within both inter-sector and educational research. The application of inter-sector research findings to the
understanding of school turnaround has been variably debated. Murphy and Meyers (2008a; 2008b; 2009) believe that the initial phase of turnaround in both education and business are equivalent. Murphy and Meyers add that the absence of the consideration of wider research findings in the education turnaround literature reflects “an insularity and parochialism in the turnaround literature in education that is as arrogant as it is ill-advised” (p. 4). Critics argue, however, that the profit/loss focus that enables rapid change in business is absent in turnaround schools, where the ‘business’ is children’s learning and that this fundamental difference underlies the limitations in drawing any parallels (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Sarason, 1991). Hawk (2008) states that as the “organisational differences are sufficient, care needs to be taken in generalising from, or even comparing, the business situation to that in schools” (p.16). Hawk’s view represents a consensus that cautious consideration of research and practice from business and non-profit organisations is justified when considering school turnaround. More recent turnaround scholars support the need for cross sector learning in the turnaround setting (Harris et al., 2010).

There are a number of researchers who have written about school ineffectiveness specific to turnaround (Brady, 2003; Calkins, 2008; Calkins et al., 2007; Duke, 2006; Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b; Shuchman & White, 1995; Stark, 1998; Wang, 2007). Most agree on the need to see turnaround succeed at scale, through clustering and supporting turnaround schools, (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009) and highlight the requirement for further research in this area. These researchers encourage principals responsible for leading turnaround to have a wide understanding of the progression of school decline, failure, turnaround and ultimately school success (Duke, 2010). This insight is regarded as important for a number of reasons and include the observation that each of these stages informs the others (Collins, 2009; Duke, 2010; Harris et al., 2010), and the observation that knowledge gained from this wider perspective provides opportunities for diagnosis and problem-solving and an understanding of the system of governance they imply (Murphy & Meyers, 2009). In addition, the boundaries between each of these stages are in reality indistinct and multiple factors combine to form a merging transition (Harris et al., 2010). The implications of New Zealand’s current measurements of school success and the characteristics of decline, failure and school improvement as they relate to school turnaround are considered below.
Rating school success

Consideration as to what school success represents and how this might be defined and measured is essential in any discussion of turnaround. It determines how one rates success of both the goal and endpoint of this process and thereby permeates all actions, outcomes and relationships throughout turnaround (Chenoweth, 2009b; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fink, 2000; Thrupp, 2007; Wrigley, 2003). Achieving a widely agreed definition of education success has however remained largely impossible. How an individual defines ‘education’ and the value they place on opportunities and outcomes is determined by their personal attributes, experience and position within the sector. Even within groups, where responsibilities and experience might be seen to engender some consensus, a difference in individual opinion is often encountered (Stoll & Myers, 1998). Recognising that the permutations were endless, Brouilette (1996) identified as a summary four broad categories that represent the most commonly held views as to the purpose of education in the western world and therefore the criteria against which a school’s fundamental success is judged. These include social efficiency (preparation for jobs), developmentalist (maximising personal potential), social meritiorist (preparing a just society) and humanist (to prepare for citizenship). While most schools combine all these purposes a variation in emphasis is commonly seen both in time and place (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b; Stoll & Myers, 1998). Complicating this further is the fact that schools are influenced by wider socio-economic, political and environmental pressures (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). This temporal variation, combined with the lack of consensus as to the purpose of education, has meant that despite considerable effort, finding a universally accepted methodology that supports a ranking or value to be applied to an educational opportunity or institution, has proved largely impossible (Hopkins, 2001). Clearly the ‘right answer’ depends on who is asking the question and their personal resources, attributes and experiences, and why the question is being asked.

Acknowledging such difficulties, the ‘School Effectiveness’ and ‘School Improvement’ movements represent a persistent and considered attempt to define school success, quantify the characteristics of successful schools and understand and improve school performance (Hopkins, 2001; Morley & Rassool, 1999; Slee, Weiner, & Tomlinson, 1998; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; West-Burnham, 2006). The initial driver for this research represented the hope that if school success could be defined, it would provide a recipe for universal school success. The school effectiveness movement evolved from this initial work in response to
increasing concern as to whether or not schools were making a difference to students’ academic progress (Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995). It represented a statistical attempt to distinguish between more or less successful schools using correlation techniques to identify reasons for success or failure. Lists of school ‘success characteristics’ were ranked on reliability and their ability to be measured easily (Slee et al., 1998; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; Wrigley, 2003). Within this paradigm a ‘successful’ school could be broadly described as one that is able to realise a collective vision and provide an effective learning environment. This is achieved through maintenance of high expectations, effective home-school partnerships, a collaborative staff (supported by appropriate professional development) and on-going school-wide self-review (Hawk, 2008).

Turnaround is represented within the domain of school ‘ineffectiveness’ and functions to progress failed organisations to a point where they are able to improve in order to re-join the ranks of effectiveness (Calkins et al., 2007). Ineffective schools are characterised by ‘organisational learning difficulties’ (MacBeath, 1998) and contrast to those of the school improvement and effectiveness domains where focus is on “continuous, improvement of satisfactory schools over a long period of time; most often with existing staff” (Wang, 2007, p. 309). Stoll and Finks (1998), with their ‘cruising school’, provide an exception to this traditional typology. Underpinned by a description of the predominant school culture, these authors classify schools as moving, struggling, sinking or cruising. In contrast to the ideal, effective and improving school culture characteristic of the ‘moving’ school, Stoll and Fink recognise the ‘cruising school’ as an “effective but declining school that sits in the successful school domain” (p. 198). Cruising schools are usually high decile schools, with high-achieving children in well-educated communities, who achieve regardless of teacher quality. Struggling schools are schools that sit in the ineffectiveness domain, are improving but not yet meeting national benchmarks. These equate to the turnaround school, schools that are rebuilding their capacity. Sinking schools are ineffective and continue to decline, leading to the possibility of closure. This description is useful as it illustrates a resilience provided to schools in higher socio-economic areas, validates the consideration of school support delivered on this basis and highlights a wider view of school success and failure. While cognisant of these findings, the following discussion will outline models of school effectiveness, ineffectiveness and improvement and adopt the terminology of decline, failure and turnaround. It is these latter concepts that have been the focus of considerably more
discussion and permeate the educational environment within which this research is conducted. These constructs continue to be developed and now represent the dominant paradigms used to justify government and education policy developments, reform agendas and as a basis of criteria for school accountability (Wrigley, 2003). They have considerable influence on all levels of school turnaround.

The application of school effectiveness and ineffectiveness research led to performance-based assessment reforms in England (‘Every Child Matters’ policy) and the United States (‘No Child Left Behind’ policy) and with the introduction of increasingly prescriptive Ministry of Education planning and reporting requirements (Spreng, 2005). Performance-based assessment requires schools to submit achievement data to their national bodies and have their performance rated against national benchmarks. This system provides reassurance to those schools seen to meet the criteria and functions to identify schools falling ‘below the mark’ (Calkins et al., 2007; National Audit Office, 2006). The application of benchmarks most often associated with school success, those of school effectiveness or ineffectiveness and national standards (Hopkins, 2001), means that schools are assessed within a narrow focus.

While failing schools with the need for external intervention were identified, a number of important limitations to this method of measuring school success are evident. Firstly, even the most robust research in the realm of school effectiveness is undermined by the issue that researchers and stakeholders alike are unable to agree on what defines ‘school effectiveness’, let alone on a manner that accounts for school differences. Not all schools shared the same purpose of education. Secondly, where no common definition of effectiveness exists, traditional benchmarking ignores aspects of education proven to have considerable value and forces choice between competing values regarding the purpose of education (Stoll & Myers, 1998). The strong focus on academic achievement promoted by the school effectiveness movement and emulated by moves within the New Zealand primary school sector, represents this as a priority over the concepts of social justice (as defined by poverty, racism, citizenship, special needs, and bilingualism) and citizenship. This conflict should encourage caution in the application and interpretation of standards traditionally used to rate school success. Highlighting this, Wrigley (2003) and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) encourage leaders to realise the benefits of practices that connect education vision to social understanding, empowerment, and student and community attachment to the school. Wrigley states that it is “a deep mistake to regard the dimensions of social justice as an optional extra. Social
divisions affect every aspect of school life and achievement, and do not disappear when we try to ignore them” (p. 153). Morley and Rassool (1999) provide a strong argument for supporting a wider view of school success. They state, “if we determine success primarily in terms of test scores, then we ignore the social, moral and aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning and we’ll miss those considerable intellectual achievements which aren’t easily quantifiable” (p. 130).

These factors are relevant to both the process and endpoint of turnaround. Discussions around aspects of social justice are most often associated with schools located in low socio economic communities or those with a high proportion of special needs children (Wrigley, 2003). These schools are often referred to as schools ‘at risk’ and they are overrepresented in the numbers of schools that fail (Hawk, 2008). When considering turnaround success, Hopkins (2001) and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) make a number of salutary observations. In schools where increased school-wide expectations are introduced these are most likely to be met if they are reframed in terms of a cultural struggle for meaning. In addition, the more difficult a student’s life is outside school the more important it is to develop a school environment which is comfortable, inviting and stimulating. Morley and Rasool (1999) state that when considering turnaround in lower socio-economic areas consideration of academic achievement alone is not sufficient; a strong focus on the social, moral and aesthetic dimensions of school life is required. Hawk (2008), however, advises caution with any move to explain away difficulties because of this context. Hawk asks leaders to differentiate between school difficulties linked with serving a low socio-economic community and difficulties because of school organisational ineffectiveness. Hawk asserts these differences require different types of support.

The third deficit arises from the observation that for some schools national benchmarks might never be reached without considerable additional support (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and fourthly, this paradigm provides no capacity to acknowledge significant improvement through turnaround below the benchmark bottom line. Lists of key characteristics, however inclusive, do not provide an understanding of how schools move from a position of failure or ineffectiveness into the effectiveness domain, so they fail to help schools wishing to do just that (MacBeath, 1998). Finally, the constructs applied throughout the school effectiveness paradigm also determine another agenda. While appearing neutral, the indicators in the school effectiveness taxonomies with their current emphasis on ‘neo liberal policies’, represent a
system of governance (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Deviation from these taxonomies depicts teachers in failing schools as “sinners or deviants from constructed norms [and] detracts from their role as cultural workers, as agents of self-definitional and cultural change” (Morley & Rassool, 1999, p. 129).

Acknowledging these difficulties, a number of solutions have been proposed. Mortimer (1991, cited in Stoll & Myers, 1998) carefully defines an effective school in relative terms as “a school in which students progress further than might be expected from a consideration of its intake” (p. 20). This ‘student-centred, value-added’ definition, gives schools freedom to recognise and account for all successes as it places value on achievement in curriculum areas outside numeracy and literacy and allows for alternative indices of improvement to be considered. This definition accommodates the potentially variable perspectives as to the purpose of education as held by pupils, parents, communities and governing bodies (Stoll & Myers, 1998) and its wider perspective acknowledges the importance of the external factors that can greatly influence school success. Stoll and Myers avoid the need for an agreed definition of school success by providing a ‘values and behavioural perspective’ to understanding school effectiveness. They argue that the best metaphor for an effective school is that of a ‘caring family’, with the opposite being true for an ineffective school (p. 6). MacBeath (1998) and Reynolds (1998) support this model and promote the use of ‘psychotherapeutic and family counselling techniques’ as a means to improve ineffective schools.

Neither lists of key characteristics (however inclusive) nor ‘value-added’ nor comparative definitions, however, provide a clear or universally acceptable definition of school success or effectiveness. The former remains insensitive to many improvements and in some cases to important wider school influences. Accepting either of the latter may lead to a compromise in standards and lost opportunity for students, as both fail to provide any quantifiable measure of accountability traditionally sought by government and policy makers. None of these definitions is helpful when considering the ‘how’ of school success (Chenoweth, 2009a, 2009b; Duke, 2010; Levin, 2008). These reasons represent many of the drivers that have led to an increased interest in the concept of ‘turnaround’ from academics, those at the coalface of education and governing bodies at all levels (Fullan, 2006).
SCHOOL DECLINE AND FAILURE – THE ‘CONTEXT’ THAT PRECEDES SCHOOL TURNAROUND

Turnaround follows from a point of school failure. Numerous definitions of decline and failure are found in the literature. While these terms continue to be used interchangeably (Stoll & Myers, 1998) they will largely be considered separately in the following discussion. The definitions and models presented to describe both terms fall under the headings of continuums, metaphors, anatomies, processes, consequences, levels, stages and typologies (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Calkins et al., 2007; Hawk, 2009; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b; Stoll & Myers, 1998).

School decline is usually defined as a path of ineffectiveness, a period during which a school is unable to self-review, recognise, accept and resolve increasing and escalating problems (Hawk, 2008; Kanter, 2003, 2004). The endpoint of this process is school failure (Lodge, 1998). Failure is precipitated when an already vulnerable school experiences a crisis or when a school has hit a critical mass of unresolved problems (Hawk, 2008). The failed school is characterised by an “overwhelming sea of pressures” (p. 151).

Problems arise during a period of school decline and failure as a result of internal or external influences or a combination of both. A summary of those influences seen to be most relevant to contemporary school decline and failure is presented in the Table 2.1. This list is not intended to be inclusive and for a given school the relative importance of each of these factors will vary over time (Keough, 1978). The argument that it is only with a full understanding of these problems that solutions to school failure can be found (Murphy, 2008a) justifies their consideration.

Social deprivation, with its associated problems, encompasses the majority of factors listed in Table 2.1 and this is reflected in the disproportionately high rate of school failure seen in poor and disadvantaged communities (National Audit Office, 2006). Succinctly put, “decline’s true roots lie deep in poverty, family dysfunction, urban abandonment, institutionalised racism and the curse of low expectations” (Green & Carl, 2000, p. 63). These environments “destabilise home life, undermine support and create despair” (Lashway, 2003, p. 25) and this in turn impacts significantly and adversely on schooling (Brady, 2003).
Table 2.1: External and internal causes of school decline and failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High mobility rates of students; net migration (Murphy &amp; Meyers, 2008b)</td>
<td>Ineffective leadership (Brady, 2003; Mintrop &amp; Trujillo, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polices and the way they are enacted (Hopkins, 2001; Levin, 2007; Spreng, 2005)</td>
<td>High staff turnover (Mazzeo &amp; Berman, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform Agendas (Fullan, 2006)</td>
<td>Poor teacher quality (Harris, 2002; National Audit Office, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketisation Policies (Thrupp, 2007)</td>
<td>Low morale (Nicolaidou &amp; Ainscow, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL children (Haynes, 2009; Herman et al., 2008)</td>
<td>Inadequate resource (United States Department of Education, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate funding (Hawk, 2008)</td>
<td>Organisations with limited experience, skills and knowledge (Murphy &amp; Meyers, 2008b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood crime; lack of social services; poverty, institutional racism (Duncan-Andrade &amp; Morrell, 2008)</td>
<td>Weak governance (Hawk, 2008; National Audit Office, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-capitation (Hawk, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between internal and external forces in school decline and failure is complex. The impact of internal forces can be difficult to disentangle, as external and internal conditions form disabling combinations and embed a culture of decline, lack of trust and demoralisation (Hawk, 2008). The fact that internal decline is associated with underachievement and this in turn is directly linked to schools that serve low socio-economic communities is illustration of such complexity (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Spreng, 2005; Thrupp, 2007; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003).

Hawk (2008) models a process of New Zealand secondary school decline where internal and external influences compete and these, in combination with a lack of leadership resilience and insufficient intervention, result in a predictable and self-fulfilling path to school failure. This model is based on the premise that the way in which leadership responds to the complex and interrelated external and internal pressures in successful schools determines whether or not the school becomes predisposed towards decline. Hawk hypothesised that the increased vulnerability of schools in lower socio-economic areas to external pressures existed as a consequence of a less competitive environment and the relatively fewer resources these schools have to draw from when support is needed. Within this context Hawk identified a set of characteristics that, if found to be present in a school, increased the probability of
decline. Hawk broadly classified these predictors under the headings of macro (societal), meso (institutional) and micro (personal) influences. A common theme of ineffective leadership emerged as did other notable concepts such as poor organisational management, inability to address problems, relationship issues, resulting in negative publicity. Hawk’s categorisation varies from the ‘internal and external’ division commonly used when considering school influences but presents some commonalities. While untested, Hawk proposed that a self-review process based on these predictors would encourage school leaders to recognise and act to avert the decline process and thereby prevent failure.

Three additional models are included in Table 2.2 that illustrate the range of different frames used to interpret the stages of organisational and school decline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murphy and Meyers (2008b): Uses organisational research findings and shows relevance to educational context</th>
<th>Kanters (2003): Models a socio psychological decline process in a business context</th>
<th>Collins (2009): Shows how ‘greed’ can stimulate a decline process through over committing resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Internal and environmental causes of decline</td>
<td>1 Secrecy and denial</td>
<td>1 Hubris born of success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Symptoms and signals</td>
<td>2 Blame and scorn</td>
<td>2 Undisciplined pursuit of more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Decreasing performance</td>
<td>3 Avoidance and turf protection</td>
<td>3 Denial of risk and peril</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Failing performance</td>
<td>4 Passivity and helplessness</td>
<td>4 Grasping for salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Crises</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 Capitulation to irrelevance or death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Murphy and Meyers (2008b) present a five-stage, ‘performance focused’ model that represents an assimilation of knowledge from both corporate and education research. Kanter (2003) models the change in behaviour seen with corporate decline:

While problems are known to the organisation during periods of decline, those in power are seen to be in denial or sworn to self or organisational secrecy or just don’t care. Everyone knew the problems, but the structures inhibited them from doing anything about it. People could take shots only across the silos. Some people knew the issues technically and could prevent obviously bad decisions, but they lacked the power to act outside their own fields of concentration. They knew
change was needed, but they were not sure how to make it happen. (p. 65)

Collins (2009) proposes that it is the ‘pursuit of more’ that creates the susceptibility to failure in environments where resources and demands are poorly matched. He outlines the personal actions that create both the vulnerability and on-going drivers for failure and, like Kanter (2003), explains why, in some instances, no action is taken. Hawk and Hill (1999) saw failure to intervene in the process of decline as a result of stakeholders’ placing of blame for problems on others or external factors, or their lack of acceptance of the seriousness of the school problems. Hawk and Hill did not include ignorance, deceit or resource limitations as a specific consideration.

All the models presented above illustrate a process influenced by both internal and external factors that will, if unchecked, progress through a period of decline to become overwhelming. These descriptive models highlight the importance of people and the often predictable manner in which individuals behave (Ball, 1993) when facing the increasing organisational pressure associated with decline.

Decline within the business sector has four consequences that include the continual erosion of external stakeholder support, growing internal inefficiencies, poor decision making and a deteriorating organisational culture (Murphy & Meyers, 2009). A declining firm fails when the combination of these consequences both exhausts the firm’s financial resources and causes creditors to withdraw support from the firm (Arogyaswamy, Barker & Yasai-Ardekan, 1995). The parallels seen in a failing school — of a declining roll, community withdrawal, deteriorating culture and infrastructure and consequent resource reduction including budget deficits — are evident (Ashby, Brown, Benefield, Hobson & Sharp, 2003; National Audit Office, 2006).

School failure ends what is often a lengthy period of decline and represents a terminal phase characterised by escalating problems (Harold et al., 2005; Kanter, 2003). A range of definitions is offered that encompass the inability of schools to improve student outcomes relative to the expectations of their intake (Barber, 1998), the school’s incapacity to self-review and spontaneously improve (Stark, 1998) and lack of direction. Mazzeo and Berman (2003) describe failing schools as those that “lack agreement on expectations for student learning and lack the means to influence classroom instructional practice in ways that result in
improved student learning” (p. 10). The United States Department of Education (2001) provides the following description of a failed school:

Expectations of students are low, teachers and parents are frustrated, and academic performance is poor. Many problems, including poverty, limited resources, unqualified teachers, and unsafe learning environments, contribute to frustration, disillusionment, and discouragingly low levels of student achievement in such schools. (p. 7)

A failed school requires external support or faces the possibility of closure. Appendix 2 highlights a generic list of problems and the lack of will or capacity of leaders to comprehend or address these. As listed, these problems parallel the description and consequences of decline seen in the business sector and outlined earlier in this review. In reality these multiple problems combine to represent a critical inertia of escalating problems. Escalation is enabled by the complex nature of schools themselves, the vulnerability created through poverty and the fact that stakeholders have lost direction, feel hopeless, unmotivated, unsafe and unsupported. Expectations are reduced. A well-entrenched negative culture, unique to that school, emerges. This culture is characterised by lack of care, individuals focused on their own needs, and common disregard for the needs of others (Wrigley, 2003); this “permeates through the school to impact finally and adversely on student learning” (Hawk, 2008, p. 44).

Hargreaves (1997) argues that there has been too much emphasis historically on the symptoms of failure, and too little understanding of the pathology of decline. Hawk (2008) supports this view stating that it is only from understanding the pathology of school decline that effective intervention in the form of school turnaround can begin.

Hawk (2008) provides an understanding of the range of interrelated problems that require cessation, mitigation or resolution during the process of school turnaround and therein illustrates the very task that the turnaround principal faces. It takes considerable courage to lead in such situations, as the cost of failure is high. However motivation alone is not sufficient. The ‘right’ leader is seen as a vital ingredient to recovery (Collins, 2009).
School improvement

Evaluation against a set of national standards has been used to ensure accountability, sustained improvement and to identify schools ‘at risk’ and in need of support (Calkins et al., 2007; Fullan, 2007). Turnaround success is represented as both an endpoint and a goal and, within this context, test data is a central part of information gathering (Hassel & Steiner, 2003) but not the only source. As a result of the enhanced pressures typical of the turnaround phase, difficulties that result from the inherent multifarious and complex nature of education are often compounded. For this reason great care is needed in the selection of measures of school effectiveness at this time. Accountability measures should not distract from the task of turnaround, and improvements below the ‘bottom line’ need to be acknowledged. The temptation to consider what is easily measurable, such as test and examination results, should be acknowledged and important qualitative outcomes be considered (Brook-Smith, 2003).

In 1990 school zoning was abolished in New Zealand. While this move was promoted as enhancing choice, the anticipated efficiencies of ‘market forces’ that were hoped for did not eventuate (Thrupp, 1998, 2007; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). Parents selected their own criteria to measure school performance and those unhappy with their local school, exercised their right to enrol their children elsewhere. Education Review Office reports, now available in the public domain, played a role in shaping the public “perception of schools” (Spreng, 2005, p. 68). Reports critical of a school were seen to independently contribute both to the inertia of decline and the often associated culture of blame (Stoll & Myers, 1998). Good schools enjoyed the resources their popularity drew, leaving others to face the implications of falling rolls and the associated social and fiscal consequences. Without appropriate and timely intervention, some schools did not regain effectiveness or recover popularity and were left. These schools continued to fail in their responsibility to provide the ‘expected’ educational opportunities for their students. In 1993, as part of a series of initiatives to improve these schools, the New Zealand government adopted a ‘decile rating’ system that enabled proportionately more funding to go to schools in lower socio-economic areas than to those serving well-resourced communities (Spreng, 2005). Despite this improved financial support, some schools were unable to recover and others continued to decline (Hawk, 2008).

The School Support Project of 1994 (Sinclair, 1999) demonstrated a shift away from the previously seen non-intervention policy. This project provided the Ministry of Education with
a range of policies and intervention strategies that specifically enabled the identification and external support of schools ‘at risk’. This role was further expanded by the Education Standards Act of 2001 (Spreng, 2005). Following a recommendation by the Education Review Office or the Ministry of Education, a number of options were now available to the Ministry of Education to respond to school failure. These included school closure, additional reporting and evaluation requirements, the development and implementation of an action plan, and the appointment of either a Commissioner or Limited Statutory Manager. A Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) would provide independent management of specific areas of a school’s function, while a Commissioner would replace the current Board of Trustees (Spreng, 2005). Recommendations to the Ministry of Education as to the relative success of a given school are based on a range of both qualitative and observational data (Spreng, 2005), yet despite these initiatives there remained no sector-wide agreement on what constitutes a ‘failed school’.

Acknowledging the limitations of school assessment criteria based in the successful school model and ensuring reporting on schools is of excellent quality, is a sector wide responsibility (Hawk, 2008). Evaluation is most useful when adverse outcomes are mirrored by an understanding of the limitations of the tools used and the provision of resources to improve quality. It is only when schools at risk experience effective intervention and follow-up that the initial exercise of evaluation has true merit (Fullan, 2007).

The overwhelming nature of school failure means that positive school change is difficult to achieve (Duke, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Harold et al., 2005) and for those considering intervention it is often difficult to know where to start (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). The limitation of our understanding of school effectiveness and school improvement in marginalised communities is widely acknowledged (Hassel et al., 2008; Hopkins, 2001; MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; Morley & Rassool, 1999; Slee et al., 1998; Stark, 1998; Thrupp, 2007; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). There is no robust evidence to support an assumption that there is connection between the factors that correlate with school effectiveness and those of school ineffectiveness, (Hopkins, 2001; Reynolds, 1998; Weiner, 2001). Stoll and Fink (1996) argue that it is insufficient to describe the characteristics of effective schools, “and assume that ineffective schools possess the mirror opposite of these factors” (p. 32). In addition there is no evidence that ineffective schools could become more effective by trying to adopt the features of successful schools (Luyten, Visscher &
Witziers, 2005; Weiner, 2001). The historical and polarising, ‘effective or ineffective’ application of reform agendas, provides no understanding about how the decline process starts, about the process itself and when it finishes (Hawk, 2008). In fact, teachers can be distracted by demands set by such characteristics and their efforts therefore directed away from the real task of turnaround; that of managing a process towards sustainable positive change. Stark (1998) provides a parallel medical analogy:

The treatment that a sick person needs to recover is different from the regime that will make an ordinary person fit. Indeed a fitness regime imposed on invalids may make them worse. The same seems to apply to schools; competence must precede excellence. (p. 36)

Building on Stark’s (1998) medical analogy, Calkins (2008) asserts that ‘sick’ schools can ‘beat the odds’ if they do not compare themselves to healthy and effective schools and model practices, without first investigating the reasons for their success. He advocates the need to understand the causes of failure rather than treating the symptoms. This requires “re-engineering” (rethinking structures, authorities, capacities, incentives and resources) not some “reform medicine” (p. 18). While research demonstrates that no one intervention appears more successful than any other, it is agreed that the ‘turnaround intervention’ requires a different model from that of effective and successful schools (Brady, 2003). With this understanding, researchers and leaders alike have sought an easily applied model for school improvement which would meet the variable needs of accountability, understanding and strategy required by stakeholders (Phenic, Siegal, Zaltsman & Fruchtter, 2005).

A range of models has been proposed that promote a contextual approach within which schools apply a ‘new’ set of criteria and intervention based on their own needs analysis (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). Recognition of the limitations of the school effectiveness movement to facilitate positive change within ineffective schools led to the evolution of the related paradigm of the school improvement movement (Hopkins, 2001). The ‘school improvement movement’ can be seen as a distinct approach to educational change within the ‘effectiveness’ paradigm, but these terms are often used interchangeably (Hawk, 2008; Stoll & Fink, 1996). School improvement represents a comprehensive knowledge base of leadership and change management that aims to enhance student outcomes and strengthen a school’s capacity for managing change. It recognises that factors affecting a school at
any one time need to be understood if change is to be effective, promotes a contextual approach to educational reform and highlights the need for combined action to increase a school’s capacity to meet change (Wrigley, 2003).

Stoll and Myers (1998) provides an alternative model to that of the ‘effectiveness and ineffectiveness paradigms’ and uses Brouilette’s (1996) work to strengthen her claim. In recognising that what might be purposeful in one school may well be inappropriate in another; Stoll and Myers model encourages local solutions to school failure that are ‘child centred’. Here leaders are encouraged to adopt practices that are ‘purposely developed’ to suit the needs of their students.

When considering models of school improvement, this area too is not without controversy. The validity of the breadth and basic assumptions of this research, and therefore the robustness of its application, continues to be debated (McCauley & Roddick, 2001). Greater consensus is found when considering the following aspects of the school improvement. Firstly, neither ‘top down’ nor ‘bottom up’ change alone is adequate to sustain school improvement. Fullan (2007) advocates that a combination is required. McCauley and Roddick (2001) agree and add, “To really succeed, schooling improvement strategy has to be developed at a number of levels, and be reinforced through other policy settings” (p. 14). Fullan (2007) refers to this combined approach as the ‘three tiers of change’ with schools, districts and their ministry supporting positive change through joint alignment, understanding, ownership and accountability. Hargreaves (2009) also promotes an inclusive vision with the fostering of both internal and external initiatives. He advocates that schools should be supported within community and corporate partnerships and suggests that successful schools should support their weaker peers. Secondly, there are no ‘quick fixes’ or ‘silver bullets’ to achieve sustainable change and such change will be slow (McCauley & Roddick, 2001; Stoll & Myers, 1998). It is widely agreed that five to eight years of support is needed to ensure that sustained change in student performance is achieved (Day et al., 2010; Fullan, 2006, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Models that provide a contextual or child centred approach to school improvement (process-oriented change models and strategic planning models) improve upon the more generic criteria of the school effectiveness/ineffectiveness movement. Because turnaround sits in the
realm of school ineffectiveness the application of all constructs to this process specifically requires careful consideration.

**LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE THEORY**

Crisis is a powerful motivator of change, and positive change cannot simply be imposed (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2008). In the face of on-going resource limitation and competing expectations, managing the social and evolutionary process of successful school turnaround involves at its very essence a change in people’s perception and behaviour. The management of this process is difficult (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005) and requires outstanding and sustainable leadership (Fullan, 2006; Nicolaïdou & Ainscow, 2005). There is much to be understood about who provides leadership and their relative and interrelated function in any educational setting (Leithwood et al., 2006a). The following section begins the discussion on the role of principalship as leadership and then considers the role of leadership and change theory as it relates specifically to school turnaround.

There are many links between literature on school effectiveness, effective leadership and effective change management (Evans, 1996; Hawk, 2008; Scott, 1999). Within this body of work, definitions of ‘leadership’ and what this represents vary in their emphasis on organisational change and relationship management. With an emphasis on organisational change Yukl (2002) considers problem solving and improving quality as the foundations of leadership. Goodstein & Burke (1991) consider leadership within the parameters of achieving a new direction. Promoting an emphasis on relationships, Owens (1973) sees leadership as the capacity to inspire people to action to achieve a common goal while Lambert (1995) considers the relationships of leaders and followers while achieving this purpose. All perspectives provide different insight.

As the leader of a school through the process of turnaround, the principal’s specific functions are to facilitate a process of rebuilding school capacity by reversing the problems apparent within the failed school (Calkins et al., 2007; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b), to work to mitigate the impact of the adversity associated with poverty (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Wrigley, 2003) and to facilitate positive change. Throughout school turnaround the emphasis on these leadership functions requires both relationship focus and organisational change, the emphasis on each will vary both on a day-to-day basis and
broadly throughout the time of the principal’s tenure.

To better understand the relationship between the changes in the turnaround process over time and the concurrent changes in the leadership requirements, two constructs are presented. Murphy and Meyers (2008b) and Harris et al. (2010) describe school turnaround as a two-phase linear process, the first of which is ‘retrenchment,’ also termed crisis stabilisation. This requires getting the right leadership, diagnosing the problem, and taking emergency action. The second stage of recovery or early performance follows, wherein the chosen leader creates an operational vision, addresses organisational efficiencies and develops processes to create and support sustainable growth. Providing an alternative view, Calkin’s (2007) ‘school readiness’ model represents both a process and an endpoint that identifies the behaviours and resource requirements of successful turnaround. These include a readiness to learn (through addressing student safety, discipline and engagement); a readiness to teach (by sharing responsibility for achievement, personalisation of instruction and creating professional teaching cultures) and a readiness to act (by securing the right resources and having agility and flexibility in the face of turbulence or unrest). Duke (2010), Harris et al. (2010) and Turner (1998) advocate leadership models that encourage leaders to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis and the employment of skills to ensure the right focus and strategies to ensure ‘quick wins’ while maintaining long term goals. Duke’s model adds understanding the pathology of decline with a subsequent focus and provision of resources to match the ‘situation’, and would function to prevent the need for turnaround at scale. It is the opportunity to embed positive change balanced with sustained, collective and incremental action across the school that allows improvements to continue and the school to ultimately meet the criteria of an effective school (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Harris et al. (2010) refer to this latter stage as “turnaround to stay around” (p. 215).

These models represent turnaround as more than “deliberate efforts to address each of the pathologies” of the decline process (Kanter, 2003, p. 60). All models characterise the improvements and efficiency in infrastructure, management actions and policy changes, along with the strategic entrepreneurial action (Arogyaswamy et al., 1995) that are required to succeed. Implicit in these models is the view that a “psychological turnaround of attitudes and behaviour” must occur “before organisational recovery can take place” (Crainer & Dearlove, 2008, p. 12) and all avoid the view that school turnaround represents a process of stopping one set of ‘bad behaviour’ and creating a new set of ‘good behaviour’ (Hawk, 2008).
constructs avoid blame, promote collaboration and responsibility and encourage leaders to identify the likely causes of failure, thereby enabling the most appropriate interventions to be undertaken. Murphy and Meyers’ (2008b) model lacks specific education strategies and risks oversimplification through a linear representation. The Calkin et al. (2007) model supports a child-centred ‘ecological’ approach wherein all enrolled children are assessed and their specific learning needs met. When considering effective turnaround leadership it is the combination of these models that provides their greatest merit. As well as the achievements required for turnaround success, they illustrate that successful leaders require the right focus and strategies and the flexibility and depth of skills to meet the variable requirements of the distinct phases of school turnaround (Day, 2011; Day et al., 2010; Duke, 2010).

Understanding the process of turnaround and the leadership requirements of each phase provides the context in which to understand the challenges of the wide range of roles and responsibilities that turnaround principals face. While being answerable to and responsible for stakeholders, with variable power and needs and facilitating positive change, the principal also needs to ensure his or her own wellbeing (Harold et al., 2005). All these factors require the principal to understand, prioritise and communicate why certain choices are made and to have the ability to efficiently ensure intended outcomes are met. The fact that the turnaround principals work both within and on the problem adds to this complexity (Argyris, 1977).

It is beyond the scope of the turnaround principal to develop a full comprehension of the exhaustive list of often confusing and duplicitous constructs that represent leadership and change theory (Duke, 2010). These constructs, however, provide two opportunities for principals. The first is to provide strategies and guidelines for action and the second gives ‘permission’ to those leading turnaround to choose appropriate action. It is accepted that leadership and change knowledge can increase the chances of leading turnaround successfully and that, when absent, initiatives are considerably more likely to fail (Ashby et al., 2003; Brown, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2002; Hassel et al., 2008). Fullan (2006) advocates that change knowledge specifically has the ability to reduce the time for school turnaround by 50 percent. The role of professional development with this intent is likely to receive support, but its specific value to a given principal and school requires further consideration.

Some experts in leadership research write as if there is one best way to lead a school regardless of the situation (Duke, 2010). The use of adjectives in front of ‘leadership’ to
capture the ‘type’ advocated by their research is commonly observed. Examples of this are Boyle’s (2007) compassionate leadership, Ball’s (1993) affiliative leadership and Collin’s (2009) pace setting leadership. There are exceptions, Robertson and Timperley (2011) for example revert to a suffix of leadership and learning and espouse Starratt’s view of “leadership of what for what” (p. 3).

In reality, the relevance of any leadership construct is determined by the situation, represented by the problem and or context (Hallinger & Heck, 2011), and the principal’s ability to choose to know what to do and when and how this might best be achieved. The ‘situation’ defines and is defined by the interaction between leaders and followers and consequently demands specific leadership requirements (Hassel et al., 2008).

Turnaround creates many ‘situations’ distinguished by the intensity of change that will be represented in a given school at a given time in a unique manner (Harris et al., 2010). Leadership within this context requires specific actions within a cycle of fast review (Hassel & Hassel, 2005; Hassel et al., 2008; Hassel & Steiner, 2003). The idea that effective leadership within such variable circumstances requires different leadership styles is widely accepted. Contemporary writers that support this view describe a differentiated (Duke, 2010), layered (Day, 2011; Day et al., 2010) or fusion leadership (Hargreaves, 2011) approach. Herein leadership success is achieved through the capacity to make an accurate organisational diagnosis, appreciate the special qualities of a situation and from there select actions that most appropriately and efficiently provide an optimal outcome. Enabling leaders to adopt variable styles allows both flexibility and responsiveness to a given situation within a set of absolutes. Within this construct diagnosis and decision making can be viewed from a range of perspectives (symbolic, structural, human resource and political lenses) that provide a different emphasis (Bolman & Deal, 2003). These include the relationships between leader and follower, the clarity of the intended outcome, the human and physical resource, stakeholder motivation or a combination of the above. Carr (2000), Gunter (1995) and Codd (1989) provide further support to this construct and encourage change leaders to critically evaluate what is happening now and learn to recognise the choices from which the future will unfold.

The understanding of leaders has developed from a traditional base that emphasised the components and knowledge requirements of leaders and consideration as to whether
leaders are born or made (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Marshall, 2008; Rudman, 2006). While this discussion continues, more recent focus has shifted to attempts to understand the ‘essential nature’ or components of leadership (Homer, 1997). Contemporary leadership theories are characterised by both descriptions of leadership function and an ‘emotional perspective’ that highlights the personal qualities of the leader, their ability to lead in times of change and the relationship between leaders and followers (Crainer & Dearlove, 2008).

A leader’s function is to “inspire their followers to sacrifice their selfish interests for a larger cause” (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 376) and work to establish direction, while aligning people and motivating them into action, for the good of the organisation (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Kanter (cited in Crainer & Dearlove, 2008) describes four ‘essential’ components of leadership that are necessary for success in this role. These reflect on both the task and the personal qualities of the leader and include promoting dialogue, engineering respect, sparking collaboration and inspiring initiative. The description of ‘good’ leaders below captures the contemporary emphasis on ‘relationships and feelings’ and the potential benefits of this focus to both individuals and organisations. Warren Bennis (2005) asserts:

Good leaders make people feel that they’re at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organisation. When that happens people feel centred and that gives their work meaning (cited in Marshall, 2008, p. 8).

Together with the focus on people, the ability to gather and assimilate information is seen as an additional and crucial component of successful leaders in any context who wish to enact change (Crainer & Dearlove, 2008).

Models of change, together with the principles and processes of change, provide a construct to understand and implement change strategies and therefore have relevance to school turnaround. Traditional models are process (from the behavioural sciences) or strategy (using organisational objectives) oriented, and promotes a bottom-up, top-down or combined approach (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Siegal et al., 1996). They are commonly described as cyclic rather than linear processes (Piggot-Irvine, 2005a) with continued problematic spin-offs that need to be addressed to safeguard against decline.
Contemporary models of change stem predominantly from the work of Kurt Lewin, who proposed a schema for change similar to that seen in refrigerator function; that is, a cycle of unfreezing, movement and refreezing (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). Schein (1992), developing Lewin’s work, outlines a four-part process that provides an understanding of the parameters that facilitate effective change and describes the human characteristics of each. These are the creation of motivational readiness and acknowledgement of guilt or anxiety created through any perceived gap, the capacity to create psychological safety and, lastly, helping people to see things differently. Schein states that there are no shortcuts in this process and failure to recognise and address each of these components is likely to lead to ineffective efforts to provide sustainable change.

Huy and Mintzberg (2003) use a temporal basis to describe the change process. They describe initial ‘dramatic change’, then a period of ‘systematic change’, followed finally by ‘organic change’ where theories and change action start emerging from employees. The predictable manner in which people behave, and the process of change, described organisational turnaround that would fit well within this construct. Kotter’s (2007) eight stage process also provides a considered approach. It fits well within the turnaround process and represents, at least in part, both a job description and a set of characteristics required for success in leading this task.

Underwritten by change knowledge, effective change management is seen as the ability of the leader to make informed decisions through testing jurisdiction, relevance and expertise or through the process of satisfying (Cardno, 1998; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). With this process effective leaders need to know the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of change management, have knowledge and fluency in change management skills and emotional intelligence to support those who find change difficult (Colman, 2002; Fullan, 2007). In summary, Fullan (2008) encourages a leadership approach that emphasises a shared goal, a caring and responsive learning focus and the development of robust systems in line with this. These principles can be applied to any situation, though their application to our understanding of turnaround is limited, as they require considerable interpretation and lack detail.

Change theory adds to the leadership knowledge that principals gain with experience. This experience is viewed in two parts, professional practice and ‘crucibles’. Crucibles are described here as “utterly transforming life events or tests that individuals must pass
through and make meaning from, in order to learn, grow and lead” (Crainer & Dearlove, 2008, p. 10). This equates to life experience and this in turn has implications therein for those placed in an environment with significant and accelerating variable demands that lack this opportunity. A number of authors support the view that change leadership is most effective when leaders make connections between an academic and professional base and their own theories and practice through a process of self-review that encourages reflection on their decisions and the consequences of these at all stages of planning, implementation and completion (Argyris, 1977; Dick & Dalmau, 1999). While encouraged to pick and choose from the range of academic constructs to enable a relevant and expert leadership approach (Fullan, 2008), self-selecting from a body of knowledge has the risks of promoting choices that are easy or enjoyable and avoid creating further demands. Working in an environment with multiple other requirements demands efficiency and it is only with opportunity, experience and critical review that leaders of turnaround will be enabled through education and reflection on their own practice (Cardno, 2006a). Targeted professional development could provide this (Duke, 2010). Appreciating the value of past experience in leading turnaround and the on-going costs of professional development, those capable of effective leadership in this field should be protected and enabled to recognise the value of connecting theory with practice.

Reeves (2006) and Robertson and Timperley (2011) advocate a model that moves away from describing variation in leadership emphasis or actions and advocates specific dimensions that describe the responsibilities of the leader. These include visionary, relational, teaching and learning, distributive, reflective, collaborative and communicative leadership responsibilities. Reeves’ work has value, as it provides a synthesis of important aspects and reminds both employers and leaders of the wide and interrelated range of responsibilities leaders face. In reality, the emphasis changes but all requirements remain throughout turnaround.

There are multiple constructs from organisational change management and leadership research and writings that can be considered to be relevant to the role of the turnaround leader. This analysis largely fails to accurately differentiate this role from many other leadership positions. Leithwood (2006a) agrees but adds that it is the demands of turnaround that requires a different leadership emphasis from that seen in effective or successful schools. A differentiated approach requires “leaders to have the skills to promote the change in attitude and behaviour within the school communities that is fundamental to turnaround success”
This requires, by necessity, confidence and persistence together with leadership actions that promote dialogue, engineer respect, spark collaboration and motivation and inspire initiative (Kanter, 2003). Integral to this is the ability to make the right choice at the right time.

Achieving sustained success

Successful school turnaround can be achieved only if change is sustained (Kotter, 2007). Succinctly put, “One victory does not make turnaround, continuity of good direction is crucial for establishing cultural capacity to keep on going from adequate to good onto the road to greatness” (Kanter, 2004, p. 125).

This task is difficult and requires considerable energy and skill. Each time change is introduced all stakeholders need to be convinced this will be meaningful (Chenoweth, 2009a). A number of leadership strategies underwrite this task and include regular and honest self-evaluation, the maintenance of good relationships (National Audit Office, 2006), continual risk assessment and the ability to keep going (Duke, 2010). Spillane and Diamond (2007) argue that sustainable change is best achieved through distributive leadership — the more people involved in the change process, the more transparent the process becomes; the greater the change knowledge base is, the more likely it is to succeed. Kotter (2007) concludes, “change only sticks when it becomes ‘the way we do things around here’, when it seeps into the bloodstream of the corporate body” (p. 103).

In light of the increasing and potentially overwhelming complexity of modern schools, it is not always possible to find all the necessary leadership traits and skills in a single person (Duke, 2006; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Rudman, 2006; Spillane, 2006; Yukl, 2002). Reflecting this, good school leaders are encouraged to distribute leadership through collaborative team structures (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The emphasis on collaboration also provides a practical environment for both leadership development and increasing leadership capacity; two factors essential to sustainable school cultures. This in turn promotes greater flexibility, wider responsibility and ownership, succession development and leadership specialisation (Fullan, 2007), yet also risks abdication of responsibility. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) provide a model of school change that emphasises a cosmopolitan, community networking focus by building from the bottom and steering from the top. This approach de-emphasises
government “deliverology”, emphasises “social democracy” (p. 107) and promotes a shared focus that mimics the aspirations of the focus of Tomorrow’s Schools. Consideration of who is at the ‘top and the bottom’ depends not only on the system of governance but also on the fact that all stakeholders have the power to withhold resources and thereby influence a school’s fortunes. The relative influence of any such attempt will depend on a combination of internal and external factors. The following authors support the view that steering and building from both top and bottom is more likely to emulate the model of turnaround success and that leadership groups may in future, fulfil the function currently seen to be the responsibility of individual leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

The human resources approach to change actions and behaviour advocated through leadership theory has capacity to change behaviour and facilitate collective action at all levels of school leadership. Fullan (2007) asserts that “behaviour change happens mostly by speaking to people’s feelings. In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought” (p. 42).

The emphasis placed by contemporary theorists on strengthening relationships (Kotter, 2007) through motivating, rallying and mobilising people (Murphy & Meyers, (2008b) and specifically encouraging and empowering development of personnel through teamwork (Gronn, 1997) apply to all stakeholders and represent a shared responsibility. This is promoted as best achieved through transparency, compassion, moral purpose, instructional leadership and initiatives that encourage emotional wellbeing and professionalism (Boyle, 2007; Fullan, 2007; Robinson, 2007).

Recognising that the role individuals play in an organisation shapes their behaviour, Beer et al. (1990) conclude that the most effective way to shape new behaviour is to place people into a “new organisational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities, and relationships on them” and “forces new attitudes and behaviours” (p. 159). According to Murphy and Meyers, (2008b) new organisational context is more effective with existing staff than whole staff replacement (reconstitution). The organisational context includes internal and external influences, specifically infrastructure, practices and policies, the rate of change, professional competencies, vision and motivation of stakeholders. The systems adopted for evaluation, school governance and reporting will provide both constraints and opportunities to progress
through turnaround by way of collective action.

GETTING THE ‘RIGHT LEADER’

While leaders of failing schools in some high poverty areas often lack the ability to lead successful turnaround (Stoll & Myers, 1998), others possess the leadership characteristics to do just that (Calkins et al., 2007). The observation that school leader differences will account for an average of 25 percent of disparity in student learning accounted for by a school is noted (Hassel & Hassel, 2005).

Getting the ‘right’ turnaround leader can occur through a process of professional development, external support or replacement (Harold et al., 2005; Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). While similar figures are not available for schools, 70 percent of successful turnarounds in business organisations involve changes in top management (Calkins et al., 2007). While these findings might be used to support the replacement of the incumbent principal of a failing school (whether at fault or not), there is no evidence that supports the premise that replacement alone is sufficient to ensure success through turnaround (Stoll & Myers, 1998). Replacement is however seen to have a number of benefits. It provides opportunity to acknowledge change and is seen as an important symbolic representation of this (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). While encouraging a view that this is a ‘new start’ and therefore promoting a willingness to acknowledge and act on problems not earlier seen (Kanter, 2003), such advantages are not guaranteed. The new principal is in fact often met by the resistance of groups fatigued by change, overwhelmed by problems or entrenched in a self-serving environment they are unwilling to leave (Hawk, 2008).

There is considerable benefit in being able to identify who would be best able to lead a school through turnaround. This analysis considers the personal characteristics of successful leaders, the practices they adopt and their fit. ‘Fit’ considers both the school and the geographic, education and social environment within which the principal will function as well as the specific experience, intent, skills and attributes of the principal. Those appointing principals to lead the task of school turnaround have been encouraged to identify the specific needs and leadership requirements of their school and match these with the attributes, skills, motivation and ambitions of applicants (Hassel et al., 2008).

Some broad understanding of who the ‘right’ leader might be is provided. Harold et al.
(2005) sees this person as one who is seeking the job for the ‘right reasons’, specifically a “higher order moral calling” with “understanding of and sensitivity to the unique challenges faced by academically underachieving children” (p. 1). Despite recognition that a subset of specific qualities are required by these individuals and research that enables school boards to identify the leadership requirements of their school there is a lack of research in education that is powerful enough to match specific leadership practices to specific turnaround schools (Harris, 2002; Hassel & Hassel, 2005; Hassel & Steiner, 2003).

Recognising the important role of leaders, the unique demands of turnaround and the fact that schools continue to fail and that many efforts at turnaround were unsuccessful, a number of authors highlight a leadership capacity gap and promote the urgent need in both England (National Audit Office, 2006) and the United States (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) for specific action to address this. While it has been demonstrated that professional development has a role in meeting this deficit, an appreciation of successful leaders, what they do and what they need is required.

**Practices, characteristics and core qualities of the successful turnaround leaders**

To date there is no school-validated research that provides a model of leadership that accurately distinguishes high performing leaders from the rest in any environment (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). The idea that successful turnaround leaders have ‘beaten the odds’ implies, however, a difference in the leadership practices and characteristics that a successful turnaround leader demonstrates, compared to those identified in ‘successful schools’ (Calkins et al., 2007; Harold et al., 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2005). Further differentiation of effective turnaround leadership from other contexts is the daily need to deal with tension and problems, unpredictability, conflict and dissent (Duke, 2010), as well as the need to respond appropriately to the unanticipated consequences of significant change while maintaining momentum, the primary flywheel (Collins, 2009), towards a specific goal (Harris et al., 2010).

Leadership can be defined in one of two ways: either by the leader’s behavioural characteristics that led them to act in certain ways or by their specific actions (Duke, 2010). Some authors have identified a core set of common tasks or practices fundamental to all leaders regardless of context (Fullan, 2008; NationalCollege, 2009b). When considering
schools specifically, Leithwood et al. (2006) concluded that all successful school leaders draw on this same repertoire of basic leadership practices. These were summarised as building vision and creating focus, setting direction and standards of performance, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching and learning programmes. They are persistent in their pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and school-wide achievement (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006; NationalCollege, 2009a).

Some authors argue that it is the turnaround leader’s ability to implement change knowledge that sets them apart from other successful school leaders (Allix & Gronn, 2005; Fullan, 2008; Kotter, 2007). Other writers propose that it is the turnaround leader’s ability to generate social capital through building relationships and distributing power to others that distinguishes them (Crainer & Dearlove, 2008; Harris, 2002; NationalCollege, 2009b). Turnaround leaders are described as concentrating on “few changes with big, fast payoffs” and use the early success to gain momentum. Secondly, they “implement practices proven to work with previously low-performing students without seeking permission for deviations from district policies” (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 51). Hassel, Hassel and Steiner (2008) assert turnaround leaders also “break organisational norms to deploy new tactics” and act quickly in a fast cycle of “trying new tactics, measuring results, discarding failed tactics and doing more of what works” (p. 5). This implies a different skill set, attitude and decision-making process, “they demonstrate the humility, knowledge and an innate capacity that enables them to make the right decisions at the right time” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006, p. 174). These leaders demonstrate sensitivity to the unique political and social elements of a school community (Wrigley, 2003) and those of children who are academically underachieving (Harold et al., 2005). Because of their success and because in failed schools nobody knows what to do, leadership practices are not normally challenged by external agencies in the turnaround phase (Harold et al., 2005). Harris et al. (2010) also recognises that turnaround is different from school improvement. School improvement is a gradual and continuous process while turnaround addresses underperforming schools and involves “dramatic, transformative change – change driven by the prospects of being closed if it fails” (p. 5). The chaotic and difficult task of turnaround is paralleled by Harris et al. (2010) to that of “herding cats” (p. 4) and to Gronn (2003), who talks generally about all principalships, let alone turnaround as “greedy” and time consuming “work” (p. 147).
Efforts have been made to identify the personal characteristics of those who have successfully led school turnaround and these are summarised here (Harris, 2002). The most successful school leaders are seen as open-minded and ready to learn from each other. While focused within a system of core values, they are described as being flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking. They are resilient, optimistic, passionate (Ackerman, Donaldson, Mackenzie, & Marnik, 2009) and committed. Resilience can be defined as our “innate self-righting mechanism” or “human capacity of all individuals to transform and change, no matter their risks” (Benard, 1997, p. 21). They are seen to care deeply about their work and the people who work with them and are able to inspire trust and build relationships (Leithwood et al., 2006; NationalCollege, 2009a). This description goes some way to advising leaders what attributes are required but as this too describes all successful leaders this analysis fails to differentiate those who will be successful in turnaround or how this task might be undertaken.

**Ensuring success through turnaround**

It is the principal’s job to facilitate effective change, but there is a collective requirement to understand both the restrictions and opportunities throughout all tiers of educational influence to support success in this role (Fullan & Levin, 2008). Efforts to improve school performance can originate at many levels. The fact that external intervention is often required in failing schools indicates that, in many cases, neither individual, nor community action has provided a timely or effective method of preventing or reversing school failure (Hawk, 2008). Early attempts at intervention are often inhibited because individuals lack power to act outside their field or it is too little too late (Chenoweth, 2009a, 2009b; Kanter, 2003; Mazzeo & Berman, 2003).

Reports by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) confirmed that disadvantaged children had significantly worse educational outcomes when compared to their peers in higher socio-economic communities (Spreng, 2005). These findings led to a number of policy reforms across the OECD and, along with policy that reinforced accountability, schools ‘beating the odds’ were identified and encouraged to facilitate the progress of others through joining distinct, collaborative ‘turnaround communities of schools’. These initiatives were supported through policy and state-funded turnaround leadership training programmes (Calkins, 2008; Calkins et al., 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Increasingly, school turnaround in the United States of America is developing into a
specialised school leadership discipline (Duke, 2010) to meet the demand created by the Federal Government and its ‘No Child Left behind’ policy.

While indicating a willingness to accept responsibility, these overarching attempts to improve student outcomes have never alone proved to be universally successful. Top-down reforms, focused on improvement across schools, have failed to change the behaviours of the personnel who are key to determining a school’s success (namely, principals and teachers). A reason for this failure is that such initiatives do not impact on the fundamental, underlying, systemic features of school life; they did not change the norms, beliefs of practitioners and, therein, their fundamental actions. As a consequence, reforms were grafted onto existing practices and in doing so the intent was lost or overcome by those already entrenched (Spreng, 2005). Effective school turnaround relies on a collaborative internal and external approach to intervention with the goal of forging a new culture within the school. The central role of the teacher–principal relationship in achieving turnaround success warrants further consideration.

Research by Leithwood et al. (2006a), concludes that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning and teachers are viewed therefore as one of the most promising points of intervention in turnaround schools. This pivotal role arises as teachers “mediate all relationships within instruction” (Finnegan & O'Day, 2003, p. 23) and ‘school success’ is integrally dependent on the skills, attitudes and behaviours of teachers in classrooms (Fullan, 2007). To realise the positive potential of teachers’ efforts within the turnaround school, the principal must facilitate professional dialogue, and motivate and protect staff. Like all other relationships within the school, this requires a degree of emotional intelligence and all parties need to be accepting of the process (Marshall, 2008; NationalCollege, 2009a). Beyond this, the principal also has a role in providing the supportive organisational infrastructure and resource protection necessary to ensure that professional development is undertaken in a coordinated manner to meet both individual and school-wide needs. Professional development also provides a means to address capacity gaps within the school that cannot be met through recruitment.

Targeted professional development, with the school principal as instructional leader, has the potential to provide the opportunity for both ‘up-skilling’ and the development of positive relationships both inside and outside the school (Cardno, 2006a, 2006b; Robinson, 2007; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). A number of conditions apply, however. Firstly,
all change needs to be purposeful, well planned and well executed. Secondly, those affected by change need to understand the reasons for it and be supported through that process with professional learning opportunities (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Independent of the structure of leadership adopted there is a sector-wide responsibility to ensure turnaround leaders are enabled and rewarded and thereby encouraged to stay. Leadership retention, longevity and succession are inherent parts of creating organisational memory and a new culture, which in turn reduces the school vulnerability to other influences (Berg et al., 2008; Fink, 1999; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

**SUMMARY**

Decline leading to failure is normally associated with a school’s inability to self-review or integrate national reforms and leads ultimately but not exclusively to impact adversely on teaching and learning programmes (Duke, 2010; Harris et al., 2010; Hawk, 2008). Failing schools are most often found in already disadvantaged communities wherein singular interventions or reactive attempts to solving problems are seldom collectively sufficient to facilitate school success (Duke, 2004). Despite this observation, some low decile schools that receive the same resources as their neighbouring school and who are subject to the same external interventions, are beating these odds and meeting or exceeding expected standards (Calkins et al., 2007).

School turnaround describes the process of change that originates from within the unique culture of a failing school and progresses to enable the school to become high performing (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). This process has been variably described as a hypothetical pathway or a psycho-social perspective. Both descriptions combine to outline a process of rapid change, followed by a period of graduated change, that illustrates a complex and problematic process subject to multifarious influences. At its very essence, turnaround is characterised by rising expectations, resource limitation, and the need to manage the unexpected consequences of change actions. All descriptions highlight the central importance of people and relationships in this process, yet imply a different emphasis and, in some, the adoption of a regimen of protocols.

Despite insights gained from inter-sector research and our increasing understanding of school turnaround, despite best wishes and enormous effort, the fact remains that schools
continue to fail. Accepting the principal’s central function in determining success through turnaround, this trend illustrates both a leadership capacity gap and a deficit in our local understanding. This reflects a need to consider the characteristics and actions of local principal leaders who have demonstrated success in leading schools from a point of failure. It is hoped that an understanding of who they are and why and when they do what they do, along with an understanding of the impact of the constraints and opportunities of the environment within which they are appointed, supported and work, will go some way to support efforts to address school failure seen in New Zealand.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

It is the function of good design to provide a methodology that enables the researcher to manage often complex research subjects while maintaining validity in research outcomes. The design process for any research outlines a pathway which provides both direction and a logical sequence of events for researchers to follow, the end result of which are study findings (Merriam, 1988). The challenge that lies within this research project is to provide a detailed and in-depth look at school turnaround and provide meaningful comment on school leadership through this process.

The factors influencing a given school at any time are multiple, complex and contextual (Berg et al., 2008; Brady, 2003; Duke, 2006; Fullan, 2006). When considering the role of leadership through school turnaround, the relative lack of research understanding and academic consensus in this area adds to this complexity (Calkins et al., 2007). The choice of research methodology therefore needed to be flexible and exploratory, yet structured enough to maintain the integrity and fulfil the intentions of this research.

This chapter presents both the rationale for choosing a qualitative case study design and a description of the methodology and processes used for the selection of schools and collection and analysis of data. The final section of this chapter outlines both the ethical considerations and limitations of this research strategy.

RATIONALE FOR SELECTING MULTI CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

A case study approach, using multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994), was chosen as the methodology best suited to a detailed in depth look at school turnaround. The flexibility and choice provided in case study methodology allows for a number of factors that are relevant to this particular study. These are:

- The complex nature of school turnaround;
- The emphasis of this research design;
- The nature of the research questions;
The requirement of the research to take meaning from individual and group collaborations; and
The researcher’s inexperience.

The relevance of the first three factors as they relate to the choice of a qualitative case study methodology for this research require further explanation and this is outlined more fully in the following section.

Complexity theory considers the world from a holistic perspective where the whole is considered greater than the sum of its parts. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) acknowledge the parallels of “holism and complexity theory” and suggest the need for “Case Study methodology which adopts an interactionist and constructivist perspective” that is “looking at situations through the eyes of as many participants or stakeholders as possible” (p. 34). The emphasis of this research is on interviews where participants recalled their perception/understandings of the turnaround period.

Acknowledging the importance of human systems as a source of information rather than a loose connection of traits, Cohen et al (2007) describes the case study approach as one that provides for “participant observation”, without a reliance on “one particular method” (p. 263). It is the ability of case study research to provide both a construct and methodology to facilitate a greater understanding of complex natural settings and the role of individuals within these that offers the true advantage of this research technique (Merriam, 1998).

Turnaround, as described in this thesis, is often an emotional ‘rollercoaster,’ where individuals world views will differ depending on the individual’s role and position within the turnaround process, therefore case study research is appropriate to this context.

A case study approach is best when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control. It allows researchers to choose from a variety of methodologies as a ‘best fit’ enabling the researcher to ‘dig around’ (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006). ‘How’ and ‘why’ questions lend themselves to an exploratory and explanatory approach. Wellington (2000) asserts that ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are more complex and intractable and therefore require a more in-depth exploratory approach, while ‘what’ questions align best with survey approaches (Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) adds, that how and why questions, “deal best with operational links
needing to be traced over time” (p.6). Finally Yin (1994) asserts that ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are best addressed through case study methodology.

Inherent in the research questions in this thesis is ‘why’ do schools fail and require turnaround and ‘how’ do leaders and their leadership address failure. The complexity within these questions was influenced by individuals and their collective ‘world views’ and the contextual differences between school communities.

While a multi-case study approach is best suited to the aims of this research the disadvantages of this approach need to be acknowledged and where possible, mitigated or managed. Creswell (2007) provides a succinct critical appraisal of the limitations of case study methodology. Creswell acknowledges that the apparent lack of rigor seen in case study design allows a researcher’s biased views to influence findings and conclusions and that these studies often take a long time and may result in massive unreadable documents. The choice to use multiple cases for this research allows more certainty. However this practice has the potential to create generalisations and overlook detail relevant to in-depth analysis. Extrapolation of research findings from single case studies is limited. Creswell promotes the use of multiple case studies to validate concepts and themes yet encourages researchers to avoid the pitfall of extrapolating ‘case studies for teaching’ to the construct of ‘case studies for research.’ Multiple case studies were employed in the research outlined in this thesis. In addition, throughout the process of study design, implementation and interpretation of data, care has been taken to understand the limitations at each step and ensure that the processes involved are valid, reliable and replicable.

The methodology adheres to the epistemological anti-positivistic interpretive paradigm, characterised by a concern for the ‘voice’ of the individual in context and the need to generate theories about behaviour (Cohen et al., 2007).

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Research confidence is developed over time through theory and action (Argyris, 1977). A stepwise construct through which research can be built upon to provide valid theory has been proposed. This construct provides a stepwise process that enables a researcher to track
research progress and ensure that each section is clearly linked to the research questions:

Step 1: Selection of schools using purposive sampling;
Step 2: Assurance of schools meeting selection criteria through analysis of ERO reports and Hawk’s predictors of decline (Appendix 2);
Step 3: Semi-structured interviews with the principal, board chair and staff member;
Step 4: Cross-school analysis of data using long table approach, concept mapping and modelling; and
Step 5: Capturing emerging concepts and themes.

Research aims and questions

Research questions provide the foundation for research design as they inform both the methodology and the literature review (Cohen et al., 2007). The research endeavoured to answer the following questions:

- What process of turnaround can be identified?
- How do principals address decline and failure through turnaround?
- What leadership characteristics are viewed as effective by these principals and school leaders in the process of turnaround?
- What theories do the principals hold about effective leadership in turnaround schools?

School selection

The initial identification of schools potentially eligible for this research was undertaken using purposive sampling; a scoping method that facilitates access to people who have in depth knowledge about particular issues (Cohen et al., 2007). In this research a purposive ‘snowballing technique’ (Bryman, 2004) was used to access colleagues and educational consultants with extensive knowledge of the sector who were able to, in turn, identify decile one turnaround schools in lower socio-economic areas. ERO reports were critical in confirming whether schools identified through the initial phase of purposive sampling fitted the established criteria for this study. The ERO reports of these schools were analysed to confirm
the presence or absence of any of the following criteria:

- Any form of external intervention (Limited Statutory Manager or Commissioner);

- Documentation of the school’s repeated failure to meet its obligations as an education provider; and

- Decreased reporting interval from standard three yearly cycles.

Results were presented in tabulated form.

Due to the temporal and fiscal constraints, priority in this study was given to schools where principals were willing to take part. One school identified through purposive sampling had become widely known as a primary school in a low decile area which had experienced a period of failure and turnaround, leading to success. As the period of failure had occurred prior to 1989 there were no ERO reports to confirm this school’s eligibility for inclusion in this study. For this reason, further validity was sought through retrospective application of Hawk’s (2008) predictors of school decline. It is proposed that if a high number of the indicators of decline were present and there was a high correlation between schools this would support the inclusion of the three schools selected. All three schools meet these criteria.

Interviewees from all schools were asked to recall their perceptions, understandings of experiences of the school during the period of decline against the list of criteria proposed by Hawk (2008) to represent predictors of school decline. The three principals, staff members and board chairs were asked to respond yes or no to indicate the presence or absence of a given attribute. A copy of the interview schedule provided to participants for this section of research is included in Appendix 1. These findings were presented in tabulated form.

A summary of the criteria for inclusion of schools in this study are outlined in Table 3.1. Following purposive sampling and analysis of ERO reports, five schools that satisfied the established criteria were approached. All these schools agreed to participate in this research and it was from this group that the final three schools used in this research were randomly selected from a hat by a colleague. These three schools included two primary schools (five to 11 year olds) and one intermediate school (11 to 13 year olds). The two unselected schools
remained available in case of a school withdrawing from the research programme and were not used.

**Table 3.1: Criteria for school eligibility for inclusion in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School (children 5 to 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decile 1 School representing a lower socioeconomic community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School recovered from a period of failure to success through a process of turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate personnel available and willing to participate in study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selection of participants**

To provide triangulation of data and therefore increase the robustness of this study, three personnel from each selected school were interviewed. In addition to the principal responsible for leading school turnaround (in all cases this was also the incumbent principal), the board chair and a staff member present at the time of turnaround were interviewed. The staff member was selected by the principal.

**Data collection: semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to vary their interview schedule in response to significant replies. This form of interviewing uses open, closed and probing questions (Bryman, 2004; Hinds, 2000). The opportunity for ‘one-on-one’ dialogue gives the interviewer flexibility to follow their instinct to follow promising replies and ‘dig deeper’ (Bryman, 2004) while also enabling participants to provide individualised and divergent responses to questions. In essence participants are encouraged to tell their stories within a frame of a given subject.

For this research, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore in-depth the role of key leadership characteristics of principals in creating an organisational culture and climate conducive to successful school turnaround (Fink & Stoll, 1998).

All semi-structured interviews were held at the selected schools and were conducted over a one week period. The interview guide for each of the interviewees was sequenced and followed a before, during, and after turnaround schema. This temporal perspective was chosen to enable a story line to flow and to thereby facilitate disclosure. In all interviews
there was purposeful alignment of interview questions with research questions and this was intended to increase the internal validity of this research.

Two interview formats were used. One was common to the board chair and staff members interviewed and the other used as the basis of interviews with the school principal. A copy of both interview schedules is included in Appendix 1. For all interviews, the questions focused on leadership of the turnaround process and explored the participant’s knowledge of change theory. Time was allotted during each interview to enable clarification of the information disclosed to the researcher. This is useful when problems are complex and contextual (as is the case with turnarounds), and functions specifically to minimise assumptions that might otherwise be made by the researcher (Robinson, 2006).

A detailed explanation of the interview process and a copy of the interview questions were provided to all interviewees prior to their interviews. This functioned to increase confidence in the interview process and to allow time for participants to become familiar with the interview content. Ensuring excellent communication throughout this process was essential to maintaining interviewee trust. During the interviews a variety of interviewing techniques were employed to facilitate disclosure; these included reflective listening and periods of patient waiting (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

**Data recording**

All structured interviews were taped to ensure everything “said was preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 87). Each taped interview was transcribed by a professional secretary and returned to the interviewee for verification. This approach was designed to strengthen internal validity and allowed me to review interviews as required. The consequences of possible equipment failure were mitigated through the provision of a back-up tape recorder. Participant wariness of being recorded, while unavoidable, was largely overcome in all cases as the interview progressed. Interviewees became more relaxed and clearly involved in the interview process. They paid little attention to the tape recorder (Merriam, 1998). Data was also recorded during the semi-structured interviews by the researcher using concept maps. This enabled visual tracking of emerging concepts and relationships and facilitated questioning (Lofland et al., 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The concept maps were further developed during the data analysis stage of the research design.
Data analysis

Data content analysis was undertaken using the long table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 132), conceptual models and mapping techniques (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). This essentially involves cutting, sorting, arranging, and then comparing and contrasting data in order to form summary statements (Hatch, 2002; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Yin, 1994). Each transcript was analysed using colour coding and line numbering to ensure easy referencing back to the original transcripts. Data was initially categorised according to the broad concepts of ‘leadership’ and ‘actions’. A diary of connections was kept and emergent categories considered against current understanding as outlined in the literature review.

Internal validity

Throughout this research every effort was made to ensure internal validity of the data (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007). Decisions on processes centred on minimising the amount of bias that might arise within the semi-structured interviews (McGeary, 2009).

The inclusion in this research of three schools and three participants from each school was intended to increase both internal and external validity. This enabled both the comparison of schools and responses within each school to be cross checked for themes and concepts. This represents a rigorous form of triangulation (Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Wilkinson, 2001).

Internal validity was enhanced in interviews in multiple ways. Following each interview participants were sent an electronic copy of the interview transcript and encouraged to comment on any inaccuracies. All interviewees remained actively engaged in this process through a notion of transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McTaggart, 1998). Trustworthiness involves the extent to which the researcher convinces the audience that the results are worth taking account of and includes focusing on such areas as ensuring that the researcher’s interpretation is credible to those from whom they collected the data (Bartlett & Piggot-Irvine, 2008). Bartlett and Piggot-Irvine assert that:

Transparency ensures a valid internal research process. This was achieved through a transparent audit trail of method, data, interpretations and reporting; by testing the coherence of arguments in a critical community; and through the cross
checking or triangulation of data in order to ensure the critical examination of any claims and assumptions (p. 150).

Internal validity was also strengthened through public accountability. Principals were made aware that this research would be available on the public domain and presented to the Ministry of Education as a requirement of the researcher’s study leave (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart & Zuber-Skerritt, 1994). Passfield (1992) also sees publication as an ethical undertaking.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Gaining informed consent

The process for obtaining informed consent described in this chapter was approved by the UNITEC Ethics Committee prior to the beginning of this research. A professional and ethical approach protected my relationship with the study participants and avoided any potential for role confusion.

School consent

Initially the principals of the five schools identified as suitable for this study were informally approached with a request to involve the school in this research. In each instance the principals agreed to participate and from this group, three study schools were randomly selected. The following actions are requirements of this study as determined by the conditions of Ethics approval. Following final selection, schools were formally approached and consent obtained from the current principal and board chair. Participating principals were then asked to complete an organisational consent form before any interviews were conducted. The informed consent form outlined the expected time commitment for this research and the participants’ right to withdraw from the study. Independent meetings were held with the principals of the selected schools to fully explain the research process, aims, objectives and research design.

Individual consent

Potential interviewees were approached to assess their willingness to participate. If they indicated an interest, they were provided with an information form, a consent form and my contact details along with those of my research supervisor. Participants were
encouraged to discuss any concerns that might develop during this research. All potential participants approached agreed to participate. Once the interviewee returned the consent form, they were called and an interview time scheduled.

When considering school decline, failure and turnaround, it was difficult to escape the implication that someone or something was responsible. It was recognised that there is potential for interviewees to have both positive and negative reactions when recounting events from a time where personal demands are often great. To minimise this potential the interviewer acknowledged this possibility at the start of the interview and this was rechecked at intervals throughout the interview process (Wellington, 2000; Wilkinson, 2001). Further mitigation was possible as all participants were given the opportunity to discuss the potential personal cost of school failure and the on-going emphasis on the positive intent of this research. This was vocalised and demonstrated throughout this project through hopefully professional and compassionate interaction with all participants. Interviewees were encouraged by the fact that their contribution to this research project might itself enable others to better address the challenges of school turnaround.

**Protecting anonymity and confidentiality**

While it is not possible to stop people guessing which schools were involved - a point raised by Wellington, (2000) and Wilkinson, (2001) - all ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to during this research. Great care was taken to ensure the schools selected for this research could not be identified. For example all dates from ERO reports were excluded to avoid tracking the school’s identity through the ERO website and aligning with content from the semi-structured interviews.

Individual interviewees were not anonymous. However participants were guaranteed confidentiality in all stages of this research. The interviewees were informed that all paperwork relating to the research would be kept on file for five years. All participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw up to two weeks after the interviews. By employing ethical research behaviours, where the dignity, privacy and interests of the participants were always respected, concerns for anonymity and confidentiality were reduced. The potential for a conflict of interest to develop during this research project was recognised. Actions undertaken to minimise this were associated with transparency of process, respect for each
school’s culture, honest and open communication channels and the airing of assumptions.

SUMMARY

This chapter provided a rationale and justification for choosing a qualitative multi case methodology for data collection and analysis. It described the methods employed, explained the data management procedures and detailed the analytical procedures. Sampling and ethical issues have also been outlined. The next chapter presents the findings gathered from the semi-structured interviews, as described in this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

The process of ‘turnaround’ in New Zealand urban primary schools has been examined in three schools through analysis of semi-structured interviews. In two of the three schools Education Review Office (ERO) reports were available for the period of time under consideration. These reports were examined to provide further insight into the turnaround process.

The principals of the schools selected for this research were all male, aged between 40 and 55 years. Two principals had previous experience in this role. Principal C had a proven record of successfully leading a failing school through turnaround. Principal A was internally promoted from a position of deputy principal. Principal B had been a teacher for 13 years and this was his first position as a school principal.

THE PROCESS OF TURNAROUND IN THREE SCHOOLS

The first objective of this research was to understand the process through which principals were able to lead their schools from a position of failure to one of school success. Herein school turnaround will be represented between the period of school failure or decline and that of school success. Evidence that both points have been reached in each of the schools examined is presented below. While this interval framework provides a useful construct for analysis, in reality the requirements and outcomes of actions within and between each phase inform each other and the boundaries between each phase are blurred.

Evidence of School Decline or Failure

This section reports firstly on the documentary analysis of ERO reports followed by the reporting of interview data.

Review of ERO reports for two of the three schools provides an understanding of the complexities and unique culture and climate of each. ERO reports were examined for evidence of decline and failure. As the turnaround process was initiated for school A prior to the establishment of the ERO, reports were not available for this school until the turnaround
Examination of ERO reports for the period prior to the appointment of the principal seen to be responsible for leading turnaround in schools B and C revealed highly critical reports, return visits by the ERO inside the usual timeframe of three years and the appointment in both schools of a New Zealand Ministry of Education statutory manager. Broad descriptions are used to hide the identity of the schools and dates have been removed.

The ERO reports for schools B and C documented a range of serious problems and illustrated a process of school decline. The boards were unable to fulfil their governance obligations and problems with the schools’ finances and staff and student safety were cited. ERO reporting described a lack of professional development, stressed and absent leadership and questioned the accuracy of student records. The failure to provide remedy for the deficits identified in previous reporting was a common theme for both schools. Despite the significant and ongoing deficits and lack of remedy, external support was not offered. Both schools B and C had a change in principal during the period of school decline. According to the ERO reports this change in leadership was extremely positive.

The ERO reports described a period of decline and illustrated both the vulnerability and importance of the principal as leader during this period. Despite their fundamental responsibility, these school boards were long unable to address school decline and failure. Any reporting of board success was seen only after the appointment of a new principal.

Reports function to highlight deficits and therefore go some way in reflecting the reality of school decline and failure. The deficits as stated and recommendations made to remedy these are, however, almost unhelpful because of their generality. While reporting was critical and visits more frequent in these schools, the role of ERO in identifying the causes of failure and functioning to facilitate positive change needs further consideration. Further evidence of school decline and failure in the selected schools was sought from interview data and a survey of interviewees using Hawk’s (2008) predictors of decline.

Hawk’s (2008) predictors of decline served two functions in this research. Firstly if Hawk’s ‘Characteristics of a Failed School’ could be shown to be present in the selected schools at the time of the principal’s appointment this would further support the school’s inclusion in this
study. Secondly, this exercise helps delineate a point of failure in each school from which time the process of school turnaround progressed.

All eligible interviewees – principals (P), board chairs (BC) and staff (S) – from schools A, B and C respectively, were presented with a table outlining Hawk’s predictors of school decline and asked to identify the presence or absence of each of these ‘predictors’ within their school at the time of the principal’s appointment. The subset of predictors (under predictor 9) that specifically relates to principal leadership was included in this analysis. Responses to each predictor and the subset predictor 9 are provided in Table 4.1. Interpretation of this table is limited by the fact that the ‘new’ principal was not present in the school during the period of decline.

### Table 4.1: Responses of interviewees on influences on decline using Hawk’s predictors (2008)

#### Macro (Societal) Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate responses to international and educational trends</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status and demographic and economic factors</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schisms over societal values, norms and social movements</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to respond to policy changes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community conflict</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Meso (Institutional) Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline in the number of students enrolled</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective internal management of systems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External influences, power and authority</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Micro (Personal) Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate and ineffective senior leadership</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Micro (Personal) Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S A P</th>
<th>S A S</th>
<th>S B P</th>
<th>S B S</th>
<th>S C B C</th>
<th>S C P</th>
<th>S C S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals do not have adequate senior leadership experience</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developments and change is not well managed</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal is unwell or stressed</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups or individuals receive (or are perceived to receive)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favoured treatment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal is often out of the school</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal does not model ethical and professional</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitudes and behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty or lack of honesty by school personnel occurs</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with respect to issues or documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The potential for personal responses to help or hinder</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The near 100 percent overall positive correlation of responses across interviewees, as illustrated in Table 4.1, confirms the presence of Hawk’s predictors of school decline within the selected schools prior to the principal’s appointment. According to Hawk’s theory this data illustrates the presence of adverse internal and external factors at a point in time and illustrates characteristics consistent with those of a school experiencing significant decline or failure.

Because this thesis is focused on leadership specifically, the interview data was examined to find further supporting evidence for predictor 9 in each school. Predictor 9 considers evidence for ‘Inadequate and Ineffective Senior Leadership’. Examples of evidence demonstrated through the analysis of the semi-structured interviews for each of the subcategories of predictor 9 are presented in Table 4.2. This analysis confirms the presence of the predictors outlined and thereby adds further weight to the legitimacy of this application of Hawk’s tool. It also presents some insight into the leadership within the three study schools prior to the appointment of the ‘new’ principal.
Table 4.2: Examples from semi-structured interviews of Hawk’s micro predictor 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate or ineffective senior leadership</td>
<td>The adverse impact of poor leadership was reported by all interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals do not have adequate senior leadership experience</td>
<td>All interviewees saw a leadership deficit and also a lack of care. However no mention was made as to the principals’ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developments and change is not well managed</td>
<td>Interviewees reported lack of direction. This was seen to result in lack of focus and efficiencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principal is unwell or stressed</td>
<td>Principals were seen to be ‘not coping’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups or individuals receive (or are perceived to receive) favoured treatment</td>
<td>Regular overseas travel by principal and senior staff with little evidence of benefit to the school seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principal is often out of the school</td>
<td>Interviewees reported that the principal was either out of the school, did not listen or appeared not to care. There appeared to be a focus on personal needs rather than the needs of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Principal does not model ethical and professional attitudes and behaviour</td>
<td>Apparent uncaring attitudes were seen to open the school to unwanted and inappropriate after-hours behaviour. The school became a victim to all groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty or lack of honesty by school personnel occurs with respect to issues or documents</td>
<td>False Ministry claims and questionable assessment data was reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 provides evidence of incumbent leaders who have been unwilling or unable to meet their professional obligations. Deficiencies were apparent at all levels of responsibility and included poor or absent organisational compliance, curriculum leadership, communication and the absence of the appropriate infrastructure to support school success. Examples of teachers feeling afraid and unsupported, negative behaviours, stressed individuals, lack of honesty and a poor physical environment characterised by a lack of care, were evident in all the interviews with board and staff members. No leadership capacity was seen to address the demands of internal or external change. Such examples provide additional support to the findings following analysis of ERO reports and Hawk’s predictors of decline, and illustrate that the selected schools had reached a point of decline or failure and that leadership within the school at this time was suboptimal and unable to facilitate the necessary change to meet the school’s obligations.

The consequence of school decline and failure were described variably by stakeholders and this reflected their position within the school. Comments made by interviewees to describe the
social, physical and educational environment of their school just prior to and at the time of the principal’s appointment collectively represent a picture common to the three study schools. The community had lost confidence in the school and the vulnerability that developed through lack of care was widely exploited. The impact of these factors, although thought to be widely understood, was not managed or accurately reflected in New Zealand’s current methods of school evaluation. Principal A succinctly stated:

Principal A: This is a story that ERO doesn’t know. And [in] some of the worst cases … schools have been victimised by everybody.

The school vulnerability follows a period of poor quality leadership, lack of genuine care and professionalism. It is evidenced by serious behavioural problems, isolation, disconnect, low expectations and poor or absent development of curriculum and learning programmes, along with an uncared for and poorly maintained school environment that was often vandalised.

The analysis of ERO documentation and semi-structured interviews along with application of Hawk’s (2008) predictors confirm that a period of decline or failure occurred in the three schools selected, prior to the appointment of the principals responsible for leading the school through successful turnaround.

Evidence of Turnaround

The process of school turnaround describes the transition from failure to success. School turnaround will be viewed through the requirements of this process and the actions of the principals that facilitated this change. This research does not attempt to describe a full list of actions undertaken by these principals, but attempts to provide a broad temporal outline of the main features and, in doing so, provide insight into some of the challenges faced by these principals and how these were managed. It is with this understanding that the leadership characteristics and theories held by these leaders, specific to turnaround, might best be understood.

The process of turnaround is described by interviewees in terms of its intent and this is reported within two frames; an initial phase of stopping decline followed by a second phase of rebuilding school capacity. The leadership requirements of the two phases are outlined in
Table 4.3: The leadership requirements of turnaround as identified in three New Zealand primary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE 1: STOPPING DECLINE</th>
<th>PHASE 2: RE-BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognise school failure and appointing the right leader</td>
<td>Address behaviour school-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnose the situation and planning a way forward</td>
<td>Execute and review initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information sought</td>
<td>- Establish shared goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Resource and organisational requirements</td>
<td>- Staffing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pupil attainment and skills</td>
<td>- Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behaviour of stakeholders</td>
<td>Other considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement priority actions</td>
<td>- Build capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Signal change</td>
<td>- Ensure motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Develop a model for consultation</td>
<td>- Address ERO concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ensure financial status and viability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Address deficits in the physical environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Address board function</td>
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The following discusses the evidence for the process of school turnaround as outlined in Table 4.3.

**PHASE 1: STOPPING DECLINE**

The requirements of this phase were identified as recognising school failure and appointing the right leader, diagnosing the ‘situation’, planning a way forward and implementing priority actions. Evidence for this process from both ERO reports and interviewees is presented.

**Recognise school failure and appointing the right leader**

The following section provides evidence from analysis of ERO reports and interview data of changes undertaken within the school in response to school failure. In schools B and C, ERO reports commented on the capacity of strong principal leadership to reverse negative trends and facilitate positive changes. ERO provided comment as to how in a short time the newly appointed principal had provided energetic, focused and effective leadership to the board, staff, parents and students. In school C ERO reports noted a change in the school to one later characterised by high levels of motivation and a commitment to improving levels of student achievement. These changes along with changes in management infrastructure and staff were
seen to be fundamental to the development of initiatives that greatly improved the educational opportunity for students. These positive changes were directly attributed to the leadership of the newly appointed principal and signalled that important influence of effective principal leadership at this time. It is noted that it is often retrospective and comparative comment that provides the greatest understanding of the significant deficits that were evident prior to appointment of the new principal and when compared to earlier reports these deficits, while clearly evident, were seemingly under reported.

The catalysts for significant intervention in a failing school were variably argued. Interviewees identified deteriorating school facilities, critical ERO reporting and the growing dissatisfaction of parents and the wider school community demonstrated through falling rolls and lack of community engagement as significant. Both Ministry involvement and the appointment of a new principal were seen by all stakeholders to represent significant intervention. Ministry intervention, by way of interim support and guidance through the leadership selection process, was seen in two of the three schools. The role of such factors in determining the specific drivers that lead to an incumbent principal leaving a failing school is beyond the capacity of this study.

Schools B and C required external intervention by the Ministry to support turnaround. Principals B and C comment:

Principal B: The Board had several complaints about the safety of students from the community and then it was highlighted when ERO undertook a discretionary review and in that report there was an indication of serious student behaviour, not only students, but staff towards students as well. One of the ERO recommendations was to appoint a support person through the Ministry of Education to help the board make good decisions in terms of employment, human resources, appointment of staff, finances and those sorts of things.

Principal C: I was contacted by the Ministry to say they needed me to apply for this job. The school is in a lot of trouble. I said no, I am not interested and that was the end of the conversation. Then I got contacted again by the Limited Statutory Manager within the school – you have got to come and have a look,
you’ve got to apply.

It is likely a culmination of factors lead to significant intervention in schools that are failing. The Ministry’s action confirms both the difficulties that exist and skills required to begin turnaround and recognition of the lack of personnel capable of or willing to lead this task.

In all the schools, replacement of the incumbent principal occurred with early efforts directed at stopping decline. The appointment of this new principal was viewed by all stakeholders as pivotal in facilitating a period of positive change for the school. Along with this understanding are two other considerations relevant to these appointments. Firstly, why the nominated principal sought selection and secondly, what level of understanding of the school’s problems these principals had prior to their appointment? While such considerations might be viewed as an aside from the main purpose of this research, they are included as they provide some insight into the process of turnaround from the perspective of individual leaders and are therefore useful for those considering recruitment into similar positions. This section will be considered in two parts. The first outlines the motivating factors underlying the principals’ application and the second examines their pre-employment level of understanding as to the requirements of the position. The specific criterion used in the appointment process, relevant to the selection of these principals was not considered in this research.

The following section outlines the factors seen by these principals to be the most important reasons for applying for these leadership positions. Most significantly principals A, B and C felt they would be able to make a difference to the lives of students and their community:

Principal A: I grew up not far away. I am a whole 3.5 km away. I went overseas, came back, saw the state of some of these schools and I was also involved in other local community organisations. I am as much a community developer as a principal.

Principal B: I was brought up in this area, I was one of these kids –it sounds dumb –but I look at the eyes of these kids and think – that was me. I know they can do well. They just need a bit of guidance and support.
Principal C: Was the draw card too the fact you were an old boy? Definitely.

Locality, past history and community links provided specific and important motivating factors for principals accepting these positions. The following motivating factors were cited but not shared by all principals and these are listed in no particular order. They include personal reasons, such as Principal A living close to the school, his understanding of the role of principal as leader and community developer and the fact that his children might attend this school and that it was one upon which their community depended. Principal B was educated within the community he now served. Principal C wished to work in a decile one school and stated he was specifically seeking a personal challenge. Principal C was asked to apply by the Ministry. Principal A had been working in the school as a deputy principal for two years prior to his appointment. The previous principal of this school reportedly worked hard to identify school deficits and meet the policy developments required under ‘Tomorrow Schools’ (Spreng, 2005). He was seen to have begun the process of turnaround. Principal A sought to continue this work.

All principals in this study confirmed that prior to their appointment they were aware that the school was in a state of decline or failure. Variation, however, exists as to the effort made, sources used and the perceived level and quality of knowledge attained in this pre-appointment phase. The potential sources of information about the school and their use by the selected principals prior to their appointment is presented in Table 4.4.

The effort made to understand the school’s position prior to their appointment was variable both in terms of the time spent gathering information and the number of sources used. A range of the potential sources of information was used by all principals. These included visits to or working within the school, ERO reports which were used most frequently and discussions with stakeholders. Stakeholders included Ministry and selection committee personnel, previous principals, current board chair and staff, parents of the school and community members. Principal C commented on the lack of and quality of the information provided:

Principal C: I didn’t get enough information. Maybe it was my arrogance I suppose, maybe thinking oh well it doesn’t matter if they can do it I can do it. So I didn’t delve deeply. And in any way, I was not told the full picture by the
Ministry that’s for sure. I wasn’t told about the money situation, the leaky buildings, and the degree of incompetency of the teachers. I had read the ERO reports but it was worse. The ERO reports were soft. There was a whole lot of information I wasn’t told. It was way worse than I ever imagined. If I knew what I knew when I started, I don’t think I would have applied actually.

Table 4.4: Sources used by principals pre-appointment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Principal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERO reports</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry /LSM</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection Committee</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Principal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in School</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting School</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of School</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Principal C felt he was not provided with already known and relevant detail of the school’s current position at the time of his appointment. He was left to later discover these facts himself post appointment and felt, at best, let down.

**Diagnosing the situation and planning a way forward**

While an initial requirement of stopping decline is to ensure that appropriate leadership is in place, this section will now be confined to considering this phase from the point at which the new principal has started his employment. It is from this point that it falls upon the principal to ensure that the initiatives chosen are likely to relatively and greatly contribute to the process of optimising the learning environment for students within their care.
**Information sought**

The principals used a variety of strategies and a number of sources to gather information and these included review of written material and formal, informal, group and individual meetings with stakeholders. Most of the pre-appointment barriers seen to limit a full understanding of a school’s position were no longer relevant. Once employed, principals had full access to school information. The following specific actions were described:

- Analysis of past ERO reports, school performance and human resource data and school accounts;
- Direct observation both inside and outside the classroom and after school hours;
- Visiting local shops to observe and understand student behaviour in the wider community;
- Formal staff and pupil surveys; and
- Talking and listening to parents, staff, ministry personnel and board members.

The following quotes are provided to substantiate the above and provide insight into the associated actions:

Principal A: By working here it was actually really good to be inside the school figuring it out. I worked with the principal in 91 and 92 and then in 93 I got the principals job.

Principal B: I sat back and listened to the conversations that were happening in the staffroom…Just checking up on what was happening… Just sort of chatting to children.

The comments of principals A and B illustrate how all Principals valued the opportunity to understand the interactions between teachers and students and make informed judgements about the current status of the school. This represented both an informal and formal process and was undertaken with the aim of providing a diagnosis. A range of factors were seen to influence the methods selected for this process and included the nature of the information sought and the principal’s previous experience.

ERO reports provided an understanding of how the schools’ current problems had
evolved, the relative success or absence of previous efforts directed at resolving these and the priorities that ERO had established for the school. Qualitative data was collated and examined. Principals considered student roll numbers, staff turnover and sick leave rates, student assessment and in one case ‘attitudinal’ data. All provided the additional benefit of a base-line of evidence from which change could be demonstrated over time. Surveys were used by two principals to access information from large groups. These provided the benefits of anonymity and efficiency. One example is provided:

Principal C: When I started we administered the NZCER student school survey. It’s to do with culture, behaviour and how children feel about the school. Questions are ranked 1 to 4. We did it last year and we have just repeated it. First time we did it the results from the kids were terrible. Now we see 62% of the results were all 4s which is bloody high.

The results of this survey confirmed an improvement in the positive attitude of students within 12 months. Principal C’s interest in this area highlighted the emphasis placed on understanding the impact of school change on the students and the need to ensure an engaged and motivated student population. Repeating this survey allowed progress to be measured against a specific goal.

All principals acknowledged that to be seen gathering information from a range of sources was an important step in examining assumptions, signalling change and creating allies. Principal C commented that while he initially felt most of his first impressions were correct, his view that the ‘community did not care’ was incorrect:

Principal C: I felt the community didn’t give a toss. That was incorrect but my staff diagnosis, if you like, was very accurate but the community one wasn’t. The parents did care and wanted something to happen and have been incredibly supportive.

A range of sources provided the opportunity for accurate diagnosis. Principal C accepted this construct and this led to greater care and understanding overall.

The need was recognised by all principals to balance openness and empathy with an
expression of clear intent that change was required. Principal C who had used surveys historically in the context of school turnaround modified these for his new school to not only gather information but also communicate a standard and intent:

Principal C: I did a survey… it was more than a survey… a whole raft of questions and statements in it and every single staff member had to fill it out…. I met one on one with every single staff member…it took six weeks… that’s basically all I did. So I was doing my reconnaissance, if you like about where they thought we were at … I was sort of manipulating…. about where we would head. So my ideas were written within it about what you think, even though I knew damn well, this is what needs to happen. So I got buy-in that way to the new stuff, plus I was seeing where they thought the school was at…. I was able to have my conversation and I had another series of questions (at interview) that were going a bit deeper with some of the statements they had written. They were just triangulating their own stuff with what they’d said in written form to what they said orally. So that gave me a lot of information.

Preparatory surveys were provided to all staff present in the school prior to the principal starting and these were used as a basis for discussion in a follow-up interview held during the initial weeks of Principal C’s appointment. This allowed the triangulation of content and thereby the opportunity to check data against other sources to ensure information was accurate and sufficient to provide for effective diagnosis.

Developing a complete and accurate understanding of their school’s current situation was seen as a priority by all principals and considerable effort was put into this immediately following their appointment. This analysis would provide the basis for determining both immediate action and the direction and action required to rebuild school capacity.

The following section considers the type of information sought for this analysis and the methods used to achieve this. The principals identified three areas as a priority for immediate understanding. These included understanding the reasons behind decline and failure, the current status of the school environment, policy requirements, curriculum and finances/budget, the level of pupil attainment and behaviour of all stakeholders. This information would provide the basis for stopping decline and the nominated actions of re-
Resources and organisational requirements

All principals felt that the lack of effective leadership was one of the primary determinants of their school’s decline/failure. Principal C describes his school in terms of the level of care and professionalism:

Principal C: I felt it was lax. I felt it was void of any professionalism. I felt that the staff didn’t give a toss and that was true.

The apparent lack of care demonstrated by the previous principal of school C was seen by the incoming principal to have had a profound negative effect on the staff. This had permeated all relationships within the school and one consequence of this had been the exodus of good teachers.

All principals undertook to appreciate the impact of deprivation as well as the unique potential that characterised their school community. Principal A remarks:

Principal A: Often the gifts for improvement are in the community already, wherever you travel in the world, so there were people who wanted stuff to happen and they could simply say – you could embrace and endorse that – it’s part of the core vision to begin with. The actual founding document of the school – the motto (persistence and hard work) is the perfect wrap-around for a Decile 1 school where there has been generations of failures.

Principal A felt that the solutions to problems could be found if turnaround principals understood the vulnerabilities and strengths of their school community and had the skills to enable cohesion and alignment towards an established common goal. Principal A used this wider socioeconomic perspective of school failure to facilitate all ‘turnaround’ initiatives. This varied from principals B and C who either adopted a more ‘in house’ approach or who favoured responding to ERO requirements as their initial focus. As Principal B stated:

Principal B: I think the first part was to get them out of that discretionary cycle, knowing that ERO was coming in nine months. I started in February and they
were coming in October – it was to get in and try to embed some really good practice in the classroom. Try and work on some of the issues so that when they did come in they knew that there was a plan of action in terms of moving the school forward.

In this setting ERO recommendations represented both a goal and a focus for action. It was important for Principal B that his credibility be enhanced through improvements in ERO reporting. Teaching, learning and student achievement became his immediate focus.

The principals unanimously agreed that an early understanding of the current state of the school environment, deficits in policy requirements and curriculum and a full understanding of the school’s finances was essential. This allowed principals to understand the reasons behind school failure, identify any shortfall in compliance that needed urgent attention, focus on ensuring a safe school environment and fully appreciate the resources available to move into a phase of school recovery. Principal B confirms that an understanding of the school’s financial position was important:

Principal B: Because we had issues around finances, I remember that very first week saying to the staff that until I get my head around the finances, we won’t be spending any money. So the battle of – here you are, expecting teachers to deliver the curriculum but yet you’re not allowed to buy resources to do that.

Principal B recognised the need for ‘efficiencies’ within his school but that this also created management dilemmas. Both financial knowledge, setting up of robust systems and a stock take of resources were nominated actions important in providing a way forward. These tasks were undertaken while maintaining a primary focus on teaching and learning and meeting ERO recommendations.

**Pupils’ attainment and skills**

School assessment data were used to evaluate the current achievement status of students. While the results of norm referenced testing are seriously regarded, the principals were aware that this historical data was not always present or in fact represented an accurate assessment of the capacity of teachers or students. In line with this concern, ERO reporting validated the inaccuracy of preceding school data. ERO reporting indicated common deficits between
schools in the representation of student potential through school assessment data that was absent or inconsistent. The importance of this data in informing teaching practice appeared absent. All new principals moved to address this deficit and provide early and accurate assessment of student achievement.

All principals attempted to understand the current behaviour, motivation and intent of stakeholders and appreciate the ‘value’ of leadership that was already present within the local and educational community. They considered how this leadership potential might best be aligned with the proposed further direction of the school. This initial assessment considered also school security.

**Behaviour of stakeholders**

Without exception all principals saw the need to ‘get the behaviours right’ before a learning environment could be appreciated. Principal B listened carefully to what teachers and children were saying:

> Principal B: Definitely, staff morale was quite low. There were tendencies of people being at each other. I think part of it was, because there was no consistency in terms of behaviour management nobody knew how to deal with the behaviour.

Principal B’s observations were followed by an attempt to understand the reasons behind the behaviour noted within the school. This in turn helped identify the steps needed to provide remedy.

The end point of this initial phase of information gathering was to provide a summary of the findings. While the process of consultation would itself signal change, its primary objective was to gather the information that would form the basis for both a diagnosis and an action plan. Table 4.5 represents a summary of the range of problems identified through analysis of the semi-structured interviews and highlights the areas of concern and the general nature of questions asked by the incoming principals. Problems have been broadly classified under the headings of curriculum, compliance, finance, attainment levels, behaviour of stakeholders and the culture and environment of the school. These together represent both the consequences of a period of decline / failure and some of the problems faced by the principal at the start of
their employment.

Table 4.5: The areas of knowledge and the nature of questions asked by principals in Phase 1 of turnaround

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Knowledge</th>
<th>Questions Asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School environment</td>
<td>What are the immediate concerns?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the costs of realising the potential of the school’s physical environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Where are the current deficits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What needs early attention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>At what level are students attaining?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current school programme?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>How much money do we have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is our immediate and medium term expenditure likely to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student attainment / Skills</td>
<td>What are the current attainment levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the reasons behind these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What skills do these children require to maximise their learning opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour and competencies of all stakeholders</td>
<td>What is the level of motivation and competency of current stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are people’s ambitions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How well do these align?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What competencies are absent in the school and how best can these be met?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While all characteristics of failure were not evident in every school, a significant and overriding consensus was found. The analysis of data provides agreement as to the apparent lack of leadership, genuine care and professionalism as well as serious behavioural problems, low expectations and poor development of curriculum and learning programmes. The school environments were poorly maintained. The quality of care reflected in the school’s physical environment was seen by all those interviewed as an important index of school achievement more generally. There is a high correlation between these independently reported observations, ERO reports and Hawk’s (2008) predictors of decline.

While the level of information achieved goes some way to validating the effort made by principals to understand the magnitude and complexity of issues faced in the process of achieving turnaround, it is what is then done with this information that determines its true
worth. Diagnosing the ‘situation’ was seen by all principals to be a difficult and demanding process. While attempting to stop decline they were challenged by the need to also make their presence felt within the school and therefore much of this work was undertaken after hours. This effort encouraged other staff members to work alongside. Board chair A explains:

Board Chair A: The staff, they’re here at the weekends – they don’t go home till 5 or 6 o’clock sometimes – they’re dedicated staff. The principal is here in the mornings. He works late at night. He’s here on the weekends. How many staff or principals would you see doing that? It’s a huge commitment.

The significant demands of information gathering and the need to assert a leadership presence required principals to complete administration tasks outside normal working hours. All principals commented that it was difficult to recruit support for this. While efficiencies were demanded the magnitude and complexity of the task meant that some work had to be done by the principal alone. Sole responsibility allowed principals to personally ensure that the limitations of all processes could be understood and outcomes trusted.

**Implement priority actions**

The principals agreed that despite robust attempts at diagnosis and planning, they were unprepared for the temporal and resource limitations that became apparent. Problems appeared much greater than initially anticipated. Financial constraints were significant in all cases:

Principal C: Yeah, money. I would have gone in saying we need two million so that I wasn’t spending all my time trying to get money from other sources – I needed money.

The scale of the problems and resource limitation that the school faced forced a prioritisation of goals within the wider vision. Recognising that the longer term intent of change was to provide an educational environment that met the community’s aspirations, it could be argued that spending money and effort on initiatives that did not improve this directly was wasteful. While acknowledging resource and financial limitations, Principal A discounted the need for financial rescue:
Principal A: The first ground-up piece of work is forging community links and to start doing what you can. That is the journey out of dependency.

Although the limitations brought about by financial constraints were acknowledged as being very significant here a leadership emphasis was placed on rallying and mobilising all stakeholders and encouraging responsibility. All principals recognised that the cost of one opportunity resulted in another being lost or postponed. The principals agreed that alone they were able to exert considerable power as to how change would be represented but that this took accurate diagnosis and careful planning.

Signal change

All principals understood that one determinant of their overall success through turnaround was their ability to demonstrate success in the early phase of turnaround. They anticipated that they needed to prove that they were worthy of and able to fulfil the leadership role as once this was achieved they would more easily be able to recruit support. In addition all principals expected and acted to realise the enquiry, goodwill and associated openness to new initiatives that was evident with their appointment. They appreciated that this was finely balanced by the apathy and resistance to change that was also apparent within the school at the time of their appointment. Within this dichotomy expectations were non-negotiable. The desire that all stakeholders act to meet their responsibilities is clearly stated by Principal C:

Principal C: We can’t have shrinking violets in our school.

Teachers and stakeholders were supported and given many opportunities to consider whether they felt able or willing to meet expectations. An example is given:

Principal C: This is a whole lot of statements – this isn’t one speech or anything – this is a whole lot of stuff that I wrote in various forms from my powhiri, from when I first started, from assembly, from the school – it’s cut and paste from a whole lot of stuff. I talked right at the beginning about working hard, being together so that we would have – and this is an example. We have to be a team – all of us working hard together.

For Principal C, expectations of collaboration and hard work were regularly communicated,
as this represented for him important but not exclusive foundations for turnaround success.

The principals worked to ensure they had identified the ‘audience’, selected and utilised a method that ensured the most appropriate communication and made certain that chosen actions would lead to success. Principals avoided early failure by choosing change actions for which they alone were primarily responsible. Many of these initiatives were seen to have other benefits beyond their initial intent of illustrating the principal’s competency, commitment to the school and an expected standard. The principals reported using a combination of strategies to signal change that included being visible and modelling behaviour, articulating a personal goal, delivering their message in a number of ways and repeating it often. These strategies are outlined below.

In addition to what was articulated, the principals conveyed their own vision and values through their actions. This included how they choose to communicate, demonstrating a high level of care and professional standards and working long hours. Principals A and B commented:

Principal A: People who think they can turn these schools around from an office are dreaming. You’ve got to get the paperwork done which is the office job – that’s why you have to work on the weekends. But actually during the daytime, you’ve got to walk around a lot.

Principal B: Walking in and out of classrooms, being visible in the playground during the break times. It was important for me to be out there so the kids knew who the leader was and my role in the school.

Principals A and B acted to ensure that their efforts were seen by others, their actions demonstrated an expected standard and that they provided opportunity for both understanding and ‘policing’. The importance of these actions and administrative demands led to the requirement of working long hours.

Articulating a personal goal served to provide a basis from which the momentum for change could be focused, allowed all stakeholders the opportunity to ensure goals were aligned and had the potential to enable confidence at all levels and facilitate recruitment. Principal A
provides an example:

Principal A: If you strive [to provide] a genuine personal voice and a real one, and struggle for all kids creating content, not just some, a by-product of it is that if you win, other people see it.

Principal A highlighted the need for a genuine and inclusive commitment to the school and students and recognised that stakeholders were most often sensitive to the leader’s intent. These attributes were central to recruiting support.

A number of methods were used by all principals to communicate their intentions for the school at the start of their employment. Principals engaged with a variety of groups, using different strategies, while also focusing on early and significant improvements in the school environment. Alongside individual engagement the principals cited using print media, meetings with local church members, staff, parents, students and community meetings to deliver their personal ‘message’. Principals stated they had one major theme and articulated this within a number of different frames.

All principals made improvement to the school’s environment a priority early in their tenure. This was undertaken to provide physical representation of their serious intent for positive change and provide an environment that would facilitate staff recruitment. Commenting on the school environment and resources, Principal C states:

Principal C: This is a huge concern and I attacked that on one front first. I thought – I’m not going to get highly competent teachers until I sort the school out. Why would someone want to come and work in a school like this? Why would a teacher want to come and work in room 25 that’s mangy, got a blackboard, no computers, no nothing, and they’re in a nice brand new room at their current school with six computers in their classroom?

For Principal C, emphasis on property improvements provided an example of leadership competency and thereby increased credibility and moved some way towards establishing a work environment into which quality staff could be recruited.
The actions reported to be associated with signalling positive change included improving the school’s physical environment, being visible for long hours in the school, modelling hard work, facilitating positive communication and excellent personal and professional behaviour. All the principals in this study acted to realise that in addition to their considerable effort and example, sustainable and positive school change would require the support of others.

**Develop a model for consultation**

Developing a shared ‘vision’ served to establish direction and priorities within this, a collective responsibility and a starting point for recruiting and mobilising support. This required consultation with all stakeholders in a manner that maximised the potential of such engagement. All principals planned for and implemented a wide consultation process that was undertaken in a manner that served to appreciate the school’s problems and recruit support for a commonly agreed solution. With the school principal acting as facilitator, open and transparent communication was encouraged in all engagements. Principal A commented:

> Principal A: There were people who wanted stuff to happen and they could simply say it – you could embrace and endorse what they said – it’s part of the core vision to begin with. I think part of turnaround is about finding solutions for people, and giving stakeholders a sense of personal voice.

Principal A acknowledged that within a given community expectations already existed and enabling a ‘personal voice’ encouraged participation in establishing common goals and finding solutions to problems. The specific role of parents in problem solving was acknowledged by Principal A:

> Principal A: We sat here with a group of parents – 12 of them – and we did the story about the ‘hole’ in the middle, outlined our desired future. We started just by describing in honest detail what it was like now. We got the parents to do that, we got the kids to do it, and we got the teachers to do it. Then we mapped the pictures on top of each other with the parents as the first group and then designed the ‘hole’ in the middle, like how we were going to get from there to there. We did it all by drawing pictures.

Quick wins for Principal A were achieved through listening carefully to parent needs and
establishing early wins by focusing on what could be achieved within resource limitations. Encouraging truthfulness and providing the opportunity for all stakeholders to understand how things were currently for each group and then to participate in constructive and collaborative planning was an essential element of this stage of turnaround:

principal A: Some stuff that we did early on, that made a really big difference, eh? That very first parent meeting that we had, when they said they wanted five things – we don’t want a budget school anymore, we want a uniform, we want a school hall, we want to get some computers into the school and we want kids to learn.

The Principal acted to facilitate, validate and cohesively integrate and feedback the information gathered. Principal A constructed an approach that valued strength and improvement:

Principal A: So whether you view it as an issue of justice or whether you view it as a strength-based approach to development as opposed to a deficit modelling one, it probably doesn’t matter. So for me there would be some issues equally in there, but for me the pursuit of equality with a focus on injustice tends to bring bitterness. And I notice when working with Maori people that the very best people to work with are those who are not pursuing a notion of equity. They are pursuing a notion of improvement. They tend to have a conciliatory way with them and they tend to not hold grudges.

Principal A promoted a forgiving approach that valued improvement rather than one that highlighted deficits and inequality. He recognised and valued the lessons learnt from the approach to problem solving adopted by other groups.

In the initial phase of turnaround these principals demonstrated and encouraged inclusiveness and openness and made every effort to recruit those previously disenfranchised back into the school. These actions also signalled an overriding intent to foster shared responsibility through a consultative process in the face of initial actions that represented a more autonomous and driven leadership style. All principals recognised the need to develop a ‘vision’ shared by all stakeholders.
Despite similarities in the overriding intent and the problems faced, variation was seen in this planning process. This reflected the principal’s level of knowledge of the school (which was greater for the one promoted from within the school), the school size and the principal’s previous experience in turnaround. The principal leading the larger school, who also had previous turnaround experience, was able to demonstrate a carefully planned and executed model for consultation that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

**PHASE 2: RE-BUILDING SCHOOL CAPACITY**

Following action to stop decline, a phase focused on rebuilding school capacity evolved. Herein principals described an emphasis on ‘re-culturing’ the school, motivating people to collective positive action and building capacity to ensure that all positive change was sustainable. This task required a wide focus, broadly classified as optimising the development of the school’s physical environment and resources, maximising the potential of positive stakeholder involvement and providing efficiencies and compliance within the school’s organisational infrastructure to support this. Managed well, these pathways combined to provide the basis for the exponential improvements hoped for in this final stage of turnaround.

The principals agreed that to establish a platform from which a positive teaching and learning environment would evolve depended on appropriate behaviours being established in the school early in the rebuilding school capacity phase. Realising the potential of the school’s human and physical resources ran parallel to this need. All expectations needed to be supported through robust management practices and policy compliance. The cultural change that was hoped for represented the culmination of all initiatives. The following section examines the evidence for and associated actions of the principals that relate directly to this requirement.

**Address behaviour school-wide**

Effective teaching and learning cannot occur in an impoverished environment where resources are exhausted by undesired behaviour. All principals were aware that the emphasis on behaviour management occurred at the expense of curriculum delivery and that, while necessary, this initial focus had to be justified:

Principal B: We did a lot of work with teachers, parents, kids that were all around
behaviour and culture. You’ve then got time and space to focus on learning. We always tried to focus on learning but the truth is you couldn’t do it that well because you were always putting out fires … We were putting out fires for years. Then we started to improve the curriculum.

While student needs were central to initiatives to improve behaviour, the principals demanded positive change and support from all stakeholders. Accountability balanced with pastoral care that ensured safety and understanding, and processes that assessed and addressed entry skill deficits and strengths, were seen as cornerstones to engagement at all levels. The greater understanding of the school’s situation attained during the initial phase of turnaround, stopping decline, enabled the principals to develop earlier initiatives in a locally and individually relevant and efficient manner and in line with wider school goals.

Because of the scale of difficulties and the recognition that some of the adverse behaviours seen within the school had roots in the community, a combined leadership effort was essential to achieve this task. This was encouraged through shared responsibility. In achieving this, the principal’s role was described by interviewees to be the modelling of expected behaviour, regular communication of expectations and demonstrating a ‘real’ consideration of the views of others through feedback, accountability, genuine care and interest, and ensuring all success was celebrated and shared. The intention of this process was to raise the confidence and aspirations of all stakeholders. One example is given:

Staff member C: Kids, especially at this age … aren’t stupid – they know what other people think of them or what they are perceived to be, and it’s getting them to overcome that hurdle, to know that because they are told that, they’re not that, and that actually they can do better despite their surroundings and despite the influence of others – and they’re beginning to get that.

Understanding the barriers created through prejudice and poverty on the aspirations and achievements of children in low decile schools is important for those aspiring to facilitate the true potential of these students.

While programmes with an emphasis on behaviour modification remained important throughout turnaround, success in this early phase was seen by principals to occur when
standards were reflected school-wide, and this allowed a shift in school resources away from behaviour management towards specific teaching and learning practices.

**Execute and review initiatives**

Rebuilding school capacity requires the implementation of the initiatives planned for during the initial phase of stopping school decline. These are outlined below.

**Establish a shared goal**

Having a shared vision was a priority for all principals. Stakeholder involvement was encouraged and promoted at all levels and solicited with the intent that widespread ownership of a shared goal would provide the benefits of greater and more effective support and a shared responsibility. The actions led by the principals with this intention began with careful, group-specific consultation that maintained throughout a community, Ministry, parental and student focus. The on-going need to balance the principal’s intentions for the school with openness to the views and aspirations of others was recognised as an important consideration in decision making and one that required careful management. The aim of consultation was to establish and report a school vision that was locally relevant and to allow the effectiveness of chosen initiatives to be reviewed. It also provided an opportunity for those previously disenfranchised to be understood and provided with a reason to stay. Efforts made to appreciate the needs of stakeholders also identified other fundamental problems. These principals sought to actively and appropriately respond to these, so every individual felt validated. Resistance to change was expected and managed. Every effort towards this shared goal was administered with the intention that positive change would occur in an integrated and complementary manner.

Considerable effort was made to create an inclusive environment. Principal A provided a reason for this focus:

Principal A: Because then you get a core of better performing children and it is across-the-board performance. They’re children that arrive at school on time, that have lunches, that go to bed at the right time at night and focus on learning. So it does change your school. So it’s not just about making these children more special than anybody else, it’s acknowledging that in communities like ours, core groups of families have a huge part to play in making a community a better place and they have to have reasons to stay. Give them the reasons to stay. Make it a
good place for them to be and typically, where you get a school that’s turning around and neighbours that are not, I would notice without fail that you would have a principal and a management team who do not recognise the importance of keeping good families safe. They’re good kids from good families and you make sure nobody picks on them. You make sure that they don’t get denigrated for being good. You make sure that the little sideways looks, the expressions and body language and the understated kinds of things that make things miserable, are not happening to them.

‘Good’ families provide an important resource in that they help determine the culture of the school and provide the opportunity for modelling of expected behaviour. To ensure that families with better performing children remained in the school, Principal A grouped them within classrooms and thereby ensured a cohort that provided support.

Resistance to change was experienced by all principals and a number of strategies were employed to minimise this. These included honest and transparent communication, careful listening and managing expectations. Many stakeholders who had adapted to the previous school environment were challenged by change. One principal found himself in conflict with a member of the board and responded forcefully using a moral argument to justify his actions.

All principals put considerable and early effort into communicating their expectations to incumbent staff. This enabled individual staff members to decide if they wished to remain in the school under the new leadership. Few staff members required attention to performance issues as most incumbent staff left of their own accord or worked hard to maintain the expectations and standards of the new leadership.

An initial emphasis placed on current staff intent allowed Principal C to quickly appreciate his staffing resources. He was able to plan for staff changes and seek applications from those he had worked with previously and whom he felt might best fit the positions as they became available. Processes were respectful and in line with expected practice. The need to manage unrealistic expectations through this process is discussed later in this chapter.
**Staffing**

The principals all recognised that their capacity to recruit and support staff would be a pivotal factor in determining the school’s success through turnaround. Staff had a central role in mediating all relationships, implementing the school’s vision and realising expected curriculum and attainment standards. A driving intention to provide excellence in teaching was shared by all principals and commonalities existed as to how this was achieved.

Careful recruitment, staff involvement in the genesis and review of school goals, clear expectations, a well understood and rigorously applied staff appraisal system, targeted professional development and operational and peer support were used by all principals to ensure staff remained open to learning, accountable and motivated. The principals sought to understand the intent, motivation and capacity of each staff member and to balance these with the requirements of the school. All principals were aware that incumbent staff may not have had the willingness or skills to meet renewed expectations and those expectations would continue to change as turnaround progressed. The principals anticipated and met some resistance to change and this was actively and carefully managed. Some teachers chose to leave:

Principal C: Every single senior teacher relinquished their position or went, by the end of my first term. We had a lot of staff leave over the course of the year, just not being able to cope, or not wanting to cope, with what’s been demanded of them.

Staff management was viewed as a time-consuming and difficult task. Staffing was complicated by the politics of change and subject to the constraints of employment law, staff availability and the changing needs of the school through turnaround. Difficulties were often compounded by the fact that once able to identify a staffing need, principals often did not have the position or resources immediately available that would allow them to recruit to meet this.

These principals had clear intentions to act in a fair and respectful manner and acknowledged that what was said of their leadership by past and present employees could affect their ability to recruit good staff in the future. Their ability to manage all staff with respect and understanding was illustrated by the fact that few staff required performance management or
disciplinary action through this period of rapid change. Both a short and long term perspective to staffing needs was necessary and this required careful planning. Principal A acknowledged how important it was to attract the right staff and integrate personnel appropriately:

Principal A: You were very intentional about who you employ and how you patch them in; how you handle the leaving and how you handle the coming; what sort of overlap you create and what sort of induction you undertake.

The principals acted to create and maintain a cooperative staff culture with a shared emphasis through both professional guidance and personal support. This continued as a long term focus for all three schools:

Staff member B: We’re all on a very similar page in terms of enthusiasm, passion and leading by example.

All principals considered the need to secure teachers able to model and manage specific behaviour. Modelling was the preferred professional development strategy employed to bring about change within classrooms. To this end, Principal C assigned two senior leaders with the title ‘Professional Learning Leaders’ with a sole role of working in class with teachers:

Principal C: Modelling has been the catalyst to try to address teacher pedagogy or competence, if you like. And the energy of all the management team has been about the modelling for teachers, about relationships and communication which is fed into the whole behaviour management improvement for the kids. So I think a lot of staff have seen that and thought, ‘well, if they’re doing that, then that’s what I can do too.’ As well as some really clear professional development for them.

Peer support helped maintain a teaching environment that focused on openness and continuous improvement. Maintaining this effort required considerable commitment. Principal B comments:

Principal B: So teachers here are very open to critique. There are an awful lot of in-class observations and a lot of modelling. Teachers go out of their own class
and go and model or go and observe.

Along with expertise in education delivery the motivation and capacity of all staff to work hard, communicate well and support others was greatly valued. The principal of school C provided further comment:

Principal C: It wasn’t always that they couldn’t teach the curriculum – it was actually attitudinal. Some of them actually would be perfectly acceptable teachers if their attitudes to the kind of work that we had to do had been appropriate. Their inability to get on with each other and the community was probably the bottom line, I think. Some of the teachers we had to try and work through things with, they could have been perfectly all right classroom teachers if they could get on with people.

The consequences of failure to follow expected practice were communicated clearly to all staff in all schools at the time of their employment. A staff member from school B and principal from school A commented:

Staff member B: When the principal employs people this is what will happen. This is how we do things. If it doesn’t suit you, don’t come, that’s fine.

Principal A: If you do choose to come here, these are the things that really are important. Not ‘this is the way it is’, but ‘this is what’s worked and this is what continues to work’.

Even when principals were clear about their expectations this did not always ensure the desired outcome. Expectations needed to be continually reinforced:

Principal C: That is always one of the questions when I appoint someone – you understand that part of the condition of employment here is – you will take key extracurricular activities. Some people don’t like that and they accept it at the time because they want the job but then they start and after a year they would leave because they didn’t like doing that. They’d come and say … ‘duty roster’ – I say,
well, that’s a condition, sorry.

Turnaround schools are subject to high degrees of change and it was acknowledged by all interviewees that working in this environment required a range of skills and certain resilience. A shift from a behavioural focus to one that provided attention to individual learning needs and achievement standards was observed in all the study schools as turnaround progressed and provides one example of such change. As the demands of the learning environment changed, principal C acknowledged that some staff would choose to leave:

Principal C (commenting on staffing mid-rebuilding school capacity): I’m pretty sure there will be some staff still that can’t cope with it and will eventually end up leaving.

Following the initial period of change that demanded an autocratic leadership style, all principals acted to realise the potential benefits of distributed and collaborative leadership within their school. Shared leadership was seen to have a number of benefits and in some cases required a new management structure to be developed within the school. Table 4.6 presents a summary of the interviewees’ comments regarding shared leadership through the latter phase of school turnaround.

Table 4.6: The benefits of distributive and collaborative leadership through turnaround as viewed by interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enables the Principals to relinquish some responsibility and hereby concentrate on other tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serves to provide competencies in the school outside the principal’s own expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decreases the likelihood of burnout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides the basis for sustainable school change through decreasing the reliance of the school on one individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for others to gain expertise in the management of school turnaround. This was seen in turn to provide benefit to the education sector more widely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinforces good practice through modelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requires a level of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requires appropriate infrastructure to enable communication and the wide understanding of expectations and responsibility</td>
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The need for all staff to fulfil a leadership role was articulated by all principals, but for principal C the establishment of an effective senior management team was regarded as an urgent priority. This need was created by the exponential increase in the number and complexity of relationships seen in larger schools and appreciated because past experience had provided principal C with insight into the risks and benefits of trying to lead alone throughout turnaround. Principal C explains:

Principal C: I had to do something with the management team first. I made sure I got the right people in the management positions to make the management team tight. Then the next step was the teachers. A core group of strong management people can convince competent teachers to do stuff.

Principal C ensured he was well supported and was able to secure competent staff in core management tasks. This was a pragmatic decision.

Great care was taken in staff recruitment. All principals saw that to work successfully in the face of the difficulties seen in a decile one school during the process of turnaround required specific attributes. All principals intentionally recruited on the basis of expertise, motivation, communication skills and personal attributes they believed best matched the needs of their community. Principal C found these attributes most often in New Zealand trained teachers:

Principal C: If you’ve got the ability to appoint a New Zealand trained teacher who is born and bred in New Zealand, be they Kiwi, be they Asian Kiwi, be they Maori-Pasifika – whatever, I’d take them.

Positive staff and student relationships were seen as a key factor in creating productive learning environments. Principals recruited staff for senior positions that had the capacity to cope with the pressures of the turnaround process. Failing schools characterised by poor resources and behavioural problems, often face difficulty recruiting excellent teachers. The principals recognised the importance of an effective recruitment policy and felt it was important that they appreciated the reasons that staff accepted positions within their schools and the need to provide on-going support to staff in line with agreed expectations. These are summarised in the following points:
• Not all staff moved to the schools for promotion or financial gain;

• The personal attributes of the principal were an important determinant in attracting good staff to the school;

• Staff anticipated that they would be well supported and encouraged in their profession through professional development and promoted as they deserved; and

• Specific recruitment strategies are required.

Success in recruitment of appropriate staffing required significant effort. Both the board chair and staff members of school B comment on the lengths and effort Principal B went to in order to secure staff:

Board chair B: He has generally employed young people and young teachers early in their career and that seems to have been successful. When I arrived here last year, 50 percent of the school was staffed by year two teachers and the teachers were highly successful teachers. He obviously employed like-minded people, as best you can, and he actively recruited at the universities throughout the country, not just in Auckland.

Over the years that he has been here, recruitment is an area that he targets. He’s successful in recruiting staff. And a lot of that in a lot of ways has to do with his personality. He will attract good staff. He’s clear about what he wants but he’s easy-going. He’s enthusiastic. He’s full of energy and life. And that attracts people to him. And a person of similar ilk is more likely to think – ‘that’s the kind of person I want to work for.’

Staff member B: We’re to a point now where he gets people ringing him.

All principals approached potential staff directly known to them or highly recommended by trusted colleagues, to fill positions within their school. Principal B sought to enhance the recruitment process through speaking at educational conferences, using and creating media opportunities and actively networking through peer groups. All principals focused on and
actively worked towards developing educational leadership from within the school’s own community. The development of an effective teaching team provided modelling for all school developments and the basis for a sustainable leadership within the school. Evidence of success with staffing was seen to be reflected in staff retention, recruitment of motivated personnel that demonstrated the required competencies and the realisation of an open, collaborative and effective teaching and learning environment that functioned to meet stakeholder aspirations.

**Curriculum**

To improve the opportunities within a teaching and learning environment that works to meet a required standard is the end focus of turnaround. This standard is determined by stakeholder aspirations and curriculum requirements. Interviewees described the curriculum development in their schools during turnaround within three frames that together represent both an outcome and a process. The first frame represents the view that the ‘curriculum’ serves to provide a ‘wrap-around’ for efforts directed at enhancing teaching and learning. This framework promotes a school-wide focus, encourages whole school integration and collaboration and the benefits of these. While not by any means exclusive of the first, the second frame enables the selection of a curriculum focus that inspires, motivates and reflects the aspirations of the community in which the students live. The third outlines the school’s obligations under Ministry contract, the endpoint of which could be meeting or improving upon National Standards in numeracy and literacy. ‘Success’ within each frame was required by all principals.

‘Wrap-around’ and relevant curriculum programs provided both direction and efficiencies and the opportunity to reinforce important messages. This curriculum strategy, with its underlying obligations, was widely promoted by all three principals throughout turnaround. The recognised need to build a school’s culture from the foundations of ‘good behaviour’ to one where students realised their capacity to learn and were motivated to do so, was the basis for this decision. Principals acknowledged that the community from which their students came had a unique character, and that engagement in learning depended on identifying a ‘hook’ relevant to these students.

School A intentionally promoted student interest in learning with the introduction of information communication technology. Oral language was developed using podcasts.
School B used a local hip hop dance group to generate motivation and focus and School C linked behaviour management to popular music to further promote the ‘moving on up’ theme adopted as part of their behaviour management programme. School C utilised gardening activities linked to literacy and numeracy programs to enhance skills and motivation. A staff member from school C explains:

Staff member C: Grounding it [the curriculum] in something practical. So for me, I realised once we’d started to build a garden up at the top of the school and they saw how what they were doing theoretically related to that – suddenly, they were able to grasp the theory and they were more interested in the theory so when we came to build the edible gardens and designed those, they knew what they were doing and they were really into it. So all of the maths kind of came through and that was fine. But to start with, it was just too abstract. So really, grounding stuff – it’s not rocket science, but in a practical context and not just sit down and tell them to turn to page 24 – this is what we’re going to do today, it’s variety.

In all schools there was an emphasis, in the initial phase of school recovery, on programmes that enhanced student interest. Numeracy and literacy requirements were then integrated into these activities:

Principal B: At the moment it runs so that they do have literacy and numeracy lessons, etc, but it’s not meant to be in that little box. So what you’re doing currently to kick-start this is to use the arts and the focus – the context for study around the arts – to kick-start numeracy and literacy.

All principals used a variety of tools that included popular culture, technology, art and horticulture to motivate and re-engage children in learning.

The development of the initial two frames was a priority early in rebuilding school capacity and resources were provided to support this emphasis. It was within a developing culture of support, integration, cooperation, motivation and success in learning that the third frame evolved. Ongoing deficits in literacy and numeracy were acknowledged and in the latter stages of turnaround resources focused on improving these through specific focus. Measuring success was a requirement. Early measurement provided the opportunity to demonstrate
improvement and this became a significant motivator in the latter stages of turnaround when the inertia generated by the big early wins slowed. The value of measurement was seen to lie in its consequent action rather than the measurement itself.

Other considerations

Building capacity
All the principals’ actions functioned to build capacity within the school in an effort to ensure that the positive changes made were continued, incremental and sustainable. The school’s capacity was balanced between the fiscal, personnel and physical resources available and the demands placed upon these. The leadership requirements of this phase were to balance the momentum of positive change with the possibility that this itself could also overwhelm the capacity of the school. This balance was achieved through a number of actions, namely:

- Understanding the reasons for problems before solutions were sought;
- Full consultation prior to implementation of programmes;
- Ensuring all parties affected by change understood the intent of the intervention;
- Providing resources to support interventions;
- Driving interventions, but with the pace of change considered;
- Addressing unanticipated outcomes of initiatives in a timely and appropriate way; and
- Ensuring actions were seen to be ‘fair’.

Principal A was aware that the pace of change had to be well managed for change initiatives to succeed:

Principal A: So you add to it the fact that as you improve the main specific content knowledge and you improve pedagogy, you can only crank the machine up so far before you start making people miserable.
The principals realised that change, if poorly managed, had the potential to significantly and negatively impact on people and their capacity to continue. They acted to carefully regulate the pace and unanticipated consequences of change, identify school needs and recruit in line with required competencies, support staff and balance the day-to-day requirements of the school while maintaining focus on long term goals and motivation. This was achieved by the principals through careful planning, ongoing risk assessment and management.

**Ensure motivation**

Stakeholder interest was ensured in the initial stage of turnaround through ‘goodwill’ associated with the appointment of a new leader and the ‘quick wins’ associated with staffing changes and improvement in the school grounds. Once appreciated, these events provided limited potential to deliver on-going motivation and new motivators had to be found. While regulating change to allow initiatives to embed, the principals had to work hard to provide inspiration and encouragement. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to demonstrate success and provide motivation in the latter stages of turnaround, where building capacity within the school remained the fundamental focus. This opportunity required a baseline of earlier and accurate measurement. All schools were able to provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence of improvement. Quantitative data represented by roll growth, absenteeism, incident reporting, achievement data and related surveys was presented with an emphasis on incremental improvement rather than achievement against National Standards, which principals saw as a longer term goal. The return to a three-yearly reporting cycle and positive ERO reporting were regarded as measures of success and represented significant milestones for these schools.

**Address ERO concerns**

Recognising that part of the public perception of their school was shaped through ERO reports, the principals saw that by responding to ERO’s ‘demands’ they would facilitate positive reporting and the removal of the school from a punitive reporting cycle. All principals, though, commented that consideration of school ‘requirements’ as outlined by ERO needed to be maintained in balance with those viewed as most important by the principal and school community and the current capacity of the school. The strengths and limitations of ERO reports in providing a ‘complete picture’ of the school were also acknowledged.
**Finance financial status and viability**

All principals agreed that sound financial knowledge was a skill fundamental to their ability to successfully lead turnaround. This enabled a complete understanding of the school’s liabilities and funding projections and allowed deficits to be identified and managed. Most significantly, it gave these principals the confidence to manage the school’s finances outside expected practice. Principal C’s comments reinforced the need for financial expertise:

Principal C: I think it’s crucial that you have financial knowledge because it’s the financial stuff that allows you to be innovative. Because if you’re good with money you can be creative and you should be. I would hate to be a principal who didn’t have good money knowledge. It must be very hard for them.

Financial knowledge is critical as it enables a confidence in managing school funds and protects both the school and its managers. All principals recognised their obligation to meet the fundamental requirements of ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ and yet all felt their schools were poorly placed to undertake the remedial work that was required through turnaround. All commented on the relative lack of human and financial resources to undertake the changes that were necessary to expedite turnaround.

**Address deficits in the physical environment**

Establishing a cared-for, contemporary and comfortable teaching and learning environment was seen as a priority by all interviewees through the second phase of turnaround. The initiatives undertaken by two principals in the initial phase to achieve this were adopted in this latter phase by the third. All principals continued this emphasis as a collective school-wide effort alongside the development of other initiatives.

**Address board function**

While all principals saw a well-functioning board as an essential part of developing a model of sustainable improvement for their school, the need to provide significant support to the board during turnaround was viewed variably. Principal C spent considerable effort aligning and educating the board:

Board chair C: He [the principal] was very transparent over policies which none of us knew about anyway. We had very long board meetings and we got
professional development through the principal, who explained things. We just went through things slowly.

Another principal viewed the relative lack of interest and expertise in the incumbent board as an advantage, as it allowed him the freedom to act quickly and without interference. The level of contribution of board members and the methods of engagement employed were variable:

Principal A: So we’ve had a lot of little meetings and regular conversations [with the board chair] during those years, of what was happening between staff or around staff, eh? She’d come and say to me – ‘this and that’s going on’ and we would talk, and decide who was going to do what. Hardly any of it has been on paper.

Principal A’s low-key, collaborative and informing approach to the school board varied from the autocratic relationship described by Principal C. The need identified by all principals to address the school board’s deficits in skill and competencies during a time when the demands of ‘turnaround’ itself are considerable is an important consideration.

THE LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TURNAROUND LEADERS

It is the purpose of this section to describe the leadership characteristics that are seen by the board chair, a staff member and the principal to be most important in determining the principal’s success in leading turnaround. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.7.

Included in all instances is reference to personality, inclusiveness and high motivation underwritten by a level of care, passion or morality. Because of the small number of interviewees only limited insight can be gained from Table 4.7. Examining the differences within and between groups, interviewees placed variable emphasis on the characteristics described. Table 4.7 provides examples of the different perspectives people hold, depending on their position within the school and also the possible impact of change over time and the variable demands relating to school size. All interviewees from School C, closer in time to the period of turnaround, placed emphasis also on management skills. This school was also the
largest of the three schools.

Table 4.7: Leadership characteristics viewed by each group of interviewees to be most significant determinants of principal success in leading turnaround

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong relationship and management skills.</td>
<td>Real concern for children.</td>
<td>Vision and drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>Ability to mix with all ethnicities.</td>
<td>Strong work ethic.</td>
<td>Transparent approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>chair</td>
<td>Cares about people and children.</td>
<td>Moral leadership.</td>
<td>Honest and up front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent communication skills.</td>
<td>Strong sense of community.</td>
<td>Energetic and vibrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilient, doesn’t give up.</td>
<td>Out and about the school.</td>
<td>Cares about the staff and children</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24/7 principal.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Energy and drive.</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Took time to understood the community's needs</td>
<td>Passion and grit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard working</td>
<td>Self driven</td>
<td>Emotional intelligent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loves the job</td>
<td>Dedicated, committed and loyal</td>
<td>Change knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Willingness to learn and ask for help</td>
<td>Servant leadership</td>
<td>Personality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community understanding</td>
<td>Moral calling</td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Empathetic to the needs of the children</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Ability to read a situation</td>
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While the personal attributes of the principal were given greater emphasis overall and were
seen by all interviewees to represent the essence of effective leadership through successful turnaround, this was particularly noted in the case of the board chairs. Only one board chair cited management skills as important. All board chairs saw a caring nature, excellent communication skills and the capacity to work hard as important. Staff members noted high standards, ability to model expected behaviour and a ‘people centred’ approach as most relevant. Staff also emphasised the principal’s capacity to keep going and work in a manner that is goal-oriented and supports others to maximise their potential. The principals included descriptions of level of care but differ from other groups in that there was a greater emphasis on skills and knowledge: the adjectival terminology used by principals – including ‘grit’, ‘self-driven’, ‘dedicated’, ‘working the problem’ – provide description of the effort they see as required to succeed in this task. The principals shared the view that it was their ability to work hard, communicate well and care that underpinned their success, but they placed considerably more emphasis on their management skills than any other group. Evidence to support the summary of the leadership characteristics follows.

Principal A identified that solutions to problems lay with the community and describes leadership as service. His work effort is underwritten by this strong ethos and this, along with hard work and professional knowledge, was seen as the basis for his effectiveness in the role of turnaround leader:

   Principal A: Often the gifts for improvement are in the community already. I think leadership is about finding solutions for people, listening to people really carefully and then reconstructing the solution, driving that solution as hard as you can and sticking at it. Giving people a sense of personal voice, connectedness, and authenticity and becoming creators of content. For our school it’s a journey out of dependency to become interdependent. I would describe leadership as service. The fundamental job of motivating, leading, listening, empowering and making stuff happen hasn’t changed. It’s about the community. It helps if you join the community and it works if you can help the community to realise their goals. If you don’t understand the fabric of the community a whole lot of stuff is difficult to do.

   Although working in this wider framework, Principal A’s primary focus continued to be optimising the education opportunities for students. Staff member A confirmed his
principal’s community influence and the effort made to maintain this. His capacity to maintain open and excellent relationships was seen as central to his success:

Staff member A: He was just very good with people in this community. He lived locally, was at the local church, so his influence was spread wide. And he is a people person. If he wasn’t in his office, he was helping out. He would run camps. People would see that the school was no longer scary. He would be out at the letter box meeting and greeting the parents. He respects all people regardless of their role in the school. As a parent you were made to feel welcome and it was all about word of mouth, the community grapevine. We were allowed into classrooms and the young teachers were amazing. The Polynesians here all attend church, so opening up with a prayer at school – a blessing – he becomes one of us. He stands for what he says, walks the talk, great faith and passion, trustworthiness and reliability. He is fair, not a snap decision maker, he allows for a good discussion and has very high morals.

Like staff, the principals placed value on their personal characteristics that enabled them to empower others. Interviews revealed an emphasis on relationships with four broad groups that included parents, staff, students and the wider school community. A balance between inclusiveness and getting the job done was outlined by Principal B:

Principal B: I like to think that I’m collaborative. I like to get other people’s ideas. But in saying that, I can be hard-nosed about things as well. One of the things that I often say to the Team Leaders is, ‘if it’s going to benefit or make a difference to student achievement or to students themselves, then let’s try it.’

While the principals maintained direct focus and employed strategies known to work, the desire to remain inclusive determined a need to adopt practices suggested by other groups that might carry some risk. A cycle of implementation and review of all efforts ensured that progress was that the school continued what was working and modified or abandoned those initiatives that were not.

Staff member B appreciated the leadership characteristics of the principal that enabled him to
attract good staff:

Staff member B: He’s clear about what he wants but he’s easy-going. He’s enthusiastic. He’s full of energy and life and that attracts people to him. A person of similar ilk is more likely to think – that’s the kind of person I want to work for.

The value of good collegial relationships and having a skilled workforce in a demanding and resource-limited work environment was not underestimated by staff member B. He regarded the principal’s attitude to his work as both inspirational and motivating.

Key descriptive terms and concepts used by staff and board chairs to described the principals included loving, good listener, honest, caring, empathetic, compassionate, resilient, idealistic, hard-working, energetic, willing to learn, committed and emotionally intelligent and moral. Neither staff members nor board chairs mentioned leadership or curriculum knowledge, though important emphasis was placed on expertise and change management skills. No judgement is made as to whether this is because this knowledge is assumed to be present, because it appeared less relevant to them, or because they were unaware of its importance. This requires further understanding, as it is relevant to principal effectiveness.

SUMMARY

School failure has been described in three New Zealand primary schools. It is represented at a very fundamental level by a lack of care and a community’s loss of confidence in a school. The schools and their students lay victim to everyone. The appointment of a new principal is shown to be pivotal in changing the fortunes of these schools. The leader’s role within the process of school turnaround was described within two phases. The first broadly functions to ensure that an accurate diagnosis of the school’s problems is made, factors driving decline are mitigated and planning is undertaken. The second phase functions to provide the school with the capacity to meet the expectations of stakeholders and give them reason to stay. Evidence was presented that outlined the requirements of each phase and the associated actions of the principal undertaken to meet these. Success through turnaround required the principals to accurately understand each problem and carefully plan, implement and review initiatives. They acknowledged that their efforts alone would be insufficient to ensure school effectiveness and that success was dependent on their ability to engage and motivate all stakeholders towards a collective positive goal, while encouraging responsibility and accountability. This
process required a collective goal and actions in line with this, along with the development of supporting management practices and organisational infrastructure. The difficulties faced in achieving school success were outlined.

The characteristics of these principals have been described. While descriptions vary in emphasis considerable value is placed on the principals’ personal characteristics that demonstrate a high level of care and that enable them to get the job done while also making people feel that they are valued and at the centre of things. These characteristics include the principals’ capacity to work hard and inclusively, their capacity to act responsibly, truthfully and with enthusiasm and their professional knowledge and skills. These represented a set of core requirements and secured the support of others. This section has described a process where commonalities exist. However, interpretation is limited by a lack of control schools and the small sample size. It does provide insight into the considerations behind, and the desired consequences of, the actions of three successful turnaround principals. This begins the difficult task of understanding of how leadership success might best be facilitated.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

OVERVIEW

The requirement for strong leadership as a pre-requisite to turnaround success is highlighted by many turnaround authors, for example Duke (2010) and Day et al (2010). Within the schools examined, leadership capacity was demonstrated by the ability of principals to understand, translate, focus, implement initiatives and review outcomes. While such challenges are common to all schools these principals achieved success from an overwhelming situation characterised by depleted and limited resources, disconnect and lack of care, multiple demands and unrealistic and/or poorly aligned aspirations. These constraints increase exponentially the potential for misunderstanding and dysfunction yet are factors that were successfully negotiated by these principals. This discussion reviews school turnaround and outlines the leadership function of three successful principals through this change process. The four research questions provide the framework for this discussion.

What process of turnaround can be identified?

Appreciation of the factors that underwrite a principal’s effectiveness requires an understanding of the task at hand. It is with this intent that the process of school turnaround will be examined. This discussion begins by considering the influences, endpoints and the process of school turnaround itself.

All interviewees were able to recognise school failure and confirmed the pervasive presence within their school of Hawk’s (2008) key predictors of decline. These characteristics and the evaluation and intervention framework imposed upon these schools at the point of failure are very similar to those outlined by Collins (2009), Kanter (2003) and Kotter (2007) in other organisations where failure is evident. The socio-psychological process of failure described by these authors represents a continuum, similar to that outlined by interviewees in this study.

The role of internal and external influences in the process of school decline and failure are better understood than those of school recovery. The external influences seen as important
Determinants of school failure and recovery are outlined below. Social deprivation with its associated problems encompasses the majority of factors that contribute to school decline. The schools in this study drew students from low socioeconomic communities and the impact of adverse external influences was highlighted by all interviewees. Principal A described his school at the start of his employment as one that had become a victim to everyone. This description according to Duncan-Andrade (2008) and the National Audit Office (2006) portrays a situation of disempowerment, neglect and abuse and one that mirrors that of failed schools internationally.

The governance and management infrastructure of Tomorrow’s Schools (McCauley & Roddick, 2001) implies a local responsibility for school decline and failure. Yet despite regular school reviews and reporting of systemic and longstanding difficulties, action capable of averting decline were absent and failure well entrenched. Effective change was only seen following the Ministry of Education’s action to provide supplementary support to boards and/or a change in the school principal. This action places fundamental responsibility for school failure with the Ministry of Education. Post-employment, the principals in this study considered the Ministry of Education’s actions as either unhelpful, too little too late or as so poorly defined that offers of support could not be regarded with certainty. This situation is confusing at best and requires clarification for all stakeholders. McCauley and Roddick (2001) highlight the need for both a top down and bottom up approach to educational problems. Murphy and Meyers (2008b) assert that this approach will be most effective if it begins with a comprehensive needs analysis involving all stakeholders.

All principals in this study could state the outcomes and reasons for decline. Leaders in the research of educational turnaround, such as Duke (2010), state that understanding decline is vital for both those leading efforts to prevent and reverse its continuum. Hawk (2008) supports this view and adds that that failure to halt decline or address failure at all levels is due to the transfer of effectiveness knowledge into strategies to ‘fix’ struggling schools. Hawk’s work stands alone in specifically considering school decline in New Zealand.

The principals in this research were unable to access information that accurately reflected the position of their school from either ERO reports, the Board or Ministry of Education personnel. The consequences of these findings for the principals in this study were variable. Feelings of isolation, frustration and anger, abandonment and a lack of trust were finely
balanced with the acknowledged and welcome freedom to act, lack of encumbrance and additional and untimely demands that would come with greater Ministry of Education involvement. Wrigley’s (2003) work supports the need for robust assessment models sensitive to the unique environments of school ineffectiveness and advocates for both transparency and truth.

While all three principals accepted the accountability and responsibility of their own leadership task and emphasised a shared solution, they approached the question of wider responsibility from different viewpoints. Principal C asked for specific support from the Ministry of Education and Principal B was motivated to respond to ERO recommendations. Principal A worked within a framework that functioned to move his school from ‘state dependency to interdependency’ and viewed Ministry of Education intervention to be a potentially adverse influence to sustainable improvement. The drivers for the different viewpoints of these principals were given as past experience, school size, expectations established by the Ministry of Education and the belief that if positive change is to be sustained it must find its roots within the community. How the principal’s personal views on the value of external intervention permeated the school’s progress through turnaround requires further understanding. All change solutions according to Fullan (2006) face this too-tight too-loose dilemma. Fullan asserts that you cannot force order and that patterns emerge over time (complexity theory). The solution is to find the right blend and this is context driven.

The impact of ERO on the process of school decline, failure and turnaround requires greater consideration and this view is supported by the work of Hawk (2008) and Spreng (2005). It is evident that ERO understood the problems in these schools and some interventions were adopted on their recommendation. However when comparing both ERO reports and interview transcripts that describe the school at a point of failure, this research demonstrates considerable mismatch between both the language used and descriptors of the school. ERO reports tend to infer problems (the principal’s absence from the school and need for professional development), and despite increased reporting cycles the reports far underestimated the leadership deficit and problems as described by interviewees. Through school turnaround ERO assessments failed to account for the considerable success described by stakeholders that occurred below the ‘bottom line’ (as defined by the applied definitions of school effectiveness). In-depth information useful to principals was missed in
assessments or not included in reporting. Further to this, despite the school continuing to function below expected standards following the appointment of the new principal, ERO commented on the capacity of strong leadership and positive change. Whatever model of evaluation is used, both evidence and comment are only as useful as the interventions that follow. In the three study schools ERO’s recommendations were not sufficient to avert decline and failure. Once failure was reached a unique model was imposed upon the school. ERO’s role within this model requires further consideration. Spreng (2005) argues that ERO is a government agency and that government response is constrained to a change in school systems as opposed to intervening in an individual failing school.

Board dysfunction was evident in all the study schools. This problem and the employer-employee relationship between the principal and board added to the vulnerability of all parties that already existed. The principals in this study saw their role in supporting school governance within the school variably. This was viewed as either a worthy exercise that contributed to the long-term sustainability of the school (functioning to help share responsibility and define goals), or a heart-breaking waste of time that distracted the principal from the ‘real’ task at hand. Despite this disparity of views, in all cases the principals undertook the responsibility of board training. There is no literature that specifically considers the role of the board through school turnaround however some findings from educational research are relevant to the board’s role.

Murphy and Meyers (2008b) promote a needs analysis that involves all stakeholders; it is only when this is achieved that the requirements of leadership will be widely understood. Hassel and Hassel (2005) and Hassel et al. (2008) state that schools need to employ based on the competencies required for turnaround. These authors outline deficits and barriers to positive change that include failure of stakeholders to be represented and realise their responsibility, and inadequate board and staff competencies (including whether or not boards are capable of employing for turnaround leadership). These authors also acknowledge that failure can arise because people in positions of power may not have the information required, do not know what to do or the lack resources to do so. The relative isolation and the lack of wider leadership and accountability described in this research mirrors the situation seen in many failing organisations (Collins, 2009; Kanter, 2003).

When considering the three research schools, all the above factors highlight a deficit in the
educational ethos and infrastructure within which they function and from which support is not unreasonably expected. Clarification of the roles and responsibilities and ultimately an avoidant approach to decline and failure is universally favoured.

In addition to issues of context, responsibility and information sharing, considerations outlined in this research relevant to the appointment of the three principals and thereby the process of turnaround, include their availability, past experience, competency - which was most often untested - and personal characteristics. While the value of critical leadership is widely acknowledged (Codd, 1989) little effort has been made to either identify the required competencies of these individuals, as outlined by Hassel et al. (2008), or match these with the unique requirements of a particular failed school. This is relevant to both first-time and experienced principals. Murphy and Meyers (2008b) remind us that the implications of recurrent failure are considerable. The desire to identify the ‘right’ leader and also help mitigate the risk of failure in this role is complicated by a number of factors. These include the fact that no two schools are alike and that principal leaders can only protect their school from some of the adverse affects of deprivation.

The way school success is defined has implications for both individuals and institutions. The achievement of school standards against national curriculum, along with positive ERO reporting, popularly defines school success in New Zealand (Spreng, 2005). In this research, success through turnaround was, alternatively but not exclusively, defined internally within these schools as that point where there was both positive stakeholder support and a constructive alignment between the aspirations and potential of all stakeholders. Within this environment a primary and inherent focus on maximising student learning potential underwrote all actions of the three principals. This internally accepted definition served to both define success and facilitate a pathway of school recovery that over time would best ensure that the criteria of school effectiveness were met. The above definition of school success does not acknowledge many factors that underwrite success or provide a given or acceptable standard. According to Fullan (2007), and supported by the principals in this study, all definitions of success and the processes that support positive change rely on stakeholder aspirations to be incentivising and aligned with actions that optimise learning outcomes. This discussion now moves to consider the process of turnaround itself.

Turnaround can be described by its requirements, the interventions undertaken,
the nature of the change observed or a combination of the above. While none provide a recipe for a failsafe, prescriptive, stepwise approach to school turnaround that is easily transportable, all provide different and useful perspectives.

A biphasic process of turnaround was outlined by interviewees in this study. The duration of the initial phase is measured in months and sees a period of ‘quick wins’, information gathering, diagnosis and planning along with effort to improve school-wide behaviour in readiness for learning. During this phase leaders are required to demonstrate that they were capable and therefore worthy of the leadership role and that positive change was intended. Understanding the reasons for a school’s decline was universally seen by this study’s participants to represent a valid starting point for accurate diagnosis, establishing options for resolution and planning a way forward. This problem-solving strategy mirrors that advocated by Murphy and Meyers (2008b) and represents the overriding modus operandi of the successful leaders in this study.

In the second phase of rebuilding school capacity, specific actions of the three principals in this study focused on re-culturing the school and those that ensured all positive change was incremental, sustained and relevant to the end goal. During this latter phase the three principals carefully developed a stepwise integration of school programmes to ensure a critical mass of good decisions sufficient to overcome the impetus of failure. They recognised that the increasing momentum of change sought for during phase two (however positive) carried a risk of overwhelming the school. Regulating the scope and slowing the range and pace of change was necessary to allow for phase requirements and fiscal, human and physical resources to catch up and positive gains to be consolidated. Ensuing positive progress relied on these basic functions and ultimately ensured school success as defined by models of effectiveness. This pathway followed that outlined for effective change by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) and Hassel et al. (2008) and align well with those described within Kotter’s (2007) eight-stage model for organisational change. Leithwood et al. (2010) and Murphy and Meyers (2008b), support the view that both organisational and student success are requirements of sustainable and positive school change.

The rapid change seen in the study schools, in the initial period of turnaround was followed by a period of incremental change. This pattern is not seen in the school improvement model and highlights an important difference. The rate and pace described within each
turnaround phase validates and necessitates the early autocratic and latter distributive leadership style adopted by the principals in this study. This finding aligns to the work of Duke’s (2010) differentiated leadership and Day’s (2011; Day et al., 2010) layered leadership.

There is considerable consensus between the function and requirement of the initial phase of turnaround as outlined in this study and other temporal models (Hassel et al., 2008; Wang, 2007). While in practice the principals in this study described tasks constructed and sequenced in line with this modelling, the Calkins et al. (2007) child-centred ecological model fits best with the overriding approach that traversed all phases. This model emphasises the central importance of students and the need for a collective effort to achieve turnaround success. These tenets were represented in both an operational and philosophical sense within the schools in this study and provided the direction required when difficult decisions had to be made. The central importance of people is supported by Murphy and Meyers (2008b) and is promoted by these authors as the best way to ensure sustainable change.

Acknowledging an end phase within turnaround that ensures that positive change is sustained has received variable support. The principals interviewed in this study were reluctant to define the time period to sustainable success but indicated that it was considerably longer than three to five years. Wang (2007) states that school turnaround can be achieved within two years. Like others that support this view, for example Fullan (2006), Wang’s endpoint to turnaround is a period of school improvement following a phase of rapid change. Many authors advocate the extension of this period to include a measured time where incremental change slows and sustainable change is ensured (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Stoll, 2011). Inclusion of this time frame emphasises the need for positive change to become part of the school’s default culture. The time and phases approach as described by the principals in this research and by the above authors aligns with that espoused by Huy and Mintzberg (2003) as dramatic, systematic and organic change.

Both the descriptions and modelling of school failure and turnaround represent a pathway of ineffectiveness through to effectiveness that is of considerable duration, is complex, hungry (Gronn, 2003) and multifarious. The principals in this study worked within a framework that fits well within a phase (Harris et al., 2010; Huy & Mintzberg, 2003; Murphy & Meyers, 2009) and ecological construct (Calkins et al., 2007); both perspectives provide valid insight
into the actions and intent of successful turnaround leaders and the framework within which they work.

**How do principals address decline and failure through turnaround?**

The role and responsibility of school principals through turnaround has been usefully described by Harris et al (2010), within four spheres; namely developing people, setting direction, pedagogy and organisational design. While there is no research to date that correlates specific factors with leadership success through turnaround, those seen to be integral to the effectiveness of the leaders is this study are cited as an acceptance by stakeholders, appreciation and knowledge of each of these spheres (or the capacity to recognise deficits and up skill or recruit to meet these), the ability to realise cultural change (and ensure this) and the capacity to keep going. Specific actions were in line with the long term goal of optimising student learning was underwritten by positive change in the level of care. All three principals in this study worked to potentiate the benefits and decrease the risks of every interaction. The following section highlights a number of these actions and the strategies employed to support them.

The capacity to adopt different styles of leadership enabled the flexibility required by the three principals in this study. A general shift from an early autocratic to a later distributive emphasis was observed. Early actions saw principals concentrate their efforts on those internal factors over which they could exert the most personal control yet represented the boldest and most overt indicator of positive change - the quick wins. This signalled their capacity and intention as leader which, along with establishing expectations and diagnosing the school’s problems, were seen as the most urgent short term goals. One principal felt his desire to impart his opinion and summarise and direct those of others to be both necessary and sometimes disingenuous. The three principals were mindful of balancing the risk of disabling function by autocratic leadership, primary focus on short term goals, spreading the message too thinly or failing to respond to multiple and fragmented demands. As turnaround progressed, this earlier approach to problem solving was integrated into the distributive forms of leadership styles that was modelled and encouraged throughout the school. This parallels the progression of turnaround leadership practices outlined by Duke (2010), Spillane and Diamond (2007) and Day (2011).
The degree to which the research principals applied prescribed change management strategies or relied on innate knowledge and experience is not considered in this research. This requires further understanding. The style of the principals in this research was most closely aligned with Duke’s (2010) differentiated leadership, Day’s (2011) layered leadership and Hargreaves’ (2011) fusion leadership. These authors avoid specific leadership styles and advocate the adoption of leadership actions to meet the focus and phase of turnaround.

The cultural change required for successful school turnaround was facilitated by the principals in this research through a range of strategies. Understanding through needs analysis and communication were central to this function. Consultation was undertaken very intentionally to enable a robust understanding, cross check findings, ensure participation, shared goals and decrease the risk of segregation and alienation. This was promoted as a two way process. Within the context of these failed schools some students, teachers and board members were seen to have invested considerable effort to survive or advance within that very context and, lacking skills and motivation, found adjusting to changing expectations difficult. The expertise of the three principals in this study was demonstrated through their ability to understand this and develop a goal that satisfied a range of stakeholders. Emphasis on actions that secured the psychological safety of all stakeholders laid the foundation for re-culturing the school. These actions included formal and informal conversations that communicated expectations and aspirations and balanced this with empathy and offers of support. The principals worked to ensure individuals were aware of expectations and in light of this their motivation and capacity were examined along with their openness to change. The psycho-social spinoffs of each action were acknowledged and diligently addressed. Exit from and entry into the school was managed with considerable care. These practices helped people to see things differently, recruited support and enabled motivation. This approach fully aligns to that of Kotter’s (2007) eight stage model for organisational change.

The problems outlined for stakeholders challenged by change described within this study and the strategies undertaken by the principals to best remedy these, were strikingly similar to those described internationally (Calkins et al., 2007). As a prescription of school success, Wrigley (2003) outlines the need to create a culture of empowerment. Fullan (2006) and Barber (1998) see strong accountability and support during periods where a school functions within the ineffectiveness domain as foundations of school-wide and academic success and encourage stakeholders to accept responsibility for school failure and support
schools and their leaders during turnaround. Currently in New Zealand there is no literature that specifically considers turnaround from the perspective of students, parents or board members.

All principals in this study understood that direction setting was central to ensuring turnaround success. The principals in this research successfully led this process by controlling change within given constraints by way of standards, careful selection and prioritisation of initiatives and resource allocation. Within this they demonstrated a flexibility underpinned by truth and transparency, a continued cycle of review and open and combined effort. Established long and short term goals were seen to be most powerful if closely aligned. Yet these functioned independently to demonstrate intent, standards and success. Goals were seen to represent important motivation tools and considerable effort was made to retain positive influence within the school. Once positive initiatives were successfully embedded and resources were available, the principal would then lift the aspirations of the school and the accountability that ensured these. Principals felt that difficult decisions were made easier if the long term intent was balanced against the short term ‘wins’. This also encouraged mindfulness that meaningful turnaround takes time. Progress achieved through initiatives, interwoven in a stepwise fashion towards a certain goal, describes the actions of these principals and emulates that described and promoted by Stoll and Myers (1998).

The principals in this study minimised risk and maximised the potential for cohesive action towards improvement by offering limited solutions to problems. Limiting options ensured the necessary coordination of initiatives and maintained direction towards an established goal. Facilitating choice was carefully balanced with encouraging personal responsibility and accountability. While it was stated that these principals seldom made mistakes they were able to stop that which was not working and interviewees respected them for this capacity. The actions described above compare favourably with Cardno and Piggot-Irvine’s (1996) problem-resolving action research model and the actions fit well with Hassel et al.’s (2008) description of the competencies and actions of turnaround leaders as problem solving (analytical and conceptual thinking), driving for results (planning), influencing others (team leadership) and showing confidence to lead (self-confidence). The strategies adopted are in line with those described by Murphy and Meyers (2008b) as requirements of leadership through a process of cultural change. However much detail as to how this change is best
achieved is missing from the school turnaround literature.

A range of strategies were used by the principals in this study to develop, promote and combine initiatives. The ability to ensure a connectedness between initiatives promoted the incremental improvement hoped for in the latter stages of turnaround. This duality was reflected through the principal’s efforts to ensure progress occurred in line with the school’s long term goals yet acknowledged the importance of inspiration, motivation and calculated risks. Resources, along with the interconnectedness of the task and the variation in the needs and demands of stakeholders determined the strategies most appropriate to achieve a desired function. Student learning practices and curriculum development within each of the schools in this study provide examples of integration and careful resource management. Stoll acknowledges the complexity of this approach and describes its success as a professional learning community, while Codd (1989) prefers a critical theory approach to learning (opening possibilities by exploring unexamined assumptions) with leaders standing back and using critical reflection in designing new actions. Both approaches require the turnaround leader to look at their situation through many lenses (Bolman & Deal, 2003) in what Hopkins (2011) describes as systems thinking.

When considering learning specifically, five understandings were realised within the research schools. All required a high level of curriculum understanding by the leaders of change. Firstly, a standard of behaviour and motivation for all stakeholders was a requirement of good learning practice. Secondly, programmes that showed students that they could learn and that it was fun addressed many of the initial barriers to learning seen within a failing school. Finding a ‘hook’ for each student was undertaken by offering a mix of cultures and vehicles of delivery (ICT, dance and gardening programs). These practices compare well with those described and advocated internationally in similar settings by authors such as Darling-Hammond (1997) and Duke (2010). While supporting these initiatives, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) and Tomlinson (1999) describe and advocate a process of critical pedagogy in which curriculum is first and foremost aligned with the cultural and pastoral needs of students. This, they believe, provides ownership and encourages engagement, self confidence and worth and these in turn represent the prerequisites of academic achievement. Chenoweth (2009a, 2009b) reinforces these sentiments and adds that the children who struggle the most should have the best teachers and the best instruction.
Measurement was used by all the principals in this research to demonstrate the requirement for wide stakeholder support, assess progress and as a motivation tool. Measurement did not modify medium to long term attainment expectations. Results and change over time were used to understand individuals, provide encouragement, realistic expectations and a responsive curriculum delivery. It was a considerable challenge to balance both the skills and motivation of students against the national curriculum standards required by the wider socio-political context in which these schools exist. Determining school success in terms of test scores ignores the other dimensions of education and the considerable intellectual achievement which is not easily quantifiable. These principals acted to support this view, identified other criteria for improvement and rated success on achievement of these within the turnaround period. This strategy is promoted by other turnaround scholars who also write about school improvement, for example Fullan (2006, 2007) and Duncan–Andrade and Morrell (2008). Calkins et al. (2007), commenting on schools within the United States of America, supports the function of National Standards as a means of highlighting struggling schools in need of intervention. These authors highlight the variance in defining success as outlined by Stoll and Meyers (1998).

The central role of teachers in school turnaround was clearly represented by the principals in this research. Two principals spoke of the need to place staff on competency proceedings shortly after starting as principal. One principal at this time described teachers as uncaring and unwilling to form positive relationships. In many cases there were language barriers. All principals found recruiting staff for their failed school difficult. In addition to the effort made to make their schools attractive to work in and advertising this, careful exit and entry processes were undertaken and the school redesigned to promote and facilitate the leadership and support structure throughout. Where deficits were realised, ‘shoulder tapping’ was a common practice undertaken to meet school needs efficiently. Both sustainable leadership and excellent staffing are widely recognised by the principals in this study as necessary and important determinants of success through turnaround and while this view is well supported in the literature, for example Haynes (2009) and Murphy and Meyers (2008b), little is made of how this is best achieved.

A critical mass of ‘good’ decisions is required for leadership success in any setting. Seeking an understanding and then acting to ensure the right decision at the right time best represents their implied intention. The complexity associated with the process of turnaround is
increased for these principal leaders by their dual role in working in and on the action. Stoll and Meyers (1998) describe the multi-factorial demands of leading turnaround and highlight some of the difficulties seen in this study caused by the sometimes conflicting and demanding roles of leaders as censors, planners and workers. Hoy and Miskel’s (2005) work illustrates the importance and complexity of decision making and the key role of leadership in its design. While not specific to turnaround Cardno (2006b) promotes the need for dilemma management for all principals.

A genuine care for students and a connectedness to the community through a personal story were two significant drivers and important contributors to the confidence and resilience of the three principals in this research. It is both confidence and necessity that ‘allowed’ these principals to deliver services and engage with stakeholders outside expected practice. Hassel et al (2008) promote confidence as an important turnaround leadership quality.

Despite strategies that increased their resilience the principals in this research admitted to feelings of isolation, stress and working very long hours. One principal felt he would have left his school if he had understood how difficult the job would have been. The others, despite their experience and success, did not express an interest to take on the task of school turnaround again. This has considerable implications if it were to be shown to represent the view of all successful leaders of turnaround. Duke (2010) suggests further work is required to understand the implication of leading turnaround on the career pathways of principals. Harris (2002) emphasises the need for self care to promote the resilience of leaders themselves and their ability to use resilient practices. She comments on the need for strong role modelling in this regard to recruit and retain staff and sustain partnerships.

Principals in this research recruited for specific school needs cognisant of their own limitations. Opportunities to enhance their own capability in leading turnaround through professional development were limited and duplicate problems seen internationally. This is illustrated by the work undertaken by the National College of School Leadership (Ashby et al., 2003; Brown, 2002; NationalCollege, 2010; Crainer & Dearlove, 2008; NationalCollege, 2009a, 2009b). There appeared to be no New Zealand literature pointing to solutions or resources such as the school networks described by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) or specific training for leaders of turnaround as offered by the University of Virginia (Duke, 2010).
These represent two alternative approaches to turnaround that have generated much interest and success.

The principals in this research recognised that the success of any initiative will reflect the requirements of different phases and the values and position of groups or individuals who stand in judgement. Further to this, success is judged variably by individuals at any one time and over time. The excitement, interest and motivation generated by the appointment of a new principal and early wins was seen to wane in the face of the harsh realities of turnaround. The principals outline a fine balance between the perceived drudgery of periods necessary to embed initiatives and periods of positive, rapid and exciting change with its intrinsic motivation. The principals demonstrated a range of strategies to manage this and the unintended consequences of change initiatives. These broadly include cycles of action and review, recruitment, measurement and advertising and crediting to others each success. Hawk (2008) highlights the need for continuing support until a school has capacity to maintain its own momentum.

Considering the requirements of each phase provides caution for those aspiring to rapid change or seeking efficiencies through reconstitution. One principal provided a good example of this, demonstrating his leadership through significant change in grounds and staffing very early in his tenure. The ‘fast and firm’ approach belies the careful planning behind these early initiatives. This type of strategy provides efficiencies but also carries with it some risk. It has the potential to destabilise the school and the principals all had difficulty replacing staff in line with school needs and in a timely manner. All the principals in this study demonstrated an understanding that as turnaround progressed the strategies employed initially did not always remain relevant. This view is widespread in the turnaround literature, for example Day (2011; Day et al., 2010) and Berg et al. (2008).

During the initial phase of school turnaround the combination of isolation and lack of models of care and support increased difficulties at a time when the school was most at need. Conversely these factors enabled the freedom to act and meant that the consequences of mistakes made by leaders at this time were unlikely to be widely realised. Two principals cautioned against encouraging any collective effort (especially in the early phase of turnaround) that came with greater levels of interference or compliance. Any joint effort would have to ensure that the principal’s capacity to lead the school was enhanced,
change was sustainable and support offered in response to the actual needs of the school community rather than a specific formula. A number of authors, for example Stoll and Meyers (1998), support the notion that one size does not fit all. Each school has its own complexities that need to be mirrored by appropriate and timely interventions.

This discussion now moves to consider the motivation, characteristics and knowledge of these leaders.

**Leadership characteristics of the successful turnaround principal**

Ensuring school success through turnaround requires careful management and a specific leadership capacity. Variable success within this role encourages attempts to identify the unique personal characteristics of those leaders who have been successful. For the purposes of this discussion characteristics refers to ones intrinsic ‘worth’. Worthiness is inferred from an application to a task and judgement of outcome. When considering success within these case studies, different measurements and end points were demanded by different audiences and thereby ‘worth’ is considered variably as different viewpoints and indices were applied. This highlights the need to understand and value leaders within different school contexts, from a variety of perspectives and over time.

This thesis does not have this power, cannot attempt to determine the relative contribution of all facets of leadership, nor does it consider whether it is these characteristics, knowledge, a ‘fit’ with the school or other factors that were the most important determinants of the principals success in leading. While all principals described high demands, working long hours and considerable stress, the author cannot make comment as to how tenuous leading turnaround may have been for each. Consideration of the characteristics of principals unsuccessful in this role would add validity to further research in this domain.

The principals in this study have been described by board chairs and staff interviewees, as professionals whose confidence and actions were underpinned by moral calling and innate values that represented a set of ‘non-negotiables’. They were highly motivated, responsible and accountable. They demonstrated genuine care, valued truth and transparency and had the ability to appreciate and relate to all stakeholders. They were characterised by a hands-on, highly visible approach and worked long hours to enable a physical presence and attention to operational needs. They were flexible in being able to move between leadership,
management and teaching and learning roles. They possessed the ‘required’ competencies and demonstrated the courage to take measured risks. They were reported to make few errors of judgement but were able to stop what was not working and continue with what was. They were patient, demonstrated resilience and just kept going. The attributes as described above are common to those of all successful leaders (Leithwood et al., 2006) and therefore fail to separate these leaders.

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews highlighted an emphasis on how the leader personal characteristics were applied. There appeared to be little attempt to separate what the principals did from the drivers of who they are and what they knew and drew on, to make decisions. This may reflect the fact that interviewees in this study were, in general happy with the choices made and this requires critical review. To overcome this complexity, Hassel et al (2008) considered the competencies and actions of successful turnaround leaders together and used this measure in an attempt to differentiate the successful turnaround leader from others. These authors considered that the ability of a turnaround leader to act without permission, extract the right focus at the right time and implement intense reforms in the first few months with big fast payoffs, were important characteristics and actions that together differentiated successful turnaround leaders from school improvement leaders. This capability sits at the very essence of the effectiveness of the principals in this study and describes actions and characteristics of the ‘right’ leader. While the combination of competencies and actions poorly differentiate the personal attributes of these principals from those of other successful leaders, it does focus attention on their courage and specific capacities and highlight the need for a different model of support.

The characteristics seen to be the most important determinants of the three principals’ success in leading a school’s recovery were described by interviewees. These are presented in Table 5.1. Three broad categories were identified by interviewees and include vision and values (the principal’s set of non-negotiables), competencies (professional knowledge and skills) and the principal’s personal attributes. The principals added a fourth category that represented their seminal experiences (life crucibles) and in all these cases a personal connection to their school. Fullan (2006) echoes the value of a moral calling and attributes much of the resilience and unyielding focus of successful leaders to this characteristic.
Table 5.1: The characteristics regarded as the most important determinants of leadership success through turnaround

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<table>
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<tr>
<td>Personal attributes</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial, well organised, able to make decisions, committed/dedicated/works long hours, energetic, personable, visible, idealistic, emotionally intelligent, empathetic, supportive, passionate, optimistic/positive, reliable/trustworthy, able to ask for help, listens, able to learn, communicates well, manages conflict well, compassionate, resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies</td>
<td>Able to make accurate diagnosis, change knowledge and management skills, curriculum knowledge, financial skills, implementation of cycle of assessment and review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and values</td>
<td>Servant leadership, values student potential, values community, inclusive/collaborative, genuinely cares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life crucibles</td>
<td>Formative life events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In combination the characteristics listed in Table 5.1 are those upon which the principals in this research drew on to make the right decision at the right time. They form the basis from which these principals were able to recognise, understand, diagnose and implement the process of all problems and therein ensure engagement, motivation, achievement and resource protection. This required flexibility. Hargreaves (2011) encourages all leaders to pick from the ‘pot pourri’ of change management, leadership and professional knowledge and apply what they have learnt appropriately. Evidence of this application through the actions of principals is seen throughout this research. Any one of these characteristics will be commonly included in lists portraying core qualities of effective leaders in any setting, such as those illustrated by Harris (2002).

The skills and attributes of the three principals in this research, as viewed by others to be relevant to the task of turnaround, are important determinants of school success. For example the high regard teachers felt for these principals and the knowledge that they would be treated well, were reasons staff choose to join and remain in the school. As a summary these skills and attributes are recognised as clarity (in establishing and maintaining goals), core belief (values), care, courage, credibility, compassion, capacity to facilitate change management and enable positive fiscal and curriculum outcomes. While the staff members interviewed did not mention trust specifically this was commonly implied. Coleman (2002) sees only emotionally intelligent principals as being able to create a high level of trust. Boyle (2007) sees trust as a
fundamental and necessary foundation of turnaround success.

Fundamental to the principal’s perspective are the aspects of their make-up that they saw as most essential to the task of turnaround and how these related to their professional understanding and skills when applied to a given problem. They described their capacity to draw from their knowledge and skill and the care taken to fully appreciate the relevance of the resource and psychosocial context within which problems occur and solutions are sought. They described their function and capacity with great humility and were quick to value and praise the efforts of others. They were able to recognise and correct mistakes. This aligns well with the work undertaken by Hassel et al. (2008) in eliciting competencies and turnaround actions.

Further to this, principals in this research were seen to employ new strategies to achieve both early wins and maintain a positive momentum towards their school’s turnaround success. This strategy was used throughout all phases and suggests that this capacity is as important as a principal’s ‘fit’ with a given school or their capacity to manage the school in line with expected practice. Making timely and correct decisions within new contexts requires an awareness of others, flexibility, skill and confidence.

What theories do the principals hold about effective leadership?

The following Table 5.2 provides a synopsis of the factors as determined by these principals and reviewed in the light of all interview transcripts and the relevant literature, to represent the determinants of the principals’ personal success. Intentionally this table has been presented in the principal’s own words and within the limitations of this study represents an essence of what they believe or learn.

For the principals in this research five important areas have been identified and provide a synopsis of the theories relevant to the principal’s primary mandate, their view of self and others, their modus operandi and the emphasis they place on supporting infrastructure. Central to this synopsis is an acceptance by these principals that turnaround as a worthy undertaking and success is possible. These theories represent both caution and support for the models presented earlier in this chapter and offer considerable insight into the perspectives of these leaders.
Table 5.2: Theories of successful turnaround principals - how to turn around and stay-around

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories of Successful Turnaround Principals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep hold of the fact that a leader's primary function is to maximise the learning opportunities for students under their care. Within the constraints of judicious care this intent underwrites all relationships and initiatives. With consideration, do what you need to do when you need to do it to achieve this end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look after yourself – take responsibility for your own wellbeing. The work is difficult you will work long hours. Key competency areas include finances, property, special needs, including ESOL, learning support, processes of curriculum development and the effects of social deprivation on student learning. Implement change with openness and flexibility around a set of personal, responsible and reasonable ‘non-negotiables’. You will require an innate confidence that you can make a difference. Model the behaviour that you wish for within the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look after others (and each other). To genuinely care provides both a modus operandi and offers resilience. Success is dependent on the positive efforts of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Modus operandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For all actions listen so you really understand the reasons for the problem, carefully plan for action, monitor outcomes and continue that which works and stop that which does not. The unintended consequences need to be actively managed. What you don’t know is as important as what you do. Approach every interaction as an opportunity to learn. Model this with openness and demonstrate your capacity to acknowledge and correct mistakes. The validity of measurement is enhanced by the quality of interventions that follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational infrastructure is required to support what happens in the classroom. Balance long term strategic goals with short term wins. Use a range of strategies but these must be cohesive. What stakeholders ‘see’ is less important than what is being done - but only just. Get help. Always recruit in line with school needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Together, the above theories represent the Harris et al. (2010) essence of - ‘how to turn around and stay around’ for principal leaders. They reflect the opinion of principals with considerable collective experience and provide a valid basis for further discussion. They help identify the competencies and resources protection strategies and reflect the humility, resilience and extraordinary skill of these principals.
The value of robust understanding, telling the truth and critical review as important factors that underwrite effective change is widely supported. For example Argyris (1977), Dick and Dalmau (1999), Cardno (2006b) and Sun and Scott (2003) believe that the ability to detect and correct errors lies at the heart of organisational learning. Ball (1993) promotes the need for strong relationships and trust as foundations of success within challenging environments: a theme supported by all change management literature, including that of Robertson and Timperley (2011).

The theories, as outlined, highlight factors addressed in both the ‘not for profit’ and business literature (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). While parallels can clearly be drawn from research in these sectors, in general the personal voice and this level of detail are missing.

The concluding chapter briefly reviews the main findings and the discussion and draws recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Decline leading to failure is normally associated with a school’s inability to self-review or integrate national reforms and leads ultimately, but not exclusively, to impact adversely on teaching and learning programmes (Duke, 2010; Harris et al., 2010; Hawk, 2008). Failing schools are most often found in already disadvantaged communities (Wrigley, 2003) and singular interventions or reactive attempts at solving problems are seldom collectively sufficient to facilitate school success (Duke, 2004). Despite this observation, some low decile schools that receive the same resources as their neighbouring schools and are subject to the same external interventions are beating the odds and meeting or exceeding expected standards (Calkins et al., 2007). An important differentiation between these schools has been shown to be the quality of principal leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). In the turnaround setting the ‘right’ leader is determined by their capacity to make the right decision at the right time (Hassel et al., 2008). This requires a set of personal characteristics, a level of expertise and an understanding of turnaround’s socio-political, education and local context and the nature of the process itself.

School turnaround has been modelled as a hypothetical pathway or from a psycho-social or evolutionary perspective (Fullan, 2006). All descriptors highlight a change process and the importance of people and relationships. A unique educational model (that sits outside that of the effective schools model) is imposed upon all schools at the point at which decline becomes overwhelming and this model remains in place until the school returns to the cohort of effective schools. This educational context and the process of school turnaround, specific to the three New Zealand schools in this study, are illustrated in Figure 6.1. While the endpoints have been variably argued in the literature by other authors, it is widely accepted that school turnaround describes an intentional improvement process that evolves from within the characteristic culture of a failing school and is complex, problematic and subject to multifarious influences. School turnaround is characterised by rising expectations, resource considerations and the need to self review and carefully manage the unexpected consequences of change actions. The research described in this thesis has shown (see Figure 6.1) that in practice the margins between all phases (both within and adjacent to turnaround) are blurred and that a critical mass of requirements, specific to each phase, need to be met to ensure
successful progression through turnaround.

**Figure 6.1: The process and context of turnaround**

In Figure 6.1 school turnaround, as described within the schools in this study, is represented as a biphasic process. All phases require effective leadership, understanding, diagnosis and planning. Phase one functions to stop decline and plan a way forward. It is a period of considerable behind the scenes effort and rapid and often overt change that serve to signal leadership capacity and intent. Phase two rebuilds school capacity and ensures the improvements, resilience and flexibility required for the school to best meet the needs of students and ultimately function within the effective school model. Following on from the inertia established in phase one, dramatic changes (quick wins with fast payoffs) continue early in phase two. This is followed by a period of graduated systematic change (embedding initiatives and raising expectations) that continues until a period of organic change (reflecting new, improved and sustainable standards) is maintained. This latter phase finally integrates into the continuous improvement pathway described within the effectiveness domain.

While the time course and emphasis of phases illustrated for turnaround in Figure 6.1 are
distinguishable, interpretation of this and how this process was achieved is limited by the scope of this research. Figure 6.1 illustrates where the turnaround school has come from, where it is going and how it will get there and represents some of the external factors that will influence this pathway. Appreciation of these factors along with an understanding of the specific characteristics of effective, declining, failed and recovering schools are important for a number of reasons. This modelling provides the framework to examine leadership in this context.

Stakeholders have the potential to exert positive and negative influences directly and indirectly on the process of turnaround. Yet it is from this group that the solutions to school failure will be found. This research has illustrated that the impact of stakeholder influence varies depending on their position and relative ‘status’ within the sector or community, alignment with the school’s goals and their ability to provide resources and/or censor. In New Zealand the socio-political and ministerial ‘context’ of school leadership and evaluation dictates the requirements, funding opportunities and a system of school governance (Spreng, 2005; Thrupp, 2007). Yet schools continue to fail (Calkins, 2008). The findings of this research, as shown in Figure 6.1, indicate a need for discouragement of the application of the effective schools model onto ineffective schools; limiting the function of this application to identifying schools in need. The findings also suggest a need to promote a collective review of the factors that permeate and drive failure and those that enable success through the process of turnaround, help direct efforts towards the appropriate, combined and sustainable improvement strategy and encourage a shared responsibility for this change.

The principals in this study realised that ultimate school success would be achieved through a primary focus on student learning, a combined effort and considerable personal skill. The findings shown in Figure 6.1 highlight the need for turnaround principals to have the knowledge and expertise of their successful peers in the effectiveness domain and also understand and act to meet the requirements of the unique context of and phases within the school ineffectiveness paradigm. In turn, the notion that education success will be achieved through a process that goes from problems to solutions without a real understanding of the cause is discouraged. An appreciation of the reasons for decline sets the foundation for turnaround and represents a valid starting point from which solutions can be found (Murphy & Meyers, 2008b). The actions of the principals in this research illustrate a pattern of success drawn from a set of core qualities together with an understanding of the problem and
the context. Figure 6.2 demonstrates this relationship and illustrates the depth and breadth of considerations that enabled these principals to make the right decision at the right time.

**Figure 6.2: Dynamic leadership in and on the problem**

This model highlights the factors that enable the flexibility required for leadership success within this educational context and sits outside any known model of school change to this researcher. The model implies a high level of personal accountability, expertise and trust. All decision making is considered a dynamic process, supported by a cycle of robust understanding, action and review. This model requires an overriding focus on cultural identity and pastoral care as foundations to securing the teaching and learning behaviours required for school-wide success. It indicates that the findings from this research suggest progression through turnaround was supported by the provision of appropriate resources and infrastructure and the capacity of these leaders to successfully protect the school from unrealistic demands. While the principals’ function was enabled through working long hours and confidence and skill, mistakes were made. The leadership task and isolation within this role was seen to be far greater and more difficult than anticipated and should not be underestimated.

Expanding this model, the principals’ core qualities in this research were defined by their personal attributes, vision and values (included together), life crucibles/experiences and competencies. Competencies included knowledge and skills and represented the opportunity for learning through professional development. Figure 6.3 shows the interaction of these four factors and how they merge to determine the principals’ core qualities. This Figure conceptualises what a given principal will draw upon to determine how the right decision will be configured (this applies to all problems big and small) and the behaviours that will be
modelled.

Figure 6.3: The components that contribute to the core qualities of successful turnaround leaders

The emphasis placed on each of the factors that make up a principal’s core qualities is significant and will vary in relation to the problem faced at any point in time. Weighting is determined by the principal’s capacity and relative strengths, the requirement to fully understand and the ‘appeal’ of the problem. Appeal refers to what it is that the problem demands. The flexibility of each parameter to modification through learning and experience requires further understanding because this may vary between individuals. Together these factors represent the focus for selection and opportunities to improve an individual’s performance and sustainability within the role of turnaround principal.

In both Figures 6.2 and 6.3 it is the marriage between all spheres, and a process of continued review, that enables the principal to make an accurate assessment of a problem, respond correctly and carefully and manage the unexpected consequences of change (Piggot-Irvine, 2005a). This ability to address unexpected consequences (or spinoffs) underwrites the capacity to make the critical mass of good decisions necessary for progress through successful turnaround.

The principals in this study demonstrated the ability to work within a range of leadership styles and possessed the characteristics necessary to generate social capital and understood and applied change knowledge successfully. The ability to see patterns and link initiatives
within a difficult environment requires considerable skill, analytical and conceptual thinking, humility and great care (emotional intelligence) as well as a capacity to just keep going. All the principals in this research had an association with their school that predated their employment. While this is likely to add to their local understanding, empathy, motivation and resilience, further research is required to understand the significance of this finding.

Implicit in the actions and level of care of these principals are a set of theories that serve to represent the overriding operandi and fundamental determinants of their success as turnaround leaders. As a summary, and to avoid duplication, two are presented. The first considers truth. The principals upheld the theory that turnaround is made easier if all stakeholders tell the truth and decision making is a transparent process. Telling the truth enabled principals to identify the real cause of problems, the level of resources available to meet these and enabled the correct decision to be made. Consideration of truth telling highlights the need for real school change to reflect the unique strengths of the community it serves, that understanding based on the truth has the potential to enhance collective responsibility, realistic expectations and appropriate resourcing and thereby promote a different model for support of school principals leading turnaround. Argyris (1977) advocates a truth based and open approach to problem solving that reflects the theories upheld by the principals in this study. Argyris’s model (the detection and correction of errors through double loop learning) requires a high level of skill and trust, increases the probability of critical reflection and encourages appropriate and innovative solutions to problems.

The principals in this study also demonstrated that school turnaround is a worthy process that requires personal and collective expertise and effort and flexibility in all leadership and learning roles. All principals in this study upheld the theory that competencies are determinants of success and that they personally could make a difference. They saw these factors as providing the necessary confidence that would enable them to work hard, act outside the box and be resilient. It led to rigorous efforts to protect all positive influences within the school. In light of this theory, the principals carefully balanced their personal values and confidence with the recruitment practices that compensated for their own personal limitations and the sharing of all success. This second theory secured a role for all stakeholders (the principals included) in modelling and achieving as students, teachers and leaders and reinforced the exponential value of a collective effort. Managed well, this balance of openness, accountability and flexibility was seen to best support positive change.
This approach was upheld by the ideals that appropriate resources and infrastructure are provided, that people treat each other well and that none of this was guaranteed. Fullan (2006) describes the importance of moral calling as this aids confidence and enhances the leaders’ capacity to make difficult decisions and protect emerging cultural norms from internal and external factors. In more recent work Day (2011) promotes the theory of moral enterprise. This describes the function of turnaround leadership within a political, ethical, educational and personal context that is constantly in tension and one that requires complex systems leadership.

Review of school turnaround, and the role of successful principal leaders in and on this process, has helped identify a range of leadership skills and core qualities appropriate to this task. While this has the potential to provide reassurance to those considering turnaround, the descriptors of the characteristics of the principals within this study have failed to differentiate these principals from other successful leaders in a range of settings. Considering this, four factors are proposed that differentiate leadership (rather than the leaders themselves), through turnaround. These include the primary focus of improvement effort, the capacity to achieve a critical mass of good decisions over a period of time to facilitate a staged progression through turnaround, an ability to recruit support towards an agreed goal from an environment of deficit and uncertainty (a teaching and learning environment from scratch) and the capacity to keep going. Together these represent the specific turnaround knowledge and required skill base of the principals in this study who have been shown to be successful in this role. Day (2011) proposes that (shown within the Figure 6.1 ineffectiveness domain) the combination of certain qualities, strategies and skills play a much greater role in the success of turnaround leaders within disadvantaged schools when compared to those schools located in areas of relative advantage (shown within Figure 6.1 effectiveness domain). Day attributes this to the fact that within the disadvantaged school (shown within Figure 6.1 ineffectiveness domain) turnaround principals face the most persistent level of challenges, apply greater combinations of strategies with greater intensity and use a greater range of personal and social skills than do those in other schools (shown within Figure 6.1, effectiveness domain).

Despite the insight gained from inter-sector research and our increasing understanding of school turnaround, despite best wishes and enormous effort, the fact remains that within current constraints and leadership practices, schools continue to fail. Accepting the principal’s central function in determining success through turnaround, this trend highlights a
leadership capacity gap, deficits in our local understanding and together the need to think about alternative models of support for recovering schools that consider the constraints and opportunities of the environment within which these principals are appointed, regulated, supported and work. In view of this the several recommendations are made in the following section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greater understanding of school decline and turnaround is recommended to facilitate efforts to prevent and remedy school failure. This, along with a robust analysis on the ongoing costs of school failure in New Zealand, is urgently required. Further research could highlight the cost effectiveness and appropriate allocation of resources for the prevention of failure and promotion of school recovery. Understandings from turnaround, management, change and leadership research and writings from other sectors have relevance to school turnaround and should be critically valued by those wishing to progress school recovery in New Zealand. Insights need to be shared. The wisdom of those familiar with leadership in this role, and successfully able to balance the external and internal influences within this setting, needs to be valued and shared. Greater understanding will be achieved when consideration includes those schools where attempts at turnaround failed, the fate of those disenfranchised by school failure and the outcome of schools where improvements were made and a change in leadership failed to secure or progress these. This understanding is necessary for all stakeholders and important for leadership training.

An alternative overarching approach and supporting infrastructure is recommended to enable success through school turnaround in New Zealand. The approach applied by the principals within this study to problem solving that enabled a successful, empowered and school specific culture needs to be mirrored by those stakeholders in positions of power who sit outside the school. Overseas research supports the value of both monetary and organisational support in expediting and ensuring success through turnaround (Calkins et al., 2007). This should be mirrored in New Zealand. The requirements of turnaround and effects of adversity will be best mentored by governance and management that encourages greater collective responsibility to promote an efficient, flexible and cohesive strategy that is ultimately student centred and within which the roles and responsibility of all stakeholders are clearly understood. There is no one size fits all approach or quick fix (Stoll & Myers, 1998). Caution
is required so that an unsustainable school environment or culture alien to that of the community the school serves is not created. Support needs to be maintained until the school has the leadership and capacity to maintain its own direction.

Sustainable and effective leadership is a requirement of successful school turnaround. Leaders of the turnaround require different support, training, assessment tools, appropriate resources and an overriding infrastructure to help them secure positive change. Research is required that evaluates efforts to promote effective and sustainable leadership and enhance recruitment to and within turnaround schools. More research is required to consider factors such as the appointment of first time principals, school size and decile rating on turnaround success and the long term implications of school failure. Consideration should be given to the value of opportunities for education, leave, additional support staff and remuneration. Turnaround training at a post graduate level is favoured, similar to that run by Duke (2010) at Virginia University, to increase turnaround leadership capacity. This would include opportunities for leadership training and develop the skills in change management, organisational infrastructure, finances, and curriculum development unique to this environment. Similar incentives should be provided to experienced teaching staff to aid recruitment into and retention within turnaround schools. All effort to support turnaround principals requires flexibility as requirements change over time and between schools.

A needs analysis and the development of a clear action plan available prior to a principal’s appointment is recommended as it is one area of school turnaround that could offer significant advantage. This would encourage wider responsibility for change, enable the principal to better judge their capacity against the requirements of the job and provide efficiencies. It would be essential that the strengths and limitations of this process be outlined for the incoming principal and opportunity provided to discuss these. The question of who would be best placed to undertake this responsibility requires further consideration. As turnaround progressed the challenge of balancing the need for shared responsibility and accountability with freedom to act would require careful management and specific support.

**STUDY LIMITATIONS**

Time, academic and fiscal constraints limited the resources that could be applied to this project and this impacted on the ability of the researcher to undertake in some instances
further exploration of answers that appeared, during the analysis phase, to warrant further understanding.

There is no research to date that validates the retrospective use of Hawk’s (2008) predictors of decline or their relevance to primary schools in New Zealand. Because of the absence of ERO reports in one school only this tool was used to additionally support this school’s inclusion.

A number of ‘what’ questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews. These questions blend themselves ideally to a questionnaire format that if applied prior to the semi-structured interviews, could have increased the initial scoping of schools. This would have provided some efficiency through the use of paper or email-communication and allowed the researcher to identify issues, specific to each school, at an early phase of this research. This in turn could have enabled wider participation in this study and greater opportunity for debate, reflection and validity.

Change is contextually complex and all turnaround situations in the three schools were described differently. It was a difficult task to synthesise this information. As the questioning had a broad temporal perspective, analysis of the transcripts demonstrated that key characteristics, strategies and outcomes were mixed together by principals. Marshall (2008) also identified this as an issue and stated, “There is rarely a straightforward way to capture the expertise of change agency nor is it always possible to translate change agent attributes into competency profiles, training interventions or empirical measures of performances” (p. 66).

Other limitations include historical recall and memory accuracy; three interviews in one school may be perceived as a weak case study; and the possible source of bias with principal gender - all principals in this study were male.

**FINAL DISCUSSION**

Schools should not fail the students and when they do remedy through turnaround is urgent. While school turnaround has been carefully and variably described, success through this process cannot be achieved quickly and is not guaranteed. The progress of a given school is influenced by a range of important external and internal influences. Currently in New Zealand there is no infrastructure that specifically supports progress through turnaround and success in this task is most often dependent on outstanding principal leadership. The
turnaround leaders in this study demonstrated the ability of successful leaders in other settings yet were differentiated by their capacity to successfully overcome the unique, complex and intense demands of the turnaround setting. Herein they demonstrated a resilience and flexibility that enabled them to make a critical number of the right decisions at the right time. This capacity was underpinned by a moral calling, specific competencies, personal attributes and the ability to stop what was not working and continue what was. These leaders were best supported with accurate information, appropriate resources, the freedom to act and a shared responsibility and action towards agreed goals (without the increased demands of added compliance). Peer support and post graduate education have the potential to both provide efficiencies and enhance the chances of success in this role. Turnaround wisdom needs to be harnessed and shared. There is an urgent need to provide a greater understanding of the role of leadership through turnaround and the implementation of strategies shown to be most effective to support success in schools at any one time and over time.
REFERENCES


Robinson, V. (2006). Putting education back into educational leadership. *Leading and
Managing, 12(1), 62-75.


the textual apologists. Berkshire: Open University Press.


APPENDIX 1

Interview schedule (Principal)

**Questions 1-6: Focuses on the principals’ thoughts prior to the ‘turnaround’ process.**

1. Why did you choose to apply for a position at a ‘declining’ or ‘failing’ school?
2. Was your school a failing school when you applied? Where you aware that (Name of the school) was classified in this way prior to your application?
3. What information about the school did you ask for before you applied? Where or who did you get this information from? What did this information tell you?
4. What did you hear, see and feel when you arrived?
5. How did you go about understanding the climate and culture of the school?
6. What was your ‘vision’ for this school when you started?

**Questions 7-14: Focuses on the ‘turnaround’ process**

7. When did stakeholders realise ‘turnaround’ was needed?
8. What do you think the catalyst was for ‘turnaround’?
9. Did you have any external support within the education sector, if not what support do you think was needed?
10. Which interventions for you worked best and were sustained?
11. Which interventions did not work well or were not sustained?
12. What evidence was collected to show improvement was happening? Is it possible to see your planning and reporting data? What evidence was important to you?
13. How long do you think the ‘turnaround’ has taken? How long do you think a ‘turnaround’ should take? What signals that the ‘turnaround’ process is over? What came next? Where there specific stages, in retrospect seen in the planning?
14. If you were to repeat this process what support would need?

**Questions 15 – 19: Focuses on principals’ leading change**

15. How did you work out what to do or where to start? (process of change.)
16. Are you familiar with any change management models? Did you use any ‘change management theories/ models’ found in the literature?
17. What’s your understanding of the term ‘capacity’? Was there the capacity within the school to change and move towards the school’s vision? What were the barriers and enablers?
18. What tensions and dilemmas did you face?
19. How were decisions made?

**Questions 20-22: Focuses on principal leadership**
20. How would you describe your ‘leadership’ during the ‘turnaround’ process?

21. Are there any key leadership characteristics that you experienced that are not evident in the school effectiveness key leadership characteristics expressed in the document ‘Kiwi leadership’? What would you add?

22. How did leadership evolve in the school?

Questions 23-27: Focuses on self evaluation

23. Were there any defined actions by staff, or you, which signified to you that you had moved towards your vision?

24. What have you learnt as a result of turning this school around? How has the ‘turnaround’ process affected you personally and professionally?

25. Would you do it again? Why or why not?

26. What three key messages would you give to someone wishing to take on a declining or failing school?

27. Is there any other information you would like to add that you deem important in the ‘turnaround’ process?

Interview schedule (Teacher and Board Chairperson)

Questions

1. My data informs me that this school has turned around. What do you think caused this ‘turnaround’ to be successful?

2. Was there anything that you tried that didn’t work?

3. What in your view signalled that you had been successful?

4. What was it like for you?

In summary what are the three most important theories you hold about turning around a ‘declining’ or ‘failing’ school?
POTENTIAL PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL DECLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MACRO (SOCIETAL) INFLUENCES</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate responses to International and Educational Trends</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The school did not interact professionally in DoE/MOE contracts or in other professional networks and had an insular outlook</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The school did not keep up to date with international and educational trends through effective professional development programmes</td>
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<td>• Financial pressures prevented the school from keeping up-to-date with technologies</td>
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<td>Socio-economic Status and Demographic and Economic Factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The school serves a low socio-economic community and has the lowest decile rating, compared to neighbouring school</td>
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<td>• The area the school serves suffered from decline in the population of school aged students and/or changes in the status or numbers of neighbouring schools</td>
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<td>Schisms over Societal Values, Norms and Social Movements</td>
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<td>• Factions existed between or amongst students, staff, trustees or parents</td>
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<td>Inability to respond to Policy Changes</td>
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<td>• Changes in government policy require schools to adopt/adapt</td>
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<td>• School zoning/de-zoning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Conflict</td>
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<td>• Community issues that divide people are brought into the school</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MESO (INSTITUTIONAL) INFLUENCES</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline in the Number of Students Enrolled</td>
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<td>• Enrolment numbers fall over several years</td>
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<td>• Roll numbers are low and do not grow</td>
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<td>Ineffective Internal Management of Systems</td>
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<td>Poor financial and asset management</td>
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<td>• Financial problems occur</td>
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<td>• Assets/resources are depleted and property is not well maintained</td>
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<td>Ineffective management of poor staff performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Personal grievances are lodged</td>
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<td>• Poor performance is not addressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate principal appraisal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The principal is not appraised formally and comprehensively</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The principal is appraised only by the BOT and/or close colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The whole BOT is not well informed about performance issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor appointments resulting in performance problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Appointment procedures are informal/unprofessional/illegal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• BOTs appoint principals without appropriate educational advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Appointments are made because of age, gender or ethnicity</td>
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</table>
### Ineffective school systems
- Ineffective systems and practices continue
- There is inadequate record keeping

### Unresolved Issues and Problems

#### Governance difficulties
- BOT training is inadequate, or not all trustees are involved
- There is a close and unchallenging relationship between the principal and board chair
- Adult agendas are put before students’ needs
- A BOT is not strong in its governance role
- Trustees don’t know when or how to seek advice or help

#### Ailing aspects of school decline
- Conflict remains unresolved
- Decision making is not transparent
- Staff morale is low

#### Problems associated with staff longevity
- Low staff turnover occurs over long periods of time
- Staff are resistant to change
- Significant numbers of staff had little interaction with other schools and/or have not participated in post-graduate study

#### Nepotism
- The partner/husband/wife/family member of a staff member in a senior or influential position is also employed in the school

#### The consequences of a deputy principal not being appointed principal
- In the process of appointing a new principal, a deputy principal is appointed to the position of acting principal in the interim
- A deputy principal applies for the position of principal and is not appointed

### External Influences, Power and Authority

#### Ministry of Education support was difficult to achieve
- External intervention happens too late
- Setting up appropriate support procedures takes too long or requires more effort than the schools can sustain
- Schools needs are inadequately assessed

#### Education review office methodology and reports
- The school receives negative media publicity following an ERO report
- ERO review recommendations are ignored or rejected without being considered
- ERO reports do not identify existing problems
- ERO recommendations are unrealistic
- A follow-up review occurs too soon to allow a school to make sufficient progress
- A follow-up review repeats previous concerns rather than focus on progress or lack of it

### Teacher Unions
- Union field officers protect poorly performing teachers
- Union members stop attending school branch meetings because of the negative nature of the discussions
- There are entrenched and negative leaders and/or members of the school branch of the union

### School Trustees Association
- STA employed advisors do not support a school sufficiently to deal effectively with poor staff performance or behaviour

### Competition between schools
- Changes in the structure of schools, involving competing with neighbouring schools for students
- School staff or trustees undermining another school overtly or covertly

### The media
- Negative media coverage of a school

### Consultants and facilitators
- Consultants/facilitators do not have the appropriate skills or experience
- School needs and problems are not accurately or adequately diagnosed

### MICRO (PERSONAL) INFLUENCES

#### Inadequate and Ineffective senior leadership
- Principals do not have adequate senior leadership experience
- Developments and change is not well managed
- The principal is unwell or stressed
- Groups or individuals receive (or are perceived to receive) favoured treatment
- The principal is often out of the school
- The principal does not model ethical and professional attitudes and behaviour
- Dishonesty or lack of honesty by school personnel occurs with respect to issues or documents

#### The Potential for Personal Responses to help or hinder
- The principal controls information that prevents staff and trustees being aware of problems
- Misguided loyalty to a colleague prevents school personnel taking action when they are concerned
- Many highly regarded staff leave in a short time
- Staff are unchallenged about unprofessional/unethical behaviour
- Many parents remove their children from the school