A Case Study on the Junior Graduation Programme at Years 9 and 10 of One School Involved with the SMAD (*Schools Making a Difference*) Project

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ABSTRACT

This research project investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of one initiative put in place in a low-decile school in Christchurch to strengthen educational delivery and educational outcomes for students at the school. The initiative, known as the Graduation Programme, focused on Years 9 and 10 students. To graduate to the next year level, students had to engage in goal setting and obtain the required number of points to graduate.

This case study was based on the narratives of six teachers and eight at-risk students directly involved in the Graduation Programme. It focused primarily on their perceptions of the programme and its impact on improved educational outcomes for students.

Overall, the students' accounts indicated that the Graduation Programme had led to a change in how teachers related and interacted with them in the classroom. This was largely due to a major requirement of the programme that students be given frequent feedback on their progress in a number of defined areas. The consequent increase in teacher/student interaction resulted in improved relationships and, in most cases, improved performance by the students. Teachers' perceptions of the programme, however, tended not to be so positive. For teachers, low staff morale, workload issues and staff retention made it difficult for them to engage effectively with the programme and to recognise its potential long-term benefits.

The study highlights issues surrounding the success of the programme for non-resilient, at-risk students. It also puts forward the challenge that such programmes will only be effective if the professional development initiatives put in place to support them provide tangible and immediate links with classroom practice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In every school there are students considered "at risk". As Barber (1996) notes, these students include the disaffected, the disappointed and sometimes those that literally disappear from the school system. Barber claims that many of the disaffected are absent for long periods of time and that they routinely absent themselves from classes, even when at school. Students at risk cannot be helped or encouraged to become successful unless the school community and the teachers begin to understand the students in their own context.

The Education and Science Select Committee report, *Inquiry into Children at Risk through Truancy and Behavioural Problems* (Ministry of Education, 2001), defines the term "at risk" as:

- students with low achievement in an educational programme
- students who impact adversely on the education of others
- students with normal intelligence whose academic backgrounds or prior performance may cause them to be perceived as candidates for future academic failure or early withdrawal.

Improving achievement for students at risk became a key focus for the Ministry of Education in 2001 when it put in place an exploratory study of programmes to monitor and assist students at risk of educational failure. The study focused on a sample of low-decile schools in Christchurch known to have high proportions of at-risk students. The study (Ministry of Education, 2001) identified a range of problems for the students that included:

- low attainment
- low self-esteem and self-concept
- lack of confidence
- low motivation and aspirations
- poor goal-setting skills
- low participation
- absenteeism, truancy

- unresponsiveness linked either to withdrawal or disruptive behaviour
- low health status.

This early study identified a number of schools in Christchurch in need of extra funding and support. This present study evaluates one of the initiatives put in place by one of these schools. Known as "The Graduation Programme", the initiative was designed to strengthen educational delivery and educational outcomes at the school. The decision to study the implementation of the programme was influenced by my interest in issues surrounding at-risk students in low-decile schools. For many years I had been a teacher in a low-decile school in Christchurch and had developed a real and genuine concern for the disaffected and at-risk students who frequently dropped out of the school system. When the project coordinator at the school, eager for an external researcher to evaluate the strengths and/or weaknesses of the programme, invited me to do this work, I was more than willing to oblige. He was encouraging and supportive and made my access to students and teachers very straightforward. For my part, having a school inviting me to undertake research on a new school initiative as well as ensuring easy access to teachers and students was an exciting prospect.

My study identified a number of issues surrounding at-risk students. Teacher educators can consequently use this information to ensure that student-teachers are aware of issues surrounding at-risk students so that they have the opportunity to develop skills that will enable them to identify and work positively with at-risk students when they commence teaching.

1.1 Background, Milton High School

Milton High School (a pseudonym) is a secondary school in a low socio-economic area of Christchurch. The advent of the *Tomorrow's Schools* legislation in 1989 and the subsequent National Government reforms of 1990 meant that many of the students from middle class backgrounds who traditionally attended Milton High School started to look elsewhere for their education.[1] The abolition of zoning and allowing parents to choose the school of their choice resulted in a steadily falling roll throughout the 1990s. In addition, the demographic makeup of the student

[1] Personal communication with project coordinator, Milton High School. Name has not been given for confidentiality reasons.

population changed, with a higher proportion of the students attending the school from lower socio-economic and ethnically diverse backgrounds as middle class parents enrolled their students in schools perceived to be "good" schools. Not surprisingly, by the second half of the 1990s, Ministry of Education benchmark indicators of academic performance showed that Milton High School had fallen below the levels achieved by similar schools elsewhere in New Zealand.

In 1996, Milton High School became one of seven Christchurch schools identified to take part in a Ministry of Education-funded schooling improvement project called *Schools Making a Difference* (SMAD). Initially, the chief aims of the project were to arrest the decline in falling roles and positively affect public perception of the schools by improving student outcomes. However, as time went on and as the school entered new phases of the project, new goals evolved, one of which aimed to improve students' academic achievement in the school. The Graduation Programme was one of the initiatives put in place to help reach the goal.

1.2 Main Themes of this Research

The key area that I wished to investigate and explore was the success of the Graduation Programme in supporting at-risk students. I intended to support my relatively broad research question—*How successful is the Graduation Programme in supporting at-risk students?*—with a number of sub-questions designed to give teachers and students the opportunity to express their views. These questions were:

- Are students aware of the programme?
- Has the programme made a difference to their attitude towards school?
- What motivates them to succeed, and how does this relate to the programme?
- Are teachers committed to the programme?
- Are teachers and students sharing a common goal?
- Has the programme been successful in keeping at-risk students at school?

I considered that the findings from this research might raise further hypotheses or propositions about the effectiveness of the Graduation Programme on students' educational achievement. These might then provide a basis for future policy

development and identify areas for professional development activities within the school. Bell's (2001) assertion that well-prepared, small-scale studies can inform, illuminate and provide a basis for policy decisions within this kind of study.

I also recognised that implementing any change is itself a risk, but as Fullan (1993, p. 24) puts it, "Change is a journey, not a blueprint." The approach to implementing change must take into account the cultural factors that will make successful change "more likely" and have made the development of a collaborative culture a *top priority*. Fullan goes on to remind us (p. 24) of one school that likened change to "a planned journey into uncharted waters in a leaky boat with a mutinous crew."

For my study, I asked teachers and students at Milton High School to comment on the success or otherwise of the Graduation Programme—a programme put in place to improve educational outcomes for all students. For the teachers "it was a planned journey into unchartered waters". Schools make a big investment in these kinds of interventions in terms of time, commitment and energy. It is important to know if they have made a difference and, if so, what kind of difference they have made.

The following chapters describe and discuss how some of the teachers (crew) resisted the journey and abandoned ship, while others took on the challenge and successfully reached their goals. The students embarking on the journey were not always certain about where the ship was taking them, but they were prepared to put their faith in the crew, in the hope that the destination would offer them opportunities and success.

Chapter 2

Schools Making a Difference (SMAD)

2.1 The SMAD Project

On 8 September 1995, the Ministry of Education issued a schools support project scoping paper that focused on eight Christchurch secondary schools. Each of the schools had falling rolls and "low levels of student achievement and retention relative to national figures for comparative schools" (Ministry of Education, June 2002, p. 5). The scoping paper proposed that the Ministry work with the Boards of Trustees of the schools to support the implementation of strategies that would raise student achievement levels and improve retention of students. One of the key requirements of the project was for each school to undertake a series of external reviews designed to gauge the effectiveness of the "Schools Making a Difference" (SMAD) project. The Education Review Office (ERO) carried out an annual inspection of each school, focusing specifically on the use of funding and implementation of initiatives under the SMAD project umbrella.

The Ministry invited the eight schools to attend a meeting to discuss the project, notably the implementation of strategies that would raise student achievement levels and improve retention of students. One of the eight schools declined to participate in the project and the remaining seven became a cohesive and collaborative team. By May 1996, the seven schools had agreed to establish a schooling improvement project designed to improve learning outcomes for the students. The schools' objectives included several "indicators of success", and these became collectively known as the SMAD project. The indicators were:

- improved student learning outcomes
- improved student opportunities
- positive school climate
- improved student achievement
- breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

The seven schools, all situated in Christchurch, had many features in common. For example, they all had the capacity to increase their rolls and were all situated in relatively low socioeconomic areas of the city. The decile ratings of the schools ranged between 2 (lowest) and 4 (highest) (ERO, 2001).

The SMAD project was funded by the Ministry of Education and was in place between 1997 and 2003. The project's overarching objectives were to strengthen educational delivery and to improve students' achievement in the identified schools. Another important objective was to improve the community's perception of the schools (ERO, 2001). The Ministry did not negotiate these objectives well with the schools. As a result, some aspects of the objectives, especially the shorter-term goals, were unacceptable to most of the schools (ERO, 2001).

For the first three years of the project (Phase 1), the Ministry gave each school $100,000 per year to improve the academic outcomes of its students and the public's perception of it. However, the original project coordinator noted, "There was little over-riding cluster structure and no theoretical model put in place to help the schools develop a systematic approach" (Brokenshire, 2001, p. 12).

The second phase of SMAD emerged from the disappointments and successes of its previous initiatives. The lessons learnt from Phase 1, in part through each school's own strategic planning and in part from the collaborative cluster approach of SMAD, underpinned Phase 2—a model based on the school effectiveness and school improvement movements in Canada (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Several of the seven schools moved from being reluctant participants to being members committed to change. There was a visible shift from competition and suspicion to a culture of cooperation and collegiality. By 2002, the seven schools had established a wide range of domains of change, including Māori, Pacific, Teaching and Learning, data to support initiatives and research initiatives.

However, teacher unrest and industrial action by the secondary teacher union, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), resulted in lack of progress in all of the schools. Teachers faced conflicting goals—either to embrace the second stage of

SMAD or to honour the "work to rule" ban imposed by PPTA. Consequently, schools became out of step with one another. Some forged ahead and others suspended all research until the PPTA issues were resolved. It was into this arena that I first entered the project. One of the schools, Milton High, was still monitoring SMAD through the implementation of some action-research initiatives, and the school invited me to undertake a case study of the success or otherwise of one aspect of the school's project-related initiatives—the Graduation Programme.

The overriding goal of SMAD, Phase 2, was three-fold:

1. To allow each of the seven schools to each tell its story and, in so doing, reflect on the work in progress and consider improvements.
2. To place SMAD Phase 2 in a wider context of "authentic school improvement programmes".
3. To suggest improvements at the three levels of school, cluster, and Ministry of Education, as they planned for 2002 and beyond.

2.2 The Graduation Programme

This programme is based on a similar model implemented at Christchurch's Hagley Community College in 1998. Hagley Community College has been more than willing to provide other schools with access to its programme, but has emphasised that Hagley tailored the programme to meet its own needs. In an interview, the College's principal, Brent Ingram, stated that although Hagley is a secondary school, it is significantly different from other schools in the city.[2] It has a student population of adolescent and adult students, and the college campus operates more like a polytechnic or a university.

Milton High School and other local schools were very interested in the Hagley model, as it had received positive reviews in local newspaper and the *Education Gazette*. "A two-year graduating scheme for Year 9 and 10 Junior College students is showing higher achievement standards and a dramatic decrease in suspensions after only a year in operation" (Education Gazette, Vol 78, No 6, 1999).The success of Hagley's Graduation Programme, together with the principal's willingness to share the system

[2] Personal interview with Mr Brent Ingram, at Hagley Community College, June 2003

with other schools, resulted in Milton High adapting the programme and modifying it to meet the needs of its school.

Some of the other schools involved in the SMAD programme have or are still intending to implement the Graduation Programme but because of the industrial action issues outlined previously, they are not yet at the stage where they are ready to embark on an evaluation of these graduation initiatives.

The Graduation Programme has, as its foundations, the following important features:

- A "contract of learning" between parents, students and the school. The focus of this contract is on the students' learning based upon agreed goals and responsibilities.
- A "credit" system across the whole curriculum that rewards students for achievement in the eight essential learning skills of the National Curriculum Framework. The credits accumulate towards a graduating "Diploma in Learning". The minimum target of achievement for every student is at the 60% performance level.
- Initiatives to ensure students are studying at their correct learning level. This means advancing students to a higher learning level when they have demonstrated they have acquired the necessary essential skills for successful learning or retaining them at their present level until such times as they have required the necessary skills for advanced study.

The programme aims to improve student behaviour and motivation and, from there, student learning and achievement at Years 9 and 10. The programme gives students opportunity to gain one point each week in six categories in their core subject areas—English, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education and health.
This achievement is realised through goal-setting, close monitoring and regular feedback to students. The Graduation Programme is discouraged from becoming a discipline programme, although it is closely aligned with the school-wide referral system and can result in non-graduation.

The referral system is based loosely on Rogers (1994) strategies for managing student behaviour. Students are given three warnings about inappropriate behaviour before

being referred to the referral room. The student has time out in the referral room, usually two or three periods. Before returning to class, he or she must meet with the teacher and resolve any issues. Students are aware of the system and know that being referred out of the class is a serious breach of school rules and that parents are automatically contacted by letter and informed of the misdemeanour. Teachers are also expected to reflect on incidents and to ask themselves if they could have dealt with a situation any differently to avoid the student being referred. Points are awarded to all Year 9 and Year 10 students across the core subject areas according to the schedule shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of points given according to criteria (10 in total)

Homework	Completed on time to a good standard	1
Attendance	Point is lost for unexplained absences	2
Behaviour	Point is lost if student is warned for second time	3
Equipment	Student must have correct basic equipment	1
Bookwork	Up to date, well ordered and tidy	1
Assessment Tasks	Points awarded in accordance with departmental policy	2

Points are allocated on a weekly basis in each subject for homework, attendance and behaviour, and less frequently for equipment and bookwork. Staff record appropriate scores in a spreadsheet that automatically calculates totals, percentages and determines the form of award to be made. The latter removes any possible inaccuracies due to the variability of the mathematical aptitude of staff. Awards are given to students if they achieve to a set level across all subjects each term. They are allocated as:

- <60% no award
- 60–79% Bronze
- 80–94% Silver
- 95–100% Gold

These awards are given at the end of the year at Junior Prize-giving. If students attain less than 60%, they are required to attend summer school[3]. If they still do not perform to a satisfactory level, they are prevented from graduating to the next year level (that is, Year 10 or Year 11).

[3] Students who did not graduate can choose to attend summer school or not graduate to the next year level.

Students are expected to catch up on homework if absent. It is up to the teacher to set a realistic deadline for students based on the nature of the task. Students must present an authorised note to the class teacher within a week of returning from any absence to avoid losing their point. This places a responsibility on the teacher to remind the students to do this.

Teachers are required to set both short-term and long-term goals with the students, and are expected to enter the students' graduation points onto the computer once a week and not leave it for longer than two weeks. Entering the results weekly gives the teachers and heads of department the opportunity to monitor students' progress and, hopefully, prevent some students from slipping "through the cracks".

Teachers are encouraged to have an updated copy of students' results on the wall of the classroom, so that the students have access to their progress. Students who are not achieving are closely monitored, and strategies are put in place to give these students support to meet the requirements. Students considered borderline are given the opportunity to attend summer school to gain the skills to cope with the following year level.

I first met with teachers and students of Milton High School at the beginning of the 2003 academic year. I explained my role and what was expected of the participants in the research.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

This chapter explores broad areas of literature into which the study fits. These areas include issues surrounding at-risk students, the importance of high expectations for academic success, and teacher/student relationships. These areas are inter-connected and should be considered when a school is implementing change to improve learning outcomes for students.

The majority of the students at Milton High School come from low socioeconomic and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Consequently, I reviewed current research from both New Zealand and overseas to establish a setting for my research, and I paid particular attention to literature dealing primarily with schools of low socioeconomic status.

3.1 At-risk Students

In their study on student performance, Harker and Nash (1996) examined the effects of student dispositions towards learning. They reported that students who were not doing as well in school as they should often had poor aspirations, a low concept of their ability and put little value on the benefits of schooling, which had little or no relationship with their home situations.

As reported by Barber (1996), young people who experience emotional, behavioural and social difficulties are very often unable to learn in the same way as their peers. More recent research, however, challenges this view as researchers explore the nature of resilient children and their ability to succeed despite emerging from dysfunctional families and/or poverty. The observation that many young people considered at risk can have good educational outcomes has led to an increase in the number of studies worldwide endeavouring to determine factors that protect young people and enable them to bounce back despite the adversity they face. This work has moved the focus from their deficits and problems to working on their strengths (Tasker, 2001).

3.2 Resilient Children

The characteristics of resilient children and the protective factors that exist in their environments have been extensively reviewed by Wang and Haertel (1995), cited by Benard (1991, p. 5). They noted that a care-giving environment in the school can provide a protective shield, and that students who establish communicative relationships with teachers do better in school than students who do not establish such relationships. They also state that at-risk students can succeed when they identify themselves as an active agent with the power to succeed or fail, that is, the self as agent.

According to Henderson and Milstein (1996), ". . . more than any other way, schools build resiliency in students through creating an environment of caring personal relationships" (p. 17). Furthermore, they identify relationship building as an essential tool to academic success: ". . . because building resiliency is about building relationships, schools that do not make time for relationship building will not be effective" (p. 19).

McGinty (1999), when searching for research focused on resilience and resistance to failure, discovered that it was easier to find research articles that dealt with the failures of at-risk students in school than with studies of their academic success. She defined educational resilience as the likelihood of success in school and in other aspects of life, despite environmental risk factors (such as poverty). She therefore focused her own research on the academic success of at-risk students of low socioeconomic status and coming from large families and overcrowded living conditions. She discovered that their success was not just as a result of attending school, but "because they developed warm, supportive relationships with teachers, these relationships and positive responses worked to make them successful" (p. 139).

3.3 Cultural Deficit Theory

According to Bourdieu (1997), cultural deficit theory is "a theoretical hypothesis which makes it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating success to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes" (p. 47). He argued that the habitus of the middle

classes constitutes cultural capital within the education system. This works in the same way that the economic system operates to the advantage of those with cultural capital. As families and social classes produce and pass on their own cultures, so does the school. This operates to the advantage of those students whose culture matches that of the school, which is, according to Bourdieu and others, the habitus of the middle classes. Although Bourdieu focused his theory on the interaction of social class and schooling processes, it is also useful when looking at the mismatch between cultures of ethnic minorities and the culture of the school (Bell & Carpenter, 1994).

Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson (2003), in their report on the experience of Year 9 and Year 10 Māori students in a mainstream classroom, had this to say:

> The Māori students, those parenting these students and their principals (and some of their teachers) saw that the most important influence on Māori students' educational achievement was the quality of the in-class face-to-face relationships and interactions between the teachers and Māori students. In contrast, the majority of teachers suggested that the major influence on Māori students' educational achievement was the children themselves and/or their family/whānau circumstances, or systemic/structural issues. (p. 1)

The report clearly indicates that the deficit theory is still prevalent within our schooling system and is a major barrier to learning. Bishop et al. called for teachers to undergo major professional development so that they understand, internalise and work towards changing the power imbalances of which they are a part, "[i]n particular, those power imbalances that are manifested as cultural deficit theorising" (p. 7). He further noted that, "This deficit theorising by teachers is the major impediment to Māori students' educational achievement for it results in teachers having low expectations of Māori students. This in turn creates a downward spiralling, self-fulfilling prophecy of Māori student achievement and failure" (p. 6).

Bishop et al. were not the only ones to challenge the deficit theory as a cause for failure. For example, Rata (2001) alleged that educationalists tend to explain differences between children in terms of a deficit model that theorises the relationship between family background and school performances in terms of inadequate home practices. "For deficit model educationalists the educational system provided equal opportunities. Families were responsible if these opportunities are not taken up" (p. 148).

Nicholson (2000) has suggested that children from lower socioeconomic homes are linguistically disadvantaged as soon as they enter school, and their ability to engage with learning is therefore limited. His theory is supported by Nash (1993), who stated that "family resources both material and cultural are the big transmission mechanisms of educational disadvantage rather than the structure of the education system" (p. 124).

However, in recent times, a number of commentators have argued that criticising the working-class home is tantamount to blaming the victim. Consequently, "Educationalists [have] turned their attention to school practices as a source of class differences in achievement" (Rata, 2001, p. 148). McGinty (1999) is among those dismissing cultural deficit theory as a valid reason for students failing in schools. The findings of her research indicate that "successful schooling is shaped by students' positive relationships with teachers" (p. 13). Her work challenges the links researchers have made between the alignment of values at home and at school (p. 11).

As asserted by Bishop et al. (2003), "These deficit theories continue to blame the victims and collectively see the locus of the problem as either lack of inherent ability, lack of cultural appropriateness or family circumstances" (p. 6). Laying the blame clearly at the victim's door negates any obligation on the school structure to take responsibility for students who are under-achieving or, worse still, students who become so disengaged that they completely disappear from the system. When schools identify the family as the barrier to students' educational success, they make some attempt to involve families in schools. Although this move must be commended, it

has not necessarily been successful, as Fine (1991) has pointed out, because it leaves working-class parents at a loss to ensure their children's success. Fine explained that parents often meet schools' attempts to invite them into the schools with, what on the surface, looks like apathy, but in reality is communication breakdown, as the values of the school do not align with those of the community. This lack of cohesiveness between teachers, students and their families is a tangible and visible barrier to learning. Structures and relationships within school, he continued, need to support good communication about young people and their learning, and these structures, in turn, need to include the young people, their parents and others involved in their learning.

3.4 Home/School: Building a Community

In reporting the findings of their investigation into factors that support effective learning, Carnell and Lodge (2002) cautioned that when we see roles (family versus school) as separate and unconnected, rather than contributing to an overall goal, they are bound to fail. This distortion also indicates a lack of opportunity for teachers and others to communicate about students' learning, progress and their overall achievements. Carnell and Lodge suggested that schools must avoid using the culture deficit perspective as a starting point, but instead built them from a common vision and goal created by the wider school community—a vision that includes students as well as parents. They described one school that had successfully connected with parents' enthusiasm and willingness to provide more support at home and in school. This school had also capitalised on parents' knowledge and experience of their children to develop resources to help other parents support their children's learning. "In this school the partnership with parents went further than consultation to include collaboration on projects to improve learning. The school's readiness to see parents as part of the community contributed to a very vibrant learning atmosphere in the school" (Carnell & Lodge, 2002, p. 105). The school, no longer seen as a barrier to learning, became a tangible and powerful place where parents felt welcomed and valued.

Recent research in New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2003; Hattie, 2002; Hill & Hawk, 2000) gives credence to McGinty's and Carnell and Lodge's theories. The findings of this research suggest that it is neither the cultural deficiencies of the student and their home, nor the structure of the education system, that should be the primary focus of educational reform efforts. Instead, it is teachers' classroom performance and teachers' relationships with students and their families that have the most impact on students' learning.

Similarly, the research of Mitchell, Cameron, and Wylie (2002) on school improvement in low-decile areas has noted that schools which successfully improved educational achievement had "formed strong links with families, community agencies, health services, churches, government agencies to benefit students and staff at the school" (p. 33). The school had found ways to engage parents through involvement in schoolwork and decision-making through home activities. They had also made special efforts to attract parents from ethnically diverse backgrounds into the school. However, including the family and the larger community is not sufficient to ensure change. Research, such as that by McGinty (1999) strongly indicates that schools that establish high expectations for all students and give them the support to achieve them improve students' academic success.

3.5 High Expectations

Successful schools share a common belief that all students are capable of academic achievement. Research on successful programmes has clearly demonstrated that a school-wide climate of high expectations is a critical factor in reducing academic failure. "A hallmark of schools that were continuously developing was a common belief that every student could learn and be successful. Teachers and principals held high expectations for student achievement and behaviour" (Mitchell, Cameron, & Wylie, 2002, p. 31). These researchers found that schools committed to change actively resisted a deficit approach, recognising the skills and knowledge that every student brought with them. Student feedback was given in ways that heightened students' insight into their own work, and students were encouraged to critique their own work and become reflective.

Carnell & Lodge (2002) suggested that teaching strategies that communicate high expectations are cooperative rather than competitive and focus on intrinsic motivation based on interest. They also place responsibility for learning on students, through active student participation and decision-making in their learning. Teachers also express high expectations by creating teacher-student relations based on individual caring for each student and taking a personalised approach to teaching. The experience of many schools, supported by research, suggests that a major factor associated with supporting students' learning is the relationship between the teacher and the student. Learning situations take account of social and emotional factors, but cognitive development is still the main purpose of learning.

Bernard's (1991) (cited in McGinty, 1999) research on successful programmes for academically at-risk students demonstrated that a school-wide climate of high expectations was a critical factor in reducing academic failure. For example, a major critical finding was that a school-wide ethos of high expectations "was able to mitigate against the most powerful risk factor for young people" (p. 5). He also noted that "Schools that establish high expectations for all kids—and give them the support necessary to achieve them—have incredibly high rates of academic success. When the message one consistently hears is 'You are a bright and capable person' one naturally sees oneself as a bright and capable person" (p. 5).

Researchers, for example, Lingard (2002), Mitchell, Cameron, and Wylie (2002), and Hattie (2002), have also emphasised the need for teachers to lift their expectations of student achievement and to make learning more challenging for their students. Validation for their call comes from *The Achievement in Multicultural High Schools Project* (AIMHI). In 1999, the researchers involved in AIMHI were commissioned to constructively critique actual teaching by identifying effective teaching and learning strategies used in the classrooms of teachers in the AIMHI schools. At that time, the researchers revealed significant gaps in related research: ". . . there is very little New Zealand-based research into the best classroom practice of teachers in multi-cultural secondary schools" (Hill & Hawk, 2000, p. 7).

Five years on, there is ample evidence being reported on students' educational achievement and the reasons for the success (or otherwise) of a variety of interventions and programmes in schools. This growing body of literature and research emphasises the importance of teachers having high expectations of their students, of students having high self-esteem, and of teachers actively acknowledging the diversity of students in their classrooms. However, as Henderson and Milstein (1996) have cautioned, schools must ensure that their actions and policies do not prevent at-risk students from succeeding, especially in terms of preventing students from getting into the system so that they are able to get an opportunity to experience success.

3.6 Teacher Relationships with Students

There is rich data available that demonstrate the influence of teacher/student relationships on students' ability to engage with learning. Teachers and students do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced by one another's expectations and behaviours. Mutual discussion about expectations and behaviours can lead to increased understanding about teacher–learner relationships that promote learning. The good teacher has relationships with students that are based on trust and openness (Carnell & Lodge, 2002; MacBeath, 1999).

When asked what constitutes a "good" teacher, students participating in a study conducted by MacBeath (1999) placed high priority on the need for teachers to be human beings first. They identified a good teacher as someone who will listen, is forgiving, perseveres with them, encourages them, has faith in them, makes allowances, and "helps you when you're stuck" (p. 60).

Evidence gathered by teachers who shadowed students to discover what it feels like being a student in a school, supports the need to change how time is used in schools (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). The teachers reported that, "Nobody spoke to me" and "Nobody asked me a question" (Henderson & Milstein, 1996, p. 19). The reaction of these teachers indicates the lack of relationships in school that many, if not most, secondary students' experience. They also stated that they were not given opportunities to make decisions or to think: "Everything was learnt in a vacuum with

no connection from one period to the next" (p. 19). This situation was exacerbated in the larger schools that took part in the study, where it was more difficult to create climates of caring, form strong webs of relationships and to personalise student education or staff development in large schools. It was also more difficult to set and maintain high behavioural, academic and professional standards in such schools (Henderson & Milstein, 1996, p. 19).

In his summary of 337 meta-analyses, conducted over a 10-year period and covering "almost all methods of innovation" (p.4), Hattie (1999) concluded:

> . . it is teachers that make the difference ... it is clear that the structural and social influences are minor, what the student brings in terms of achievement and disposition to learn are powerful, and the teaching process is paramount... this must lead to the conclusion that teachers make the difference, but only teachers who teach in certain ways (p.10).

Similarly, Lingard's (2002) longitudinal study of some 3,000 students and 491 teachers, conducted between 1998 and 2002, showed that a "teacher's classroom performance had the most impact on students' learning" (p. 3).

Although a considerable body of research shows clear correlations between student performance and their home backgrounds, various commentators now stress the need to refrain from using the deficit model to explain failure (see for example Bishop et al., 2003; Hattie, 2002 and Hill & Hawk, 2000). Instead, they should focus on the emerging research which puts the responsibility back with the school. Raised achievement depends largely on schools being able to relate to the parents of at-risk students (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 17). An OECD report (1999) (cited in the Ministry of Education's report, 2001), on integrating services for children at risk, documents overseas projects providing for the needs of at-risk students and their families. Most of the initiatives involved co-ordinated school-wide programmes, based on more collaborative partnerships with parents. A number of the programmes were targeting hard-to-reach parents, and many were aiming to provide greater support to parents and some form of parent education. The Ministry concluded that

such programmes can improve the dispositions of otherwise at-risk students towards their own learning (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Alton-Lee (2003), reporting the results of a nationwide strategy designed to enable parents to take a more active role in supporting their children's numeracy and literacy development, stated, "the evaluation of the programme showed that parents' positive attitudes to helping students learn had strengthened, barriers had weakened, knowledge of how to help had increased, and participation in targeted helping behaviours had increased" (p. 41). These parents were playing a large and important role to play in supporting their children's learning, and the collaboration between school and home was ensuring strengthened relationships.

Summary

The literature review has identified important areas that must be considered when a school endeavours to improve educational outcomes for students. The more recent literature challenges the cultural deficit theory as a reason for students' inability to engage with learning. It strongly suggests that when schools (and families) hold high expectations for students to succeed and support those expectations with practices and procedures that are part of a school-wide strategy, students are more likely to experience success. The literature encourages schools to extend opportunities for decision-making to more parents, especially where students are at risk of failure. Some of these procedures relate to collaboratively working together within the larger school community (for example, teachers working with the families of the students), and building up successful relationships with the students, to ensure successful educational outcomes.

There is also a note of caution from Hattie (2002):

> In order to optimise academic outcomes for students, school communities and policy makers must take cognisance of the emerging rich data on students' success in our schools. For too long schools and educators have been subjected to rigorous scrutiny and accountability based not on their performance as

> teachers but on their ability to teach the right stuff, concentrate on the right set of processes, and use the best set of teaching activities to maximise a narrow form of achievement. (p. 6)

Society should applaud teachers who endeavour to improve educational achievements for all students. It should also validate the wider role of the teacher so that the teacher can give equal time and resources to at-risk students. Some of these students may never attain a level of achievement that will be deemed sufficiently high for recognition in society but they may nevertheless move from being at risk and disaffected to taking a participatory role in the school and wider community.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology, methods and processes used for the research, including the sources and selection of data, ethical issues and data collection and analysis.

I decided that because I was interested in teachers' and students' experiences and perspectives, qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology for this study. A qualitative research approach would also allow me to represent the multiple realities of the Graduation Programme under study. To do this, I would need to gather and analyse the data interpretively. More specifically, my research took the form of a case study, as this approach seeks to find out and understand what is happening and investigates a "real life event". A researcher's data-gathering plan is a step-by-step guide to developing and defining a case study. The plan lists research questions, identifies appropriate data sources and allocates time for the research to be undertaken, the data analysed, and the outcomes reported. According to Janesick (1998), the researcher works within a frame of a disciplined plan of inquiry, adhering to the high standards of inquiry and looking for ways to complement and extend the description and explanation of the project through multiple methods of research. Janesick also cautioned that qualitative researchers do not accept the misconception that more methods mean a better or richer analysis. Rather, the rationale for using selected methods is what counts.

Qualitative case study is situated at a given time and place for the people in the case study. As Stake (1995) observed, the researcher tries hard to understand how the people being studied see things even though the interpretations of researchers are likely to be emphasised more than the interpretations of the people studied. Nonetheless, the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views being expressed. This view is supported by Yin (1999), who noted that case studies are the preferred strategy when the researcher is posing "how" and "why" questions and when the investigator has little control over

events. Yin also advocated the use of case study when the focus is on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

The choice of case study is also supported by Neuman (2003), who observed that many features over a period of time can be analysed in depth, rather than numerically presented, to give a story of what has happened and what is going on. The case study is chosen not because it represents other cases or because it attempts to solve a problem, but because it is of interest. A case study can be undertaken for its own sake, irrespective of outside concern, not to solve some general problem, but to learn more about the case (Stake, 1999). I considered that a case study approach would enable teachers at Milton High School to reflect, debate and make decisions and plans about future developments in their school.

According to Yin (1994), "Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs" (p. 85). It was important to me, the researcher, that I had the opportunity to interview the participants, as interviews can provide shortcuts to the prior history of the situation. It also allows the interview to remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner (Yin, 1994).

4.1 Selection Process

Selecting the informants for my research was done in conjunction with the project coordinator at the school, whose good will was essential. We decided that I should interview teachers from Years 9 and/or 10 who were actively participating in the Graduation Programme and a number of students from different ability levels at Years 9 and 10. We considered it important that I gain a broad range of perspectives, and the project coordinator was a valuable source in ensuring that I had ready access to teachers and students. We asked students and teachers to volunteer to participate in the research.

To do this, I met all teachers who were participating in the Graduation Programme, explained the nature of the research, and asked if any of them would agree to being interviewed. Six teachers said they would, and I arranged to interview each of them at a suitable time. All interviews took place at the school. The project coordinator approached students who fitted our selection criteria and invited them to be part of the

research. Eight students volunteered their participation and met with me in an office at the school to arrange interview times. I also met them there to conduct their interviews.

The project coordinator identified which year level each of the eight students was at, including whether he or she was repeating a year level. All eight were in middle to low-ability classes, and were considered at risk by the project coordinator or had been prevented from graduating to the next year level. The students were of similar age but had varying backgrounds and experiences. Two had transferred from other schools because they had been "in trouble", and Milton High offered opportunity to start again. One had recently arrived from a different town. Another one had been held back a year, as he had failed to graduate at the end of the year.

The teachers included two men and three women with varying degrees of teaching experience. Two had completed their first two years at the school. One had been teaching in Britain and had arrived in New Zealand the previous year. One was the HOD of English, and another had a management unit in physical education.

4.2 The Research Setting

Milton High School is a low-decile, large, secondary co-educational school in Christchurch. It draws its students from a mixture of state-housing and mid-range private dwellings.

4.3 Ethical Issues

Ethical behaviour in research involves respect for the rights and dignity of informants, responsible caring, and integrity (Lindsay, 2000). Ethical issues were considered and addressed prior to the commencement of the study. The research was approved by the Christchurch College of Education's Ethics Committee and was carried out in accordance with its standards. Participation in the research project was strictly voluntary, with written consent obtained from each teacher, student, and Milton High's principal. No information was gathered or stored without informed consent.

All information collected was treated as strictly confidential, with pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of the students, teachers and the school. Interviews were

conducted in private rooms, with no other people present. The interviews were recorded with an audio tape recorder. I transcribed the tapes word for word, kept the tapes and the transcripts in a locked drawer at the College of Education, and protected files held on my computer with a password. In accordance with what I said to the interviewees, any quotations from the transcripts used in this thesis are attributed to pseudonyms. At the completion of the research, I will send the project coordinator at the school a complimentary copy of the thesis, which he may choose to share with his colleagues.

Although the children whom I interviewed were asked to volunteer their participation by the project coordinator, I considered it essential when they entered the room for the interview to give them clear explanations about my role, what I was doing at the school, and what my expectations of them included. Adolescents may not fully understand the implications of participating in research—age, cognitive ability and emotional status need to be taken into account (Lindsay, 2000). I was also aware that the students would probably see me as a person with power, and because it was important for me to ensure that the students opened up and spoke freely, I spent time building rapport with each of the students before the interview commenced.

> Children who are treated with respect, and trust the interviewer as a friend are much more likely to open up and give full and rich responses to the questions asked. Conversely, if a child feels stressed for any reason, or coerced into responding to a question, the quality of the data produced is likely to be poor (Barnes, Williams, & Clarke, 2001, p. 112).

Thompson (1992) has alleged that extra sensitivity is required when interviewing adolescents, because in some situations an interview could have a negative effect on the interviewee's self-concept. For example, situations arose where students discussed their lack of progress and their negative feelings about school. I, as the interviewer, had to judge when to disengage from the subject and be sensitive to their wellbeing.

As noted by Barnes, Williams, and Clarke (2001) anyone interviewing children needs to be aware that adolescents will pick up subtle cues from the researcher and try to give what they think is the "right" answer. A possible solution to this would be asking

a similar question but in a different way later on in the interview. All of the students interviewed, without exception, relaxed and appeared to enjoy the opportunity to engage in conversation and talk about the programme. As stated by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), ". . . the interviewers come on slow initially as they try to establish rapport with informants, ask non-directive questions early in the research and learn what is important to informants before focusing the research interests" (p. 88).

Before the formal interview was conducted, I ensured that each student signed the consent form, assured them about their anonymity and gave them some details about myself. They asked questions and were interested in why I was carrying out research in their school.

4.4 Data Collection

Although my interview questions were structured, I allowed room for subsequent questions to be shaped by the responses of the interviewees. This allows the interviews to be closer to a friendly conversation than the stimulus-response model of formal interviews (Neuman, 2003). The researcher guides the interviewee into particular areas, but the path that is actually followed is usually decided by the person doing the talking. The focus is on reproducing the world of the person being interviewed.

I collected the data over a period of nine months, between February and August 2003, relying on the cooperation of the project coordinator during this time. At our initial meetings, he gave me access to all the information he had, both written and verbal, on the SMAD project. The staff at the school undertook professional development every Friday (as part of the SMAD initiative), so we decided that I should visit the school on one Wednesday every month to interview students and teachers who were available at that time and who had volunteered to be interviewed. A room was provided for me to conduct the interviews. The project coordinator ensured that the students arrived on time and had explained to them that their participation was completely voluntary. I reminded them again of the voluntary nature of their participation before they signed the consent form.

The teachers came for the interview in their free periods or the project coordinator relieved the teacher from classroom teaching so that he/she could be available for the interview. Their perceptions were seen as rich and valuable source of data. All data were collected was by interview and, as previously mentioned, the interviews were taped and transcribed. Although transcribing was time-consuming, it ensured accurate recording of student and teacher talk. Some valuable information was lost when the tape-recorder ceased to record. Fortunately, I noticed this during the interview, but the spontaneous, honest responses were lost as the interviewee (a teacher) and I tried to capture what had been said.

Eisenhardt (1989) described interviewing as "the ethnographer's principle means of learning about participants' subjective views; thus, ethnographic interviews are usually open-ended, cover a wide range of topics and take some time to complete" (p. 64). Swann and Brown (1997) used open-ended interviews in their study of teachers' thinking. They regarded the open-ended interview as the best strategy for getting close to teachers' and students' thinking.

4.5 Interviews (Teachers)

The broad question '*How successful is the Graduation Programme in supporting at-risk students?'* was supported by a number of sub-questions designed to give teachers the opportunity to express their views:

- Are students aware of the programme?
- Has the programme made a difference to their attitude towards school?
- What motivates them to succeed and how does this relate to the programme?
- Are teachers committed to the programme?
- Are teachers and students sharing a common goal?

These led to other relevant sub-questions, the asking of which depended on the responses received from the teachers to the above questions.

- How well do you think the Graduation Programme is working?
- How could it be improved?
- How often do you give feedback to the students about their work habits?
- What do you think is the most significant change brought about by the Graduation Programme?

- What difference has the Graduation Programme made already or will it make in the future?
- What difference has it made to the students?

The interviews were approximately 20 minutes long, but often extended to 30 minutes. I asked the teachers if they would be available for a second interview and they all willingly agreed. Unfortunately, only one of the teachers from the first round of interviews was still at the school when I tried to arrange the second interviews. I interviewed the only remaining teacher on his last day in the school before he returned to Scotland.

4.6 Interviews (Students)

The eight students who had agreed to be interviewed were eager to participate. I asked them a few carefully worded probe questions:

1 What do you know about the Graduation Programme?
2 How much is the Graduation Programme helping you?
3 How often do you get feedback on your progress?
4 Have you been using the Graduation Programme to help set goals? How?

These questions were open-ended and allowed the students to expand and elaborate, providing me with opportunity to ask further questions to seek out more information. Other questions or points of clarification emerged during the interviews, which added to the pre-established questions (Glesne, 1999). Following the first interview, and before I met with the second student, some reshaping of the questions was necessary, as some key information was not forthcoming. All of the interviews lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

Students, sometimes reticent when they first entered the room, had to be drawn out, and encouraged to relax through the establishment of rapport. I found their ability to be forthcoming once they relaxed very rewarding. Their honesty about themselves, the school and their goals took me by surprise.

4.7 Analysis

The analysis of the data occurred throughout the process. To ensure my own judgements were not colouring the data analysis, I discussed the data collected and emerging themes with my supervisors. I also kept a research journal, and this was a valuable tool when transcribing interviews. Immediately following an interview, I recorded notes against the interviewee's name. These included such things as "very shy to begin and I had to work hard to get him to relax and open up" and reminder notes to aid transcribing, for example, "He seems very angry and kept returning to the unfairness of the treatment he received—more obvious in his tone and body language than with the words he said." These reminder notes ensured that I engaged closely with the transcripts and looked for meaning beneath words.

At times, my lack of knowledge of the school and its programme was a disadvantage, which meant that I needed to seek clarification from the coordinator of what had been said so that I could put it into the wider context of the school. Having access to the project coordinator on each visit prior to the interviews became a valuable part of the process. Although our meetings were brief (usually about five or 10 minutes in duration), they filled in the gaps for me, and as time went by, I began to have a deeper appreciation of what the school was endeavouring to achieve.

4.8 Coding the Data

Coding data is an integral part of data analysis. As noted by Neuman (2003), ". . . coding data is guided by the research question and leads to new questions. The researcher organises the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts, which he or she then uses to analyse data" (p. 441).

Once the data had been transcribed, more formal analysis took place. I coded the data using a modified form of Taylor and Bogdan's (1998) eight-step process. This required me to establish initial codes and form categories. I gave each page of transcribed notes a code, written in the left margin alongside each paragraph. In the right-hand margin, I wrote key words to describe the content of that sentence or paragraph. I then photocopied the page of notes and cut them up so that I could sort material under topic headings, with each topic's worth of material placed in its own envelope. I printed the teachers' transcripts on coloured paper, to make them easily

identifiable. Because I asked the students and teachers different questions, I used different coding systems for their respective sets of data.

Throughout the data analysis, I met with my supervisors to ensure that my own interpretation was objective and that it did not influence the data analysis. These meetings were valuable, as the supervisors posed questions that ensured I reflected on the interpretation and analysis. For example, while coding, I realised that none of the teachers had considered the long-term impact of the programme on the school or on the students; consequently, there were no data to code under this aspect. Further patterns emerged with ongoing checking and rechecking of the assignment of codes and the coded material.

The coding programme helped me develop and refine interpretation of the data, and led to the following initial grouping of data:

- **Teachers**: workload issues; professional development; giving feedback; commitment to the programme; significant changes in student behaviour; perceptions of the success or otherwise of the programme.
- **Students**: feedback from teachers; knowledge of the Graduation Programme; changes in behaviour; goal-setting; motivation.

What were initially general insights, vague ideas, and hunches soon became refined, expanded, discarded or developed. Eventually, some of my initial categories collapsed as themes emerged. For example, although I had not asked any direct questions regarding relationships, it became so apparent in students' responses to the research questions that I re-read the data with relationships at the forefront of my thoughts. This saw me merging original categories under the new theme of "Relationships", so giving this theme the recognition it deserved.

As the themes surfaced, I returned to the literature to see if these they had emerged in previous studies. To give an example, research by Bishop et al. (2003), and Hawk and Hill (2000) highlighted that the relationships students have in their classes are fundamental to their ability to engage with learning. Although Bishop et al. (2003)

were reporting on Māori students, they acknowledged that positive relationships with teachers are an essential component of quality leaning for all students.

In Chapter 5, I give a detailed account of the study's findings under the key themes that emerged.

Chapter 5

Results/Findings

This chapter describes the study's findings using the key themes that emerged from the analysis in relation to the main research question. These three themes are: (1) relationships/feedback; (2) workload and professional development issues; and (3) failure and success. The findings have been set out in terms of the efficacy of the Graduation Programme.

Gilham (2000) states that case study research is a method not to be wasted on issues considered unimportant. Chapter 4, Methodology, covered the background and problem statement and the tools of inquiry used to gather data. This chapter presents the analysis of the data from the teachers' and students' perspectives. The themes used to explore the findings relate directly to the research questions from the study (see Section 1.2).

The main themes that emerged from the analysis are represented in the following sections.

- **Theme 1, relationships/feedback**, reflects particular educational discourse that influences teachers' daily classroom interactions with their students. It also deals with the theme from the students' perspectives.
- **Theme 2, workload/professional development**, covers issues that put enormous pressure on teachers and affected how they viewed and implemented the Graduation Programme.
- **Theme 3, failure and success,** deals with teachers' views on the success of the programme as well as their concerns for at-risk students. The success, or otherwise, of the programme was also evident in the students' data, but at times this is linked to the consequence of failure—of not being allowed to graduate to the next year level, for example.

5.1 Theme One: Relationships/Feedback

Although I did not ask a specific question about relationships during the interviews, the data I collected from the students indicated that good relationships with teachers had a major impact on their motivation to succeed within the classroom. This theme therefore emerged as a major factor that students considered contributed to their success.

I decided to re-analyse the data collected from teachers to see if student/teacher relationships were implicitly or explicitly present in their responses to questions. Although relationships with students were not mentioned specifically by any of the teachers, some of their responses led me to believe that other factors had a direct impact on their relationships with the students. For example, workload issues and lack of commitment had a direct bearing on how they interacted with students concerning the Graduation Programme. Teachers who were supportive of the programme ensured that students had feedback on a regular basis. This feedback time, usually fortnightly and given individually, allowed student and teacher to engage in quality time. Encouragement was given to students to ensure that they could meet their goals. Students' comments below indicate the importance of teacher approval and interest in them as individuals:

> **Kiri**: I know that the teacher is watching me and she always reminds me of my behaviour, and so I go all quiet and do my work because she takes an *interest* in me. Other teachers, they ask about how I am doing in class—like in my tests and stuff like that, and they tell me I am doing really well and my grades have gone up quite a lot since last term, and stuff like that. I feel really proud of myself when the teachers tell me I am doing really well in class.

> **Anne**: The English teacher has been quite nice to me, and I like getting somewhere in that class now because the teacher seems to like me.

The following two students related how their grades had improved as a result of the teacher taking an interest in them.

> **Jason**: My English teacher, she came up to me and told me that I was doing really well; that was last year, but I remember because I tried harder after that.

> **Robert**: I am working much harder now and I want to pass but I work harder in the classes where the teacher talks to me. Some of the teachers don't seem to care about the kids who are not working. As long as they are quiet, they leave them alone.

The importance of teacher interaction evident in these comments was not explicitly expressed by the teachers as a factor in students' achievement. Teachers recognised the importance of giving feedback, as they noticed that students' behaviour and work output improved when they gave them frequent and accurate feedback on their progress. However, they did not appear to make a link between the feedback and building positive relationships. Conversely, the students' response to feedback was always linked to building positive relationships. The consequence of the feedback for students may have meant better performance but, for many of them, feedback was the first motivating tool to success. Several teachers commented on how feedback about progress (points) towards graduation helped to motivate students.

> **Ben**: This regular feedback is very important and it makes an enormous difference. I know it has really helped this year. They know more about the programme because I am constantly reinforcing it. It also means I am *talking* to all the kids, whether it is a few words of encouragement, or a warning about losing their points.

Philippa also noted the importance of regular discussion with the students. She stated that she had noticed a huge improvement in their behaviour and progress this year, and she believed it was because of the regular feedback on their progress in regards to graduation.

> **Philippa**: They always ask me how they are doing, and I always try to keep my records up to date. It is a two-way thing; they keep me on my toes because they are interested and they want to know. They really appreciate the interest I take in ensuring that they will graduate. It is for them an important part of being in my class.

Although Philippa and Ben were not explicitly discussing relationships, they were implied in their comments. Both of them acknowledged that feedback tended to promote a more positive attitude in the students and that, as a consequence, they were more focused in class. Brendon's comment, "...they think I am achieving something", echoes similar sentiments from Philippa and Ben, who said that the students appreciated the teachers' input in helping them achieve their goals.

> **Brendon**: I think the Graduation Programme holds a lot of interest for the students, and that they think, "I can see where I lost that point," or it reminds them that they must get a note for that absence. I think it's a good programme. I think that the students think that I am achieving something and so I think it's a very positive thing, and it is instant feedback that they desire, so that they know where they are all the time.

Conversely, there was also evidence of the impact of negative relationships on students as noted by Louise, who suggested that other teachers did not use the programme appropriately, at times using it as a means of preventing students from graduating the students that they "did not like". Louise believed that students noticed inconsistency between teachers in applying the system:

> **Louise**: I shouldn't be telling you this, but there are teachers who just don't do it, and then, when it comes time to fill in the form, and they haven't done a common assessment chart. So, at the end of the term, they haven't done it consistently throughout the term—they just have a chuckle when doing it, and make their decision on whether they like

the kid or not. This could have meant a bronze or a silver award for that kid, but the teachers (some of them) just don't care.

On further probing as to why the teachers did not care, Louise showed more sympathy for the teachers:

> **Louise**: I think their attitudes reflect lack of commitment to the Graduation Programme—not because they don't believe in it, but because they are in survival mode, and when one teacher sees another teacher not implementing it properly, and they are feeling overworked, they just go with their intuitive feeling without ever having put the work in with the kids.

Simon, a repeat Year 9 student, felt his teachers had treated him unfairly the previous year. His perception was that they did not care, and he felt angry and resentful. I must emphasise that I interviewed him in March, and Simon consequently was still endeavouring to adjust to being in a repeat year level with students who were younger than he was. When he realised the previous year that the only course of action open to him was summer school, he said that he had made a commitment to attending and working so that he would be promoted with his peers to Year 10. He believed he was going to succeed, but on the last day of summer school he was told that he would not go into Year 10 in 2003. His comments indicate his disappointment:

> **Simon**: I did all of my work to catch up at summer school, and I did more than anyone else; even at home, I did it. I still didn't get through, and I was gutted.

In response to my question as to whether or not he had conveyed his feelings to the teacher, Simon stated:

> When I found out on the last day of summer school that I had failed, I was angry and upset and I just went home.

In response to the feedback he received in 2003, Simon stated:

> No one gives me feedback. The sheets are hardly ever put up on the notice board. If it is put up, I do go and have a look.

However, when I asked him how he was progressing, Simon said:

> I am on a "gold" for English, as the teacher put them up yesterday, but she didn't talk to me or anything.

Simon was the only student interviewed who expressed negative feelings about the Graduation Programme, and he was the only one interviewed who had been held back. One of the teachers referred to a boy in her class who had been held back (not Simon), and how she and some of the boys in the class made a commitment to ensuring that he would graduate this year:

> **Tracey**: There is one student who didn't graduate in my class, and two of his friends have made a commitment: "We are going to help you get through this term." Today, I used that as a discipline measure. I say, "Now you guys are supposed to be helping him get through each term. What's happening with that today?" They realised that to ensure Hamish reached the grade, they would have to keep him on track. After that they settled down again. I am continually following through and reminding them because they can lose sight of the end of term. I am so pleased with them (generally) helping each other to get through.

It is implicit in Tracey's statement that she was using the programme as a method to keep "at-risk" students focused on the goal of graduating. By using this method as a discipline tool, she was meeting the required goal, but by a circuitous route.

Summary

The data revealed that the teachers interviewed wanted the students to succeed. The students' narratives identified that when teachers took an interest in their progress, when they perceived that the teachers liked them and wanted them to be successful,

they responded in a positive way. Intrinsic and extrinsic effects of feedback (or lack of it) were borne by the students. Feedback was a powerful motivating tool when used appropriately by the teachers, as it gave them the opportunity to make a connection with individual students, thereby putting in place foundation blocks for relationship building.

5.2 Theme Two: Workload and Professional Development Issues

5.2.1 Workload

An important theme that emerged for teachers related to issues surrounding workload. To put this theme into context, one needs to be cognisant of the political framework and the pressures that teachers were undergoing during implementation of the Graduation Programme. NCEA (National Certificate in Educational Achievement) Level 1 had been implemented the previous year (2002), resulting in an increase in teacher workload. Conflict between the government and the PPTA surrounding workload and salary issues had left teachers feeling demoralised throughout New Zealand.

During an informal discussion, the project coordinator told me that the culture was such that staff felt they were victims of circumstance with little or no power to affect positive change within the school. He mentioned that one staff member had communicated to him that he had never worked in a school with such a feeling of negativity and oppression as this one. This and other comments from the teachers provided clear evidence of a serious morale problem amongst the staff.

In addition to low morale, fatigue levels were high. As Tracey mentioned, teachers were making mistakes when entering the graduation progress points because of fatigue. She had five junior (Year 9 and Year 10) classes. Consequently, the time spent on data entry was considerable.

> **Tracey**: At the end of the week, I get very tired. Consequently, I have made mistakes. I have entered results in someone else's place. I had to delete them all out of there and re-enter them again. I have done that about three times now. It is so easy to make a mistake, and it just increases the workload when you are tired. Sometimes, it is unbelievable; it can take me so long to get the results in, check them and print them. On a Friday, it can take

me anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour. I have five classes to do, and it takes a while to get them all done.

Tracey's honesty about her mistakes is interesting, as there were other teachers (not interviewed) who, according to the interviewed teachers, did not recognise that they had entered their results in the wrong classes. This caused stress and frustration:

> **Ben:** One thing I notice is that when I am entering my results into the computer is that some teachers obviously have gone into the wrong subject and not realised it, and they have changed all the grades in my area. Instead of going into English, they have gone into the one that opens up first without checking. When I am tired, and yet I want to record the results, it really annoys me when I see someone has been into my class and basically stuffed everything up and done nothing about it.

Louise spoke about the lack of commitment from some teachers and admitted that the previous year she had not given the Graduation Programme her full commitment.

> **Louise**: There is a lack of commitment from some of my colleagues, who just play lip service (as I did last year). The teachers that are not committed allows for those kids in their classes to fall through the programme. Teachers are always moaning about the time it takes, so maybe time should be given to teachers to do it properly.

Neil, a creative, innovative and resourceful teacher was frustrated at the time he had to waste "ticking boxes".

> **Neil**: The whole programme takes so much time. Not just in the class but I am always … there is so much to do these days as a teacher, there are so many boxes to tick and so many things to be aware of, and the curriculum is so broad. I just think it has increased my workload and has not helped with behaviour at all.

> Yet I have to carefully monitor all these different areas when I know half of it already, without monitoring it and ticking boxes. You get to the end of the week and you think, "I haven't checked that," and then you have to go back through, and it all seems so pointless.

He was committed to teaching and described himself as a passionate and dedicated teacher. He felt disempowered when the programme had been put in place. He believed that the essential quality of "learning" had been lost, as the focus centred on improving students' behaviour. Tensions were created between his own feelings of frustration as he grappled with the dilemma of his own goals for the students (learning) and the goals of the Graduation Programme (behaviour).

> **Neil**: I think it is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the kids are behaving appropriately in their classes. I teach English to juniors, and I believe it is my responsibility that by the end of the year my class goes away with skills as well as study habits that will help them in the senior school. I don't like the way the programme disempowers me, as I know these kids, and I resent that it gets in the way of what I might put in place myself. I have to follow this kind of tick box as I go. I had a perfectly good behaviour modification in place with my classes, and it worked. Now I have to adhere to a programme that does not work for my kids. It doesn't work for my kids because it doesn't work for me. My energy seems to go into paying lip-service to a system that has taken my autonomy away. The kids in my class were there to learn, and learning did take place—it still does—but so much time goes on ticking boxes and entering grades.

It is clear from these comments that Neil believed he was a good teacher and that good teaching and learning was an essential component of his life in the classroom. Now he was finding his energy channelled into a system that did not meet his needs or the needs of his students. His views were in stark contrast to those expressed by Ben, who was 100% behind the programme.

Although committed to the programme, Ben had concerns about the workload issue, and wished there was more time to make the programme effective. In his first interview (February), he was keen and eager to implement the programme and expressed disappointment that he did not have the time to do it effectively right from the beginning.

> **Ben**: I wish I could have done it from the beginning, but time just did not allow for it. The Graduation Programme means that I need to spend between half an hour and an hour just making sure that we actually enter it into the computer—it takes time.

When I spoke with him on his last day in the school (July), he was still as committed to the programme, but he had decided to return to Britain. He said he had never had to work as hard in Scotland as he had to work here. He also talked about the relatively low retention of staff and the ongoing problems associated with initiating new staff into the Graduation Programme.

> **Ben**: I think there is an awful lot expected of teachers, especially those that are tutor teachers.[4] There is an enormous amount of paper work that has to be done. On top of all that, there has been a huge change in staff, which adds pressure to those staying, so it is easy for the Graduation Programme to be put to one side as they just cope with surviving on a daily basis. There is far too much paper work here. I am going back home tomorrow, and I can honestly say that teachers at home don't work as hard as they do here. I don't think we use teachers' skills or their time in the most effective way here.

This issue of retention was also evident when I approached the project coordinator to set up a second interview with the staff. Of the six teachers initially interviewed, only one was still at the school (Ben), and I managed to interview him on his final afternoon in the school.

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[4] Those who have responsibility for pastoral care of a year cohort.

Summary

Workload issues overshadowed the commitment (or lack of it) to the Graduation Programme. Teachers communicated through their body language and through their narratives the exhaustion associated with NCEA implementation. The PPTA directive to "work to rule" also affected their ability to give 100% commitment to the programme. The teachers experienced tension between the political dimension and the personal dimension as they grappled with the dilemmas of expectations to implement the Graduation Programme successfully and the work to rule directive issued by the PPTA. The amount of time teachers needed to enter points was an obvious drawback of the programme. Teachers were also frustrated that other teachers made mistakes with data entry and did not seem to care. The lack of commitment to the Graduation Programme by some made it very difficult for others to implement the system successfully, resulting in low morale and negative feelings.

With only one exception, the teachers I interviewed were committed to the programme. They believed that if all the teachers gave it support and commitment it had the potential to be very effective in improving students' performance, both academically and socially in the classroom. However, they also had misgivings about its ability to succeed because many of their colleagues did not have the commitment or the energy to ensure that it was implemented successfully. None of the teachers interviewed expressed anger at their colleagues or judged them; in fact, they were empathetic and understood the issues that prevented them from being rigorous in giving effective feedback, entering results and being fair to all the students in their classrooms.

5.2.2 Professional Development

At the time of my research, the school had already identified professional development as crucial to ensuring that effective teaching and learning took place. Although professional development was not one of my research questions, its emergence in the data was too important to ignore. Teachers resented the compulsory attendance at professional development sessions on Fridays (the last day of the week) because of the amount of administration they needed to complete before the weekend. They considered professional development another intrusion into their busy schedule:

> **Tracey**: No one has asked us if we agree with the timing of the professional development. We just have to turn up and attend, and so many of the teachers (including me at times) go into the professional development with the wrong attitude, and this just blocks any good that should be coming from it.

Neil expressed a similar point of view when he stated:

> **Neil**: Teaching is important to me; seeing my students succeed is why I am here. But I find my energy and my morale just slipping. Something is not right, and now we have professional development to add to the mix—don't get me wrong, I know that having professional development is important, but right now I would prefer the time to get on top of the administration, plan lessons, mark work.

Neil's and Tracey's views emerged over and over again in the data. These teachers were not impressed with the burden of professional development and could not see the point of it:

> **Ben**: The last thing I feel like on a Friday afternoon after a busy week is the opportunity to be "professionally developed". I think they need to review the timing.

Louise also questioned the necessity of professional development. She suggested that the time should be made available for the Graduation Programme:

> **Louise**: We have a lot of professional development times here at school, so maybe we could use some of that to give teachers some time to do the graduation programme properly—there needs to be some recognition for doing that.

Summary

The teachers considered Friday afternoon professional development sessions another workload issue. Teachers went to these sessions reluctantly and without any commitment to the goals of senior management. They failed to see links to the Graduation Programme. Instead, they saw professional development as another intrusion into an already busy and overloaded week.

5.3 Theme Three: Failure and Success

5.3.1 Teachers' Discourse

Teachers had concerns for at-risk students in terms of academic achievement. Most of the teachers could see the benefit for the top students who wanted to strive for gold and the middle students who were motivated to get a silver or a bronze. However, they noted that the students at the bottom were staying at the bottom, and that something different might be needed for them. Some at-risk students had disappeared completely from the system. They had stopped coming to school; they had "fallen through the cracks". Comments from Philippa and Neil provide examples of how the teachers perceived this situation.

> **Philippa**: Kids at the bottom of the pile that are *I don't care* kids, I'm not convinced that it is helping them. I don't think it makes a lot of difference to them. They still think, *I don't care*. It's not that they can't graduate because it's not that hard to graduate. It's only the basic essential skills, but it doesn't make any difference to them because they are going to carry on not caring. They are on a spiral downwards, and nothing I can do seems to help.

> **Neil**: I think that the students that respond to a programme such as this are the students that respond normally to any type of programme. That is the fundamental problem for the students at the other end. If they don't care, then this programme doesn't really help those students. It does not follow kids through into the senior school, so I can't see where the validity of actually doing something like this is. I also think it is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the kids are behaving appropriately in their classes.

Prior to introduction of the Graduation Programme, Neil had a very successful reward programme in his classes. He called it the "star programme". Neil awarded students stars for doing their homework to the required standard, for behaving in

class and for engaging in learning. Any student who accumulated 20 stars in one term was given a movie pass. Neil said his programme was very successful. The "stars" were immediate and tangible, and the students knew what was required to get enough stars to gain the reward.

> **Neil**: It [my reward programme] was my way of trying to get them to develop good homework habits, so that they still got their marks. But it was something a little more immediate [the stars], more tangible. Some students went from really minimal homework habits to doing their homework and doing extra work because they could see that the stars were accumulating with a tangible reward at the end. When I took it [my own programme], away, then they just reverted back to not doing these things—it didn't last. Now I am nagging them again and again, saying "Where is your homework?" whereas before, with the star programme, they were walking to the room with their books out and open to show me their homework so that they could get their stars.

However, he also conceded that the Graduation Programme did work for some of the students. He reflected on the end of the previous year when students received their awards and how pleased they were:

> **Neil**: Yet, at the end of the year, you do see students quite pleased with their achievement of the gold or the silver they are awarded. You see the students comparing certificates, so obviously the programme does hold some sort of mana amongst them, but what about the kids that didn't get any? I worry about them.

Ben and Philippa were more positive about the success of the programme on all students. Ben acted on his belief. For example, he reminded them regularly about the point system and daily checked that the students had the correct phys. ed. gear.

> **Ben**: Now the kids know much more about the programme because I have reinforced it. They always know when they are gaining or losing graduation points every time they come to phys. ed. It has really helped with their gear and things like that. I reinforce it twice a week. I show them a mid-week review, so they always know where they are and what they need to do. They know if they are in the middle, if they are close to gaining a silver award, or if they are on a bronze.

Philippa's comments echoed Ben's as she experienced the tangible evidence of students consistently asking about their own performance and if they were maintaining it.

> **Philippa**: I think overall it's working really well. I think for the kids who want to keep an eye on their progress, eventually they'll ask you; they are always watching to see how they're going with their points; some are going for gold. Yes, those students who are heading for gold, it actually works really well for them. It works really well for most of the middle of the road kids because it gives them something a bit more to aim towards. They can see something at the end of the term, and they are working towards that. So, little things become really important. For example, they know if they get this bit of homework in on time, then they'll still be sitting on a gold or silver, or if they can get a note from their parents to explain if they haven't done it, it helps.

5.3.2 Students' Discourse

As I analysed the students' data, the following sub-themes relating to the main theme of success and failure emerged: goal-setting; feedback from teachers; motivation; fair treatment; and relationships. I found these sub-themes interconnected to the point that they were inseparable. As I coded the data and identified the emerging themes, I found it impossible to extract students' motivation from their knowledge of the programme or from their goals. Because of this inter-connectedness, I have not separated out these sub- themes, but rather reported them as students' perceptions to

illustrate how the majority of the students believed they benefited from the programme.

Without exception, the students spoke about their goals, their aspirations and their motivation when talking about the programme. Although they tended to say that they "did not know much about the programme", they demonstrated in their responses a clear understanding of it; they just did not have the labels to attach to it. This was also the case in their talk about goals. All the students said their goal was to succeed within the programme. They were scared about being held back and worried that they would not graduate. The students consistently stated that their motivation to succeed was inseparable from their fear of being held back. Although they may have had other reasons for working hard, behaving and succeeding, these reasons somehow became submerged in their fear of failing to graduate.

When I talked to the project coordinator about this, he expressed the opinion that goal-setting and feedback were the cornerstones of the Graduation Programme. He said that these elements provide powerful motivational tools if used the right way. His claim was borne out in the students' data. Without exception, when discussing the programme, the students focused on their goals and their motivation.

Simon was one of the most concerned students. He was repeating Year 9 as a result of the programme, and his main objective in life was to get out of Year 9 and go to Year 10. He wanted this to happen at the end of the term, although he had no idea if he could get promoted through good behaviour in just one term. He said that he had difficulty behaving appropriately because he liked to impress girls. This year he was pleased that to have been put in an all boys' class because this was helping him to concentrate. He was trying hard to stay out of trouble.

> **Simon**: Last year [Year 9], I thought it was all a bit of a joke [being held back]. But it does actually happen, and now that I have been held back, I just want to graduate to Year 10. I hate not being with kids my own age. I still get around with them at lunch time, and I have made some friends with the kids in my class, but I don't like being here. I check to see if I am on track. I

like girls quite a bit, and I like to impress them. Being in an all boys' class helps me. I am pleased they put me in an all boys' class this year—I am sure I will graduate because of it.

Simon's fear of not being promoted was echoed by all the students interviewed. Although Simon was the only one in the study group repeating a year, the others demonstrated the same fear of being held back. Graduation was, in effect, a huge motivator for the students to behave and to learn.

Jason: The thought of being held back really scares me. I work better because I don't want to be held back. Sometimes when I am doing something in the classroom, I know that if I keep on doing it, I will be held back. It's keeping me out of trouble.

Anne said that she was learning much more, and that because she wanted to graduate, the programme was helping her not to be sent out of class. She was making sure she did her homework, and she was working much harder than she had at intermediate school. When in referral, Anne said she would think about the Graduation Programme, and that it was therefore helping her change her attitude. Without prompting, she mentioned her goals and her recording of them in the back of her book.

Anne: I really think the programme is great. I am starting to look at the back of my book to see what my goals are. It is making me learn more things and actually helping me not to be sent out because I want to graduate. It is making me do my homework. I am learning a lot more than I did at intermediate.

Some of the students commented that the competitive nature of comparing grades motivated them. For example, Stuart said he was staying out of trouble by having changed his behaviour, and by linking this change to a competitive element. He said he checked to see how well he was doing compared to his friends, and when he found he was doing better, he would be motivated to continue. He said his motivation was linked not only to the programme but also to the importance of doing better than his

peers. He also explained that he had "bunked" (truanted) a lot the previous year, so one of his goals this year was not to bunk. He had now bunked only a few periods (rather than days) and was very motivated to get a gold certificate this term. He had received a silver for the first term, but now wanted gold.

> **Stuart**: When I see everyone else's scores, I tell myself to work harder, so I make a big effort to push my score up. I like it when my friends say, "You are doing really well," when they check the score.

Extrinsic rewards also motivated Robert. He was delighted, as he had been placed second in the class. He had consequently maintained better behaviour so that he would not only graduate but also perhaps get the top prize.

> **Robert**: I check my grades every week. The teacher gives them to us on a bit of paper. We all tell each other what we are getting. I was chuffed last week because I got good grades. I was second from the top. The Graduation Programme makes people work harder, and if they do, they don't have to repeat. I really like the programme; it gives you something to work for.

Kiri also found the programme motivating. She had transferred from another local high school in the same geographical area, as she had been "behaving badly". She liked the Graduation Programme because "you get marked for behaviour". She admitted that she had great difficulty controlling herself in class but that she was endeavouring to work very hard this year because "the teacher keeps telling them that if you want to graduate at the end of term, you will have to pull up your grades". Kiri's motivation to graduate was linked more strongly to avoiding having to attend summer school than going into the next year level.

> **Kiri**: I am definitely going to work. I don't want to have to go to summer school. I want to do my own thing in the holidays, instead of going to school in the holidays.

When I asked the question: "How much is the Graduation Programme helping you?" she was very supportive, saying it was making a difference to her attendance, behaviour and learning:

> **Kiri:** The Graduation Programme has got me really settling down in class. Like, last year at my last school, I didn't really behave very well, and I got told off quite a lot, but now I get marked on behaviour as well, and it is really hard for me to control myself, but I am trying.

Kiri was also motivated because she was succeeding, and family approval was very important as well. She knew that she had let them down the previous year, so her motivation was two-fold: avoiding summer school and making her family proud of her. She wanted to be a "good girl".

> **Kiri:** The Graduation Programme is really helping me. It makes me do my homework on time so I know that I am going to get homework points and stuff like that. I want to pass. I want to do really well this term because I didn't do well lately so I will do more homework and behave in class—be a good girl. I feel really good because my grades are going up and I have a silver award now. I was hoping to get a silver or a gold so that my family would be proud of me.

Tom was motivated to graduate because a boy in his class had been held back. This constantly reminded Tom about would happen if he did not do his work and did not behave. Like the other students, he expressed a real fear of failing.

> **Tom**: I want to pass; no way do I want to have to repeat a year. There is a boy in my class who has repeated twice now. Man, he was in Year 10 last year, and the year before, and he is in it again this year. My main goal is not to repeat. No way. I am in the whanau class, and it is quite easy to pass things. It is quite easy

to get through, like *if you try hard most of the term*, you will get through.

This student had made the link that if he put effort into his work, he would graduate. Matt's main goal was to get silver every term and to try to get at least one gold. He said that he wanted to get a gold because "that proves you have worked your absolute hardest, like you are on good behaviour, doing your homework and doing your class work; that is the main way you get a gold."

Matt was the only student interviewed whose motivation focused on pleasing his mother. His mother was a major influence on his life, and pleasing her was his explicit goal. He lived alone with his mother, and it became apparent as the interview progressed that she was the most influential person in his life. He talked about the subjects he did not like (Mum did not like them at school either), the subjects he was good at (Mum was good at those as well).

> **Matt**: I got three bronze and one silver last year, and I worked real hard for those, especially considering in the first term I did miss quite a bit because of illness. I am good at the subjects Mum was good at. I am trying to live up to *her expectations* and get real good stuff in certain classes. I am trying to get silver every term and at least one gold. I really would like to get a gold because that proves that you are working your absolute hardest; like, you are on good behaviour, doing your homework, doing your class work—that is the main way to get a gold. If you get a gold at the end of the year, you get it in front of the school, not just with your report. Mum would be so proud of me.

Matt had missed a lot of school at the beginning of the year because of bullying. He referred to this as "illness" (see above). However, he had seen the counsellor and the student dean, and he felt more confident that he could now handle the situation and not "bunk" again. He was also very positive about the Graduation Programme and thought that it would motivate him to succeed by the end of the year. He always checked his grade to ensure that he was on track.

> **Matt**: I was bullied a lot in the first term and that is why I did not come to school. I tried my hardest when I settled down again. I am working my absolute hardest now. It's quite a good programme because as long as you keep notes and stuff, you get the points to graduate which help you for the year. I thought that as I had missed out at the beginning of the year that I would try my hardest and learn as much as I can in the last term, so I picked up everything which passed me for the year. I check my grades once a week. I used to check them once a fortnight, but my grades started to slip, so now I check them once a week to keep myself on track.

Kiri was the only student who felt that some students had found ways to abuse the Graduation Programme.

> **Kiri**: Absences—students who are absent—a lot of them just forge [absence] notes, and they don't get busted for it, so it seems unfair. The teachers don't check up or ring or anything. A lot of my friends are doing it, and no one rings home, so they just mark it off as if they were there. It really annoys me that they get away with it when I am doing my best this year. The teachers are just being slack.

When I questioned Kiri further on the note forging, she suggested that the parents were accomplices and that even if the teachers rang home to check, the parents would back up the students. She understood that although the students got away with it, it was more of an indictment on the parents than the school.

> **Kiri**: They forge notes for really important matters, and their parents know, and they will say to the teacher, "You can ring home," and if the teachers do, their parents just go along with it.

After the interview with Kiri, the project coordinator confirmed that the school had removed absences from the Graduation Programme. He stated that the majority of teachers had requested this change, as it seemed to unfairly penalise the students who were absent from school for valid reasons.

However, Kiri's assertion about parents colluding with students in deceiving the school brought into sharp focus the findings of recent research by Carnell and Lodge (2002), who found that when schools and family are disconnected and when they do not have a shared vision and goal, students are at risk of failure (see Chapter 3).

Summary

The teachers interviewed (with one exception) had positive statements to make regarding the success of the Graduation Programme. Even when feeling despondent and demoralised about workload issues and the mechanics associated with recording students' points each week, they conceded that there had been noticeable improvements in students' behaviour, attendance and ability to engage with learning. However, there were also expressions of doubt as to the programme's effectiveness in other classes with other teachers. Individually, the teachers interviewed saw its potential, but knew that it could collapse because of the antipathy of some of their colleagues. Neil, although not committed to the Graduation Programme, accepted the challenge and was not prepared to pay just lip service, as he wanted the students in his class to succeed. Tempered with this was his feeling of disempowerment as he believed he was a very good teacher who had systems and procedures in place that worked successfully for him before the introduction of the new system.

A major concern centred on the students who were at the bottom: none of the teachers interviewed had any faith in the system's ability to engage these students and make life at school meaningful for them. According to the teachers, students at the low-achieving end had not changed their attitudes towards achieving and continued "not to care".

The students interviewed were also positive about the Graduation Programme. I compiled many of the sub-themes that emerged from the students' narratives under the broad title of "Success and Failure". It was difficult to separate out the woven

themes, as each aspect depended on and related to the others. For example, students' motivation and goals were bound tightly to their fear of failure. Although the intention of the graduation system was to be encouraging and not punitive, the underlying apprehension of being held back, or having to attend summer school, was a major motivator for the majority of the students.

The Graduation Programme was a successful tool and motivator for all the students interviewed. There were two dimensions to their faith in the programme. Firstly, they wanted to succeed, and success was its own motivator. Seeing the results on a weekly basis and being aware of what they needed to do to keep their points or to gain more points enabled them to set goals—goals that were attainable. They were proud of their success and wanted to share this with their parents. For many it was the first taste of success and they liked it. There was room to stumble yet not fall. Teacher support and input was an added bonus, as these provided the students with feedback and encouragement to try harder to reach their goals and create new goals.

Secondly, the fear of failure, the fear of being held back, was a double-edged sword. The fear had the potential to block students' ability to be positive—this was especially so for the students that I interviewed who had experienced failure. At times, the fear of failure clutched at their core, paralysing them to inaction and making their days at school a rather unpleasant experience. However, these resilient students were the at-risk students who were succeeding with the support of their teachers within the Graduation Programme.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the success or otherwise of the Graduation Programme. This chapter considers the data presented in Chapter 5 in relation to the research questions designed for this study. It also discusses the implication of the findings for teachers and at-risk students.

In general terms, the analysis of the data showed the students' perception that when teachers were committed to the programme, students' behaviour improved, and that as a consequence of this improved behaviour, set in place the foundations for effective teaching and learning. All six teachers interviewed perceived the Graduation Programme to be a valid and useful strategy for improving student behaviour. Only one of the six had some misgivings, as the programme forced him to drop his previous behaviour modification system—a system that he considered a successful tool in ensuring good behaviour and, in turn, the opportunity for effective teaching and learning.

The study also highlighted the complex issues involved when undertaking research on a programme put in place to support at-risk students. The students interviewed had been at risk and the Graduation Programme was benefiting them in some way. However, this chapter also asks some serious questions about the disaffected students who continued to be disengaged from the programme. Such students are, and will continue to be, a genuine concern for all teachers. Another concern, linked with disaffected students, was the lack of data on positive working relationships with parents and families in the community.

In this chapter, I summarise the key themes and implications that emerged from the study, discuss the limitations of the research process, suggest implications for my own practice, and indicate some possible questions for further research.

6.1 Teacher–Student Relationships

The importance of the teacher–student relationships in low-decile multicultural New Zealand schools has been well documented previously (see for example; Carnell & Lodge, 2002; Hattie, 1999; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Henderson & Milstein, 1996 and MacBeath, 1999) and this work is supported by the research undertaken for this project. For students, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are fundamental tools in achieving learning goals, but they do not work in isolation from the atmosphere and learning environment generated by the teacher in the classroom. Positive student–teacher relationships, although not initially considered within the research framework, emerged from the data as an essential part of the success of the Graduation Programme.

The students' responses to the questions indicated that good relationships with teachers were motivating tools for engaging with learning and that good learning was better achieved when the students set themselves goals to ensure that they graduated. Although they did not explicitly say as much, the students knew that in order to graduate they had to behave and that the result of good behaviour was the ability to listen and learn. Consequently, good behaviour had the positive outcome of improving their personal development.

As Lauder, Hughes, and Fitzgerald (1992) noted, debates about school effectiveness have ignored non-cognitive outcomes such as personal development. Hill and Hawk (2000) further validate the argument in their report that teachers interviewed as part of the AIMHI research suggested there should be a way of formally recognising or rewarding students' positive changes in attitude, leadership ability and social skills. As well as recognising students' who have had a shift in attitude, it is also crucial that teachers are rewarded for their positive impact on student achievement. This is supported by (Hattie, 2002) who argued:

> . . . we should focus on the greatest source that can make the difference—the teachers. We need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimised to have powerful and sensationally positive effects on the learners. Teachers can and usually do have positive

> effects, but they must have exceptional effects. We need to direct attention at higher-quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet—and that these occur once the classroom door is closed and not by reorganising which or how many students are behind those doors, by promoting different topics for these teachers to teach, or by bringing in more sticks to ensure they are following policy. (p. 7)

Wentzel (1997), cited in Alton-Lee (2003), reporting on a longitudinal study of 248 middle school adolescents in the United States, found the students' perception of "pedagogical caring" in their teachers to be strongly and significantly related to their motivation. Students saw aspects of caring involving not only the teacher caring for them as individuals but also the teacher listening, caring about teaching and providing feedback and assistance. Wentzel postulated that such results are apparent in the research not only for minority and low-achieving students, but for all students, regardless of race or family background. As evident in the analysis chapter, the students' narratives support these findings.

Further validation can be found in the report on effective teaching practice in low-decile schools. The researchers in the AIMHI project indicated that a good teacher–student relationship is a prerequisite for student motivation and learning (Hill & Hawk, 2000). The researchers discussed several aspects of the importance of teacher–student relationships, including teachers respecting students. "The relationship that students in these schools form with their teachers is crucial. If a teacher has not been able to form a positive relationship of reciprocal respect the students in that class will find it very, very difficult to be motivated to learn" (p. 4).

The result of my data align with current literature and recent research results from sources such as AIMHI (Hawk & Hill, 2000) and Te Kötahitanga (Bishop et al, 2003).

> In particular, the principals identified the relationship between the teacher and their students as the most significant theme within the discourse. The sub-themes noted that the attitude of the teacher was

> a critical factor in the relationship that formed between teacher and student. (Bishop et al., 2003 p. 78)

Kiri, one of the students interviewed, crystallised Bishop's et al. assertions. She made a salient point: "The teacher has taken an interest in me. Other teachers ask about my tests and stuff like that and they tell me I am doing really well and my grades have gone up quite a lot. I feel really proud of myself when the teachers tell me I am doing well and I want to try harder."

Kiri's comment was reflected again and again in the data from the other students. It is therefore imperative that teachers at the school recognise the importance of relationship building with all students in their classrooms. Relationship building may be in the guise of goal-setting, feedback and/or feed-forward. It is my belief that it is these small interplays which give the students individual time with the teacher that result in students feeling that someone cares about them and that someone is there assisting them to achieve their goals.

Although relationships were not an explicit feature of how teachers talked about students, the teachers' comments strongly suggested that teachers saw relationships as important to students' participation and learning. Ben, for example, mentioned he "talked more to the kids" since he had begun recording their points. He wanted them to do well, so he gave feedback and engaged dialogue. Tracey ensured that students honoured a commitment to help Hamish stay focused by reminding them of their promise. These teachers liked their students, and the students knew this. The impact was positive and immediate—the students tried harder because someone cared about them. This caring was usually expressed via the feedback to students on their success or otherwise in gaining points.

6.2 Feedback

The improved student behaviour was inextricably linked to feedback from teachers. As the project coordinator observed, goal-setting and feedback provided the cornerstone for the success of the Graduation Programme. The teachers who engaged

with the students on an individual basis, who set goals with them and then monitored their progress by giving feedback, were the teachers who stated that they had the most success in improving student behaviour.

In support of these teachers' claim, many of the students identified that the feedback had a direct impact on their ability to engage with learning and their willingness to set goals and endeavour to reach them. They appreciated the interest from teachers and the scaffolding they provided to help them succeed. For most of the students, this interaction was the first positive engagement they had experienced with teachers in their years at school. This point is validated by Bishop et al. (2003), who noted that:

> According to the students, the discourse of relationships was very important. For example, the students noted that when their relationship with their teacher was not good, then their learning experiences were unrewarding. Mostly, the students felt that having good relationships with their teachers would lessen some of the tension within the classroom and enable them to learn better. (p. 49)

6.3 Fear of Failure

One concern that cannot be glossed over was the genuine fear of failure articulated by the majority of students interviewed. This was linked to their overwhelming desire not to be held back a year (not to graduate). For them, the Graduation Programme became the extrinsic motivator that galvanised them into action. The threat of being separated from their peers and being humiliated by being placed in a class a year behind their year level resulted in more on-task behaviour. The on-task behaviour, reinforced by the points system, attracted more positive teacher intervention, which resulted in relationship building through the feedback process. Although the outcomes of "fear of failure" resulted in more engagement by the students, I am uneasy with this extrinsic tool as a motivator and wonder if, for some students, the threat does not work and they become the disengaged, absent students who continue to fail. Neil alluded to this possibility when he equated the graduation programme to "a behaviourist approach to

keep students at school. The big stick was the fear of being held back." He went on to say:

> **Neil**: This programme works for some kids, but my own behaviourist approach was positive—they got a pass to the movies; they looked forward to it. They were not motivated by a negative, a punishment. Now, I am not sure. I know we have lost kids. Is that what we wanted? I don't think so.

6.4 Disengaged Students and those with Resiliency

Neil's concern that "that the kids at the bottom stay at the bottom" was echoed by Philippa. She, like Neil, claimed that the students who had disengaged from the school had not had their needs addressed. The comments of these two teachers suggested that although the programme had made a difference for some students who were potentially at risk, there were still students who had slipped through the system and eventually "fallen through the cracks". The teachers interviewed and the project coordinator had no strategy for assisting these students. The disengaged students continued to be disengaged or absent because there was not enough energy or time to deal with them.

It is worth noting that the teachers' concern regarding disengaged students was not supported in this study. This could be because the students interviewed had resiliency and managed to resist failure even though they had the potential to "fall through the cracks". Resilient students can be thought of as possessing the ability to bounce back after experiencing stressful life events or the ability to cope despite the adverse conditions they live in. They achieve this by having a sense of being valued, feeling secure and having many connections with families and communities (Tasker, 2001).

However, it must be stated that disengaged, disaffected and at-risk students were visibly absent. Although the students who participated in the study were chosen randomly, they did not include those at-risk students who could have supplied particularly rich data on what the Graduation Programme meant for them. These students could not participate because they were absent. They could also have given

real insight into the efficacy of the Graduation Programme. They were the students who, for whatever reason, had decided to opt out of the system. Perhaps for them, the fear of "being held back" and their inability to act as an agent for self (Henderson & Milstein, 1996) made it impossible for them to persevere. As noted in Chapter 3, students need to be empowered so that they can participate in decision-making and goal-setting.

With only one exception, the students interviewed had indifferent success at school. One had transferred from another school because of behaviour problems; one had been a regular truant; another had been held back and prevented from graduating the previous year. I did not interview any high ability, academically successful students. This was not pre-planned. The project coordinator presented me with a group from which I asked for volunteers.

6.5 School and Community: What Was Going On?

Kiri's comment about parents' supporting their children in deceiving the teachers alerted me to the lack of any data in my findings regarding the importance of the school building and maintaining relationships with its families and community. During my conversations with the project coordinator, he did not mention parents' involvement or support for the Graduation Programme. Parents were aware of its existence through school newsletters and information sent home informing them of the aims of the programme.

If Kiri's assertions are true (there is no evidence to refute them), then Milton High School needs to seriously ensure that when implementing new initiatives, schools must consult with their community and gain their support and trust so that they present as a united front to the students. This evidence supports the views of Fine (1991), Carnell and Lodge (2002) and Bishop et al. (2003), who suggest that schools must build positive, open and supportive relationships with parents so that the goals and aspirations of parents for their children are acknowledged and that collaboration between all parties exists. Unless this happens in Milton High School, it is highly likely that making a difference for at-risk students will fail.

6.6 Impact of Additional Responsibilities on Teachers

A recurring theme (already documented in the analysis) was the issue surrounding workload that emerged in the interviews—a reality that impacted on the teachers' ability to give 100% to the programme. The teachers I interviewed were committed to improving educational outcomes for the students in their classes and were working hard to be successful in achieving their goals. However, the pressure associated with implementing NCEA, low staff morale and industrial action imposed by the PPTA had created an environment that did not foster enthusiasm and motivation. Over the last five years (since the formation of NCEA), schools have been increasingly subjected to professional development, inspection and moderation, as the Ministry of Education implemented the new system. The climate of accountability which surrounds schools makes it less likely that school leaders in at-risk schools will do other than comply with the pressure to demonstrate improved performances.

As noted by Carnell & Lodge (2002), ". . . the consequence of failure makes it harder to take risks" (p. 154). However, Milton High School was prepared to face the consequences and take risks, one of which was the introduction of professional development into the school. It is important to consider professional development when discussing workload, because, for the teachers in the study, professional development was a workload issue—an additional expectation that required time and energy.

The goal of the school was to allow teachers time to engage with professional development, a goal supported in the report on effective teaching practice in low decile schools (the AIMHI project) (Hill & Hawk, 2000). The researchers in the project stated that schools should design their professional development programmes around ensuring that teachers are able to meet the needs of students. Unfortunately, the teachers interviewed did not make the necessary link between the professional development sessions on Fridays and the Graduation Programme. As Neil stated, "It involved a lot of box ticking to manage discipline, but for what outcome?" Had the aims and the process been more explicitly expressed to the teachers on Fridays, there is a possibility that instead of the professional development becoming another

workload issue, it may have done what it aimed to do—support teachers in their implementation of the SMAD Project which included the Graduation Programme.

This view is supported by Fullan (1993). He observed that professional development workshops delivered in isolation from other strategies that the school is endeavouring to implement will fail unless teachers can make the connection between the development and their practice. It would seem, then, that senior management must make explicit and direct links so that the teachers can appreciate the value of professional development and understand the inter-connectivity between initiatives, professional development and implementation. This was not occurring at Milton High School, and consequently teachers had no commitment to professional development.

When reflecting on what the project coordinator had said to me in some of our meetings, I realised that whole-school discussions specifically about teaching and learning had been few and far between in the years leading up to 2003. "A great deal of discussion at staff meetings had centred on peripheral issues, such as tinkering (in a seemingly never ending cycle of change) with the discipline system. The coordinator stated that the "experience of working with the other SMAD schools has taught us that this is something of a 'low-decile problem' in many schools, where the negative pressures of dealing with students from difficult backgrounds often negate the need to change what is happening in the classroom from a learning perspective" (Project Coordinator, 2003).

As cautioned by McNeil (1986), when a school's organisation becomes centred on managing and controlling, teachers and students take school less seriously. As students disengage from enthusiastic involvement in the learning process, it is often viewed (by management) as a control problem. Management then increases its attention to managing students and teachers, rather than identifying the root of the problem. This situation was apparent at Milton High School, where ticking of boxes (managing and controlling) exacerbated the workload issues. Teachers became disaffected and uninterested (see Section 5.2.1 workload).

6.7. Retention of Staff

Unfortunately, the workload/professional development issues exacerbated issues related to retention of staff, the addressing of which would give stability and continuity to schools. For Milton High School, staff turnover was a barrier to the effectiveness of the Graduation Programme. Since 2000, there had been a 40% turnover of staff, which had had a negative impact on students and staff. Teaching staff who were members of the initial team involved in implementing the programme had moved on or were initiating new staff part way through the school year. New staff found it difficult to embrace the programme as they grappled with all the issues surrounding being a "new" teacher. Similarly, students felt the negative impact of the constant change in classroom teachers. It was an unsettling time for the students as they also came to terms with low staff morale—a tangible force in the school. They also had to deal with new teachers who had little or no knowledge of the Graduation Programme.

> **Robert**: Teachers seem to come and go all the time, and we have a lot of relieving teachers who don't know much about the school. We have to tell some of them about the points system because they don't know about it.

Fullan (1993), recognising the difficulties of implementing change, stressed that any resistance to change would need to be addressed before the change could be regarded as successful. At Milton High School, staff turnover prevented resistance being addressed satisfactorily. Although the management team were working enthusiastically and with positive action to share their vision, staff turnover had worked against these efforts and, in turn, effective teaching and learning. According to the researchers in the AIMHI project (Hill & Hawk, 2000), retention of good staff is important for schools to succeed. Drawing on data supplied by the PPTA, they found that, over a four-year period, lower decile schools received fewer applicants for teaching positions than did the higher decile schools. They had more jobs for which there were no applicants, had fewer applicants per position and had fewer New Zealand-trained applicants.

The inability of Milton High to maintain a stable, committed workforce risks the sustainability of the Graduation Programme. Although I did not set out to explore this notion in my study, I believe that future research may indicate that too many initiatives, leading to staff exhaustion, may have had a direct link to the low staff retention rates at Milton High, which had an immediate adverse impact on the quality of the teacher–student relationships underpinning the efficacy of the Graduation Programme.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The findings of this research clearly show that although the Graduation Programme appeared to be working for most of the students deemed at risk, it was not the explicit administration of the programme that was having this effect, but the tools used to ensure that the programme's efficacy. These important tools—requirements to give feedback to students—ensured that the teachers engaged with the students. Consequently, the Graduation Programme became a vehicle through which more student-teacher interactions occurred. Every student interviewed had quality time with some teachers—whether through setting their goals, reflecting on their progress, getting encouragement or receiving extrinsic motivation. It was the interactions with teachers that caused change to take place.

Similarly, the teachers themselves were encouraged by the students' responses to feedback as noted by Philippa:

> They like getting feedback and they know that I want them to get a silver or a gold. My enthusiasm and support is appreciated by the kids. I can always find something to talk to every kid about now—even the kids that find it difficult to communicate respond when I begin discussing their progress and what we can do to ensure they keep their points.

This study also highlights the importance, when implementing change, of taking note of what students have to say, especially as these can point to disparity between the students' and teachers' perceptions of a new initiative like the Graduation Programme. It also challenges the effectiveness of existing professional development programmes that fail to make tangible and immediate links between a new initiative and classroom practice. Nonetheless, it is evident from the data collected that the teachers and students interviewed for this study were mostly positive about the success of the Graduation Programme. Although the teachers raised concerns about

workload issues staff retention, they, along with the students articulated the benefits as outweighing the concerns.

Milton High School has, during its implementation of the SMAD programme, taken time to reflect and learn as it monitors its initiative to raise students' achievement through new programmes, professional development, staff commitment and reflective action. However, it is crucial that the issue of staff retention be addressed urgently so that the school can move forward with a stable and committed staff, otherwise the time, energy and resources used to improve quality outcomes for students will be wasted.

The aim of the Graduation Programme at Milton High School is to strengthen educational delivery and outcomes for *all* students. However, the data indicate that the programme is successfully strengthening educational outcomes for *some* students, but not all. A number of students continue to disengage from the school system—the non-resilient at-risk and disaffected students. A more robust form of the programme or an alternative must be put in place to ensure these students are not abandoned by the school in particular and the educational system in general. As I noted in Chapter 3 of this report, rich data has emerged in recent years that show when appropriate interventions are put in place, the outcomes for at-risk students change. Milton High School must explore these options so that all students are given the opportunity to be successful.

7.1 Limitations of the Study

Research of this nature is bound to have its limitations. With such a small sample of students and teachers, the validity of the research findings is impossible to verify. When I analysed the original data, I found themes and issues emerging that I had not initially considered. For example, workload was at the forefront of teachers' minds, whereas relationships were a recurring theme for the students. I intended to engage the teachers in further interviews to further explore and verify my suppositions but, as stated, all of the teachers interviewed left the school either permanently or on secondment. The project coordinator also left at the end of 2003.

7.2 Further Research Opportunities and Future Directions

Further research into the success of the Graduation Programme in improving teaching and learning would provide Milton High School and other schools offering a similar programmes opportunity to measure the impact on all students of an initiative like the Graduation Programme. A real concern for me is that without greater understanding and clarification of what makes such programmes work well, the Graduation Programme will become a behaviour tool used to motivate students to comply and behave without taking into consideration real issues surrounding learning for students in low-socioeconomic schools.

Research indicates that, for useful change to occur, the structures that support learning must include consultation with family and community. Neither students nor teachers interviewed for this thesis gave any indication of trust and open communication with parents. (Kiri was the only participant to refer to parents. She was upset that teachers accepted forged notes and that when teachers rang home, parents lied for their children (see section 5.3.2)). My recommendation therefore is that Milton High School takes cognisance of recent research on low-decile schools in New Zealand and implements approaches within the programme that includes building stronger relationships with students and with their families. More involvement with the community, leading towards mutual goals and developing trust together, with a movement away from the discourse of blame and guilt, should ensure that success replaces failure (Bishop et al., 2003).

Although the findings of this study have limitations, they support other research findings of the need for teachers to challenge their own deficit theorising and its impact on students' educational achievement as well as changing their performance in their classrooms. In association with this, the school and, indeed, society need to validate and encourage the wider role of the teacher so that teachers can give equal time and resources to at-risk students who may never make it in the Graduation Programme, but who may nevertheless move from being at-risk and disaffected to being valued members of the school community.

Creating and maintaining a successful school that promotes success requires a whole school approach that is proactive and stable. Milton High School has made a start. They are onboard the ship. It is still unstable but it is afloat. However, they must not lose sight of the disaffected at-risk students, many who have already fallen overboard. They need to ensure that these students get on-board; otherwise the programme is failing the very students it set out to rescue.

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Appendix A

10a Coniston Avenue
Avonhead
CHRISTCHURCH

November 2002

The Chairperson and The Principal
School name deleted
CHRISTCHRCH

As part of my study for a Masters of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education, I would like to be involved with the SMAD programme in your school. I have attended some of the meetings held at the College of Education and met with the Assistant Principal, on a number of occasions to discuss my research. With your permission, he has agreed to allow me to carry out research with the graduation programme. Throughout the entire study I will be closely monitored by him and I will be supervised by Missy Morton and Lindsey Conner, both of whom are lecturers at the College of Education and involved in the SMAD programme.

The general aim of my research is to monitor the success (or otherwise) of the domain of change nominated by your school this year. The domain of change is the graduation programme for Year 9 and Year 10. The study will involve me meeting a group of teachers at your school, gathering teachers and student data on the impact of the Graduation Programme, both negative and positive.

All data gathered will be confidential and anonymous and will remain the property of your school. Any quotations used in published work will not be directly attributed to persons interviewed. The process is being coordinated by the project coordinator and although I will have access to the material collected, my role is to search out connecting themes and analyse the significance of the implementation of the Graduation Programme for your school.

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact one of my supervisors, the project coordinator at your school or myself.

I feel very privileged to be given the opportunity to be part of the project. I know that the project coordinator is fully supportive of my involvement but for ethical reasons I also need your approval.

Yours sincerely

Ann McGrath
Senior Lecturer
College of Education

Appendix B

December 2002

I am a senior lecturer and a student in the Masters of Teaching and Learning programme at the Christchurch College of Education. During the next six months I will be working towards the completion of a research thesis. The purpose of my research is to investigate the effectiveness of the graduation programme at Year 9 and Year 10. I hope the findings of the study will provide information to support more effective monitoring of the scheme.

The study involves you as either a Year 9 or 10 student or as a core subject teacher of a Year 9 or 10 class. You will be involved in an interview, approximately 20 minutes in length. These may be followed, at a later date, by a one on one interview with a randomly selected teacher or student to assist in the clarification of the data.

The interviews will be scheduled at time convenient to you and based within the school environment. The interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy and will be transcribed by the interviewer. Complete confidentiality will be ensured throughout the study by assigning each participant a code number. The code number will be used to identify the participant in the audiotapes, transcripts and research report. I will be the only person who knows the identity of the participants. A list of participants, code numbers and their consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home. At no time will the schools name or the names of the participants be recognised or used.

The findings of the study may be presented at education conferences and submitted to professional education journals for publication. Participant confidentiality will be maintained in these situations.

If you have agreed to be involved this study I will liase with the Programme Coordinator to organise interview. All participants will be asked to sign a consent form prior to interviews. Students will also be required to get parental consent. These are attached for you to complete at your convenience, prior to the interview time. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time your wishes to do so will be fully respected.

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaints concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent persons is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education

PO Box 31065
Christchurch.

If you have questions, please contact me at any time on 0252328818 of 3578486. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have. My thesis supervisor is Lindsey Conner, Senior Lecturer, School of Secondary Education at the Christchurch College of Education and she can be contacted if you have any further enquires on (03) 3482059.

Thank you for your time and willingness to be involved.

Ann McGrath

Appendix C

How successful has the Graduation Programme been in supporting at-risk student at Years 9 and 10 in one school involved with the SMAD (Schools Making A Difference) project?

Contact numbers of Investigators:
Researcher: Ann McGrath, (03) 3482059
Thesis Supervisor: Lindsey Conner (03) 3482059

Teacher Consent Form

This is to certify that I, _____ (print full name),
agree to participate in the study: "How effective has the Graduation Programme been in supporting at-risk students at Years 9 and 10.

I understand that my participation in this study will require the following processes. I agree to these as stated:

An interview, lasting approximately 20 minutes, in which my opinions on the effectiveness of the graduation programme will be recorded. A transcript of this interview will be mailed to me at my request.

Audio taping and transcription of the interview. I may ask to have the tape recorder turned off and the tape erased at any point I wish.

My confidentiality will be maintained in this study by the following procedures:
I will be identified by a code number on audiotapes, transcripts, thesis and in presentation or publication of this study.

The researcher, Ann McGrath, is the only person who will know both my identity and my code number. A list that links my identity to the code number will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

The transcriber will have access to audiotapes, but my anonymity will be protected by identifying the audiotape by code number only. The audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed after five years.

Transcripts will also be available to the supervisors/examiners, however, they will not be aware of my identity.

All information gained from the interview process will be used for illustrative purposes only. Any quotations used in publication will be unatttributable.

I understand that I may choose not to participate in this study, may refuse to answer any questions, or may withdraw my participation at any point, without any adverse effect. I understand that there are no risks to me participating in this study.

If I have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding I can contact Ann McGrath on (03) 3482059.

If I have any concerns regarding my rights in this study, I may contact the Ethical Clearance Committee. Address all concerns to;

The Secretary
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31-065
Christchurch 8030

Telephone: (03) 343 7707
Fax: (03) 343 7789

My signature below indicates that I have agreed to participate in this study, that I have received a copy of this consent form and an information letter about the study.

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Witness _____

Date _____

Appendix D

How successful has the Graduation Programme been in supporting at-risk student at Years 9 and 10 in one school involved with the SMAD (Schools Making A Difference) project?

Contact numbers of Investigators:
Researcher: Ann McGrath, (03) 3482059
Thesis Supervisor: Lindsey Conner (03) 3482059

Student Consent Form

This is to certify that I, _____ (print full name),
agree to participate in the study: : "How effective has the Graduation Programme been in supporting at-risk students at Years 9 and 10.

I understand that my participation in this study will require the following processes. I agree to these as stated:

An interview, lasting approximately 20 minutes, in which my opinions on the effectiveness of the graduation programme will be recorded. A transcript of this interview will be mailed to me at my request.

Audio taping and transcription of the interview. I may ask to have the tape recorder turned off and the tape erased at any point I wish.

My confidentiality will be maintained in this study by the following procedures:
I will be identified by a code number on audiotapes, transcripts, thesis and in presentation or publication of this study.

The researcher, Ann McGrath, is the only person who will know both my identity and my code number. A list that links my identity to the code number will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

The transcriber will have access to audiotapes, but my anonymity will be protected by identifying the audiotape by code number only. The audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed after five years.

Transcripts will also be available to the supervisors/examiners, however, they will not be aware of my identity.

All information gained from the interview process will be used for illustrative purposes only. Any quotations used in publication will be unatttributable.

I understand that I may choose not to participate in this study, may refuse to answer any questions, or may withdraw my participation at any point, without any adverse effect. I understand that there are no risks to me participating in this study.

If I have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding I can contact Ann McGrath on (03) 3482059.

If I have any concerns regarding my rights in this study, I may contact the Ethical Clearance Committee. Address all concerns to:

The Secretary
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31-065
Christchurch 8030

Telephone: (03) 343 7707
Fax: (03) 343 7789

Or I will contact the assistant principal, is who the school coordinator for the research project being undertaken by Ann McGrath.

My signature below indicates that I have agreed to participate in this study, that I have received a copy of this consent form and an information letter about the study.

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Witness _____

Date _____