Local Innovation or Government Initiative? Curriculum Specialisation in New Zealand's Education Quasi–Market

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INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates and compares approaches to the phenomenon of specialisation within secondary education in New Zealand and England. Both countries have witnessed a movement since the 1980s towards a market-based system of education; in both cases there has developed increased curriculum-based specialisation among secondary schools, although this (as we shall demonstrate) has been quite different in form and especially in scope. New Zealand and England exhibit within their education systems many similarities and yet provide contrasting patterns of specialisation. Although New Zealand has become economically more dependent on Asia than on Britain (as in the colonial and more recent post-colonial past), there is some evidence that in the field of education, New Zealand continues to be influenced by British education policy. For instance, the wholesale adoption of unit standards during the mid 1990s was clearly modelled on the SCOTVEC framework of vocational qualifications (Irwin, 1994; Smithers, 1997), and Smyth claims that *Tomorrow's Schools* (Department of Education, 1988), which followed the Picot Report (Picot, 1998) and ushered in many of the changes, was modelled directly from the policies of Thatcher's England (Smyth, 1993). It is therefore interesting to examine the extent to which the different education systems, the level of government encouragement and support and the differences in underlying philosophy have affected the form and development of approaches to specialisation in the two countries.

Curriculum specialisation, largely driven by the existence of government funding, is well established in England, and is becoming increasing thoroughly documented. Such developments will be examined in a later section of the paper. In New Zealand, specialisation is considerably less commonplace, often possesses a local or 'homespun' character, and is not generally supported and encouraged by government initiatives. Our research project, Curriculum Specialisation in New Zealand (CSNZ), was set up to investigate the scale, scope and nature of such developments, and in

particular to examine the imperatives that have driven the establishment of specialist programmes in individual schools. CSNZ is comprised of case study research carried out in a small number of New Zealand schools which have gone at least some way towards establishing specialist programmes in a variety of subject areas. While this sample could be viewed as the tip of the iceberg, as many schools within New Zealand are undertaking similar initiatives to those described, it should be noted that the research undertaken represents a snapshot of some of the more notable examples of this sort of curriculum development. Furthermore, while many schools have diversified in terms of curricular provision, specialisation is only found in a minority of New Zealand schools; it is these latter schools which are the focus of this paper. With these points in mind, it is important to define what we mean by the terms *diversity* and *specialisation*.

It is clear that schools that are diversifying are seeking to expand the range of subjects on offer to their students beyond the range of what has been traditionally available; initiatives to develop courses in areas such as electronics and horticulture are certainly examples of diversity. Specialisation is more difficult to define. A programme geared to providing a level of education in a particular subject that is significantly higher or more intensive than that usually offered will perhaps indicate that the programme is worthy of the denomination 'specialist'. Significantly enhanced expenditure for a particular programme may also be indicative of specialisation, although we must be careful to delineate between specialist programmes, and 'flagship' school departments, which while excellent, do not in themselves provide a specialist education. A third indicator that may be used in determining whether a school has a specialist programme, is apparent in schools where the programme in question becomes a focus for the activities and image of the school; it is clear that some of the schools surveyed, fall into this category.

QUASI-MARKETS IN EDUCATION

Any analysis of specialisation, whether in New Zealand, England or elsewhere, cannot be separated from the prevailing educational orthodoxies which have driven government policy in recent years. The stated aim of these has been to increase devolution and choice within secondary education and the education system in general. Both England and New Zealand have been in the forefront of what Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998) identified as a widespread, if not global phenomenon. This has involved the delegation of some powers and responsibilities (particularly those involving budgets and administration) to individual schools, coupled with increased parental choice of school, which linked enrolment closely to school funding. This marketisation of schooling is predicated upon a number of stated (although many would argue fallacious) assumptions: parents will use their equal knowledge about schools to exercise choice in selecting schools for their children; schools will become more socially and ethnically mixed as a result of this, and that diversity of provision will occur as a corollary; and education markets will drive up school performance and the quality of teaching, as bad teachers are fired and poor schools close due to lack of enrolments (Lauder et al, 1999). It is not the purpose of this paper to assess the validity of these propositions.

At the same time, there has been increasing central control over curriculum and teaching through a process of managerialism (Clarke et al, 1994; Gerwitz et al, 1995; Helsby, 1999; Codd, 1999). This has manifested itself via the development of a 'corporate culture which 'empowers' workers to take responsibility for (but not power over) the achievement of prespecified organisational goals' (Helsby, 1999, p30), and accompanying 'systems of managerial surveillance and control that have fostered within educational institutions a culture in which trust is no longer taken to be the foundation of professional ethics' (Codd, 1999, p45). A rhetoric of school failure which emanates from the New Right (MacLure, 1993; Eisner, 1996; Elliott, 1998),

termed 'discourses of derision' by Ball (1990), has served to 'create a sense of unease about teaching and justified subsequent government attempts to reconstruct teachers' work' (Helsby, 1999, p24). Thus a 'legitimating discourse for the use of power is constructed which marginalises the voice of teachers and produces an appearance of successful curriculum change' (Elliott, 1998, p34). Moreover the 'term accountability has been used by successive governments to establish a discursive consensus which constructs teachers as being in need of external regulation' (Poulson, 1996, p585; see also Menter et al, 1997). The net result of this has been in many respects an illusion of autonomy and devolution, and merely a 'procedural autonomy' (Barnes et al, 1987; Bates, 1997). The quasi-market in education is in fact 'steered by government, which sets the rules of exchange and decides the nature of the product' (Hartley, 1997, p138).

New Zealand has been described as having 'the state-of-the-art quasi-market schooling system in the English-speaking world' (Gordon, 1996). In effect New Zealand has become a laboratory, in which the social experiment of the New Right has been performed (Kelsey, 1995). Hirsch has argued that school autonomy and the stripping out of intermediate layers of control and administration between the schools and the central state have gone so far in New Zealand, that it has become almost oxymoronic to talk of a national system of education (Hirsch, 1997). Jesson has described New Zealand as 'a freak amongst nations' and 'the Kampuchea of the free market'. (Jesson, 1999, p19).

There are two main points to be made about this. First, this a relatively recent phenomenon:

> 'Prior to 1987 New Zealand education was a centralised bureaucratic system of education. Approximately 90% of school expenditure was determined by the Department of Education in Wellington. The rules and procedures, which governed the

> conduct of school administration, were also centrally determined… (the system)… tended to be slow and inflexible; it didn't encourage innovation (although it certainly didn't preclude it)' (Lauder et al, 1999, p37).

The administrative reforms heralded by Picot (1988), Tomorrow's Schools and the 1991 Education Amendment Act, and the curricular reforms contained in the Curriculum and Qualifications Frameworks have changed all of this in a relatively short space of time and have served to 'marketise' the education system.

Second, and this may explain the lack of a centralised programme to develop specialist schools in New Zealand, education policy has manifested a more 'hands off' nature in New Zealand than it does in England. According to some critics of the quasi-market in education, the state sees itself as 'an unnecessary interposition between consumers (students and parents) and providers (teachers)' (O'Neill 1996/1997, p129). The New Zealand Curriculum Framework is far less detailed and prescriptive than the English National Curriculum, even in its post-Dearing slimmed down version. As such it lacks the more traditional conservative and state directed elements that permeated its English counterpart. This, despite the wider problems accruing from the adoption of the market model of education, and despite fears expressed at the time that the Framework would lead to 'frills' squeezed out by an overemphasis on 'basics' (Snook, 1990), has provided some opportunities for schools, in allowing 'sufficient flexibility for schools to interpret curricula to suit particular needs' (Barr and Gordon, 1995). Thus it has probably contributed to the development of diversity and specialisation in many schools, including those covered in our survey, although these developments are counterbalanced by the lack of a coherent government programme for specialisation as exists in England.

However, despite the existence of differences between English and New Zealand approaches to recent education policy, there are many similarities. Included in these is the development of specialist programmes in schools, and it is therefore worthwhile to consider the emergence of specialisation in New Zealand's schools against the context of similar developments in England. To do this it is first necessary to briefly examine the *theoretical* role of specialisation within quasi-education markets. Proponents of the free market in education would claim that at least two conditions must be met before the education market can operate efficiently. The first of these is the provision of information to parents (consumers) about the choices on offer so that they can make rational choices. Thus in England, league tables of test, examination and attendance records, OFSTED reports and statutory information which all schools must publish in their prospectuses provides information to parents. In New Zealand, while there is no statutory requirement for schools to publish specific information in this manner, the Ministry of Education publishes statistical information (in a non-league table format). This information contains the benchmarks, which enable schools and parents to judge the performance of a particular institution against averages collated from similar schools. The Education Review Office (ERO) also publishes reports detailing school performance. These are available to parents seeking to make informed choices about schools.

The second condition deemed necessary for the effective operation of the market, is the provision for diversity within the education system. One of the criticisms levelled at the previous comprehensive approach to secondary education was that it produced a dull uniformity, which failed to reflect the different abilities, aptitudes and aspirations of potential pupils and their parents. On this view a choice between essentially identical offerings would be no choice at all. Thus any local education market should ideally provide a range of different types of school from which parents can choose. Diversity could be achieved by the provision of choice in terms of single sex versus coeducational schools, or by allowing parents a choice in terms of curriculum

(e.g. schools with a focus on technology or sport). This latter diversifying characteristic is the major focus of this paper and it is clear that within any local market, advocates would wish to see a range of schools emphasising different curricular specialisms. The aim would be to produce a horizontally diversified range of different but equal schools.

As we have indicated elsewhere (Higham et al, 2000), this scenario raises several issues. First, did the previous approach produce the 'dull uniformity' that neo-liberals would claim? This question is quite clearly beyond the scope of this paper. Second, within the narrow confines of national curriculum prescription, is diversity possible? Within the strait jacket of the English National Curriculum there are certainly difficulties in this respect, but as noted previously, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework is considerably more flexible. Third, can local education markets, especially in rural areas, sustain the differentiated provision, which the market model assumes? This point is especially pertinent with regard to New Zealand. Fourth, where a range of provision can be achieved, will it comprise vertical diversity (the establishment of a hierarchy of schools within a local market) rather than the more desirable horizontal diversity? It seems fairly clear to us that a pure, horizontally differentiated market is likely to exist in few, if any, localities.

SPECIALIST SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Market theory claims that specialist schools will be established in response to real or perceived demands from consumers (students and parents). Because funds are fully devolved to schools there should be no necessity for the central state to play a role; rather schools will respond to the needs and wants of their local communities and will establish specialist programmes.

It is clear that in England this has not been the case and that the development of specialist schools has occurred as response to the availability of government funding. The last decade or so has seen the development of a centralised, state-driven approach to specialisation, most recently exemplified

by the establishment of the specialist schools programme. The current thrust towards specialist schools has its roots in the policies of the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major during the 1980s and early 1990s. The first examples of this variant of school were the City Technology Colleges (CTCs). It was intended that these controversial schools were to be funded, at least in part, by private sponsorship from industry. They focused on the use of technology across the curriculum, and sought to attract students who had an aptitude for technological subjects. These were to be a 'new kind of school orientated explicitly towards an enterprise culture driven forward by high technology' (Edwards and Whitty, 1997), and were clearly a product of a reductionist view of education, conceived as a product with instrumental goals. Due to a lukewarm response by potential sponsors, only fifteen were ever established. The 1991 Technology Schools Initiative (TSI) further extended government support for this type of curriculum, by giving one-off capital grants to secondary schools that were willing to specialise in the direction of technology.

However by far the most extensive initiative to establish specialist schools has been the specialist schools programme. This development was first signalled in the 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity: A new framework for schools* (DfE, 1992). The paper extolled the virtues of diversity and proposed that a network of Technology Colleges, specialising in Technology, Science and Mathematics, be established to build upon the achievements of the CTC and TSI programmes. The first Technology Colleges were announced in February 1994 and in November of the same year the programme was extended to include Language Colleges. A further announcement in 1996 means that the programme now incorporates Sports and Arts Colleges.

In order to receive the designation ‘specialist school’, an institution must raise $330,000 in cash or kind for capital projects from business sponsors and produce a three year development plan showing how they will meet the broad aims of the programme and the detailed objectives which they have set

themselves. Once accepted a school receives matched $330,000 capital funding and up to a maximum of $330,000 per annum. Thus over a three year period a school stands to gain up to $1650,000 in additional funding (including sponsorship) with more to come upon being successfully redesignated. Unsurprisingly, the scheme has been popular, and there are now over 500 such schools.

There are several comments that can be made about the development of specialist schools under this programme. It is clear that specialist schools in England can be largely identified with the specialist schools programme; as such they are not a market-driven phenomena. They have not come about through schools identifying a niche in their local education market and exploiting it. The programme is clearly state-driven both in most respects. At the level of policy it is based upon a human capital/modernisation model of education, driven by the perceived needs of national economy in the context of globalisation. The strong focus upon technology and languages is indicative of these motives. In their practice, institutions are closely monitored by the government's specialist schools unit. They are required to submit annual reports and the third year of recurrent funding is dependent upon them achieving tightly defined and prespecified outcomes.

It remains uncertain whether the curricula found in specialist schools are significantly different to those pursued in schools outside the programme. Some have alleged that that the specialist schools are doing mainly what other schools do, but doing it with greater resources. The programme has also come under attack from some commentators as an assault on comprehensive schooling. This is because specialist schools are permitted to select up to 10% of their incoming pupils on the basis of aptitude in the specialist subjects. Indeed Nigel de Gruchy of the teaching union NAS/UWT has alleged that specialist schools have become the new grammar schools of the English system, stating that 'they are better resourced, and because they are oversubscribed they end up selecting youngsters. It is not surprising that they

do well' (quoted in Judd and Russell, 1999). As yet however there is little or no evidence of the effects of specialisation on admission patterns to specialist or neighbouring schools. Research currently being undertaken for the Department for Employment and Education by the School of Education, University of Leeds and the Centre for Educational Research, London School of Economics will throw light on these questions.

GOVERNMENT POLICY INITIATIVES IN NEW ZEALAND

There has been no initiative in New Zealand comparable to the specialist schools programme. Curriculum projects involving central designated funding have been generally very small in scale in New Zealand. Where the funding has been more significant, such as in the case of the Second Language Learning Project, it has been available for a finite period of time only. Lack of money and the concomitant lack of perceived support from the Ministry of Education have thus constituted a barrier to such innovation, and it is clear that the lack of programmes comparable to the English initiative is the main reason why specialisation remains rare in New Zealand. However the available evidence indicates that in the few cases where there have been projects with Ministry backing and funding, these have led to diversity and in some cases to specialisation. These projects fall into two main categories: ongoing funding, and funding for short-term curriculum projects.

The Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource is a good example of ongoing funding for school based curriculum projects. By enabling schools to run courses that would normally be available only in tertiary institutions, such as electronics or catering, it opens up a range of specialist programmes to school students. STAR provides for taster courses in Years Nine and Ten, as well as for programmes for students in Years Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen. However the limited nature of STAR ($23.7 million in 1998) makes it unlikely that the fund will lead to the establishment of specialist schools. It merely allows schools to run subject options that could not be otherwise funded.

The second type of Ministry funding has involved specific curriculum areas. This has often taken the form of specific funding for a pilot study in a single school (e.g. the Computers in the Classroom Initiative: Boyd, 1997). In other cases government money has been made available for an established project (CANTATECH, which will be discussed in due course falls into this category.). In at least one case, the Technology Development Schools Project, the Ministry of Education has accompanied the announcement of funding with the stated intention to establish specialist schools. This initiative, launched by Lockwood Smith in 1993 called for bids from schools who wished to become 'lighthouse' technology schools; subsequent to this announcement, four high schools were designated as such, and received funding between 1994 and 1996 for this purpose. Three of the schools chose to focus on developing their school libraries into high technology information centres, and the fourth invested in portable computers, primarily for staff use.

The project is largely remembered as being less than successful (Hawk, 1997). The funding is seen today as being inadequate for the stated aims of establishing and maintaining technology schools, and the schools in question did not have the resources to continue with the project once the initial funds dried up. This was exacerbated by the failure of the hoped-for sponsorship from industry to materialise. According to Hawk, the funding,

> 'was certainly not enough to make them into the kind of specialist schools that the original Gazette announcement signalled when it specified that the schools would attract 'students who would probably not otherwise enrol at the school concerned (. . .) and who may be attracted to the opportunities offered by a technology development school'' (Hawk, 1997, executive summary).

The unclear nature of the Technology Development Schools Project's objectives was without a doubt a reason for its failure:

> 'This project incorporated and hinted at a number of goals, but did not clearly state what the key underpinning objectives were. This seemed to result in a diverse set of requirements that eventually became unrealistic' (Hawk, 1997, p81).

Moreover, schools were given six weeks (falling over a holiday period) to produce a detailed proposal; this militated against comprehensive planning. The evidence suggests that the success of this well-intentioned and well-publicised project was compromised from the beginning by poor planning, unclear and unrealistic expectations and inadequate funding.

The Second Language Learning Project is a more recent curriculum project sponsored by the government. This 'exploratory study' has 'allocated $4.8 million (for) second language learning for students in Years 7 to 10' (Ministry of Education, 1997, p3). The project has funded clusters of schools over a period of two and a half years to facilitate the use of secondary school language teaching expertise in delivering foreign language programmes to students in intermediate schools. An important spin off effect of this has been an increased uptake of language learning in the secondary schools involved with the project, as many students in intermediate schools have developed a taste for this. While it is probable that this funding has not on its own enabled schools to establish specialist language programmes, it is clear that in some cases it has allowed secondary schools to offer a more diverse range of foreign languages than previously, and thus boost their profile of language learning. This funding has now finished and it is likely that many of the schools involved will be unable to continue with the programmes established as a result of the project.

It is clear that New Zealand has not attempted to set up a coherent programme of school specialisation as has been the case in England. Initiatives such as the Second Language Learning Project and the Technology Development Schools Project are smaller in scale, scope, and duration than

comparable projects in England, for instance, and in any case are largely atypical of government policy. Nevertheless our research indicates that diversity is common, and that specialist programmes do exist in some schools. Some of these schools are highlighted in the next section of the paper, which examines the imperatives that have led schools to establish such programmes.

CURRICULUM SPECIALISATION IN NEW ZEALAND: METHODOLOGY

The research that forms the basis for this paper took the form of visits to 12 schools spread around New Zealand. During these visits interviews, based upon a common semi-structured schedule, were conducted with key members of staff who had played an active part in the curriculum area surveyed, being either at the level of Head of Department or Senior Management. The purpose of the research was to explore the nature of and reasons for various forms of curriculum specialisation and development, consequently the focus was on the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data.

The schools selected for the visits all had one thing in common: each of them had been identified as running a curriculum programme that was different to the norm, either in terms of excellence, enhanced funding or level of specialisation achieved. We thus chose to research a small sample of schools across a range of curriculum areas: Art; Music; Technology; Sport; ICT; Technology; Outdoor Education; and Foreign Languages, though not all of the schools surveyed can be described as having specialist programmes. The schools identified as having strong Art departments provide a good example of this. These departments are well funded, in one case there are extensive new buildings, and both employ specialist staff in order that subjects like sculpture can be taught successfully. Students at these schools consistently produce art work of the highest calibre, and achieve excellent examination results. However, despite this evidence of excellence, it would be difficult to describe such programmes as 'specialist'. Art is accorded equal status with

other subjects within the schools, there is little evidence of an emphasis on the Art programmes within publicity material from each institution investigated, and in each case Art is an option subject open to all students. Excellent provision does not equate in this case with specialist status.

The secondary schools that we have highlighted in the following case studies cannot be considered to be representative of New Zealand schools with specialist programmes. They have however been selected as being indicative of the forms of specialisation that have been established, and for their ability to provide useful insights into the imperatives that drive local curriculum specialisation. Thus, within each of the case studies, we have sought to identify and delineate the different imperatives that occur.

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT: ICT AS A FOCUS FOR THE SCHOOL

Canterbury Area School[1] has developed an impressive ICT programme, incorporating extensive networked facilities and a cross-curricular approach to computers. Most notably the school has been the driving force behind the CANTATECH initiative that has enabled the delivery of many hard-to-staff subjects such as Japanese and Classics in the absence of specialist teachers, through the use of audiographic conferencing and on-line teaching.

The school has faced significant problems. It is a rural school catering for students from Years One to Thirteen. As such, it faces the perennial issues common to schools of its type. In particular small numbers of students in each cohort mean that composite classes are sometimes necessary, and invariably subject specialists are at a premium making it impossible to offer a wide range of subject options at senior levels. Moreover, the school was failing to retain large numbers of students past Year Nine, as many were transferring to the school in a neighbouring town, or even becoming boarders at schools in the regional centre.

> ‘We don’t have the base in the school for providing a large number of topics, so if we are not very careful we lose our senior pupils down the road to other schools who can offer a broader range of subjects’ (Interview with Deputy Principal, 1998).

A new Principal in 1991 was quick to perceive the nature of these problems, and following discussions with staff, it was decided that existing staff strengths in IT should be built upon to establish a computer-based programme for all students. This programme currently consists of a large provision of core IT in Years Seven to Nine, as well as extensive cross-curricular provision in all subjects. The school possesses a very good network with a high-powered server, and considerable numbers of computers, both in dedicated suites and in classrooms and the library. Students have easy access to the Internet, and IT forms a very large part of the culture of the school, being ‘very much seen as a tool, rather than an end in itself’ (Interview with Deputy Principal, 1998).

The school’s involvement with CANTATECH stems from the perceived need to tackle the problems faced by the school. The original project, CASATECH developed in 1992/93 out of discussions with six other area schools which faced similar 'worries and concerns' (Interview with Principal, 1998). Falling rolls and the concomitant low achievement rates were the catalysts behind the schools’ involvement in CASATECH, and extending the range of subjects offered to senior students was seen to be an answer to these problems:

> ‘It was simply about being able to offer a broad enough curriculum to retain senior students (and the closely linked government funding). With small numbers of students in many curriculum areas, schools could not afford specialist teachers. The virtual classroom promised a solution’ (Zwimpher, in Cantatech, 1997, p1).

This was to be achieved by the establishment of a network through which on-line teaching could be offered. Initially, schools were able to collaborate in offering Agriculture in Year Eleven, Economics, Physics and Graphics and Design in Year Twelve, and Accounting and History in Year Thirteen. In 1996, the project was extended to include a further four schools, and renamed CANTATECH to reflect the fact that it now incorporated schools from across the Canterbury region. By 1997 it offered twenty-three subjects, as well as providing links with a Polytechnic for the provision of vocational engineering-based courses. The project has been partially funded by the Ministry of Education, who provided a grant of $70,000, and this has been supplemented by a further grant of $25,000 from a bank. However the availability of this funding was not the catalyst behind this innovation, it merely facilitated it. Most of the costs, especially those involved in the maintenance of the programmes offered, have been met from existing operating budgets, which has caused considerable strain for the schools involved.

The initial impetuses behind the establishment of both the IT programme at the school and CANTATECH are clearly the problems of falling rolls, caused at least in part by the poor range of subject options at senior level. However it is apparent that these are conditions that are not peculiar to this school. There are many rural schools that face similar concerns, but which have not chosen to operate similar programmes. Why then has Canterbury Area School 'stepped out of the education comfort zone, and taken a risk' (Zwimpher, in Cantatech, 1997, p1)? The role of a key individual (in this case the school's Principal) has been an important factor in facilitating the development of the ICT programme at the school.

> 'It has always been a focus of the Principal the Information Technology is the way of the future, and it was her influence and ability to convince the staff that has produced the drive that is there. One of the reasons why I was appointed as DP

> was that I also have an interest in that (IT) and that I was (in my last role) in charge of computers…. I don't think that it would be unfair to say that the Principal is internationally recognised as one of the forefront people in the idea of Information Technology in an educational sense being used in a classroom and being targeted as a main focus and emphasis within a school. She has pushed it for these two reasons: one being that we are isolated here and the kids need the access, and two a philosophical thing from her view that she saw that digital information was going to become of major importance' (Interview with Deputy Principal, 1998)

The experiment has been a clear success in many respects. A Ministry of Education evaluation of the early part of CASATECH reported increased levels of 'personal confidence, confidence in the use of technology, ability to work with a group and with a minimum level of supervision, a willingness to take responsibility for one's own learning and (the development of) social skills' as by-products of the distance education project (MacKinnon, 1994, p19). The trend towards falling rolls has been reversed[2], and the school claims a significant improvement in examination results since 1991[3]. While the links between this type of success and IT-based programmes have not been conclusively proved (Boyd, 1997; Philips, 1995; Watson, 1993; Rowe, 1993; Gardner, Morrison, Jarman, Reilly and McNally, 1992), the Principal of the school is sure that such a link exists at least in part, stating that,

> 'the kids' chins were really down in 1991, and it is my gut feeling that the success that the kids are having now across the whole range of curriculum areas is that the publicity and good comments made out in the community have spurred them on' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

Moreover, this publicity has not been confined to a local level; the school has enjoyed national recognition and success, having recently been awarded the Goodman Fielder Award for being the best school of its type in New Zealand.

'THE SCHOOL THE WHOLE COUNTRY IS TALKING ABOUT'

This assessment of the urban coeducational Rapanui High School by one of its students (quoted in Brett, 1997, p77) has not been far from the mark since its much publicised Sports Academy was set up in 1997 for students in Years Twelve and Thirteen. The school has been the subject of newspaper articles, and by the admission of the Principal has been inundated with enquiries from schools seeking to emulate the school's success. According to the Principal the Sports Academy should be examined in the context of the school and previous attempts to cater for its students:

> 'the school is in a low socio-economic area, and high numbers of students leave school before they complete five years of secondary, and so I've been interested right from the start in post-compulsory education for less than academic students. In the senior school there has been a high degree of frustration and a high dropout rate, and over a ten year period we have been experimenting with all sorts of programmes' (Interview with Principal, 1998)

The Sports Academy came about specifically because of a strong interest by a Maori member of staff in tackling under-achievement amongst students from his own community.

> 'He had this idea about motivating kids and directing them into career paths…. He interviewed every senior Maori and Pacific Island kid in the school. The only thing that was a common thread is that they are all mad keen on sport' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

The Academy coach has asserted that 'sport is just a means to an end. It's a motivational tool that we are using to change attitudes' (Academy coach in Brett, 1997, p77). The Principal has expressed similar sentiments, stating that,

> 'rugby isn't an issue. The school's about having the kids stay on at school, getting some qualifications, getting some skills, learning how to fit into the world, and the Sports Academy is just the hook.' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

This is the crux of the Academy. In return for being able to join it, participating in the sports activities, playing for the school teams and receiving the specialist coaching, students are expected to take part in a range of normal school options in Years Twelve and Thirteen, and to attend lessons. Further Academies have been set up in 1998 to capitalise on the success of the original Sports Academy; these include Management, Trades, Drama, Hospitality and Childcare. Moreover, similar specialist options have been introduced into the junior school on a more limited scale, in order to raise participation rates in the school programme at entry level. The Principal describes the programme as, 'student needs-based' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

Rapanui's Principal has also described the Academies concept as a 'new way of looking at senior education for schools such as this'. He is prepared to admit that it can be seen in many respects as,

> 'a euphemistic use of titles. It is simply a school programme that is focussed and targeted for the needs of this particular group of kids. It is PR exercise, but it is also a philosophical thing that is acknowledging that they are valuable, and that the courses they are doing are valuable, and that we put experts in there who are enthusiastic, and that rubs off on the kids' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

The Principal is quick to acknowledge the opportunities provided for his programme by the inception of the Qualifications Framework and the availability of unit standards in non-traditional subjects.

> 'The reality is now under the new assessment framework that there are an inordinate number of qualifications available in all sorts of things. And the beauty of this is that they can be doing this as well as traditional bursary exams' ((Interview with Principal, 1998).

A tangible, indicator of the success of the Sports Academy lies in the numbers of students enrolling at the school. The school roll has increased by 6.8% between 1994 and 1998 (Ministry of Education Benchmark Indicators, 1998). According to the school Principal, recent rises in the roll can be largely attributed to demand for places in the Sports and other Academies. A welcome corollary of this has been the enhanced rates of funding that accrue to senior students. Moreover, the number of new entrants in Year Nine increased by twenty in 1998, suggesting that the Rapanui High School is finally succeeding in reversing the trend of recent years for more academically inclined students to be sent to the local single sex schools.

> 'As a result we are getting more acceptance in the community as a whole. They wouldn't send their kids here before because it is Rapanui and it's synonymous with crime and violence, but now you are more likely to see the school mentioned in a positive way in the newspapers. And also then because it is a special programme that has got results, people say I'm going to Rapanui but it's to the Academy programme, so it's OK to go there. We've broken a few of those taboos and barriers' (Interview with Principal, 1998).

If this proves to be the case, then the value of the Sports Academy as a flagship to raise the profile of the school within the community, will have amply justified its existence.

EDUCATING THE TALENTED: SPECIALIST PROGRAMMES IN MUSIC

At least two high schools in New Zealand have set up innovative specialist music programmes. Both are decile ten schools. One (Brookside College in Christchurch) is coeducational. The other (Lakeside College for Girls in Auckland) follows the pattern for strong Arts programmes to be a feature of single sex girls' schools. Both schools are very large; in the case of Brookside College nearly 2200 students attend the school. While both schools are still in the early stages of their programmes, which have emerged during the 1990s and which must be seen as experimental, the schools are claiming clear signs of success in terms of raising students' abilities, competition success and increased publicity for the schools.

Brookside College was the first school to set up a programme of its type, and it is this school that forms the basis of the next case study. The specialist programme developed for a number of reasons, which are largely contingent on its geographical position within a locality with a high socio-economic profile. According to the Head of Department for Music,

> 'Brookside College has had a very long tradition of music as a special character of the school, to some extent because of the staff involved, and to a large extent because of the type of students who are actually in the zone (as an oversubscribed school, Brookside operates an enrolment scheme)' (Interview with HoD, 1998).

The socio-economic profile of students entering the school has also facilitated the development of the programme, by guaranteeing large numbers of students with existing skills and aptitude in music and the financial resources to participate. The Head of Department is convinced that the 'impetus in

reality comes from students and their parents' (Interview with HoD, 1998). He believes that the parents of many of the students on the programme,

> 'are out to get the best possible deal that they can from us as an add on to what they already have privately…. I feel that although we had all these very gifted students, quite a number of them weren't taking our music programmes…(the department) did need to cater for these students, the students already within the school' (Interview with HoD, 1998).

A third source of impetus for the establishment of the programme came from discussions between the University of Canterbury's Music Department and local schools about the possibility of setting up a specialist music school along the lines of St. Mary's School in Edinburgh.

> 'I was invited to join a discussion group about the idea of establishing such a school by staff at the University. I liked the idea of catering for these students, but I didn't like the idea of a separate school. I didn't feel that it fitted New Zealand culture…. The fact that the University is very close geographically is a big reason why they were interested in Brookside' (Interview with HoD, 1998).

As has been the case with all of the schools highlighted in the case studies, the role played by key individuals has been a vital component in establishing the programme. The Head of Department has ensured that new ideas have emerged and been implemented, has dealt with opposition from both within and outside the school, and has been instrumental in the appointment of like-minded staff to drive the programme along. He has been helped in this by the sheer size of the school, and an 'encouraging and very helpful' Principal (Interview with HoD, 1998), which have made funding such a programme easier.

The programme is primarily aimed at students entering the school in Year Nine and utilises a streaming mechanism to identify students with musical potential. Out of an eighteen-form intake, three classes are designated as performance classes. These classes receive an enhanced music programme in Year Nine (enhanced in terms of content, but with the same time allocation as the Year Nine core music programme).

Within one of these classes are placed twelve students who are chosen by audition for their musical ability; in essence these students are a stream within a stream. This is the specialist programme and, while these students receive roughly half of their tuition with their class, they spend the remainder of their time in small groups with specialist peripatetic tutors. They receive regular assessments from University tutors, and are encouraged to participate in a full range of extra-curricular musical activities. The students continue on the specialist programme as they progress through the school, taught in part with the Music option groups, and continuing to receive the specialist tutoring. The specialist programme is funded directly by fees paid by the students involved in it, despite the fact that the school is a state school, and students are expected to pay for private tutors (although some support is available for this in cases of hardship from a charitable trust).

CONCLUSION

It is clear that some schools in New Zealand have chosen to develop specialist programmes, and that programmes of this type should be clearly differentiated from the curriculum diversity that is commonly found in secondary schools. Both diversification and specialisation could be subject, as we have previously suggested (Higham et al, 2000), to the existence of a number of key factors, or dimensions. These are *opportunity*, *source of impetus* and *support*. The *opportunity* to specialise or diversify seems to have been at least partially provided by the administrative and curricular environments created by government reforms since 1989. In particular, and despite the

increased influence of state managerialism, our research suggests that the parallel development of the Curriculum Framework and especially the Qualifications Framework has enabled schools to diversify in an environment where 'procedural autonomy' is becoming the norm. This seems to be in line with a more general trend highlighted in recent OECD (e.g. OECD, 1995) reports for an,

> 'increasingly differentiated and diverse provision of curricula within and between educational institutions to cater for a range and variety of individually and locally determined learning needs' (Elliott, 1998, p75).

Our findings suggest that a number of New Zealand's secondary schools have taken advantage of this opportunity for diversification. However the fact that specialisation is uncommon suggests that opportunity is not sufficient on its own to encourage the development of a specialist programme.

Source of impetus is a second factor that can lead to the development of specialist programmes. In England the existence of government initiatives such as the specialist schools programme has plainly been a source of impetus to schools that have established such programmes, and 'the availability of substantial central funding has acted as the 'carrot', ensuring the participation of a large number of schools' (Higham et al, 2000). The comparative absence of such programmes and the concomitant funding has proved to be a barrier to specialisation in New Zealand. Specialisation is expensive. Where the impetus of central funding has existed, New Zealand schools, like their counterparts in England, have sought to diversify, and the availability of money has led in some cases to a degree of specialisation, as with the 'lighthouse' technology schools, and some of the foreign language programmes established under the auspices of the SLLP. However, as we have indicated, such funding has either been limited in scale and scope, or has been for a fixed period. As a consequence it is difficult to attribute long term

specialisation to this factor alone. Indeed, all of the specialist programmes surveyed have developed in spite of rather than because of the existence of government funding and other support.

It is apparent that other sources of impetus for specialisation are required if programmes such as those described in the case study schools are to be established. The main sources identified in the course of our research were as follows. First, it was clear that many schools had specialised as a result of the need to respond to specific challenges and crises. For instance the Sports Academy at Rapanui High School had clearly evolved as a response to the perceived related needs to boost achievement, and reverse falling rolls. Second, a common thread in all of the schools that we researched is the existence of members of staff in key positions with a vision and with the necessary drive to carry it through. Third, programmes can develop as a consequence of propitious local conditions, or environmental factors. The outdoor education programme, which we surveyed at Moonstone High School, had developed primarily because of the existence of favourable local conditions (including a good climate and suitable countryside). A final factor identified concerns local demand for a particular type of curriculum provision. For example, both of the music programmes described have developed at least in part as a response to demand for such provision within the community. However, this must be seen as a minor determinant of curricular change. Schools do not usually specialise in response to the requirements of a minority of parents within their catchment zone. The overall picture in New Zealand seems to conform with Hirsch's contention that schools do not generally change their character radically in the search for niche markets,

> 'since most schools put a priority on retaining their sizeable semi-captive home markets - those living nearby - who might not happen to like particular changes in character or specialism chosen by a local school.' (Hirsch, 1997, p159).

The third dimension involved in specialisation is *support*, which is linked to the issue of sustainability. We would contend that ongoing financial support, such as that provided by the Specialist Schools programme in England, is necessary to ensure the continuation of specialist programmes, at least in the medium term. In New Zealand, where such central funding for curriculum projects has been significantly less sustained, the likelihood of schools continuing to support expensive specialist programmes is more limited. For example, Hillside High School has indicated that the future of the SLLP initiative is in considerable doubt once the funding dries up (interviews with HoD, and former Associate Principal, 1998). It is likewise clear that the 'lighthouse' technology schools did not sustain their status as specialist schools in the absence of central funding after the trial period ended.

It is not surprising that specialist programmes are considerably less common in New Zealand than in England. As we have suggested elsewhere, 'whilst the opportunities exist for specialisation to occur, the sources of impetus are not so powerful, and sustainability is hampered by the lack of ongoing financial support' (Higham et al, 2000). As argued by Hirsch (Hirsch, 1997, p161) 'mechanisms for achieving diversity need to balance some guidance from the centre with the encouragement of genuine local initiative'. Where specialisation is to occur, these mechanisms need to be stronger still. Hirsch uses an American example to argue that:

> ' . . . educational dynamism and diversity is more likely to be created by empowering teachers rather than over-defining their jobs. Such empowerment may nevertheless need to be combined with some degree of planning for diversity given the disinclination in most cases for schools to seek 'niche markets' for competitive reasons alone.' (Hirsch, 1997, p162)

In New Zealand this balance is clearly lacking. While local initiative is possible (as is evidenced by the existence of diversity in many schools), and is

indeed facilitated by the administrative reforms laid down in *Tomorrow's Schools* and by the development of unit standards, adherence by the successive National governments to neo-liberal orthodoxies has limited the level of central direction and support necessary to prompt the establishment of substantial numbers of specialist schools. As a consequence specialist programmes that have become established have been largely driven by local factors, especially the influence of key personnel.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms have been used for the schools that comprise our sample. Programmes in the following schools were researched for CSNZ:

    - Φ Brookside College: Music
    - Φ Rangatira Girls' School: Art
    - Φ Rapanui High School: Sport
    - Φ Canterbury Area School: ICT
    - Φ St. Morton's College: Agriculture
    - Φ Canterbury High School: Agriculture
    - Φ Lakeside College for Girls: Art and Music
    - Φ Moonstone High School: Outdoor Education
    - Φ Weller High School: Technology
    - Φ Wildwood Intermediate School: Technology
    - Φ Hillside High School: Foreign Languages

2. The Ministry of Education's Benchmark Indicators for 1998 illustrate this trend. Between 1994 and 1998 the school roll has risen by 15.9%. The former Principal of the school attributes this success to CANTATECH and the focus on Information Technology across the school (interview with former Principal, 1998).

3. The school's submission for the Goodman Fielder Award points to the 'steady improvements in academic grades' between 1991 and 1997. In

particular the School Certificate results for Art and Mathematics are highlighted as being 'notable', and 'improvements' are noted in English, Science and Music. In Art, Mathematics and English, the school's mean results at School Certificate exceeded the national means for those subjects (submission for the Goodman Fielder Award, 1998).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank Roger Peddie for assistance given during the research phase of this project.

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