

# Preface

Every school leader and teacher knows that the challenges of change are constant and ongoing. What was accepted in previous years is no longer sufficient. Expectations have risen, particularly as New Zealand has sought to raise the achievement of all its students, with a major focus on the underachievement of some groups across the nation's schools.

The material for this book has arisen from our involvement in different research and development projects that were designed to improve students' learning and achievement. Major contributions have been made to this work by teachers and leaders working in schools, and by members of the professional development community. The results have been promising. Late in 2007 we came together as a team in a research and development project designed to build evaluative capability in schooling improvement across clusters of schools in New Zealand.

Following an initial year of research, evaluation and development we decided that we could be more helpful to schools if we made the thinking behind the issues we raised and the suggestions we offered more explicit. As a result, we paused in our research and evaluation activities to write a series of position papers on various aspects of schooling improvement. Draft papers were shared in cross-sector meetings with a large number of school leaders, teachers and professional developers.

Feedback on the usefulness of the position papers from these people engaged in building better schools was very positive, but they wanted more: more explanation, more case examples and more descriptions of how to make faster progress. These requests for more demonstrated their high level of commitment to building better schools. This book is our response. The original papers have been rewritten and case examples reworked to make them more relevant to individual schools that are looking for direction in building better schools.

This is not a “how to” book with all the answers. It is a book designed to provoke thinking and talking by those engaging in improvement activities, and to provide sets of principles and suggestions for processes that need to be considered in any development efforts.

As with any book, the ideas have been influenced by those with whom we work and those whose books and papers we read. It would be impossible to acknowledge them all because much of the thinking has developed over many years through iterative cycles of research and development. However, we do wish to acknowledge all those professional developers, school leaders and teachers who have challenged our thinking, demanded we offer something useful and told us when something does not work (and when it does). Without their input our ideas would not have stood the tests of reality.

A special acknowledgement must go to the Ministry of Education. Much of the research in which we have engaged has been supported with funding from the Ministry. More importantly, a number of people within the Ministry have engaged with our ideas and challenged our thinking. These people have acted in ways consistent with the best sense of being public servants. They have rolled up their sleeves and demonstrated their commitment to raising achievement and reducing disparities in very real ways in New Zealand schools. At the same time we must acknowledge that the material presented in this book represents the ideas of the authors and does not necessarily represent either the policy or practice of the Ministry of Education. Copyright in the position papers is held by the Crown and the Ministry has agreed to our use of that material in this book.

We are also grateful for the involvement and critique of many schools from the Building Evaluative Capability in Schooling Improvement Project in particular, but also schools from our wider research activities. Although the book is written for schools, it could not have been written without their involvement.