

# SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: REDEFINING THE TERM FOR NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS TODAY AND TOMORROW

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## **Abstract**

The term "school-based curriculum development" (SBCD) had great currency in 1970s and 1980s educational literature. However, in many countries the term dropped out of use during the late 1980s/early 1990s. The current New Zealand Curriculum/Marautanga Project has sparked renewed interest in SBCD. This paper draws from a background paper prepared for the Ministry of Education to inform the Curriculum Project. In the 1970s and 1980s, SBCD was seen as a solution to many of the problems of school education. These included perceptions that centralised curricula were too slow to keep pace with changing social and educational environments. SBCD was also strongly tied to a view that teachers should be developers, rather than simply transmitters, of curriculum. Today, central concerns for SBCD include developing school curricula to reflect local needs, bringing students and other people into the school curriculum development process. This paper argues that a new meaning for SBCD must be developed to reflect the current context, and future directions for New Zealand schools, and this will require renewed discussion about many aspects of New Zealand curriculum and schooling practice.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Like clothing fashions, ideas in the education world sometimes fall out of style, only to return again decades later as a "fashion revival"<sup>1</sup>. For example, right now 1980s-inspired fashions have regained some popularity. Next time you are out on the street, you may notice young people wearing colours and styles that you purged from your closet 20 years ago. But before you dig out and start wearing your old gear, take a closer look at what they are wearing and you'll probably notice some subtle differences from the clothing you knew. That pink cardigan in the shop looks just like the one you had in 1981, but it's made from a different kind of knit, and you wouldn't have worn it with hipsters. Maybe you used to have a shirt in the same shade of aquamarine as the one that guy is wearing. But yours didn't have that in-built cellphone pocket. Fashions do come back, but they always come back with modifications to suit the contemporary fashion landscape.

In the same way, "old" educational ideas that return in a "new" educational climate are never precisely the same as they were the first time around. Like fashion designers who draw inspiration from previous decades and add their own contemporary twist, educators must take good educational ideas from the past and reinterpret these to fit the contemporary educational landscape. In this paper, I discuss the resurgence of the notion of "school-based curriculum development" (SBCD) in New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> Tara Maginnis, associate professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an expert in fashion and costume theory, points out that fashion revivals of various sorts have occurred regularly in Western fashion since the French revolution. Prior to the 1970s, wearing "vintage" clothing was more a sign of poverty than a sign of being cutting-edge. However, "fashion revivals" have become a fixture of modern fashion, particularly since the 1980s (Maginnis, 2004).

SBCD was a widely described notion in 1970s and 1980s educational literature. However, in New Zealand and many other countries, the term dropped out of use in the literature during the late 1980s/early 1990s. The current New Zealand Curriculum/Marautanga Project<sup>2</sup> has sparked renewed interest in SBCD. This paper draws from a literature review about the principles, processes, and practices of SBCD prepared for the leaders of the Curriculum Project (Bolstad, 2004). Here, I argue that a new meaning for SBCD must be developed to reflect current and future directions for New Zealand schools. Drawing on a range of recent research and writing about schooling and curriculum, I outline four reasons why I believe SBCD is important for New Zealand schools today. Namely that it provides a mechanism for schools to: (1) better meet the needs and interests of students and the school community; (2) embed school learning in local resources and knowledge; (3) be responsive to new ideas and technologies in education; and (4) take advantages of opportunities created by new curriculum and assessment structures.

## WHAT IS SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT ?

It is difficult to provide a simple definition of SBCD. The term is used in the literature at different times as a slogan, as an educational philosophy, or as a method or technique (Marsh, Day, Hannay, & McCutcheon, 1990). As a *slogan*, SBCD:

...conjures up action at the local level, it connotes participation, grass-roots control, and many other attributes which are held to be near and dear to the general public (Marsh et al., 1990, p. 47).

Meanwhile, authors like Skilbeck (1984, cited in Marsh et al., 1990), construe SBCD as an *educational philosophy*. Skilbeck presents SBCD as ideally internal and organic to the institution, and his descriptions emphasise aspects such as shared decision making between teachers and students. Bezzina (1991) identifies *collaboration* among school staff as a defining feature of SBCD:

SBCD is a collaborative effort which should not be confused with the individual efforts of teachers or administrators operating outside the boundaries of a collaboratively accepted framework (Bezzina, 1991, p. 40).

School-based curriculum development does not necessarily entail the creation of entirely new curricula within schools (Brady, 1992; Marsh et al., 1990). For example, Bezzina (1991) suggests that SBCD can involve at least three kinds of activity: *creating* new curricula; *adapting* existing curricula; and even *adopting* an existing curriculum unchanged. For Bezzina, the latter still constitutes SBCD, as long as it represents a collaborative choice amongst staff.

Views about what form(s) of SBCD are most desirable vary, and personal and national differences are evident in the literature. For example, Sabar et al. noted that:

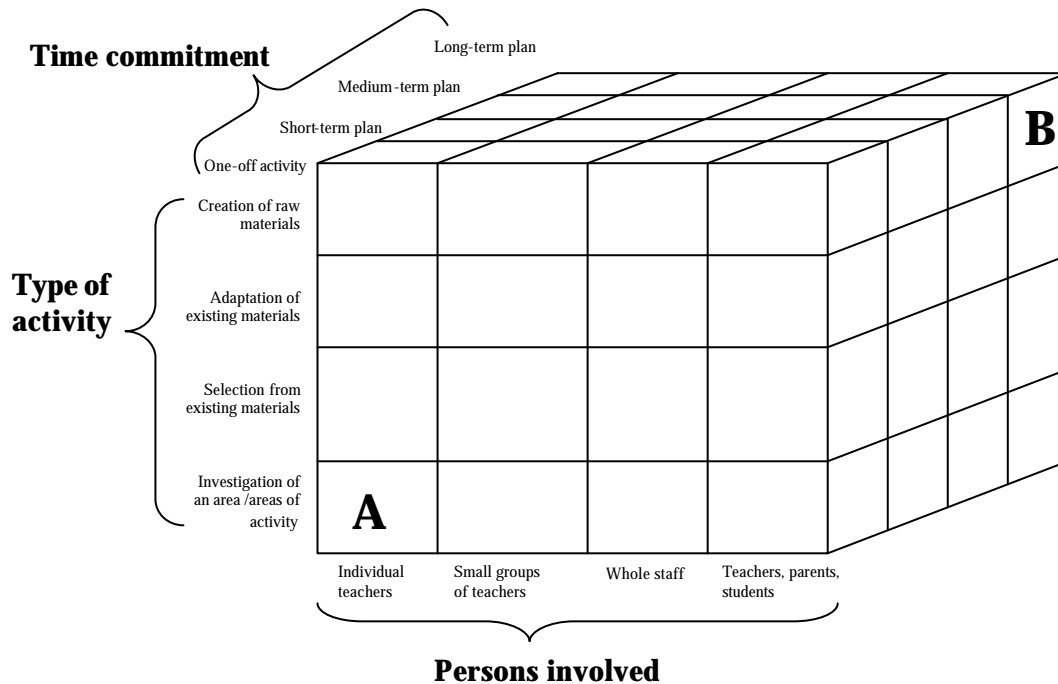
...while the English with their supposed tradition of autonomy see SBCD as being about *whole* school curriculum planning, in Israel SBCD is about planning *part* of a school curriculum in relation to one or more school subjects (Sabar, Rudduck, & Reid, 1987, p. 2).

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<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Education's New Zealand Curriculum/Te Marautanga o Aotearoa Project involves a wide-ranging process to engage teachers, principals, students, lecturers, and others in revitalising the New Zealand curriculum. The goals of the project, which runs from 2004 to 2007, are to: clarify and refine outcomes; focus on quality teaching; strengthen school ownership of curriculum; and support communication and strengthen partnerships with parents/whanau and communities. For further information see <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/community/nzcurriculum/>

Several authors (including Brady, 1992; Marsh et al., 1990) have tried representing all the different possible forms of SBCD using a matrix. Brady suggested a matrix of 12 different permutations of SBCD depending on the *type of activity* (e.g. creating curriculum, adapting curriculum, selecting from a curriculum, etc.) and the *people involved* (e.g. individual teachers, groups of teachers, whole schools, etc.). Marsh et al. added a third dimension to this matrix: *time commitment* (e.g. one-off activity, short-term plan, long-term plan, etc.) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: A matrix of SBCD variations (redrawn from Marsh et al., 1990, p. 49)**



This matrix is useful for showing that SBCD can comprise a range of activities. On the other hand, one difficulty with the matrix is that it is so inclusive that one could ask, what is *not* SBCD? And are some variations of SBCD more or less valuable than others? For example, how does point A on the matrix (one teacher investigating an area for a one-off activity) compare with point B on the matrix (teachers, parents, and students working together to create curriculum for long-term school plans)? One way to think about the differences between these two extremes of SBCD is in terms of the size of the curriculum “decision-making space” (Brady, 1992) available to those in schools. At point B, the decision-making space is considerably wider than at point A.

Another way to describe SBCD is in terms of a shift in curriculum decision-making power and authority from centre to periphery. For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1979) described SBCD as just one example of the trend in the 1960s and 1970s towards greater citizen autonomy and participation in decision making in many walks of life, including education, industry, and government. OECD described SBCD as:

...any process which – on the basis of school-initiated activity or school demands regarding curricula – brings about a redistribution of power, responsibilities and control between central and local educational authorities, with schools acquiring the legal and administrative autonomy and the professional authority enabling them to manage their own process of development (OECD, 1979, p. 4).

This definition acknowledges that schools sit within a wider educational network that includes many groups and institutions which have a stake in, and expectations of, school education. These

include Ministries of Education, local educational authorities, teacher unions, parent associations, communities, political parties, the mass media, and so forth. A few definitions position SBCD as a complete opposite to centralised production of curriculum (e.g. Print, 1993). However, many authors prefer the term “school-focused” rather than “school-based” curriculum development. The term “school-focused” is seen to reflect a middle position between centralised and decentralised extremes (Marsh et al., 1990), and indicates that curriculum decision making does not rest *entirely* within schools.

To reiterate some key points about SBCD to be drawn from the preceding section: first, it can involve a broad range of activities and processes, and there are varied opinions about which form(s) of SBCD are most desirable, and who should be involved in school-based curriculum decision making. Second, the degree to which the power to make decisions about curriculum is devolved to people in schools is a strong influence on the shape and form that SBCD takes. Third, conceptions of SBCD appear to vary depending on time, place, and context. This feature of the SBCD literature will be discussed next.

## VARIATIONS IN THE SBCD LITERATURE CONNECTED TO TIME AND PLACE

While searching for references for the SBCD literature review (Bolstad, 2004), we found very little literature about SBCD written during the last 10 years. Most of the literature identified in the searches was written between 1974 and 1990, with significant use of the phrase in literature from Australia, the USA, Canada, the UK, and Israel. Recent references to SBCD were mainly found in articles from Asian nations (e.g. Huang, 2004; Lam, 2003; Wu, 2001).

There seemed to be reasonably infrequent use of the term “school-based curriculum development” in the New Zealand literature. However, we did identify literature stemming from at least two large SBCD projects in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ramsay et al., 1995; Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriot, & Poskitt, 1993), and a case study of school-based curriculum development in one urban primary school (May, 1992).

Clearly, at least in the English-speaking countries listed above, interest in “school-based curriculum development” was at its zenith during the 1970s and 1980s. The use of this term in the literature declined dramatically from the mid-1990s. Why was this so? One possible reason, supported by the literature, is that SBCD faded from the educational landscape with the onset of widespread educational reforms in many countries during the late 1980s and early 1990s. A second possibility is that there was a shift in the language and terminology used to describe the principles and processes of SBCD<sup>3</sup>. Further searching and reading indicated that both the above scenarios were true to some extent. School-based curriculum development, at least as it was defined and described in the literature of the 1970s and 1980s, *did* appear to wane during the mid-1990s and beyond. However, authors like Brady (1995) suggest that this did not represent the end of SBCD, but rather a change in its scope and form (i.e. a directional shift away from SBCD of type “B” shown on Figure 1, towards SBCD of type “A”). The changing nature of SBCD over the last few decades is discussed next.

### **School-based curriculum development in the 1970s and 1980s literature**

In the 1970s and 1980s literature, SBCD was cast as a solution to many of the problems of school education. This included the perception that centralised curricula changed too slowly to keep pace

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<sup>3</sup> The term “curriculum innovation” was widely used in the 1990s literature. However, much of this literature discusses curriculum innovation at the national level, not school level; for example, the introduction of new curricula in areas such as technology education. An exception is Nolan et al., who discuss the history of school-based curriculum innovation in New Zealand schools (Nolan, Openshaw, McKinnon, & Soler, 1992).

with changing social and educational environments. It was believed that decentralising curriculum development to schools could make curricula more relevant and meaningful for learners (Elliot, 1997). Print's (1993) definition reflects the view of the time, that SBCD was:

...an on-site [i.e. within schools] resolution, in curriculum terms, of problems with the existing curricula. This resolution is carried out by teachers, with or without outside advice, as they are considered to be those educators most aware of student needs (Print, 1993, p. 20).

Many authors have argued that having the responsibility to develop and implement curriculum is crucial to the professional identity of teachers (Howells, 2003), and that teachers' knowledge and experience should *necessarily* inform curriculum development (Begg, 1998; Howells, 2003; Print, 1993). Case studies which explore the experiences of teachers involved in SBCD are common (e.g. see Bezzina, 1991; Cocklin, Simpson, & Stacey, 1995; Day, 1990; Hannay, 1990; Marsh, 1990; May, 1992; Prideaux, 1993; Shoham, 1995).

The idea that teachers could be developers of curriculum, rather than simply conduits for the transmission of curriculum, has particular historical roots. For example, Elliot (1997) links SBCD in the UK to the emergence of teacher action research during the 1960s and 1970s. This occurred in the context of major social changes, and concerns that the traditional curriculum was alienating many young people. There were calls to develop new curricula that were more meaningful and relevant to learners, and teacher action research was constructed as a tool for "pedagogically-driven" school-based curriculum change (Elliot, 1997).

### **A shift from curriculum prescription, to curriculum with a purpose**

While decentralisation of curriculum decision making was the catchcry of the 1970s literature, literature from the 1980s and 1990s (particularly in New Zealand and Australia) reflected concerns that new national curriculum statements were needed to provide coherent direction for the goals and purposes of school education. Once again, underpinning these concerns was the idea that the world was changing, and so too should school learning<sup>4</sup>. The New Zealand curriculum review of the late 1980s was said to be brought on by "concerns...that school education in New Zealand had not adjusted rapidly enough to changes in society or to the growing demand for more equitable learning and assessment" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 27). In Australia and New Zealand, there was also a shift towards an "outcomes-based" view of curriculum (Willis & Kissane, 1995). This sees the role of national curriculum as specifying the "outcomes" that students should gain from their school learning, with the means to attaining those ends to be determined by teachers and schools.

The decentralisation of decision making to New Zealand schools and their boards of trustees at the end of the 1980s made schools responsible and accountable for providing "teaching and learning programmes which incorporate the New Zealand Curriculum (essential learning areas, essential skills and attitudes and values) as expressed in National Curriculum Statements" (National Administration Guideline 1). Although the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* does not use the phrase "school-based curriculum development", the document clearly indicates a role and responsibility for New Zealand schools to engage in curriculum decision making to "develop programmes which are appropriate to the needs of their students" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 1). The *Framework's* distinction between Curriculum with a capital "C" and curriculum with a lower-case "c" could be read as a mandate for school-based curriculum development (see Table 1).

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<sup>4</sup> For critical analyses of the changes to curriculum and assessment in New Zealand education during this time see Lee (2003) or McCulloch (1992).

Table 1 Excerpt from *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 4)

**The New Zealand Curriculum** comprises a set of national curriculum statements which define the learning principles and achievement aims and objectives which all New Zealand schools are required to follow.

**The school curriculum** consists of the ways in which a school puts into practice the policy set out in the national curriculum statements. It takes account of local needs, priorities, and resources, and is designed in consultation with the school's community.

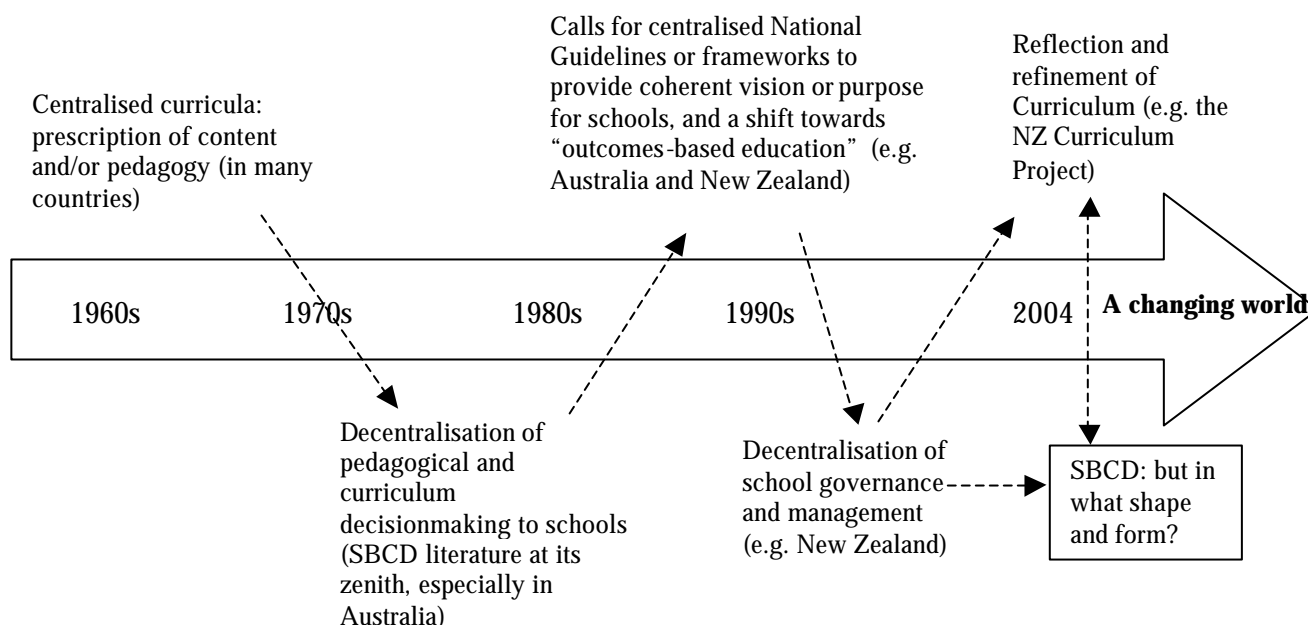
Page 6 of the *Framework* makes the point even more explicitly, saying:

The New Zealand Curriculum provides for flexibility, enabling schools and teachers to design programmes which are appropriate to the learning needs of their students. The school curriculum will be sufficiently flexible to respond to each student's learning needs, to new understanding of the different ways in which people learn, to changing social and economic conditions, to national needs, and to the requirements and expectations of local communities.

### A changing space for SBCD

Over time, SBCD has existed in a changing space between decentralisation (of school self-management and decision making) and centralisation (of national curriculum statements). Yet the overlapping trends towards centralisation and decentralisation both could be seen to address the same question: namely, how can schools provide appropriate and responsive education for students in a changing world? As outlined above, the "answer" to this question has varied at different times and in different countries. Figure 2 represents some of the general trends in curriculum outlined above, with reference to the notion of SBCD<sup>5</sup>.

**Figure 2. How can schools provide appropriate and responsive education in a changing world? (Reproduced from Bolstad, 2004, p. 17)**



<sup>5</sup> It is important to reiterate that there are many points of divergence between these international trends, and New Zealand's unique curriculum history. For comprehensive accounts of this history, see Lee (1992, 2003), McCulloch (1992), and Nolan, Openshaw, McKinnon, & Soler (1992).

One key message to be drawn from the international SBCD literature of the last 30 years is that wider features of education systems are an important factor in determining the shape and form that SBCD can take at any given time/place. Significant systemic influences include:

- the structure and nature of the national curriculum;
- the degree of centralisation/decentralisation of school decision making;
- schools' assessment and reporting requirements;
- the expected role of teachers in school curriculum development; and
- the expected or potential role of other people in school curriculum development.

Clear factors for shaping the current "operational space" for SBCD in New Zealand schools include the decentralisation of governance and management to schools in 1989, and the introduction of a new national curriculum framework and associated curriculum statements between 1992 and 2000.

The New Zealand situation was paralleled in Australia in the mid-1990s by the development of national curriculum "statements" (or agreed national position) and "profiles" (description of progress in learning outcomes at eight levels) for eight learning areas. An Australian article by Brady (1995) reflects mid-1990s speculation about the "fate" of SBCD on the eve of the development of new national curriculum statements. Brady's opinion was that the national curriculum statements and profiles would not remove schools' ability to engage in SBCD, but that it would create a more limited "decision-making space" for teachers on curriculum matters than was the case in the past. Describing the Australian situation, Print (1993, p. 22) asserted that in the 1990s:

...the term 'school-based curriculum development' is rarely found in the literature and certainly not in curriculum documents emanating from curriculum and assessment agencies, departments/ministries of education as well as other organisations responsible for curriculum development. Rather the emphasis is upon centrally constructed curriculum policy and policy directions associated with an acknowledgement of **school level curriculum interpretation and implementation** (bold added).

Print's and Brady's comments could equally apply to New Zealand in the 1990s. It is simply not possible for teachers to teach the New Zealand Curriculum precisely as it is written in the curriculum statements, nor is this the intended purpose of the statements. But if school-level curriculum interpretation and implementation is a form of SBCD, then SBCD must be assumed to already occur in some form in *all* New Zealand schools. But what does this actually mean in terms of the curriculum experienced by students in these schools? Are New Zealand schools developing curricula which are "sufficiently flexible to respond to each student's learning needs, to new understanding of the different ways in which people learn, to changing social and economic conditions, to national needs, and to the requirements and expectations of local communities" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 6)? Is SBCD the normal practice that occurs in most New Zealand schools, or is it something more? Finally, what kind(s) of SBCD might be appropriate, possible, or desirable in New Zealand schools today and in the future?

## WHY SHOULD NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS ENGAGE IN SBCD?

I argue that to define what SBCD means (or could mean) for New Zealand schools now and into the future, it is necessary to consider *why* New Zealand schools could or should engage in SBCD. Below, I outline four reasons why I believe SBCD is an increasingly important direction for New Zealand schools to pursue. Drawing from recent literature about education, curriculum, and the future directions of schooling, I argue that SBCD provides a mechanism for New Zealand schools to: (1) better meet the needs and interests of students and the school community; (2) embed school learning in local contexts, knowledges, and resources, to meet local and national aspirations; (3)

be responsive to new ideas and technologies in education; and (4) take advantage of opportunities created by new curriculum and assessment structures. Each of these will require renewed discussion about many aspects of New Zealand curriculum and schooling practice.

### **Reason 1: To better meet the needs and interests of students and the school community**

One important rationale for SBCD is to enable schools to provide more responsive or appropriate learning opportunities to match the particular needs and interests of students and the school community. This intention is certainly supported by statements in the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, noted earlier, that the school curriculum should be designed in consultation with the school community to reflect these needs.

The literature often states that SBCD should begin with a “situational analysis” of student or local needs and current situations. Yet it is uncommon to find examples showing how schools have identified such needs, or whether students or parents have been involved in the process, although there is some New Zealand literature on this subject. A New Zealand research project from the late 1980s (Ramsay, Harold, Hawk, Marriot, & Poskitt, 1992) had three main aims: (1) to trial materials for enhancing collaborative decision making between teachers and parents on curriculum matters; (2) to trial materials, including a national draft curriculum statement, relevant to the collaborative decision-making process; and (3) to document the process of change from non-collaborative to collaborative forms of decision making. In another example, May (1992) described Richmond Road School as an example of a “relational” school; that is, one with a democratic decision-making framework among staff, and an established consultation process with the local community. Through this process, Richmond Road School developed a language policy across the curriculum (LPAC) in the 1980s to meet the needs of the school’s multi-ethnic and multilingual community.

There are few other obvious descriptions of parent and community involvement in curriculum development in the New Zealand literature. However, there has been an ongoing research interest in features of parental and community involvement in New Zealand schools in general, particularly post-*Tomorrow’s Schools*<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, findings from a 1999 national survey of the impact of these reforms (Wyllie, 1999) suggested that parents’ involvement in schools actually *decreased* between 1989 and 1999, and that the main forms of parent involvement were occasional (such as contributing to fundraising, or helping with sports or school trips). School consultation with the community was mainly indirect and paper-based.

Traditionally, students’, parents’, and communities’ needs, views, and interests have not been part of the way we think or talk about curriculum development. Holliday (2001) suggests that professional discourses of teaching and education can actually “prevent us from seeing the real worlds of the people we work with”. Holliday suggests that the technical discourses of teaching can lead to a constructed image of “the learner” and the learner’s needs (or the needs of stakeholders in the curriculum, e.g. the community). Holliday argues that educators must be aware of the way that these discourses can shape curriculum innovations that fail to engage with the real needs, concerns, or interests of the “recipients” of the curriculum innovation.

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<sup>6</sup> Some information about community involvement in curriculum development might appear in literature in other areas, for example, literature about Health Promoting Schools (e.g. see Wyllie, Postlethwaite, & Casey, 2000), or literature on school-parent partnerships aiming to improve student achievement (e.g. see Timperley & Robinson, 2002), or literature about the curriculum development in kura kaupapa Māori (e.g. see Christensen, 1996; Nepe, 1991; Smith, 1992).



How exactly could or should schools engage parents or communities in the development of curriculum? The 1987 *Curriculum Review* (Department of Education, 1987) indicated that each New Zealand school would “need to plan its own curriculum to conform with the national curriculum in ways which are appropriate for its own students and community”. Further, “responsibility for local planning will be shared among the teachers, the parents, the students, the managing body, and the wider school community”. To do this, the *Review* suggested that each school establish a curriculum planning group that was “representative of the mix of the local community”, drawn from the managing body, students, whānau, families, the teaching staff, and the early childhood, primary, and secondary sectors in the locality. The curriculum planning group was expected to consult with the community before and during the curriculum development process (see Department of Education, 1987, pp. 21–22). Yet Ramsay et al.’s (1992) New Zealand study showed that cultivating parental involvement in school curriculum development is a complex and slow process, requiring significant amounts of support and reassurance for both teachers and parents.

Although the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* indicates that the school curriculum should be developed in consultation with the community, unlike the *Curriculum Review*, it does not specify a particular process for how this should occur. Nor is community involvement required for curriculum development under the National Administrative Guidelines, which only specify that “Each Board, through the principal and staff, is required to develop and implement teaching and learning programmes...” (NAG 1)<sup>7</sup>. Involving parents and the community in developing the school curriculum clearly poses challenges for schools, and it appears further attention and discussion about the involvement of parents and communities is needed within the New Zealand education community, particularly regarding questions of “what”, “why”, and “how”.

### **What about student involvement in curriculum development?**

Two international articles (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Mac an Ghail, 1992) both raise questions about the degree to which *students’* views, opinions, and ideas feature in school curriculum decision making. Brooker and MacDonald (1999) argue that traditional authority structures in schools have “systematically silenced” students’ voices in curriculum making, and that even when students’ views and opinions are sought, the focus is often on finding out how students view their learning programme, rather than how they have contributed (or might contribute) to the *construction* of those programmes.

It was disappointing that these two articles (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999; Mac an Ghail, 1992) were the only references located in the review of SBCD literature (Bolstad, 2004) which discussed students as anything other than the *recipients* of school-based curriculum development. However, it is not necessarily surprising; rather, it seems to reflect a general pattern in the way that the relationship(s) between “the learner” and “the curriculum” is framed in most educational thinking and practice. In general, the curriculum is viewed as something that is designed *for* students, not *by* or *with* students. However, the idea of negotiation or co-development of curriculum with students has been explored elsewhere, particularly with respect to the notion of “curriculum integration” (see Boomer, Lester, Onore, & Cook, 1992; Fraser, 2000). There have been examples of curriculum development involving students in radical alternative schools, particularly those established in Great Britain, the United States, and New Zealand during the 1970s. However, these attempts, often generated from a democratic philosophy or to foster student connection to the school, were typically impromptu, ad hoc, and poorly documented (e.g. see Bremer & von Moschzisker, 1971; Duke, 1978; Graubard, 1972).

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<sup>7</sup> However, NAGs 1 and 2 do specify that BoTs, principals, and teaching staff must report to the school community regarding student *achievement*.

The literature clearly suggests that involving students in curriculum development represents an enormous shift in thinking for practice in most school-based education.

## **Reason 2: Embedding school learning in local contexts, knowledges, and resources, to meet local and national aspirations**

A second rationale for SBCD is to enable schools to embed students' learning experiences in local contexts, knowledges, and resources. Arguably, many New Zealand schools already incorporate local contexts and resources into their school curriculum to varying degrees. Two different examples of the use of local contexts and resources in school curricula are:

- the use of local environments or environmental issues for school-based environmental education (Bolstad, Eames, Cowie, Edwards, & Rogers, 2004); and
- partnerships between secondary schools and local tertiary education or employment providers to develop learning programmes and career and educational pathways for senior students (Boyd, McDowall, & Cooper, 2002).

The use of local contexts, knowledge, and resources in the school curriculum clearly has connections to the idea described above, that SBCD can allow schools to better meet the needs and interests of schools and communities.

There is also a deeper philosophical rationale for embedding school learning in local contexts. Gruenewald (2003) calls this "place-conscious education". Gruenewald's use of the word "place" connotes much more than simply a spatial area or location. "Places" have perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological dimensions, and "places" are as much a product of human decisions as they are a physical point in time and space. Gruenewald argues that the current education system neglects and obscures our relationship with places:

That is, schooling often distracts our attention from, and distorts our response to, the actual contexts of our own lives (places) (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 621).

A shift towards place-conscious education has enormous implications for the way we think about the purpose of education and schooling. Place-conscious education resonates with the notion that the ultimate purpose of schools is to produce the kind of people we want as members of our community and society – that is, people who will sustain, transform, or create the kinds of "places" we want our world to comprise, at the local, regional, national, and global level:

Recognizing that places are what people make of them – that people are place makers and that places are a primary artifact of human culture – suggests a more active role for schools in the study, care, and creation of places...schools must provide opportunities for students to participate meaningfully in the process of place-making, that is, in the process of shaping what our places will become (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 627).

Supporting students to "participate meaningfully in the process of place-making" implies a need for school learning to have a visible and meaningful connection to local (as well as national and international) contexts, knowledges, and resources – that is, to the "place" in which students live (and learn). Place-conscious education has a clear affinity with the principles of kura kaupapa Māori education.

Gruenewald's description of place-conscious education and its implications for schooling resonates with an interesting theme in the SBCD literature. Namely: that SBCD can support a "transformative" agenda for redefining conventional ideas about what a "curriculum" is, and who should have a voice in curriculum decision making. In the late 1980s, when international interest

in SBCD was high, Reid (1987b) argued that a fundamental shift in conception of curriculum was needed away from curriculum as “*things-to-be-learned*”, and towards a view of curriculum as a *vehicle for the shaping of group and individual identity*. The shift has important implications for thinking about who should be involved in the determination of curriculum. In the first case, which sees curriculum as *things-to-be-learned*, certain groups will have more status in decision making than others (e.g. employers, teachers, academics). In the latter case, where the curriculum is seen as a *tool for shaping identity*, the curriculum becomes a project to which many people with many different interests can contribute. If curriculum is seen as a vehicle for shaping group and individual identity, then important questions for curriculum development are: What kind of people do we want to be? What kind of community would we like to live in? What sort of schooling could help us to be those kinds of people and have that kind of community? Such questions need to be deliberated at both national *and* local levels. Where societies are culturally or socially diverse, “local” needs and knowledges may assume particular importance in the conversation.

### **Reason 3: Responding to new ideas and technology in education**

A third reason for SBCD is to enable New Zealand schools to adapt their curricula in response to new ideas or technologies for teaching and learning. Three potent areas of thought which *should* be influencing school curricula are: the introduction of new technologies that have the potential to enhance or transform teaching and learning; the implications of new thinking about “knowledge” for schools; and new understandings and theories about learning. The school curriculum also has to be flexible to incorporate emerging national priorities. However, none of these areas are likely to have a significant impact on teaching practice if teachers perceive “the curriculum” to be fixed or inflexible.

#### **New technologies for teaching and learning**

Much has been said during the last decade about the potential for information and communication technologies (ICT) to transform teaching and learning in schools. In many countries, heavy investments have been made in ICT for use by teachers and students, but the purposes of these investments have not always been clear or made explicit (Higgins, 2003). ICT development in the school sector has sometimes paid insufficient attention to the pedagogical purposes for introducing the technology, or the supporting conditions and resources that might enable the technologies to contribute towards better teaching and learning experiences. While there is evidence from school-sector research that ICT *can* help pupils to learn and teachers to teach more effectively (Higgins, 2003), research has also uncovered many examples in which the widespread rollout of ICT into schools has done little to improve or transform teaching practice, or students’ learning experiences in any meaningful way (Bigum, 2003; Brown, 2003; Robertson, 2003). The evidence is clear that simply providing ICT equipment to schools or teachers will not necessarily make a difference; what makes the difference is the way that this equipment and other resources are used (Higgins, 2003). Arguably, the widespread rollout of ICT into schools has, for the most part, had minimal impact in terms of transforming educational thinking or practice.

#### **New thinking about knowledge**

Jane Gilbert (forthcoming 2005) argues that the meaning of “knowledge” is changing, and this has major implications for what we do in schools. Knowledge is now widely thought of, not as a “thing” that is developed and stored in the minds of experts, but more as a form of energy – something fluid, that does things or makes things happen. Curriculum development in schools of the future will need to be underpinned by these new ways of thinking about knowledge, and hence new ways of thinking about learning and teaching.

The “old” views of knowledge (knowledge as a “thing to be learned”) sits underneath traditional views of curriculum. Hence, much of what happens in schools sets students up to be “consumers” of the knowledge that is taught (see also Bereiter, 2002; Bigum, 2003). However, Gilbert suggests re-organising the school curriculum to focus on engaging students in knowledge-building (as

opposed to knowledge-consuming) learning activities. This suggests a whole new way for thinking about schools and their relationship to the curriculum. Rather than being positioned as sites for the delivery of knowledge (curriculum), schools must become sites where students have the opportunity to build knowledge, and staff must think deeply about how to create learning environments that support students to do this.

### **Research about learners and learning**

Research in education, as well as in other areas (e.g. neuroscience or sociology) can provide new understandings about learning, the conditions, environments, and teaching practices that support learning for students each with different interests, abilities, prior knowledge, and personal, cultural, and social backgrounds. Teachers need access to this research, in order for it to feed into their pedagogy and curriculum practice. However, if new knowledge about learning is to have an impact on school curricula, teachers need to do more than just be aware of what current research says about learning. They must also learn how to problematise, question, and seek evidence about their schools' and their own current practices and the impacts of these for students' learning. Reid (1987a) calls this "a habit of deliberation":

Deliberation begins with the identification of problems. Thus ideally, it should operate in the school *before* any formal introduction of SBCD (Reid, 1987a, p. 111).

Without this kind of questioning or deliberation, teachers are unlikely to see the curriculum as a tool which they can craft to ameliorate the particular learning issues they see for their students. That is – they need to be able to connect what the research says, with their *own* (deliberated) knowledge about learning issues for their students.

### **New national priorities**

The curriculum also needs to be flexible to incorporate, where appropriate, new social and economic priorities. For example, current rhetoric on the need to develop a nation of "innovators", and the importance of new knowledge-based industries (for example, biotechnology, or the creative industries) to achieve New Zealand's economic and social goals (Ministry of Economic Development, 2003). National priorities around health issues (for example, changing patterns in food consumption and exercise, rising rates of obesity) also have obvious relevance for the school curriculum. As New Zealand becomes increasingly multicultural, schools (and all other facets of New Zealand society) must also adjust to integrate a wider spectrum of cultural histories and values. Since every school will have a different community mix, the issues that are pressing for schools in one area may be very different to those that are pressing for schools in another area. Some national priorities should influence the curriculum of *all* schools, so that all learners have opportunities to achieve whatever goals for education are determined to be national priorities. However, school curricula should also have the flexibility to meet the issues that are most pertinent to them.

### **Reason 4: Taking advantage of new curriculum and assessment structures**

The fourth reason for SBCD is to enable New Zealand schools to take advantage of new national curriculum and assessment structures, and to use these as opportunities to diversify and expand the learning options and opportunities for their students. Two pertinent examples are first, the cultivation of a cross-curricular learning area like environmental education, and second, the expansion of secondary students' learning opportunities and pathways through judicious use and interpretation of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) assessment regime.

### **Making a curriculum space for environmental education**

In 1999, the Ministry of Education published *Guidelines for environmental education in New Zealand schools* (Ministry of Education, 1999). The *Guidelines* are intended to assist teachers and

schools to plan and provide education in a way that integrates with learning objectives from the seven mandatory learning areas of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993). However, there is no expectation or requirement for schools to teach environmental education, and the extent of environmental education within the individual school curriculum is determined by the school and its board of trustees.

With strong ties to wider social, political, environmental, and cultural discourses about the environment and environmental sustainability, environmental education as a field has developed mostly outside the mainstream education system, and certainly outside the traditional areas of curriculum. Gough (1997) describes environmental education as one of several forms of “adjectival education” (such as peace education, health education, and social education), that have developed in this way. Environmental education and other cross-curricular or non-traditional areas of learning in school practice have often been marginalised in school education practice (Bolstad, Baker, with Barker, & Keown, 2004).

A recent evaluation of environmental education practice in New Zealand schools (Bolstad, Cowie, & Eames, 2004) found evidence of both successes and challenges for schools to integrate environmental education in their school curriculum. Some case-study schools saw environmental education as an opportunity to craft learning experiences for students that: provided “authentic” contexts for integrating the essential learning areas, took account of Māori knowledge and values regarding the environment; and supported students to take greater control and leadership of their learning activities. Most of the case study schools were moving towards formalising their commitment to environmental education through its inclusion in school policy and planning documents. However, teachers in the eight case study schools, and survey responses from 367 teachers at 193 New Zealand schools, indicated there was a strong tension for schools to “fit environmental education into the curriculum”. While most survey respondents strongly endorsed the value of environmental education, it was widely perceived that environmental education had to compete with many other curriculum and assessment priorities.

### **Interpreting new assessment regimes as an opportunity to expand students’ learning opportunities**

A current 3-year study (see Hipkins, Vaughan, Beals, & Ferral, 2004) is documenting changes in the subject choices offered to senior students in six New Zealand secondary schools, as the NQF/NCEA qualification reforms are progressively implemented. This research provides some insight into forms of SBCD that are occurring in six fairly “typical” secondary schools in the context of the NQF/NCEA. With the availability of both achievement standards and unit standards, and the ability of schools to mix and match these in their programmes of assessment, some schools are beginning to create newer and more different kinds of courses than they may have offered in the past.

An emerging research finding is that old distinctions between “academic” courses and “vocational” courses have the potential to become blurred in the course offerings of some schools. Hipkins et al. (2004) gathered data about subject options in English, mathematics, and science offered at the six schools, and described the tentative emergence of some new types of courses that contain elements of what could be described as “academic” learning and elements that could be described as “vocational” learning. Hipkins et al. called these “locally-redesigned” courses, and “contextually-focused” courses, and contrasted them with the “traditional-discipline” courses that more closely matched the structure of most senior secondary subjects of the past.

“Locally-redesigned” courses have the following characteristics: assessment may include a mix of achievement standards and unit standards; and different mixes of standards are chosen at each school. The curriculum of these courses is usually organised around the assessment instruments used. However, most locally-redesigned courses “cover” less of the traditional curriculum content,

allowing for some variation in pacing and limited introduction of broader contexts for learning. In some schools, locally-redesigned courses where traditional-discipline boundaries break down by offering assessment standards from different curriculum areas (for example, mathematics and music, or several different science disciplines) were also beginning to be discussed.

Another type of course option has evolved from what would have formerly been called “vocational” or “applied” courses. Hipkins et al. called these courses “contextually-focused” because they make closer links to students’ everyday life contexts, or to contexts of future work or leisure. They have the following characteristics: assessment is mainly by unit standards; a reduced number of credits is offered; and assessment is exclusively or predominantly internally managed – students seldom sit end-of-year national examinations. The division of the curriculum into topics may or may not reflect traditional partitioning of knowledge and there is an emphasis on skills and “doing”, rather than the recall of decontextualised knowledge.

A hallmark of both the locally-redesigned and contextually-focused courses is that they have been designed with the perceived learning needs of particular students in mind. Both kinds of courses seek to provide some kind of match-up between the “curriculum” and “where the students are at” in terms of their interest, motivation, and previous success in learning. However, Hipkins et al.’s research suggests that in most of these six secondary schools, the benefits of SBCD are seen mostly to accrue to a particular subgroup of students – namely, low-achieving or underachieving students. The “locally-redesigned” and “contextually-focused” courses were most often designed to target students who were seen to have “problems” with learning in the more traditional discipline subjects. However, Hipkins (2004) argues that locally-redesigned and contextually-focused courses offer the potential to create new kinds of school subjects, with new combinations of knowledge and skills, for *all* students. Hipkins draws from Gilbert (forthcoming 2005) to argue that in the “knowledge society” all students will need to be able to link the decontextualised, “established” knowledge, which is the substance of most traditional-discipline subjects, with local, real-world contexts. This will be necessary because it will no longer be enough for students to *gain* knowledge through their schooling – they will also need to be able to *do* something with that knowledge:

Subjects need to be both practical and academic. It seems to us that locally-redesigned courses offer interesting prospects for achieving the necessary balance (Hipkins, 2004, p. 10).

## **CONCLUSION: WHAT MIGHT SBCD LOOK LIKE IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS?**

In this paper I have discussed four reasons why I believe SBCD is an important direction for New Zealand schools. I have outlined some of the challenges and shifts in thinking that SBCD could stimulate for New Zealand schooling and curriculum practice. An important idea to emerge from this review is that “school-based curriculum development” is best defined in relation to the wider features of the national educational system in which it occurs. Critical factors include the nature and structure of the national curriculum, the degree to which schools are able to make their own decisions about curriculum and other matters, schools’ accountability for demonstrating the outcomes of their curriculum practices for students, the expected role of teachers in curriculum development, and the expected or potential role of other people in school curriculum development.

Decisions about the New Zealand curriculum that result from the 2004–2007 New Zealand Curriculum/Marautanga Project will be a key element in shaping our views about what SBCD means in New Zealand. In the meantime, Figure 3 is a conceptual diagram to show the factors that might feed into SBCD processes in New Zealand schools. The top level of the diagram shows the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, which sets out the desired outcomes for all New Zealand

students and specifies the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that students should develop as a result of their schooling.

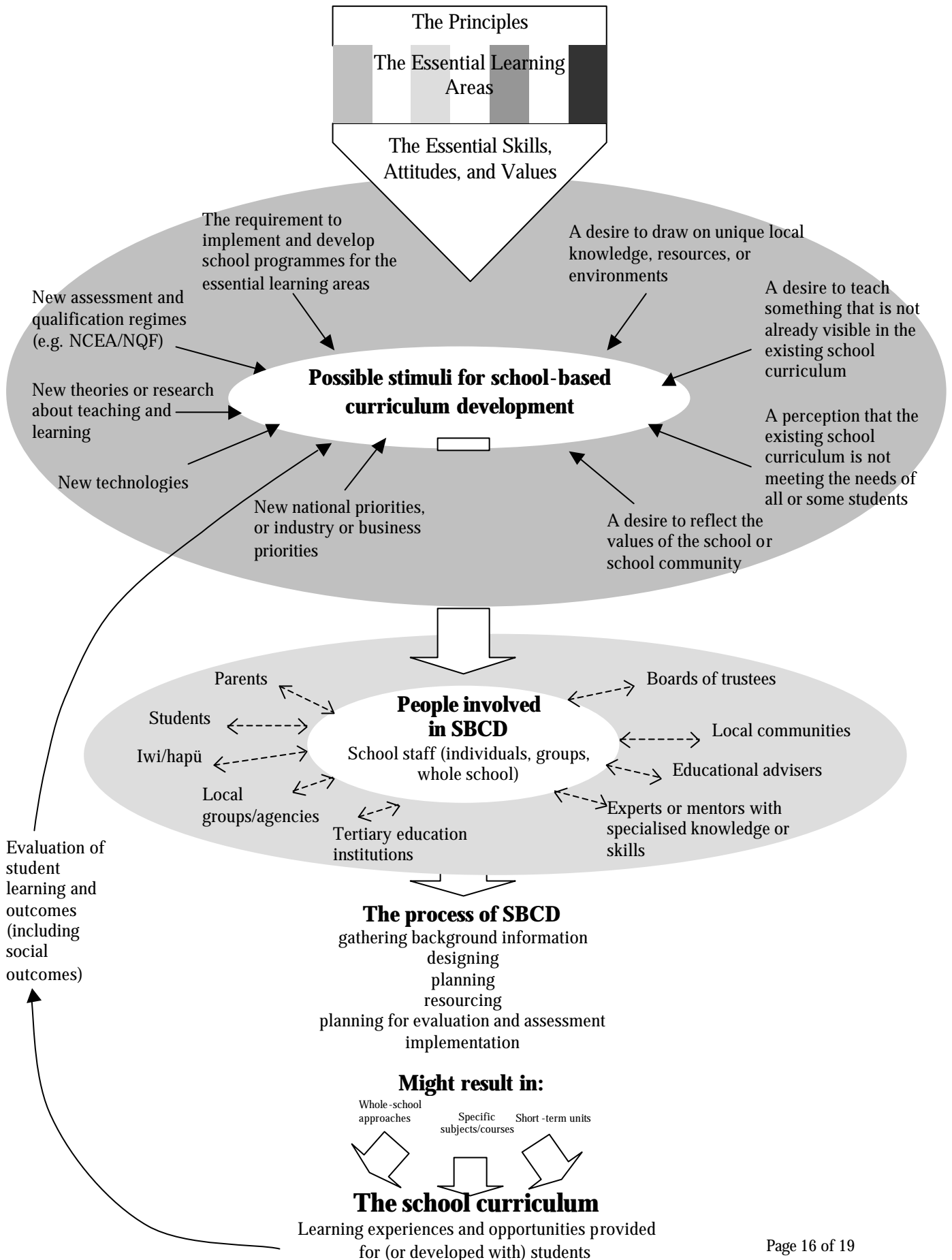
At the next level down are some possible stimuli for school-based curriculum development. These range from the requirement to develop and implement school programmes for the essential learning areas, to a desire for the school curriculum to reflect the values of the school or school community. The third level down shows the people involved in SBCD. School staff sit at the centre of this process (whether working as individuals, or in groups, or as a whole staff). Others who may be involved in SBCD are shown in the disk around the school staff.

Finally, through the processes of SBCD, different kinds of learning experiences and opportunities for students will result as part of the school curriculum. Depending on the circumstances, this could take the form of a whole-school approach, or specific subjects or courses, or short-term units or programmes. Ideally, school-based evaluation of student learning and other outcomes (including social outcomes) provides a feedback loop for the ongoing development of the school curriculum – indicated by the arrow on the bottom left-hand side of the diagram.

**Figure 3: Factors that might shape SBCD practice in New Zealand schools**  
 (Reproduced from Bolstad, 2004, p. 17)

**The New Zealand Curriculum Framework**

– sets out the desired outcomes for all New Zealand students





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