

**SCHOOL PROSPECTUSES:
WHY DO NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS PRODUCE ONE?**

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ABSTRACT

Since the Ministry of Education 1988 introduced market principles and policies as recommended by the Picot Report, New Zealand schools have been encouraged to use marketing strategies to ‘sell’ their school. For many schools marketing is a challenging idea, however, it appears that increasingly schools have to promote themselves to attract more students and thus gain more financial support from the government. As competition between schools increases for the same students in an area, prospectuses could be viewed as promotional materials. Although New Zealand schools are not legally required to produce a prospectus, it may well be a parent’s first impression of a school. This research study questions whether the prospectus makes a significant difference to the attraction and retention of students and promotes the image of the school.

This study examined 19 secondary school prospectuses in selected New Zealand North Island areas from a qualitative and quantitative stance. Two methods of data collection were used: a Content Analysis on 19 prospectuses, and two questionnaires both of which were given to the five sample schools who agreed to be part of the study. The first questionnaire was for parents of Year 9 students in the sample schools and the second questionnaire was for the school prospectus production teams.

The results indicate that there are very few similarities between prospectuses and a wide range of differences. The language used in the prospectuses was difficult for the majority of the public whilst some prospectuses used very few words; some were very well presented, and some did not contain information sought by parents. The findings suggest that parents want to retain the prospectus as a reference guide to the school but most did not use it to select their child’s school.

The results indicated that schools use prospectuses for image projection in the main and as a reference for prospective employees. The prospectus is also used to promote the vision and goals of the current principal rather than that of the school. No members of the Board of Trustees participate in the design of the content of the prospectus.

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GLOSSARY

Public Relations	An aspect of communications that involves promoting a desirable image for a person or group seeking public attention (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007).
Marketing	The means by which the school ultimately communicates and promotes its purpose, values and products to the pupils, parents, staff and wider community” (Davis and Ellison, 1997, p. 4).
‘Success’ criteria	As an external marketing strategy; An attraction and retention of students; Communicating the intended school image; and Parental approval and increased parental involvement.
Prospectus	A booklet or folder which provides the reader with information about the school.
Communication Networks	Transmit and exchange information between and within groups and organisations (Cheney, Zorn & Ganesh, 2004; Monge & Contractor, 2001; Tourish & Hargie, 2000).
Semiotics	The theory based on the meaning of signs
Signifier	The physical form of the sign
Signified	The concept that is evoked
Denotation	The exact definition of the sign

Connotation	The secondary meanings that have become attached to the sign
Evaluation	Concerned with “doing things better, both now and in the future (Osborne, 1990, p.151)

ABBREVIATIONS

MOE	Ministry of Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of study

Last year, a friend was about to send their first child to a secondary school and they had the choice of two secondary schools in their area. This couple was lucky because they were able to select between the two schools as they live in a large town in New Zealand. They had spoken to many local residents as to which school to choose, and looked on the websites for information about the schools. They were also encouraged to inspect these schools' prospectuses to give them good information about the school. Their view at the time was that a school visit and the information on the government website, along with the school's own website supported by anecdotal evidence were sufficient information for them to make their decision.

Along with this example, in New Zealand, many primary school children spend some time in a secondary school's 'manual programme' where they learn technologies that cannot be catered for in their own primary schools. This shows that many New Zealand children and their parents are already aware of their local secondary school before their children begin their next journey in education. Parents' selection of school for their children's education is the next phase and this arrangement with primary schools can also be viewed as a crucial public relations exercise for secondary schools in the recruitment of the next year's students; practical engagement rather than a written school document, such as the school prospectus, as a strategic marketing tool for secondary schools.

As a senior manager who has worked in three secondary schools, the researcher has not been involved in the production of the school prospectus. Her belief was that the school prospectus was developed by the Board of Trustees in association with the principal. Further, the researcher supposed that the prospectus, being a communication tool, not only spoke of the vision and goals of the school but also offered parents an insight into the daily routines of the school. The researcher

also believed that the vision represented the views of the school board and the principal rather than that of the school community.

For a strategic marketing operation, this seemed to be a course of action which appeared to be dislocated and far removed from the rest of the school community; a document that did not appear to truly represent the school. This became the prompt for this research investigation into the value and worth of the school prospectus in New Zealand secondary schools in today's commercial climate.

Marketing and the school prospectus

School prospectuses or pamphlets have been in existence in New Zealand schools, some in the Auckland city region dating back to the 1970s and yet it appears there has been no robust critical examination of these publications. There has been relatively little research conducted into the content value and purpose of the school prospectus and none at all in the marketing context. The literature on school prospectuses identifies tension between traditional, pre-reform attitudes to marketing in the educational context and the demands of the post-reform environment and this tension is examined. It is necessary to give careful consideration to the definitions and parameters of marketing as a promotional activity in the new educational environment, since the research suggests there is some confusion about marketing concepts in this context.

An article in the New Zealand Herald (14 June 2000, p.9) described the reactions of the principal of the first school in New Zealand to use a television advertisement as part of its marketing strategy. The principal was quoted as saying "If you don't promote yourself, people will think you don't care and don't have anything to promote". As marketing is an emerging strategy that schools are beginning to consider more seriously than before, it would be interesting to determine how school publications like the school prospectus fit into that planning.

As parents begin the task of selecting the 'right' secondary school for their children, this is the cue for many secondary schools to institute their marketing strategies. Some of the reasons for these are that the number of students at a school means better financial support from the government, it offers an opportunity to enhance the school image, and may suggest that the school is a successful one. The role of the school prospectus as a marketing tool could be an important publication for the school.

Vining (2005) and Vincent (2001) suggest that education is an intangible product and historically, up until the sixties, the status and power of educators was unquestioned. Parents attended their child's school only when invited for either discipline issues or to celebrate an achievement.

Over the last thirty years, criticism by the media has provoked interest from educators, parents, students and governments. A question of accountability has stirred teaching professionals to look to their own practices, whilst confidence in the education system has been shaken. As the balance of power shifts towards parents, these stakeholders now look at the education system as an investment programme for their child's future. So, the question is how do parents find out about the school that they are thinking of sending their child to?

One of the main focuses of marketing is about building relationships through good communication. Vincent (2001) suggests that to be successful marketers, schools should relay in simple language, to mixed audiences, the complex service they provide. One of the mediums a school has at its disposal to communicate its messages is the school prospectus. The school prospectus could foster good relationships with their stakeholders and provide valuable information about the school.

It is evident that schools are now in a competitive market place for students (Donnelly & Grebot, 2005) and cannot take public or government support for granted. Educators are beginning to realise that they must work to strengthen their school's identity and they must direct and protect their image as other professions and institutions do (Vining, 2005). Therefore good marketing strategies need to be utilised that can persuade stakeholders to support the

school's vision, attract enrolments and encourage advocacy and sponsorship. Marketing can play a key role in fostering loyalty in students, staff and parents (Vincent, 2001). Davies and Ellison (1997) believe that marketing bears a direct relationship to what the school does and how it does it.

Research problem and research questions

The focus of this research was to determine whether the school prospectus, given that it is not a compulsory document required by New Zealand schools to produce, is a useful marketing strategy, attracting and retaining students, communicating clearly the school's functions and culture, and regarded by the school as being a 'successful' document. Since there is little New Zealand research on the school prospectus in terms of the research questions as stated above, this research will break new ground. The broad aims of the project are:

- To examine the nature and quality of the school prospectus in the present educational marketplace by critically examining the prospectus and questioning their makers and readers; and
- To interpret these responses and determine their significance in the New Zealand context.

From these broad aims, four key questions emerged that shaped the study, which in turn shaped the literature review and methodology:

1. Why do NZ schools produce a prospectus?
2. Is the school prospectus valuable as a communication tool?
3. What are the stakeholders' expectations of the school prospectus?
4. How do schools judge that their prospectus has been 'successful'?

To answer these questions, the study has analysed the contents of 19 New Zealand North Island secondary school prospectuses. This, together with opinions and views of parents of year 9 students from five sampled secondary schools, as well as the opinions and views of the same sample school prospectus production teams, compiles the data that was collected and analysed for this study.

New Zealand school prospectuses are not mandatory documents but appear to be produced by most secondary schools. It is dutifully given out to possible Year 8 secondary school new entrants at their primary schools by the senior management team from the local secondary schools as part of an enrolment package. Some primary schools allow all the local secondary schools in through their school gates to 'sell' their schools. Parents are invited to listen at these meetings and ask pertinent questions of the senior management team in order to make their selection of secondary schools. This is the researcher's experience as a senior manager in three secondary schools.

Communication is an important and integral part of the school enrolment system and the messages that are conveyed at this point have a huge impact on student numbers. The relationship with stakeholders of the school is vital. The way in which a school delivers information, be it verbally or in the form of regular publications like newsletters, is crucial. It means that the quality of the communication presented by the school will impact not only on school image but will be reflected on the number of parents wanting to enrol their children at the school.

Definitions

There appear to be differences in authors' use of the terms 'school brochure' or 'the school prospectus'. Some authors use 'brochure' to mean a document that could also be described as a pamphlet: a piece of paper that is folded over several times. Careful attention to the manner and use of the word 'brochure' was given before judging that it could be construed to mean what in New Zealand is called 'a school prospectus'. Therefore, for the purposes of this research study, the use of the word prospectus is defined as a booklet or folder which provides the reader with information about the school; whether it is image presentation and/or factual details about the school.

The prospectus is a major public relations exercise and it was interesting to see how effective it has been as a part of the school's marketing strategy. Public Relations is defined in this study as an "aspect of communications that involves

promoting a desirable image for a person or group seeking public attention” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007).

Marketing as defined by Davis and Ellison (1997) is the one that will be used in this study. Hence, marketing is "the means by which the school ultimately communicates and promotes its purpose, values and products to the pupils, parents, staff and wider community” (Davis and Ellison, 1997, p. 4).

In this study, stakeholders are defined as those persons who have or may have a vested interest in the school. This could be the local business community, parents, students and prospective employees.

Schools have long been "image conscious", but now it becomes pressing for all schools to understand why their image is of such consequence and how to project one that is positive and advantageous; the reason Topor (1998) believes is that there is a greater chance that children will learn better in a school with a good image. Parental attitudes, so central to children's performance, are highly susceptible to image; a good one creates a context in which trust and shared values can flourish.

So, the types of communication networks a school develops, as well as consciously growing the school image, plays an important part in how the school markets itself through the prospectus. “Unlike the commercial world, where success is judged by units sold and profits made, success in education and respect for the practitioners is measured by the satisfaction of the community it serves” (Vincent, 2001, p. 2). The school prospectus is one of the links the school has with its local community and as such needs to represent the school's values through education systems that earn the school trust and respect; a good marketing strategy. This will bring about successful partnerships that schools need to continue to develop their professionalism as an organisation.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

This provides a background to the study and introduces the school's current use of the school prospectus as a public relations exercise and its impact as a marketing tool. A brief historical perspective of marketing through the school prospectus is also presented in this chapter. The research problem is identified, the research aims clarified. Four key questions are posed which frame the research project.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The next chapter in the study summarises the literature available on school prospectuses, communication networks, and marketing strategies. It begins with a description of the reform of education administration in New Zealand, and the emergence of the notion of an education market. There is an examination of the traditional role of the school prospectus in schools, followed by an analysis of the school prospectus with regard to school choice. This is followed up by a review of literature on the school prospectus and its influence on school image. The chapter also examines the nature of communication and how the school prospectus is used to communicate the school's messages to its stakeholders.

Chapter three: Research Methodology and Methods

The chapter begins with some reflection on the quantitative and qualitative approaches of this project. The research essentially examines the methods of data collection from a content analysis of 19 school prospectus with that of two questionnaires: one from parents of Year 9 students in five sampled secondary schools and one from the same five sampled schools prospectus producers. A description of the limitations of the study is also included in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis

The research findings are organised into two sections. The first section uses content analysis methodologies to critically examine 19 school prospectuses from

the sampled area in relation to the language, photos, communication of intended messages, history and tradition, and accessibility of the school prospectus. A consolidated analysis of the findings from the content analysis follows. The second section summarises the data collected from the two questionnaires detailing the perceptions of parents and school prospectus producers. A consolidated analysis of the two questionnaires follows this section.

This chapter also presents a discussion based on the data collected from the content analysis and the two questionnaires with that of the existing literature on school prospectuses.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This last chapter develops the analysis of the research findings and examines the relationship between the findings and the existing theory of the literature review. The research establishes that school prospectuses will continue to be produced as a 'traditional' document even though there is huge disparity in the quality of the document as well as the information presented in it. Parents and school prospectus producers are presented with advice and guidance from the evidence collected.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This research study focuses on investigating the reasons underpinning why New Zealand schools produce a prospectus and whether the information that is contained within it is relevant to stakeholders and the school's local community. The research questions whether the school prospectus influences the school's stakeholders' choice of schools and if that is their primary intention. This study also examines how schools have viewed school prospectuses since the 1970s, and considers the importance of the prospectus as a marketing tool and as a means of communicating with their public.

Hanford's (1992) research believes that as a major avenue for liaison between school and prospective parents, the United Kingdom Education Act 1988 (Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) 2006) states quite precisely the requirements for a school prospectus. Davies and Ellison's (1997) work supports schools by providing a content structure for school prospectus producers as a guide. They argue that schools in the United Kingdom do not exist to "provide teachers with jobs; they exist to provide effective education" (p.4) and this effective education needs to be marketed carefully in the prospectus. New Zealand schools do not have to produce a prospectus and the Ministry of Education does not offer guidelines to schools on prospectus development. Subsequently, if it is a major avenue for liaison between school and prospective parents, then according to Vining (1999) schools need to learn how to use their marketing tools like the school prospectus to convey their messages in simple language. Stott and Parr's (1991) research indicates that a school prospectus must reflect the quality of service that the school provides and argue that the prospectus is a means by which "the school can communicate to its identified clients" (p.100). The standard of communication in terms of language, photos and quality of presentation impacts on the school's overall image. This study of

school prospectuses analyses the communication methods employed and assesses their relative success.

Schools have always been 'image conscious' (Hastings, 2005) and as a result need to understand how to project this image to their best advantage. Each school has its own image which is a set of beliefs or expectations. It may be made up of a visual symbol in the form of a logo, a house style, a colour code, a set of observable behaviours or a combination of these. They go together to form a picture of how we see a school (Stott & Parr, 1997). Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) describe schools that have created a corporate image, one that promotes efficacy and formality, a school that is business-like and detached. This image becomes the perceptions of the school's stakeholders; a powerful and determining factor in their decision-making (Stott & Parr, 1997).

Two research studies conducted by Knight (1992), and Hesketh and Knight (1998) examined the strategic marketing of school prospectuses in the United Kingdom. Two further studies were used in this study: A semiotic analysis on school prospectuses by Symes (1996) and a study by a group of students from the University of Columbia in Vancouver: Brett, Mansfield, Palm and Rollins (2005) into the value of publishing a school prospectus using the data collected from two independent schools.

This chapter has been divided into eight sections: section one determines the definition of the school prospectus that will be used in this study; the second section examines the history and background of marketing and the implications this has had on the development of the school prospectus; section three studies research of schools' experiences of marketing and the impact of this on the school prospectus; the fourth section looks at school choice in conjunction with the school prospectus; section five reviews literature about the promotion of the school image through the school prospectus; section six looks at studies that have been influenced by semiotic and content analysis of their publications; section seven considers stakeholders' expectations of the school prospectus; and lastly, in section eight, this thesis will examine the research of schools' view of a 'successful' prospectus.

Historical development of ‘strategic marketing’ through education reforms

Research suggests that school prospectuses were introduced into the New Zealand education system as part of the introduction of market style policies by the New Zealand Treasury in 1987 (Treasury, 1987). Before the 1989 New Zealand education reforms, schools understood the value of spreading the ‘good news’, by promoting their institutions to their school communities. School senior management, in particular the principal, made good use of local reporting of activities and did not pass up an opportunity to present him/her self at community functions (Vining, 1996). This was an expectation of principals of the day.

Before 1989, all decisions about the national curriculum were made by the Department of Education. Schools were resourced through a large, centralised system that was highly regulated with schools having no real control over their own school’s strategic management issues. Teaching and learning were the key tasks in a school (Codd, 2002). Historically, the core values of public education in New Zealand have been those of liberty, equality and universality; education being aligned with an egalitarian system within a social democratic model (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998). Educational professionals were given to sharing and co-operating with each other to provide an equality of educational opportunity. In this system, image promotion of a school, had little in common with ideas of competitive, commercial advertising or marketing as a managerial process. Business approaches to educational management were seen as inappropriate (Peters & Marshall, 1996).

Marketing strategies became more widely used following the 1989 education reforms legislated in the *Education Act* (1989) and articulated in the ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ document (Department of Education, New Zealand, 1988e). This reform gave rise to a very different paradigm of school management and paralleled similar reforms in Britain, Australia and some parts of the United States. The political forces that shaped ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ reflected the ascendancy of New Right ideology within government, and this influence continued with the change to a National- led government from 1990 – 1999. The resulting economic and social reforms generally involved the realignment of the state based on policies of corporatisation, deregulation and

'user-pays' (Dale & Robertson, 1997). Today, the impact of these reforms for New Zealand schools has been and still is an issue as studies continue to indicate that schools with low decile ratings struggle to raise their educational standards and resort to marketing initiatives to lift their school profiles in their local community (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1997). However, managing the relationship between the school and the community through effective communication is one that is still viewed as suspicious by educationalists and the community, and research shows that the use of market forces in education is still to be a recurrent emotive topic (Davies & Ellison, 1998).

The most significant change for education was the devolution of accountability and responsibility for schools to their local community, addressed in the main points of the reform:

- Removal of the Department of Education in its previous form, replacing it with a policy-focused Ministry;
- Specific agencies developed to deal with qualifications and assessment, special education and accountability; and
- Governance of schools to be in the hands of an elected Board of Trustees (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1997).

Pre- 1989, to develop the image and profile of their schools, principals were visible in the community involving themselves in service clubs, churches and sports clubs as part of their public relations role. Most school principals provided articles about the school in the media as well as the school's own newsletters to develop a confident school image with parents. Hoxby (2005) suggests that this activity could be described as advertising and marketing, to all appearances this was consistent with conventional (pre 1989) leadership. Perhaps this activity could be described as a 'symbolic' function rather than part of an integrated, strategic management plan (Hoxby, 2005).

By the beginning of the 1990s, there was a powerful marketing imperative at work in New Zealand education (Education Review Office, (ERO) 1997). This aspect of senior management is reflected in research conducted by the New Zealand ERO (1997) where principals were asked to respond to a survey about professional leadership. The major finding of this survey was that schools considered the development and maintenance of constructive community relations as important in terms of community and public relations, and indeed, most principals saw that public perceptions of the school rested on their own performance. Schools and their principals determined that public perceptions meant competing for prospective parents and research by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1997) suggests that a competitive environment was established as the education reforms allowed schools to market themselves. This permitted parents to believe that they were able to select a school for their child. The part played by the school prospectus in this choice-making by stakeholders was subject to scrutiny, as schools developed their marketing strategies.

Gordon (1997) observes that although the government did not create competition for social advantage in education, it did modernise that competition and deployed it as an instrument of government in education. Gordon (1997) discusses the tension between 'market' and 'community' goals implicit in the reforms, and concludes that market goals are predominant with New Zealand schools operating "as a series of autonomous providers, essentially left alone to work through, adapt to and influence market forces" (p.67). Arguably, the end effect of the reforms provided a vehicle for parental selection of every New Zealand government state school, as well as some government schools being able to select their parents (Marginson, 1997). The development of school prospectuses was part of the change that allowed schools to market themselves and this thesis examines the role of the prospectus in this marketing strategy.

The impact of market forces on schools has been considered in some recent New Zealand studies. The Smithfield research project conducted by Lauder et al. (1994) compared the effects of marketisation on four different schools. Their study found that the schools in the project used different approaches to combat or utilise market reforms in their communities with each school using a variety of

tactics to increase roll numbers and attract a larger proportion of wealthy parents. In one of the schools, 'Miro College' Lauder, Hughes, Watson, Waslander, Thrupp, Strathdee, Simiyu, Dupuis, McGlenn and Hamlin (1994) noted that the reforms had little impact. The principal noted:

I do not spend a single cent on publicity. I have the plainest, simplest prospectus. I do not do anything at all except to have an open night and it is so packed you can't fit into the hall. I say quite publicly that our advertising is what goes out of the school gate and that's where it stops.....I don't have to market the school, the product is there, people know it's there. (Principal, 'Miro College', in Lauder et al., 1994, p.53)

The implication of this principal's view from Lauder et al. (1994) research suggests that some schools in New Zealand were in a position where they did not need to use the school prospectus as a marketing tool. Stott and Parr (1991) state that the "price of education, in real terms, is more than money" (p.4). However, they go on to argue that schools do need to consider their position in the market place as admissions of new students bring with them a 'sum of money" (p.5). Davies and Ellison (1997) contend that if a prospectus brings in an extra number of students the prospectus will pay for itself and then be considered "worthwhile and cost-effective" (p.146). Further to this argument of the financial outlay on a prospectus, this study asked schools participating in the project to estimate the financial cost to the school to produce a school prospectus and evaluate the school's gains from the production of the prospectus. New Zealand educational reforms have necessitated that senior management and boards of trustees in secondary schools evaluate their position on marketing. Holcomb (1993) considers that the use of the word 'marketing' in educational terms is not about selling; it includes factors such as "analysis of the market, planning production and advertising, implementation of plans, control of personnel, product, place and price" (p. 21). Kotler and Fox (1995) regard the evolution of educational marketing as a strategic activity. Their research indicates that educational marketing requires planning to promote the school's image and articulate the school's major goals and trends to shape "its uniqueness in order to attract students to the school; the school brochure being one tool in the marketing

strategy” (p.12). Therefore, for example, if the school’s uniqueness is that it promotes ‘excellence’ in sporting codes and it is clearly stated in the school’s prospectus, then parents need to understand this ‘excellence’, what it actually means and how it will affect their child. Gray (1991) reports that some schools in West Sussex, in the United Kingdom, made a total of fifteen bogus claims in their prospectuses regarding their academic achievements and sporting facilities and believes that these kinds of action will lead to poor reputations and dissatisfied customers.

With regard to the work and cost involved in producing a school prospectus, Fidler (2002) says that: “recognition of this effect can save effort on promotion and redirect it to trying to enlist the co-operation of the other schools” (p. 30). This suggests that neighbourhood schools should endeavour to meet and discuss ways of supporting each other rather than competing with each other. The contention here is that less money could be spent on the school prospectus because there would be no competition from neighbourhood schools. This researcher believes that schools need to finance a prospectus that reflects the school’s reality in the school prospectus irrespective of other schools, as well as providing a platform for future development and thinking upon which the school hopes to embark. Parents need to know the facts about the school, but they should also know that as Davies and Ellison (1998) suggest a school prospectus should be used to “inform, persuade, remind and condition” (p.218) their targeted audience.

In New Zealand, in 2005, the Minister of Education announced school closures due to falling enrolments in some areas. Vining’s (2005) research suggests that these closures provides strong evidence that schools are in a competitive marketplace and educators are beginning to realise that they must work to strengthen their school's identity. Marketing through the school prospectus is a means to communicate this image and promote the school’s activities could perhaps be a step towards avoiding closure (Brent & Ellison, 1997).

Research of schools' experiences of marketing and the impact of this on the school prospectus

The school prospectus has been developed as a tool to promote the school, communicate information to stakeholders and invite prospective parents to send their children to the school (Vincent, 2001). A number of researchers have questioned the value of the school prospectus in promoting the school and attracting parents to send their children. Fidler (2002) describes the factors that influence parental choice of their children's secondary school in the United Kingdom and states that although the school may have factual information available, only some parents consult this. "Most parents are influenced by the 'grapevine' effect, their own first-hand experience in dealing with the school and what they read in the local media" (Fidler, 2002, p.29). It would seem that courting the local reporters and establishing regular links may be more fruitful than efforts placed into producing a glossier prospectus; a notion that appears to be in keeping with the traditional (pre 1989) values and responsibilities of school senior management in New Zealand.

However, literature in the United Kingdom, where the school prospectus is a compulsory document, indicates some interesting material which supports the idea that the prospectus has value if marketed carefully. Medgett (1997) states that "School publications have two functions: firstly, to inform the reader about what is going on; and secondly, to present the image of the school" (p. 89). On the other hand, the research conducted by Stillman and Maychell, (1986) suggests that there is the parental reading or interpretation of the prospectus, where there is almost bound to be an element of public relations in some brochures. Although the inferences from this last piece of research is dated, the relevance of the findings appears to be pertinent in today's climate and supports the themes of this research investigation. Some parents are skeptical of public relations and, faced with any brochure, will believe that the schools are putting a gloss on everything. Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) argue that:

The work of image production whether in the form of press releases, brochures, open evenings or primary' liaison' absorbs significant quantities of teacher time, emotional energy and financial resources which could have

been spent on enhancing the educational experiences of children in the school. (p. 123)

Even though Stott and Parr (1997) agree with this sentiment their research indicates that schools need to gain parental interest and commitment, indicating that good relations are important. Failure to do so could result in the inevitable decline in rolls, fewer funds and a continuing downward spiral for the school (Hanford, 1992). So this researcher believes that school image and how it presents itself in any external publication could be important. Topor (1998) advocates that schools need to be alert and aware of the image they present to their public.

In the United Kingdom, school prospectuses are legal documents which contain specific base information, and that information is available on the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) website. This suggests that readers of the school prospectuses in the United Kingdom are able to compare and contrast schools. Considering the United Kingdom context of school prospectuses, Davies and Ellison (1997) believe that a prospectus is designed to be an attractive promotional document but that it must also comply with the statutory requirements as set out by the DfES (p.145). Copeland (2001) who researched the contents of school prospectuses of some independent schools in the United Kingdom suggests that private schools in the United Kingdom are able to be more selective, produce glossy professional prospectuses and screen the contents carefully. The prospectuses of these independent schools do not need to include as much information as state schools in the United Kingdom. Copeland (2001) believes that in the United Kingdom in the state sector the school prospectus has become a complex instrument of bureaucracy whose contents are severely prescribed:

In technical terms, particularly with regard to the quality of paper, the reproduction of text and photographs, almost all the brochures (95 per cent) reflect the highest possible standards and are comparable with other brochures in different fields. Indeed, it could be argued that they surpass the quality of handbooks produced by concerns such as finance houses, whose

main pages are matt. The predominant format of the independent school brochure is either glossy paper throughout or glossy pages with supplementary matt pages tucked in a pocket on the inside back cover. This level of quality contrasts sharply with state-sector brochures, where only a small minority of secondary schools achieve such standards. (Copeland, 2001, p.89)

Copeland's (2001) research suggests that glossy school prospectuses are the standard for independent schools in the United Kingdom and they are not obliged to print the DfES statutory information as with the state sector schools. Donnelly and Grebot (2005) argue that the information in the prospectuses may not necessarily reflect the school's reality saying that "there is no doubt that schools are having to juggle difficult, often competing demands, balancing commercial objectives with educational realities" (p.3).

In one of their case studies, Fidler, Russell and Simkins (1997) found that one principal of a school changed the format of their school prospectus from a glossy product costing a lot of money to a black and white document which 'gives the basic information' asserting that the school now believes that "a glossy brochure does not promote the school well enough to warrant the expenditure" (p.136). Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995), present a principal's reflection on the expenditure on marketing from one of their case studies:

We've said, Well yes, we'll put £1000 more into the publicity budget, because, yes, we do need little leaflets that fold over as well as a prospectus," but at the same time two years ago we'd have been agonizing and saying that £1000 would buy a computer for the geography department or whatever, whereas now we don't have those discussions, [we] just do it. (P. 123)

The same principal also said:

What you actually say, Well... it's no good just doing this and this, we have to spend money on something that looks glossy – and you're spending

money on that instead of on the textbooks. And that kind of thing is for me the line between what I've found acceptable in the past and what I would like to have always said I would find unacceptable (p.123).

This study showed that a school prospectus needs to be a well presented document which is valued by the school's stakeholders as well as providing relevant information about the school. The researcher went on to look at the quality of the school prospectuses of sampled New Zealand schools and aimed to discover the extent to which schools go to produce a publication that is more than just an instrument for communication; a glossy product with status and little detail of the school's reality or one that is not only well presented but also states the school's philosophy and vision clearly.

School Choice and the school prospectus

Some authors suggest that school prospectuses are documents promoting a relationship with the school's client base (Gallagher, Bagin & Kindred 1997, Knight, 1992 and Kotler & Fox, 1995). This implies that school prospectuses are written as a public relations exercise. Clarifying the nature of public relations and what that implies for New Zealand school prospectuses is important to the research because it is a component of the school marketing strategy.

Public relations is a twenty-first century phenomenon whose roots are as old and deep as human communication itself (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1995). According to Phillips (2001) the art of public relations is used to influence the behaviour of other people and has done so throughout the history of humanity. Kotler and Fox (1995) define public relations as that which "consists of efforts to obtain favourable interest in the institution and/or its programs, typically through planting significant news about them in publications...." (p.351). Gallagher, et al. (1997) suggest that it is a step a school can take to build its confidence by letting interested people know what the school is doing well; whilst Tymson and Sherman (1996) believe that public relations needs to be based on a long-term view of an organisation's relations with its' publics.

So what of the school prospectus and public relations? Marland and Rogers's (1991) research suggests that school brochures are one of the biggest failures in the marketing of schools. "Too many schools see the school prospectus only as an annual report or handbook. Too little thought goes into what they should contain, how they should look, and who is going to read them" (p.47). However, they go on to say that the brochure "is a key marketing tool for the school and should be considered with great care" (p.47). Davies and Ellison (1997) believe that as first impressions are important, "Leaders should be confident that there is a consistent message going out about the aims of the school and about the activities which are taking place in order to achieve those aims"(p.144).

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994) describe the public relations process in four steps:

1. Defining Public Relations Problems – this is usually conducted in terms of a "situational analysis" or SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). This answers the question "What's happening now?"
2. Planning and Programming – the main focus in this step is "strategy", and this step should answer the question "what should we do and say, and why?"
3. Taking action and Communicating – or the "implementation" step. This step should answer the question, "How and when do we do and say it?"
4. Evaluating the Programme – the "final assessment" answering the question "How did we do?" or evaluating the 'success' of the promotion.(p. 10)

To communicate their intended messages, Vining (2005) believes that schools need to consider their public relations strategy carefully and plan the content of their school publications. Vincent (2001) concurs and encourages schools to evaluate their prospectuses as to the 'success' of their promotion.

Promotion of the school image through the school prospectus

When most schools establish their image, they begin to do something about it and want to display their image to their community in a publication of some variety (Vining, 2005). It is important the image has to be accurate because publication of inaccurate information about the school image is a high risk strategy. Stott and Parr (1997) argue that promotion of the school image is only a part of marketing and that “Without promotion, a good school may not be known” (p.100). As far back as 1991, researchers such as Marland and Rogers (1991) believed that brochures and publicity materials from a school should be used to serve a dual purpose in promoting school image and the strengths of the school. However, Deem, Behony and Heath (1994) argue that market ideology may cause schools to examine themselves inwardly at “their image and market appeal” (p.547), rather than look towards a better quality of education. Davies and Ellison (1997) suggest that:

When considering promotional approaches, the school’s first priority must be to ensure that these ambassadors have accurate and positive information to disseminate. (p.143-144).

The ‘ambassadors’ that Davies and Ellison (1997) refer to are staff, governors, current students and parents who are an integral part of the school and will communicate their perspectives of the school.

Though promotion is an integral part of business expenditure in our complex society (Belch & Belch, 2001) the world of advertising is not an option to most schools and even without promotional action, an image is portrayed to the outside world. However, Lauder et al. (1997) research into the impact of market policies on school selection, suggests that the socio-economic composition of the school’s population as well as academic results play an important part in school choice. Davies and Ellison (1997) state that whilst a prospectus is a statutory requirement for schools in the United Kingdom, decisions about how they promote their prospectus or published material can be made by the school. For example, schools are required to publish their examination results in their

prospectus offering comparability with other schools for their parents; how they present these results is up to the school.

Studies that have been influenced by semiotic and content analysis of the school prospectus

This study looked at research studies that influenced the content of a school prospectus in terms of the language and photos used to reflect the school image. The school prospectus is a publication presenting information that provides a school with an avenue of communication that cannot easily be refuted (Knight, 1992). According to Davies and Ellison (1997), the following design (Table 1) outlines the points that need to be considered as necessary items of inclusion in a school prospectus, and they are supported in this thinking by other commentators, including Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, (1995), Stott and Parr (1991).

Table 1: A combination of key points that should be considered when creating a school prospectus according to Davis and Ellison (1997), Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) and Stott and Parr (1991)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Decision about the purpose of a school prospectus;▪ Tasteful and eye-catching cover;▪ Decision on key issues that need to be included, for example: stating the school mission in the first few pages and then reinforce key words from the mission statement throughout the prospectus;▪ Simple text and/or photographs – One photograph can send more key messages about the school than a paragraph of words, for example: a smiling boy and girl in traditional uniform, standing outside the school chapel holding textbooks under their arms, represents as follows: Uniform = standards and discipline Textbooks = academic standards and study The Chapel = traditional values and approaches A boy and a girl = a mixed school;▪ Clear structure and language that is relational to the readership of the school. A prospectus clear of jargon and teachers' speak that the general public will not understand, simple but able to talk to a wide variety of clientele is important;▪ Not too long and easy to read;▪ Contact information about the school should be prominent – perhaps on the back cover.
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Therefore, as suggested above, if schools go to the trouble of presenting a glossy document, then the prospectus should say more than simply giving the facts and figures (Davies & Ellison, 1995). The school needs to consider how the information is presented and what information is to be included in its content (Stott & Parr, 1991). All of these give a message about the school and play a key part in contributing to the school's image as well as informing prospective parents. Belch and Belch (2001) argue that the value in analysing signs and symbols in the packaged product is helpful as it gives the senders (of a message) an idea of what message has been received by their readers. Cheney, Zorn and Ganesh's (2004) work suggest that stakeholders may want to understand something about the culture that predominates within the school, for example, a religious based culture, sports or arts inclined school and how words and images are used to depict the culture and organisation. These are some of the features that Cheney, Zorn and Ganesh (2004) call "organisational communication" (p.440).

Communication networks transmit and exchange information between and within groups and organisations (Cheney, Zorn & Ganesh, 2004; Monge & Contractor, 2001; Tourish & Hargie, 2000). Lair (2004) argues that communication is not just about a single message, but a complex set of interactions shaped by the organisation for its recipients. Furthermore, a school prospectus is part of the strategic planning of the school, a means of communicating the school's goals the next academic year. The responsibility for the delivery of good communication through the school prospectus is with the school prospectus producer. This team is charged with the need to let stakeholders understand something about the school so that parents select their school and the community wants to support the school. The question is whether the key messages that are sent to stakeholders are the messages that are intended by the school and how many could 'miss-read' the communication. This will be important as schools endeavour to transmit information about their school to their stakeholders through the prospectus, and in turn, the stakeholders will have expectations on what information they want to receive; a communication network.

It has been argued that the organisation can be understood through the form of text; and it is the metaphor of the text that draws our attention to the extent the

organisation is written, spoken and constructed by its members both linguistically and symbolically (Cheney, Zorn & Ganesh, 2004). In other words, when we read the prospectus, the interpretation of the symbols and images we see depict an image of the school.

Since organisational communication is about the way in which the key messages are used to shape the organisation, it is important to understand the nature of communication in context of promotion and school image. Belch and Belch (2001) contend that since communication is a very complex process, marketers must understand the meanings of words and symbols and how they influence their stakeholders' interpretation of products and messages.

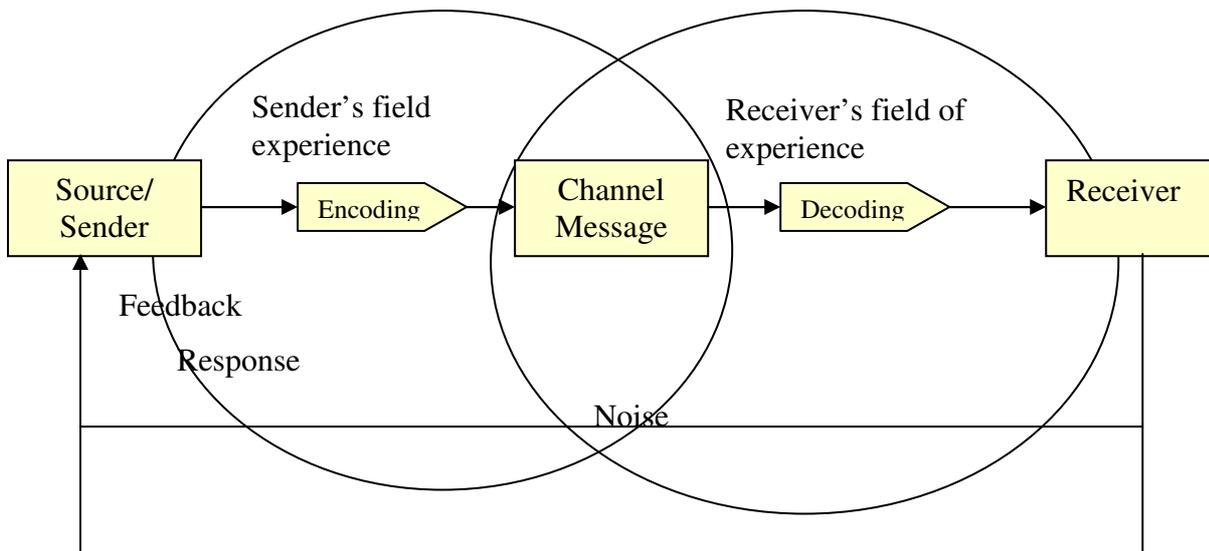


Figure 1: A model of the communication process (Belch & Belch, 2001, p.139)

Belch and Belch (2001) have constructed a model of the communication process (figure 1) with the following explanation:

Two elements represent the major participants in the communication process, the sender and the receiver. Another two are the major communication tools, message and channel. Four others are the major communication functions and processes: encoding, decoding, response, and feedback. The last element: noise, refers to any extraneous factors in the

system that can interfere with the process and work against effective communication (p.139).

The message might be verbal, non-verbal, oral, written or symbolic. The degree to which a given text is understandable to a reader is dependent upon the nature of the topic that is being communicated; the reader's expectations and prior knowledge, and the perceived role relationship between writer and reader; and the organization of the text and density of information. To better understand the symbolic messages in a product (semiotics: the study of the nature of meaning through gestures, myths, signs, symbols and theories) Solomon (1999) notes that from a semiotic perspective every marketing message has three basic components: an object, a sign or symbol, and an interpretant.

The theory based on the meaning of signs was initially proposed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Saussure, 1989). Saussure (1989) divided linguistic sign into three aspects:

1. signifier;
2. signified; and
3. sign.

The signifier is the physical form of the sign, for example the written or spoken word, the signified is the concept that is evoked and the sign is the combination of the both the signifier and the signified. Schirato and Yell (2000) took this proposition, clarified the meaning and understanding of what Saussure (1989) proposed and summarised it as:

1. Signs are adaptable and changeable;
2. Words – signifiers – have a history of meanings; and
3. The meanings that are read into signifiers, the meanings that are activated from a variety of potential meanings, depend on the specific context.

For example, “the word ‘dog’ is a signifier; the image of an animal that it evokes in our minds when we see or hear it is the signified” (Marsen, 2006, p.56). Chandler (2004) explains that the use of the word ‘signified’, is due in part to the way we conceptualise about the ‘thing or signified’ which is why Saussure

deliberately selected the choice of terms for his model. Marsen (2006) describes the new semiotic approach as a means to communicate messages by representing ideas and emotions (p.54). Two other terms that need definition before proceeding are denotation and connotation as they are an integral aspect of semiotic analysis. Denotation refers to the exact definition of the sign, for example, a 'fire' denotes a red, hot, element that emits smoke. Connotation refers to the secondary meanings that have become attached to the sign, for example, the concept of 'fire' connotes passion, heat, enthusiasm.

From this Schirato and Yell (2000) surmise that meanings are relational and are produced through the relations between signs. Signs do not possess meanings in themselves; that the interpretation of a signifier is always made through another signifier and finally that the production of meaning is an area of ideological contestation. The school prospectus contains many photographs, school logos and symbols that possess meanings to all stakeholders that view the publication. The school, then, must also have a clear view of how the customer perceives its product. It is amazing how often others' perceptions are at variance with our own. The solution to this problem is simply to ask them, as this research study did. If management, for example, sees itself as providing a solid, traditional product in which parents can have confidence, the decision makers need to be sure that they, the parents, see it this way too (Stott & Parr, 1991).

Stakeholders' expectations of the school prospectus

As market forces have impacted on New Zealand education, parents have begun to take an active interest in the choices available for their children. Lauder, Hughes and Watson (1999) argue that pro-market advocates believe that the "spurs and sanctions of competition drive up performance of schools" (p.87). These researchers continue to say that since parents know more about schools and have power to exercise this knowledge, they can send their children to schools of their choice. It is a market of "consumers" where the best schools will profit in student numbers, higher educational standards and good, clean competition between schools (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1999).

Vincent's (2001) research indicates that parents constantly complain that they don't get enough communication from the school. They only hear from the teacher when something is wrong. Miscommunication can cause damage to the school if they are allowed to 'take root and flourish' (Topor, 1998, p.25). Effective marketing means building public awareness and appreciation through good communication. Assuming that school promotion is never of a propaganda nature (Gray, 1991), it follows that inaccurate and misleading information in a school publication reduces credibility in the long term. Vincent (2001) makes a good point when he states that "It is vitally important to affirm to parents that they are valued customers, that they are receiving a quality product and that they made the right choice when they chose your school" (p.20).

Although there is literature on communication, parental choice, school image, public relations and marketing in education, there is very little literature which combines the value of the school prospectus with these themes. This is a significant gap in the field that this research will address through a contribution to the pool of knowledge on the impact, if any, of school prospectuses in New Zealand.

Schools' views of 'successful' prospectuses

Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995), give an example of a principal in a United Kingdom school and how she views success in the use of the prospectus. This principal believes that the investment can be justified when a school succeeds in attracting extra students, retaining excellent staff, thereby determining for that school, their criteria for success. Fiske and Ladd (2000) believe that in New Zealand schools today specific marketing practices are standard and publicising the school through glossy publications is essential if the school is to become a successful school.

So, for the purpose of this study, the ‘success’ criteria will be defined from the school’s perspective as:

- as an external marketing strategy - to communicate to a larger audience and to paint a broad picture of the school’s unchanging elements (Vining, 1996);
- attraction and retention of students – to increase the school’s student population is one of the prime reasons for marketing (Davies & Ellison, (1995);
- communicating the intended school image – promote the activities of the school to present and prospective parents as well as the local community (Stott & Parr, 1991); and
- parental approval and increased parental involvement – the engagement of parents in the education of their children moves the school to a more synergistic and effective level (Renihan & Renihan, 1991).

Davies and Ellison (1997) believe that evaluating the school’s marketing strategies is as important a task as evaluating the educational product, “to ensure that the educational aims and objectives have been met” (p. 193). A component of the research study will examine how schools evaluate their prospectuses with emphasis on how they define their ‘successes’. Evaluation is defined in this study as being concerned with “doing things better, both now and in the future” and described in terms of effectiveness and efficiency; “doing the right things and doing them right” (Osborne, 1990, p.151). From a strategic marketing perspective, Davies and Ellison (1997) suggest that part of an evaluation of a school prospectus needs to include not only the statutory information but also the production and presentation aspects of the prospectus. O’Connor (1990) believes that once a school prospectus has been produced, the school must consider the relative importance of the prospectus when assessing its effectiveness. How this is achieved and evaluated will be of importance to the school for future marketing considerations.

Stott and Parr (1991) suggest that apart from the statutory requirements for schools in the United Kingdom, the prospectus should also include a map and its location, some recent biographies of recent successful students, pictures, illustrations, the benefits of life as a student and the future of the school (p.99). Stott and Parr (1991) also believe that the school should invest in presenting their prospectus as an attractive and readable publication if it should be considered as an effective prospectus.

This research considered the following elements (Table 2) as part of an effective prospectus:

Table 2: Elements of an effective prospectus as considered by this research

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic information it contains – what are the basics? A map and location of the school, mission statement, school goals, curriculum guide, pastoral care systems, bus system, sports and other activities, qualifications of teaching staff and photographs of the students/staff/facilities; ▪ Language/words used and the key messages it sends; ▪ Glossy or not glossy, high quality; ▪ Philosophy of the school – is it consistent throughout the prospectus? ▪ Logo/Crest and motto – message it sends? Symbolism/semiotics ▪ Number of pages, organisation of material within the prospectus – what is on what page? Does it state its importance if it is in the first few pages? ▪ Number of photographs and what are the photographs about? People, buildings, facilities? Are these in the foreground or background? Are there photographs of students in classrooms? Is the uniform displayed? ▪ School Image – what language/words are used to define the school’s unique characteristics?
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Vining (2005) believes that when communicating with present customers (pupils and parents) the school is talking to their most valued audience and are, therefore, the school’s best advocates. This means that the quality of the school is only as good as the perception held by the school’s customers.

A school that is aware of effective written communication to its stakeholders uses every opportunity to paint the school in a positive light. Many channels of communication can be used to reach a school's internal audience as well as its external audience. The school prospectus is one vehicle of communication that could be used effectively.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has reviewed literature about the place of school prospectuses in each New Zealand school's internal strategic marketing structure. Through research, that has been carried out about the school prospectus both nationally and internationally, it could be argued that the school prospectus is both an asset and a liability as a public relations exercise. The document is one that needs to be constructed carefully if it is to become a useful product to the school and the school's stakeholders.

From the research it is evident that schools are in the market to attract new students and their parents and rely on good information from the school to make their school selection. The prospectus should be a cost effective exercise and schools need to have an understanding of the value of the prospectus. The proper use of publications will serve school management well because the publications can communicate detailed ideas to large numbers of people at a minimum cost with relative ease of production.

The school prospectus producers should be providing consistency nationally in order that stakeholders can reasonably compare schools for selection purposes. Consistency is also important to avoid confusion over the school's vision and its reality. Research shows that the prospectus could be used as a promotional tool for the school's self image as long as it is in keeping with what is actually happening in the school. Evidence from studies indicate that school prospectuses should provide accurate details of the school's examination results as well as achieve a balance between the quality of presentation and the accuracy of information contained within it. The prospectus needs to use images and language that accurately depicts the school culture.

Schools need to conduct their own market research to help them identify exactly what they want to promote, and either enlist professional guidance or engage in professional development for their prospectus production teams. According to Kotler and Fox (1995) educational institutions need to develop effective and efficient communication with their markets and publics, the school brochure being one method.

Despite failings, no one wants to turn the clock back on the New Zealand school reforms; rather how can schools utilise the marketing strategies and promote these strategies to their best advantage.

There is a significant gap in New Zealand literature that combines all these components in determining the worth and value of the school prospectus and this thesis has set out to fill this gap.

The next chapter describes the methodology and research methods used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY and RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the research design in this investigation. It begins with a definition of the methodology used and justifies the use of this choice in relation to the research questions. The first two sections deduced the methods of data collection: questionnaires and content analysis enabling rich and empirical data to be collected for examination. As part of the content analysis, communication analysis and a semiotic analysis were also carried out on the information presented in the school prospectuses, and these are discussed in the following sections three and four. Section five is an examination of the sample size and the limitations of the project. Triangulation, reliability, validity and the limitations of the collected data are also discussed in sections six, seven and eight respectively in this chapter along with the ethical principles, in section nine, applied to this research.

Methodology overview

A significant proportion of the information collected for this study was obtained through a systematic and detached manner of inquiry, thereby engaging mostly in a quantitative paradigm. However, a proportion of the information educed from the data was from a qualitative stance. Neuendorf (2002) suggests that both quantitative and qualitative investigations may be empirical and are equally useful providing “a highly valid source of detailed or “deep information” (p.14). Sechrest and Sidani (1995) agree with this notion that researchers from both qualitative and quantitative positions use empirical observations to address research questions. Since educational research is fundamentally a problem-solving activity (McMillan & Wergin, 1998) it is a discipline that addresses a problem, or tests a hypothesis or explains a phenomenon. In education, research attempts to address questions or solve problems through the collection and

analysis of empirical primary data for the purpose of description, explanation and application (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003).

In relation to communication analyses, Reinard (1998) argues that as communication covers a broad set of topics no single methodology is adopted by researchers as they must have a broad knowledge of the topics, and this requires multi-method approaches. By using quantitative, and to some extent qualitative methods of data collection in this research (by way of questionnaires and a content analysis of school prospectuses), it was therefore possible to not only analyse responses in numerical terms via quantitative data, but also able to tease out issues raised through the questionnaires using open-ended questions, via qualitative data.

Quantitative paradigms draw on the natural sciences with an emphasis on empirical quantifiable observations that lend themselves to analysis by means of mathematical tools (Husen, 1997). De Landsheere (1997) argues that these research methods are based on scientific modes of inquiry where researchers collect data and analyse it in a measured way, believing that the world is based upon a natural order, where knowledge containing valuable observations is acquired and that the universal truths determine people's behaviour.

Quantitative research claims to be objective and that there is independence between the researcher and the research. This form of research is seen essentially as value free and is based within laws that lead to prediction and control (McMillan & Wergin, 1998). Quantitative research attempts to find universal truths, whereas qualitative research acknowledges the ever changing world, with its demands and conflicts and the interactions and values between the research and that which is being researched (Husen, 1997). Reinard (1998) suggests that although quantitative research methods are inquiries in which observations are expressed in numerical terms, they are tools that are a means to an end – not an end in themselves. He continues to say that quantitative research tends to be explanatory in an attempt to understand human communication comprehensively.

De Landsheere (1997) believes that quantitative research does not allow for a flexible approach and is a scientific model embodied in the positivist paradigm.

While the debate continues as to the best research approach to enquiries, research continues to occur, develop and modify the perceptions of the world. There is no 'right' answer as to which hypothesis works best. Researchers need to understand the debate and then select a stance that best fits the problem. This research has a component of a qualitative perspective as qualitative data was gathered through specific questions in the questionnaires. Although some people believe that qualitative data is intangible and immaterial, a qualitative research style values the collected data of what people say (with words, gestures and tone), written documents or the examination of visual images (Neuman, 1997). "Whilst a positivist approach to educational research strives for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour, the interpretive paradigms strive to understand the world of people" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003, p.28). Keeves (1997) says that "Educational research is essentially *multidisciplinary* in nature drawing on many disciplines" (p.278).

These two classical paradigms, quantitative and qualitative, are dynamically opposing and can create a striking effect of inquiry (Husen, 1997, Razik & Swanson). The view presented by Gray and Densten (1998) that "quantitative and qualitative research may be viewed as different ways of examining the same research problem" (p.420) coincides nicely with the approach that has been made to this research problem. Having said this, Wellington (2000) asserts that educational research is complex and messy as it involves people. On reflection, this current project is primarily about the publication, namely the school prospectus, created by people to invite or encourage other people to share in their school, thus creating a complex component to the study.

The researcher took an objective view of the problem in order to present a dispassionate and honest investigation. Razik and Swanson (2001) suggest that objectivity is a cherished belief because "objectivity sees the world for what it is,

and leads us to inquiry that seeks to achieve the ‘truth’ and certain knowledge; however, objectivity fails to recognise dynamic and changing patterns” (p.199/204). The combination of subjectivity and objectivity in an investigation may contribute to the multiplicity of values and knowledge (Keeves, 1997).

Thus, this study drew on both quantitative and qualitative paradigms and demonstrated the value of both stances in this educational research. The next section deals specifically with the methods of data collection and analysis, namely, the two questionnaires, and content analysis of 19 secondary school prospectuses used in the study.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003), describe research methods as “that range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction” (p.44). Essentially, the researcher utilised a content analysis and two written questionnaires as the research tools for this study. The samples were taken as follows:

- A content analysis sample
- A prospectus user sample - questionnaire
- A prospectus producer sample - questionnaire

The schools were selected from North Island New Zealand secondary schools. The written questionnaires provided data collected quickly and efficiently (see Appendices 1 and 11). The content analysis sample was used to triangulate the collected data from the questionnaire.

The next two sections will explore the two selected methods used in this study: the questionnaires and the content analysis. The sections that follow discuss the use of communication analysis and semiotics as methods of analysis of the content of the school prospectuses in this study.

The questionnaire

Whilst a questionnaire is a useful tool in educational research because it provides a clear picture of the current situation, it also poses ethical issues in its design and implementation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003). Williams (2003) states that questionnaire design is at the very heart of 'scientific' social science because "...the data we analyse and the subsequent statistical output are only as good as the research design and the 'instrument'" (p.121). Thus, there must be careful thought given to the design and planning of the questionnaire. Moreover, Reinard (1997) maintains that questionnaires are used as survey forms to ask people to report their understanding of things, often including their own behaviour. Questionnaires can however, become quite complex as variables such as the number of questions that are asked and the way the questions are phrased will affect the results (Bouma, 2002). A good questionnaire forms an integrated whole (Neuman, 1997). This is done by weaving the questions together so they flow smoothly. It is also important that the questionnaires are clear of jargon, technical terms, ambiguity and vagueness (Keyton, 2006, Neuman, 1997). Williams (2003) believes that there are three dimensions of questions that need to be considered to produce a good questionnaire: context, content and appearance:

- Context - How and from whom the data are to be collected determines the design of the questionnaire. The layout and the cultural knowledge of the respondents are also important.
- Content – The questionnaire contains instructions, filters, require closed and open responses as well as a variety of questions.
- Appearance – The 'look' of the questionnaire is important for three objectives: To get the questionnaire completed, to get it *accurately* completed, and to allow an accurate analysis. Therefore, the questionnaire needs to be both attractive and simple to complete. (Williams, p.107)

Keyton (2006) goes on to state six important points if a survey is to be effective:

1. The survey should be used as part of a sound research design;
 2. Survey questions or items should be straightforward;
 3. Survey respondents should be a representative sample of a population using appropriate sampling procedures;
 4. A survey should be both reliable and valid;
 5. Participants' responses should be analysed within the context of the questions asked; and
 6. The survey results should be reported accurately and ethically.
- (p.164)

Oppenheim (1992) put it rather well:

Some people still design questions as if the process of interviewing or filling out a questionnaire were rather like unloading a ship, with every item of cargo labelled according to its contents and marked with a specific destination, so that it can be lifted out of the hold and set down as and when required. In reality questioning people is more like trying to catch a particularly elusive fish, by casting different kinds of bait, at different depths, without knowing what is going on at the surface. (pp.120-1)

In this thesis, the researcher believes that these points were applied to ensure reliability and validity of the results and that the responses were analysed in context. The inquiry about the usefulness and validity of the school prospectus is the subject of the questionnaire. Both the questionnaires were designed and underwent a pilot test to check that the questions were straightforward.

The determination of the sample size is explained later in this section and both questionnaires were subject to ethics approval through the rigorous Unitec ethics committee. Care was taken so that the interpretation of the results has also been reported accurately and ethically. Informed consent was obtained from participants of the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This took the form of a preceding information sheet providing brief details of the project before the participant moved to the questionnaire. This afforded

participants information about the study and allowed them to withdraw from the sample questionnaire group if they wished to do so. The questionnaires in this research study were given to parents of the present Year 9 students (prospectus user sample) of the schools and to the prospectus producers in order to offer a diverse range of perspectives in the research findings. The findings from the content analysis of the school prospectuses together with the findings from the prospectus user sample were given to the prospectus producers sample before this team was invited to complete their questionnaires.

The researcher differentiated between the types of questions that were set up for each of the questionnaires: the questions given to sample secondary prospectus producers for completion differed from the set of questions set up for prospectus users in the sample schools. The reasoning behind the differentiated set of questions intended that the analysed data from the content analysis and the questionnaire for prospectus users was useful information for prospectus producers to assess, absorb and utilise when they answered their questionnaire. It was hoped that this in turn would generate a larger questionnaire return from prospectus producers in sample secondary schools.

Specifically, in the questionnaire for prospectus users, questions 1 – 8, 13 and 15 were analysed quantitatively, whilst questions 9 -12, 14 and 16 were analysed qualitatively. The questionnaire designed for prospectus producers was analysed in a similar vein, questions 1 – 6, 10, 11, and 12 were analysed quantitatively and questions 7 – 9, and 12 – 19 were qualitatively analysed. It was envisaged that from the five sample schools who agreed to take part in this aspect of the study, there may be approximately 650 students in Year 9. The researcher visited each of the sample schools at appropriate gatherings of parents (for example: parents' evenings and reports evenings) and asked for completion of the questionnaires at that time. These evenings occurred in the first two school terms of the school year. The questionnaires were also sent to families who did not attend new parent or report evenings. This was done to gather data from a variety of parents. The questionnaire for prospectus users was distributed as soon as the sample schools were selected, whilst the questionnaires for the prospectus producers

were distributed after the completion of the content analysis and the return of the questionnaire responses from prospectus users in the sample schools.

Both the questionnaires contained multiple-choice, open-ended and rating scales types of questions. The multiple choice questions sought respondents' views on the school prospectus, for example whether their school's prospectus is: a) waste of time, b) a useful marketing tool, c) informative and well structured. Open-ended questions elicited honesty and added value to other answers from respondents (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003). Using open ended questions in the questionnaires extracted participants' opinions, values and beliefs about the school prospectus enriching and supporting the information gained from the content analysis. For example: What aspects of the school prospectus did you like the most? This is an example of such an open-ended question. Rating scales provided a "measurement of peoples' subjective states: their knowledge and perceptions, their feelings, and their judgments" (Fowler, 1995, p.46). The researcher used these types of questions to understand how respondents felt, for example: How does the prospectus convey messages about the school that attract the school to you?

And finally, it must be said that the questionnaire for prospectus producers was revised after the content analysis was completed as other questions were generated from the data analysis. The revised questionnaire was sent to the prospectus producers together with the responses from the questionnaire sent to prospectus users.

Content analysis

Content analysis is an established methodology in the social sciences when examining the issues of communication content. Babbie (2004) and Berelson (1952) have both variously defined content analysis as the study of recorded human communications. Lasswell (1992) formulated the core questions of content analysis: "Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?" (p. 1196) in his Communication Model and was primarily concerned with the effects of mass media communication and how they affect the audience.

Holsti (1969) offers a broad definition of content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (p. 14). Under Holsti's definition, the technique of content analysis is not restricted to the domain of textual analysis, but may be applied to other areas such as coding student drawings (Wheelock, Haney, & Bebell, 2000), or coding of actions observed in videotaped studies (Stigler, Gonzales, Kawanaka, Knoll, & Serrano, 1999). In order to allow for replication, however, the technique can only be applied to data that are durable in nature.

Krippendorff, (2004) suggests that qualitatively, content analysis can involve any kind of analysis where communication content (speech, written text, interviews, images ...) is categorized and classified. A content analysis summarises rather than reports all details concerning a message set and "this is consistent with the nomothetic approach to scientific investigations (i.e. seeking to generate generalizable conclusions)" (p.15). According to Krippendorff (2004), there are six questions that must be addressed in every content analysis:

1. Which data are analyzed?
2. How are they defined?
3. What is the population from which they are drawn?
4. What is the context relative to which the data are analyzed?
5. What are the boundaries of the analysis?
6. What is the target of the inferences?

Neuendorf (2002) clearly states that content analysis is briefly defined as the "systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (p.1) and is applicable to many areas of inquiry. She adds that among academics, content analysis is regarded as easy and that anyone can do it. However, Neuendorf (2000) maintains that the researcher who designs a content analysis needs to have some special knowledge and preparation, have a coding scheme that is objective and reliable, and be proficient in the language of the message pool.

With regards to the school prospectus, and using Krippendorff's (2004) six questions, the data that was analysed was the content of each school prospectus.

The data was clearly identified by their categories: school mission statement, goals, curriculum, sports, uniform description, discipline systems, etc. The boundaries of the analysis were set by the categories determined in each of the school prospectuses. As most, or all, New Zealand schools have a school prospectus, the target of inference is that prospectuses make a difference to the attraction and retention of students as well as contending that successful schools will have well organised, glossy prospectuses, this being a nomothetic approach to the investigation.

The principle apparatus for a content analysis is the coding scheme, which is a system of categories and subcategories into which segments of content are coded. Burns (2000) suggests that coding the themes and topics may continue to be refined whilst data collection is in progress as researchers come to terms with the emerging themes. Burns goes on to say that as observers “enter the research situation with no prior theoretical preconceptions and create, revise and refine theory” (p.433), it is in the light of the collected data that new theories begin to emerge. A coding scheme needs to be one that brings the data together and gives insight into the topic. Miles and Huberman (1984) state that “Coding is not something one does to get data ready for analysis, but something that drives ongoing data collection” (p.63). Although Neuendorf (2002) believes that a coding scheme should be established ‘a priori’ (i.e. “before the fact”) in advance of the actual measurement, she continues to say that the whole process should be viewed as a combination of induction and deduction.

Taking into account Neuendorf’s (2002) definition, it must be stated that the researcher of this thesis is an educationalist and has special knowledge of secondary schools’ management systems and is therefore fairly proficient in the language of the message pool. The coding scheme was designed a priori and, in the researcher’s view, objective and reliable. This means that all variables, coding rules, and the codebook were constructed in advance. However, through painstaking and creative work, the process may be viewed as a combination of induction and deduction (Neuendorf, 2002, p.12).

As part of a content analysis, the study required the researcher to organise how the collected data was collated and coded ready for analysis. “The key virtue in coding is consistency” (Gorard, 2003, p.30). To do this, a coding scheme and code book had to be set up. Neuendorf (2002) suggests the meticulous construction of a coding scheme, which means a set of dictionaries for text analysis and a set of measures in a codebook for non-text analysis.

For the content analysis of the school prospectus categories or levels that were used for each measure was given a coding label (see Table 3 below). This is an a priori design where the coding scheme is set up before the examination of the data. The data collected from using the coding scheme not only generated figures, but also data that was analysed qualitatively. The number of photos as well as the number of pages in a prospectus allocated to topics like sports, principal’s message, curriculum statements, and so on were analysed quantitatively. The words used in the principals’ messages, for example, and the types of words used were qualitatively analysed, as were the messages depicted in the photos.

Table 3: CODING SCHEME

CATEGORY	CODE
Language	This will be analysed using the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Grade Level. Using a sample of similar language from each prospectus.
Key messages	KM – uniqueness of the school (KMU)
Basic information (BI) the prospectus contains information that parents through the questionnaire determined as basic information.	BI – principal’s message – BI/PM mission statement – BI/MS School Goals – BI/SG curriculum Approach – BI/CA Subject Choices – BI/SC Sports – BI/SP Discipline and Guidance systems – BI/DG uniform regulations – BI/UR fee structure – BI/FS Drugs and Alcohol policy – BI/DA
Philosophy (PH) of the school – consistent with mission statement?	PH – consistent = 1

	inconsistent = 0
Logo (Lo) and motto (M) – message it sends? Symbolism	Logo – Lo Motto - M Logo on front cover only (FCO)– L/FCO Logo and no. of pages L/P School Motto and no. of pages SM/P Motto clearly explained – M/CE No. of words in Motto – M/W+(no) Mission Statement + no. of words = MS Mission Statement + no. of pages = MS/P
Number of pages, organisation of material within the prospectus – what is on what page? Does it state its importance if it is in the first few pages?	TP – total no. of pages Pages - P1,P2,P3,P4, etc.
No. of photos (PO) and what are the photos about? What is in the photos? People (PE): Teaching staff (TS), students (ST) Photos with buildings (B)	PO – number in whole document PO/bw – black and white photos PO/c – colour photos PO/C – Photo on cover PO/BP – Photo on back page PO/1 – photo on page 1 PO/TS – No. of Photos/teaching staff PO/ST – No of Photos/students PO/B – No of Photos/ buildings

The Codebook

The codebook describes each unit of data collection and their unique properties analysed in this study:

Language (L)/words

This is the analysis of the readability of the principal's message in each of the prospectuses that are analysed. The method adopted was the Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch-Kincaid Reading level both of which can be used through Microsoft Word.

Flesch Reading Ease score

This index number rates text on a 100-point scale: the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. Microsoft (as part of the WORD "help" package) recommends that, for most standard documents, writers should aim for a score of approximately 60 to 70. The formula for the Flesch Reading Ease score is:

$$206.835 - (1.015 \times \text{ASL}) - (84.6 \times \text{ASW})$$

where ASL = “average sentence length” (the number of words divided by the number of sentences), and ASW = “average number of syllables per word” (the number of syllables divided by the number of words)

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

For most standard documents, writers should aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.

The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is:

$$(.39 \times \text{ASL}) + (11.8 \times \text{ASW}) - 15.59$$

Basic information

The items were selected after the parents’ questionnaire was completed in order to ascertain how much of the prospectus met the expectations of the parents.

Principal’s Message	Sports
Mission Statement	Discipline and Guidance
School Goals	Uniform regulations
Curriculum Approach	Drugs and Alcohol policy
Subject Choices	Fee structure

Philosophy

This was to determine whether the philosophy of the school was included in the prospectus and was consistent or inconsistent with the mission statement.

Consistent	Inconsistent
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Logo and motto

This was an analysis of whether a school carried a logo or motto and how often these features occurred in the prospectus.

Logo on front cover only	School Motto
Logo on all pages	Motto clearly explained
No. of words in Motto	

Number of pages and the content of each page

An analysis of each page as well as the number of pages in each prospectus would determine the differences in how many pages of information a school felt they needed to communicate their key messages to their stakeholders. A page by page analysis would discern whether schools followed similar layout formats.

Photographs

This was to find out how many photographs a school included in their prospectus and the subject of the photos. A semiotic analysis would be used to learn the types of messages schools were sending through the photos:

Number of photos in whole document	Photo on page 1
Photo on page 1 with people	Photo/page no./teaching staff
Photo/page no./students	Photo/page no./buildings

This completes the coding book information that was used in this project.

As the researcher has analysed school prospectuses through a content analysis, it is also important to note that part of this investigation engaged in a communication analysis. The following section discusses this aspect of the study.

Communication analysis

Each prospectus was subjected to an in-depth content analysis to identify what information the schools want to communicate to their stakeholders. For example, not only is the size of each section, the number of photographs used, the use of symbolism, the space given to special characteristics of the school important, but also the messages that are expressed in each section, about the mission statement, school goals, curriculum and the principal's message.

Schirato and Yell (2000) argue that the notion of communication as a cultural practice produces meanings through cultural literacy. One technical

communication textbook wrote that, “The *Challenger* was not an engineering disaster; it was a communication disaster...clearly indicating that good communication, especially for technically trained people, is essential” (Pattrow & Wresch, 1993, p.11). With reference to the school prospectus it was interesting to explore the relationship between the expectations of the stakeholders and that of the school with regard to their explicit and implicit organisational communication and the communication of school culture; what the school intends and what it actually imparts to stakeholders. The tools used to explore the communication between the expectations of the stakeholders and the school was semiotics, language analysis and a qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses from both parents and prospectus producers.

To continue with this section on methods of data gathering and analysis, one other discussion needs to take place; that of semiology as this was also used, albeit in a minor way.

Semiology (the science of signs)

Semiotics may not itself be a discipline but it is at least a focus of enquiry, with a central concern for meaning-making practices. Semiotics helps us to realise that meaning is not passively absorbed but arises only in the active process of interpretation. The semiological approach suggests that the meaning of an advertisement or photo does not float on the surface just waiting to be internalized by the viewer, but is built up out of the ways that different signs are organized and related to each other, both within the advertisement or photo and through external references to wider belief systems. “More specifically, for advertising to create meaning, the reader or the viewer has to do some 'work'. Because the meaning is not lying there on the page, one has to make an effort to grasp it” (Leiss, Kline & Jhaly, 1990, p. 201).

This thesis looked at the photos on the cover pages of the sampled prospectuses and interpreted the possible messages that were sent to the reader. The meanings generated by a single sign are multiple. Therefore, from a comparison of signs in

some of the sampled prospectuses this study compiled a number of possible meanings.

Sample Size and the limitations

There is some debate as to what constitutes an appropriate sample size. This debate centres firstly on the necessary sample size that must be achieved for results to potentially assume statistical significance and, therefore, to enable a general statement to be made about all New Zealand secondary schools, and finally for the actual data management and data analyses to be manageable (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). For a content analysis to be generalizable to some population messages, the sample for the analysis should be randomly selected (Neuendorf, 2002).

In general, whilst there is a variation in what authors see as an appropriate sample size, it seems that the larger the sample, the better (Burns, 1994, Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003). This is because a large sample allows for less error and a greater representation. On the other hand, if a sample is too large, the time, energy and resources needed in analysing the results may be too great for the researcher. Thus a balance must be found, with a sample size sufficiently large in order to be statistically correct, to be representative and to be manageable. This being the case, this researcher would like it noted that a truly representative sample was difficult to acquire given the restrictions of time and money, so the results carried a degree of deficiency (Burns, 1994).

In the event, this researcher employed a simple random sampling strategy (Burns, 1994, Cohen, Coleman & Briggs, 2002, Henry, 1990, Manion & Morrison, 2003, & Neuendorf, 2002) to choose the schools in which to distribute questionnaires to parents. It must be noted that the only use made for the sampling frame was to gauge stakeholder perceptions of the school prospectus.

The names of the schools in these areas were numbered and grouped in the following categories: rural and city schools. Three schools were drawn from each of these categories:

- Three rural secondary schools;
- Three large town schools; and
- Three city secondary schools.

The list of all schools in the sample frame was taken from the Ministry of Education's public information on their website and was then placed in the categories listed above. The schools in each category were given a number and a teacher colleague was asked to select a number. This sampling continued until all the schools were drawn from each category.

As soon as the schools were selected from the sampling frame, the principals of these schools were contacted by phone, email and letter and invited to take part in the study. Again, it was envisaged that a number of the schools that were drawn would not want to take part and another draw was required. The principal of each sampled school was asked to suggest the most suitable method of distributing and collecting the questionnaires from their parents.

The researcher wants to make it clear that the sampling frame was used to gather data about stakeholders and their perceptions about the school prospectus. The rest of the data was obtained from the content analysis of sampled North Island secondary schools and a questionnaire was sent out after the content analysis to the sampled prospectus producers.

Triangulation

The two methods of data gathering, questionnaires and a content analysis, provided a means to check and validate the findings. Using two or more methods of data collection to cross check, confirm and support the conclusions is termed triangulation. Triangulation can be used effectively in both quantitative and qualitative research and no single research method will ever capture all of the changing features of the social world under study.

Burns (1994) defines triangulation as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (p.272). By

triangulating the data, the researcher believed that a more holistic picture of the problem was realised. Triangulation allowed for cross-checking of the physical data in the content analysis, with those of the viewpoints expressed in the information gathered from the questionnaires, thereby providing validity to the study. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2003) state that “the more the methods contrast each other, the greater the researcher’s confidence” in the findings (p.112) and they further point out that one method may “bias or distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality s/he is investigating (p.233).

Neuman (1997) believes that in social research, triangulation means using different types of measures or data collection in order to examine the same variable and the variable measured in this study in the value of the school prospectus. The argument for triangulation is that measurement improves when diverse indicators are used. Neuman (1997) continues:

As the diversity of indicators gets greater, our confidence in measurement grows, because getting identical measurements from highly diverse methods implies greater validity than if a single or similar methods had been used (p.151).

Denzin (1997) agrees with this statement and goes on to say that “The use of multiple methods in an investigation so as to overcome the weakness or biases of a single method taken by itself is sometimes called multiple operationalism” (p.318).

Validity

Validity is an important key to effective research, and should also be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state (Cohen, Gronlund, 1981, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Neuendorf (2002) asks the question in terms of validity, “Are we measuring what we want to measure?” (p.112). Neuendorf (2002) further states that in a general sense, validity is the standard of having ‘good’ measurement and encompasses the criteria of reliability, accuracy (freedom from bias – non-random error), and precision.

There are many forms of validity documented by many authors. All of them agree that the researcher needs to select the criteria to ensure 'good' measurement structures are in place for data collection. Therefore, in this study the researcher used a coding form, scheme and book to measure consistently all the school prospectuses. The validity of this data was enhanced through the responses gathered from the questionnaires to triangulate the data collected from the content analysis of the school prospectuses.

Deciding on appropriate and valid data collection methods depends on the type of questions asked, the nature of the target population resources available and the purpose of the research. Validity therefore, the extent to which research findings are congruent with reality, is difficult to manage and as Miles and Huberman (1994) state:

The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, and their confirmability – that is their validity. Otherwise we are left with interesting stories about what happened. (p.263)

Thus it was important that the meanings that emerged from the collected data were thoroughly tested and confirmed.

Reliability

Reliability can be defined as the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Given that one of the goals of content analysis is to identify and record relatively objective characteristics of messages, reliability is fundamental. "Without the establishment of reliability, content analysis measures are useless" (Neuendorf, 2002, p.141).

This means that another coder could use the same processes and procedures as set down in this research study as a measurement tool to demonstrate that the "obtained ratings are not the idiosyncratic results of one rater's subjective judgement" (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975, p. 359). This researcher is confident that

the measurement tools that were used could be replicated by another coder and demonstrate that the results obtained are valid.

Limitations of the research

The researcher acknowledges that there were limitations to the project. The following points are considerations for the limitations to this research:

- The small percentage of questionnaire returns.
- The design of the questionnaires
- The level of expertise of the researcher as a first time coder
- The number of prospectuses that the study was able to analyse
- The number of schools agreeing to take part in the project

Firstly, from a quantitative perspective the sample size was too small to analyse thoroughly using statistical inferences. Instead, the data was tabulated, and the researcher explored the findings through descriptive measurements rather than inferential statistics.

Secondly, the design of the questionnaires, following correct processes and procedures for this research was important. The questions that required both prospectus users and prospectus producers to comment on their impressions of the school prospectus or question the worth of the prospectus are potentially unreliable. Such questions could have been 'mood sensitive'. Therefore, it was important that all these questions in the questionnaires were substantiated by descriptive measurements through the Content Analysis and related questions in the questionnaires.

The coding scheme and code book were modified, checked and rechecked, but as a first time coder, the checks were only as good as the researcher's own expertise. As the researcher attempted to address the limitations of the study, a recognition of the notion of *reflexivity* in the approach to research was deliberated. "Reflexive research reflects upon and questions its own assumptions. Researchers must self-consciously reflect upon what they did, why

they did it, and how they did it. The values of the researchers become an explicit part of the research process” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p.152).

The researcher’s interest in this topic was due partly to the fact that she was a member of two senior management teams in two secondary schools and was firstly, not part of the school prospectus production team, secondly, was not aware who was involved in the production of this publication, and thirdly, became aware that many members of staff did not know much about the production of the prospectus or were unclear about marketing strategies of the school. The researcher needed to be sensitive to these points in terms of how this would influence the results of the research. In other words, a commitment to being “reflexively accountable” (Platt, 1989, cited in Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 39) became an important feature of the methodology.

Ethics

It is important in any research study that the researcher is wholly accountable for conducting their fieldwork and final thesis with ethical standards. “Because research both offers benefits and imposes burdens, there is a need to think about the circumstances in which research would be justifiable. This is ethical reasoning” (Wilkinson, 2001, p.13). Neuman (1997) writes “Ethical research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher and his or her own values” (p.443).

As a researcher who is a practising professional in a New Zealand secondary school, there was an awareness of confidentiality of the schools taking part in the project. This is because New Zealand is a relatively small education system and a degree of sensitivity needed to have been considered in terms of the competitive marketing environment in which we all exist. Therefore, sample schools were not named, none of the parental respondents were identified specifically with regards to individual sample schools and all collected data was confidential and would not identify any school in the reporting section of the study.

Summary

In summary, the methodology selected was a combination of quantitative and qualitative perspectives as a frequently utilised mode of approach to research. The two methods of data collection were a content analysis of 19 secondary school prospectuses from New Zealand, and two questionnaires, one for parents of students from sample schools and the other for prospectus producers from these same sample schools. The two methods of data collection allowed the researcher to check and validate the findings. Communication and semiotic analysis was also employed as part of the content analysis of the school prospectuses. Content analysis methodology meant the researcher set up a code book with a coding guide 'a priori' to the analysis. Ethical issues were considered and appropriately declared with the Unitec Ethics committee allowing the project to proceed.

The next chapter analyses the collected data employing the methods that have been described in this chapter. The collected data has been analysed from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The two data collection methods employed in this study were content analysis and questionnaire. Section 1 of this chapter examines the data from a content analysis perspective. Altogether 19 school prospectuses were analysed and although it is a small sample, the results are indicative of what could be obtained from a larger sample group. Section 2 of the chapter explores the data that was collected from the two questionnaires, one from prospectus users in the sample schools and the other from prospectus producers in each of the sample schools in the project. The results suggest that parental and school opinions do not always concur as to the value of the prospectus. At the end of each section a consolidated analysis of the findings is presented.

Section 1: Content Analysis

There was a great variety in the presentation of the New Zealand school prospectuses in the messages, the structure, and design of the prospectus. The study analysed a total of 19 prospectuses. There was a diversity of information but lacking in consistency and quality in all the sampled school prospectuses. Most prospectuses contained photos of students and all but one had a photo of their principal. Most prospectuses carried the principal's message towards the beginning of the document; only one did not have a message as such. Instead, in this school prospectus, the principal used one or two sentences to acknowledge the school's ability to provide an education. This principal's message is presented later on in this chapter with an in-depth look at the principal's messages.

This section on Content Analysis is presented in the following way:

Photographic analysis – a semiotic approach;

Language analysis from a semiotic position as well as describing the readability levels in the principals' messages.

Photographic analysis – a semiotic approach

The number of photos used by schools varied from no photos in schools 4 and 10, to 80 in school 11's prospectus. (See Table 4: below) The photos varied in size from nine or ten thumbnail photos on one page to one large photo taking up the whole page. School 11, for example, had 80 photos in their prospectus, most of them thumbnail sized photos.

Table 4: Photographic analysis of school prospectuses in this study

Schools	No. of photos	Rank	PO/B No. of photos with buildings	PO/bw – no. of black and white photos	PO/c – no. of colour photos	PO/C– Photo on cover	PO/bc – Photo on back cover	PO/1 – photo on page 1	PO/TS No. of photos with teachers	PO/S No. of photos with students
1	23	9	5	0	23	1	1	0	1	22
2	19	12	4	0	19	1	2	1	3	15
3	17	13	1	0	17	1	0	3	2	5
4	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	27	5	1	0	27	1	5	9	0	27
6	17	13	9	0	17	1	3	4	8	19
7	27	5	2	2	25	0	13	0	2	26
8	1	17	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
9	8	16	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	7
10	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	80	1	7	0	80	1	14	0	6	80
12	25	7	4	0	25	0	0	0	1	25
13	38	3	3	0	38	1	1	4	4	30
14	30	4	2	0	30	1	1	1	5	21
15	11	15	1	0	11	1	0	1	3	11
16	21	11	0	0	21	4	1	2	5	24
17	24	8	0	0	22	1	1	0	1	24
18	62	2	7	4	55	1	0	55	2	55
19	22	10	0	0	22	4	2	3	4	22

The principal is often the only member of the teaching staff featured in the prospectus. Three out of 19 prospectuses analysed in this study had no photos of any teaching personnel, whilst 11 prospectuses had a photo or two photos of

only the principal. Principals seem to be presented as kind, academic and thoughtful personnel in an authoritative posture. Visually, the principals in the prospectuses give the impression of radiating a symbolic representation of education in New Zealand: well dressed, smiling, head often angled to one side, in an office or in the school grounds with their students in good school uniform.

School 4 had 18 pictures taken from the clipart galleries of Microsoft software rather than 'real' images of their school. 13 schools either used no photos of buildings in their school grounds, or one to three photos. 14 out of 19 photos of buildings had some students in the foreground and three with the principal and their students in front of the building. All the photos of students that were used showed students engaged in various activities. From a semiotic perspective, this is a powerful way of showing stakeholders at a glance what the school offers.

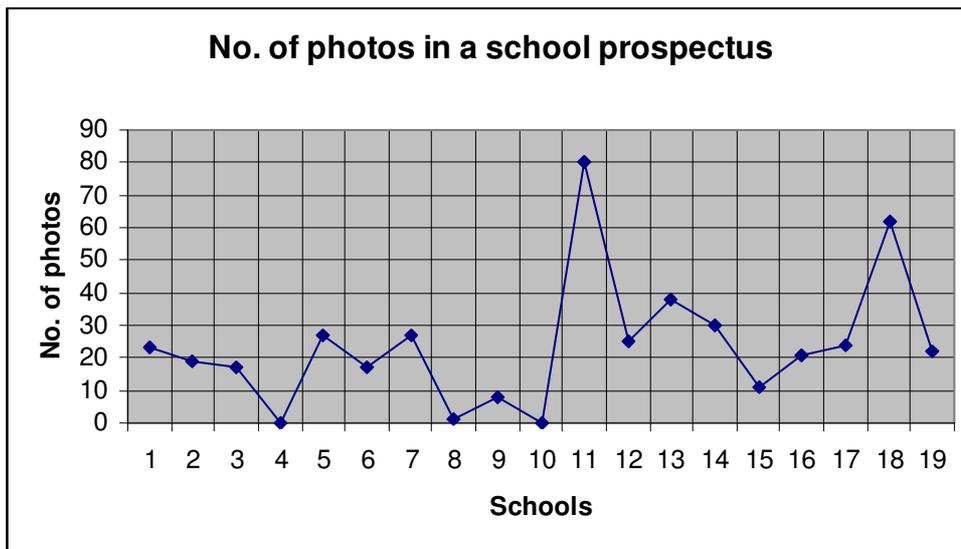


Figure 2: Number of photos in each school prospectus in this study

School 11 had 80 photos of varying sizes throughout the prospectus, depicting school life: six photos with teaching staff, seven with school buildings represented, and all of them with students either in the foreground engaged in a range of school life or in the background surrounded by the gardens or buildings of the school. In contrast, school 10's prospectus contained no photos at all.

Two examples will demonstrate the large number of possibilities of connotations that photos have in a school prospectus: school 16 and school 17. To preserve the anonymity of the schools taking part in the study, table 5: below describes the photos in both prospectuses for the reader. Both prospectuses are glossy and the photos are of excellent quality. They both depict students, school 16 with students in a variety of activities and school 17 with their students walking through the school grounds. The prospectus from school 16 uses many photos to show what the school stands for, whilst school 17's prospectus uses one large photo. School 16's prospectus has words in the background (on the board behind the students) and School 17's prospectus clearly states its values and mission in three words in the foreground.

Table 5: Description of photos from two school prospectus

<p style="text-align: center;">School 16</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Photo description</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">School 17</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Photo description</p>
<p>1. Three students (one boy between two girls) standing in front of two display boards with names of past students who have shown excellence in sport and scholarship winners. All three students are holding cups. It is the larger of the four photos on the front cover of the school prospectus.</p>	<p>One large photograph that takes the whole page:</p> <p>Two young boys in immaculate school uniform, school bags on their backs walking through a set of pillars of stone. The pillars appear to be very old and in a Grecian style. The boys are walking on slabs of stone, chatting to each other, looking relaxed, with happy faces.</p>
<p>2. Five students (all girls) in school hockey uniform in the goal mouth watching and waiting forprobably the opponents' corner drive. Their faces show concentration and focus in this activity. This is the second largest of the photos</p>	
<p>3. A boy (of international culture) sitting at a computer with a male teacher beside him. Both of them are smiling.</p>	
<p>4. A group of students of mixed gender that looks like the school orchestra or band playing their music.</p>	

The photos in school 16 connote successful students, active students, creative and skilled students in different settings. They also connoted the guidance of

teachers in achieving these skills with the presence of a teacher in one photo. All the students are smiling or, smiling and focused in their chosen activity. The school logo is visible, but not very clearly stated as a school logo in that it appears in the same font colour as that of the name of the school but is only recognised (or the researcher is making an assumption) as a logo because it is used as such elsewhere in the prospectus. On the other hand school 17's front cover denotes two uniformed boys but with the school ethos (printed in font size 20 using 'Times Roman' script) under the photo: "Responsibility, Respect, Relationships". These words connote strength, stability, and success which is further demonstrated in the imposing pillars in the photo. The school logo is clearly visible with the Latin motto underneath.

The connotations in these two prospectuses produce emotions and ideas by the prospectus producers to promote their school for their stakeholders. Both schools are likely to be well respected schools in their own countries. Arguably, however, School 17's front cover appears to represent success, traditional values and achievements in its front cover presentation with elegance and style.

Another example of presentation of the front cover of two New Zealand school prospectuses and their photographic styles analysed through a semiotic focus is that of school 18 and 19. The front cover of school 19 shows four small photos of students being successful: in academic work (photo of a girl receiving a trophy at a school prize-giving from a respected adult), in music (photo of three girls, two of whom were international students playing a variety of instruments), in Art (a student engaged in landscape drawing) and one of two students with their awards in their hands. A semiotic analysis suggests these photos are powerful tools to exemplify what the school wants their stakeholders to know about their school.

Some of the connotations that could be drawn from this photo are:

- That the school performs well for girls although this is a co-educational school
- Emphasis is placed on the education for girls in this school

- There is a high number of girls who take up music at this school; or
- Girls are now performing well at this school.

In school 18, the first four photos on the cover page show boys and girls in equal numbers: photo 1, a girl in the foreground watching a sports game, photo 2, a group of international students (7 boys and 5 girls), photo 3, depicts what appears to be an Education Outside the Classroom fishing trip with 2 boys and 1 girl who is in the foreground and the last photo is of a boy in the technology area of the school working on a machine. A semiotic analysis of the presentation connotes that this school:

- Educates equally well for both boys and girls
- Both boys and girls perform well
- Boys and girls are involved in all extra-curricular activities offered
- Offers equal opportunities to both genders as well as to an international community, or
- A holistic approach to education.

There were significant differences in the presentation of each New Zealand school prospectus. Out of the 19 prospectuses studied, each one produced differences, not only in content, but also in size, quality and information about the school. For example, School 18 (see Table 6), there are 21 pages, 24 photos which are small and do not dominate the prospectus. The photos occupy a quarter of the total space with large fonts (average font size used: 14) being used to display language content: three-quarters of the prospectus. The presentation of the prospectus from school 18 could be judged to be just as interesting to the eye as the presentation of the school 19 but contains more information than that of school 19.

Table 6: Contents Analysis of prospectus from school 18

school 18 Total no of pages 21 / Size A4	P.1 Scholarships awards	P.2 Acronym of name of school	P.3 School Offers international students, Learning, junior amps certificate
P.4 Some quotes from recent ERO report, Tikanga Maori, Innovative programmes, Te Kotahitanga	P.5 Curriculum courses	P.6 Sports, culture, recreation, outdoor education, and elite sports programme	P.7 Behaviour/ rights and responsibilities, uniform
P.8 Leadership opportunities, outstanding features, HWK, parents help students	P.15 Cybersafety form	P.9 Leaflet about AMPS	P.10 Student health services
P.11 Music	P.12 Uniform costs	P.13 Enrolment form	P.14 Option form
P.16 Parent information form	P.17 and 18 Uniform	P.19 Fees	P.20 ERO report
P.21 Principal's card			

In contrast, School 19 (see Table 5) presented a completely glossy document but did not include any facts about subject choice, fees, discipline system, curriculum approach, principal's message, policy on drugs and alcohol, or the qualifications of the teaching staff. School 19's prospectus (Table 7) was only six pages in length, contained 22 photos which filled two-thirds of the total prospectus and talked about the topics as detailed in table 5, occupying one-third of the total space in the prospectus with language. The font size on each page varied with most of the written language printed in font size 14 and above. Nowhere in the prospectus was there any information about the curriculum approach, school donations or fees, and details about day to day routines and expectations.

Table 7: Contents Analysis of pages in prospectus from school 19

Sample rural school 3	Total no of pages: 6 (slightly wider than A4) pages	p.1 Photos and motto	p.2 In the classroom (in brief)	p.3 On the sports field (in brief)
p.4 Pastoral care and contact us	p.5 Cultural activities (in brief)	p.6 Extra curricular activities		

In the presentation of the prospectuses from both these schools, a comparison of information suggests that school 18 is attempting to present a school that is diverse, future thinking and creative, and much of this represented through language. School 19 on the other hand presents a document that appears to indicate that photos are a ‘better’ representation of the school and describes its attributes through them. Both schools are of similar sizes and the presentation of their prospectuses may be indicative of the competitive environment with other schools in their areas to attract and retain their students.

Although there is a diversity of presentation of material, there are similarities in the prospectuses, namely the principal’s message, the vision and goals of the school and an indication of the curriculum that is provided. The differences are greater in the size of paper used, style and font, use of language, presentation of the images conveyed through photos or not having any photos, ERO reports, and the description of the facilities available to support learning.

Accessibility

The researcher used Wellington’s (2000) framework of questions for the analysis of the data for classifying documents for educational research based on the criteria of authorship and accessibility (Scott 1990). There is a range of categories that have been selected to analyse the prospectuses against, the first being accessibility. Wellington (2000) devised a graphical framework to categorise documents ranging from ‘closed-personal’ to ‘openly-public’ (Figure

3). According to Wellington’s framework, the prospectuses would be categorised as ‘organisation/institution-available free’ because the prospectus has been developed by the organisation as a marketing tool for their communities.

The prospectuses are easily obtained from the schools. In fact schools are keen for people to show an interest and provide prospectuses willingly. The researcher used different methods of obtaining prospectuses, from emailing principals directly to asking for a copy at the reception desk of a school. Only in one school did this become a problem: the reception personnel could not locate their school’s prospectus, and gave the researcher a copy of enrolment forms thinking that this was the prospectus.

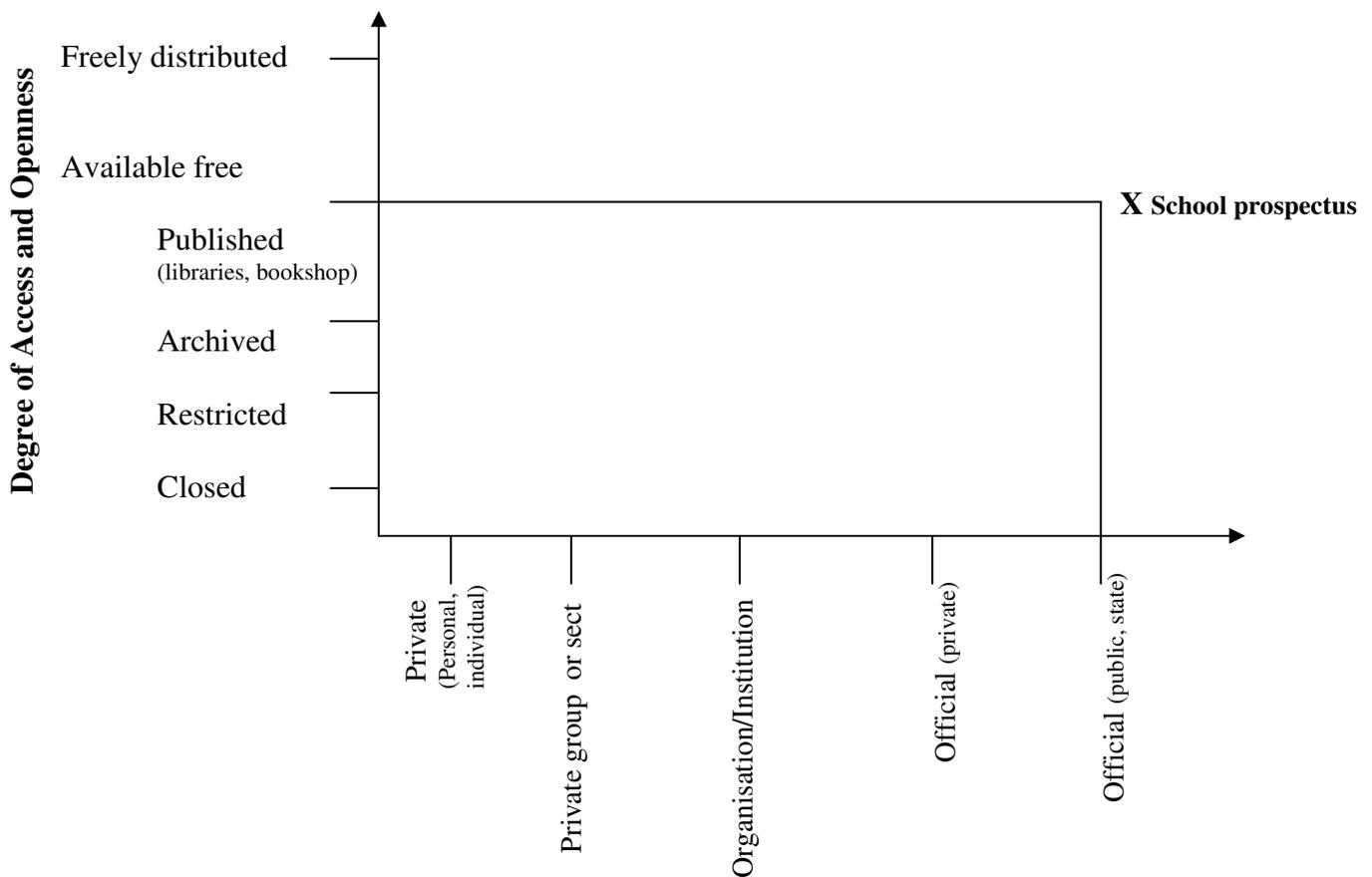


Figure 3: Framework for Classifying Documents for Educational Research (Adapted from Wellington, 2000)

The reception staff did not know what the prospectus looked like and the deputy principal eventually sent one in the mail a few weeks later. This is interesting as the researcher made an assumption that the school community were aware of the existence of a school prospectus in their school, and specifically that reception staff knew what of its existence. The reception staff were aware that the prospectus was accessible to all who asked for a copy. Although this was not the focus of this research, in terms of marketing a school through its frontline personnel, this is an emerging theme and perhaps a focus of another research project.

Principal's messages

The messages from principals in prospectuses are always expressed in eloquent terms. Out of 19 school prospectuses studied, only one did not present with a principal's message. The one that did not have a recognised principal's message still had a short message from the principal inviting parents to contact him at the school. The example below is taken from school 18, this being the prospectus that did not have a principal's message; instead the principal said that s/he invites:

Parents who are interested in a quality and inspiring education for their children to visit _____ college and arrange an interview with me. Then we can talk about your child's specific educational requirements.

I am committed to the college being an exemplar of high quality learning for the whole region and to creating an environment that challenges, inspires and rewards all students.

So, even though the principal did not present a message at the beginning of the prospectus as did all other principals, he did what all the other principals did; which was to suggest that the principal's vision is the one that dictates the image the school presents. This suggests that school prospectuses are documents that focus on the visions set by principals. The Table 8 below shows some

examples of the sentences from the sample schools, used by principals, in their messages, that are indicative of how they will lead their schools:

Table 8: Examples of messages from sample school principals in their prospectus

School	Sentence from the principal’s message
School 15	I am proud to be leading the learning community of _____ school and look forward to working in partnership with families as our students move towards an exciting future.
School 17	_____ school will provide a quality education which enhances student learning, builds on student needs and respects student dignity.
School 18	Our aim is to provide excellence in education within the framework of a rural setting which upholds traditional values.
School 16	The key element in our school ethos is the expectation of high achievement in every activity or programme offered.

All the examples highlight the use of words like “excellence”, “high achievement”, “quality” and “partnership” as those which schools want to represent the school’s ideologies and the context of education they provide. This seems to signify that one of the inducements for producing a prospectus is to provide stakeholders with an impression of the school’s vision and educational pathway for their school community. This implies that principals have made a large contribution to the authorship of the prospectus as their messages (frequently at the beginning of the prospectus) more often state the future direction of the school and how this will impact on their stakeholders.

Readability analysis of principals’ messages

Analysing the whole prospectus in terms of the use of language would have been an enormous exercise in itself. For that reason, where possible, the researcher chose the principal’s message to analyse. Readability levels were analysed using the computer tools in Microsoft Word. Readability levels describe the ease with which a document can be read and were readability tests were designed to assess the suitability of books for students of particular ages.

Below are two tables which describe the readability levels from both the Flesch Reading Ease (Figure 4) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (Figure 5).

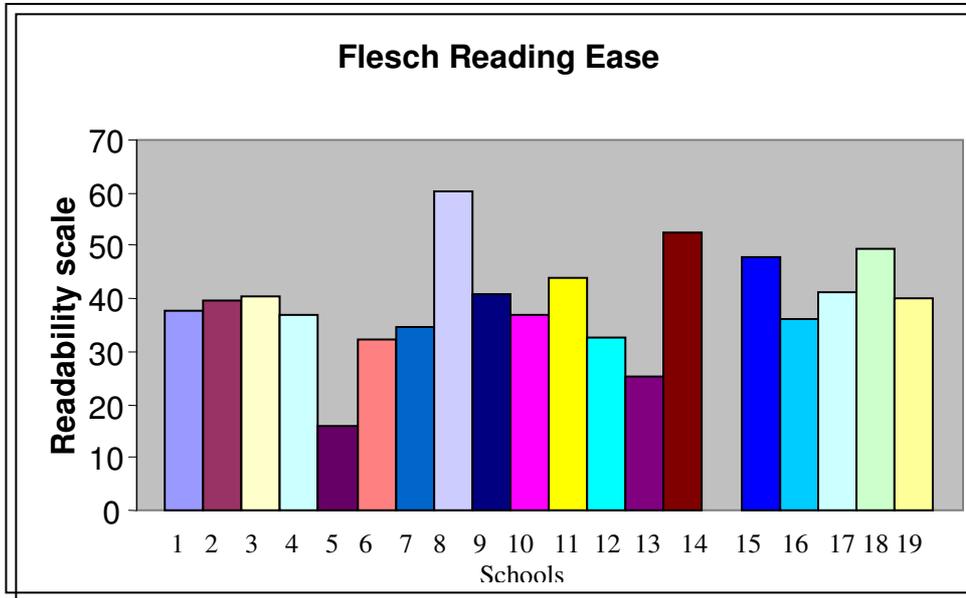


Figure 4: Readability Scale from school prospectuses

The use of this method of analysis has been guarded and minimal, simply to highlight the measure of difficulty of the language in the school prospectuses. However, what both these tables indicate is the level of readability for the ‘average’ reader of school prospectuses. The school prospectus is available to a range of readers, and as two parents wrote:

- A certain level of prospectus is required to help identify the school and provide goal focuses; excessively wordy, large document prospectuses may not be worth the cost of producing them.
- Not everyone can read. How can a school get ‘prospectus’ information to these people and people whose English is a second language?

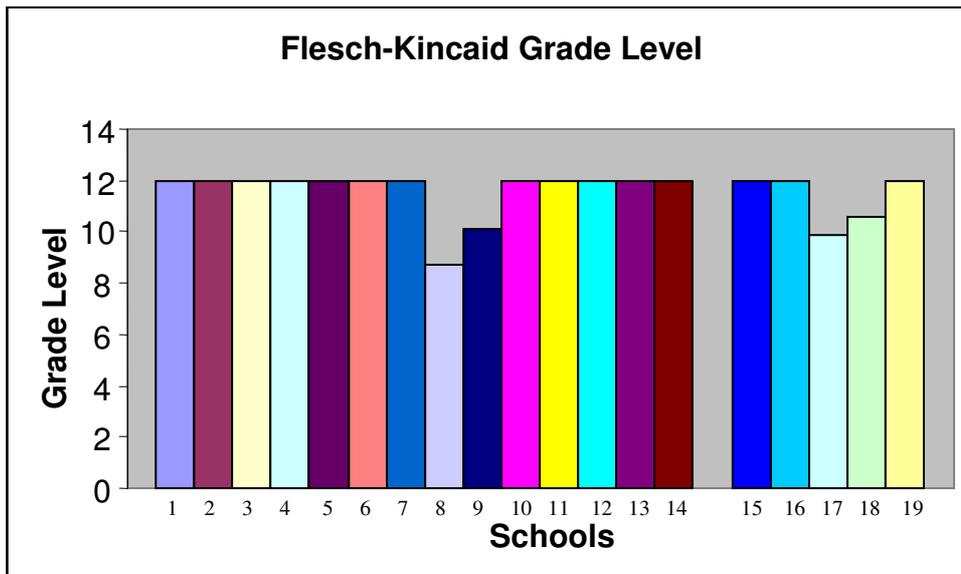


Figure 5: Principals messages in the school prospectus and their Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

The Flesch Reading Ease suggests that there is more variability in the language used for the school’s stakeholders. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (Figure 5) suggests that the language principals have used in their messages are of a very high level, perhaps a level that some parents may not be able to understand and why prospectuses are using images to promote their ideas.

The following graph (figure 6) has combined the bar graphs (Figures 4 & 5) for ease of comparison between the Flesch reading Ease and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. The lower pink line on the graph represents the Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level and the higher blue line on the graph represents Flesch Reading Ease level. Looking across the graph at the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and remembering that the Grade Level will not be graded above 12 (a notional reading age of 20), apart from four schools, all the others could be classed as difficult texts for the average person to understand.

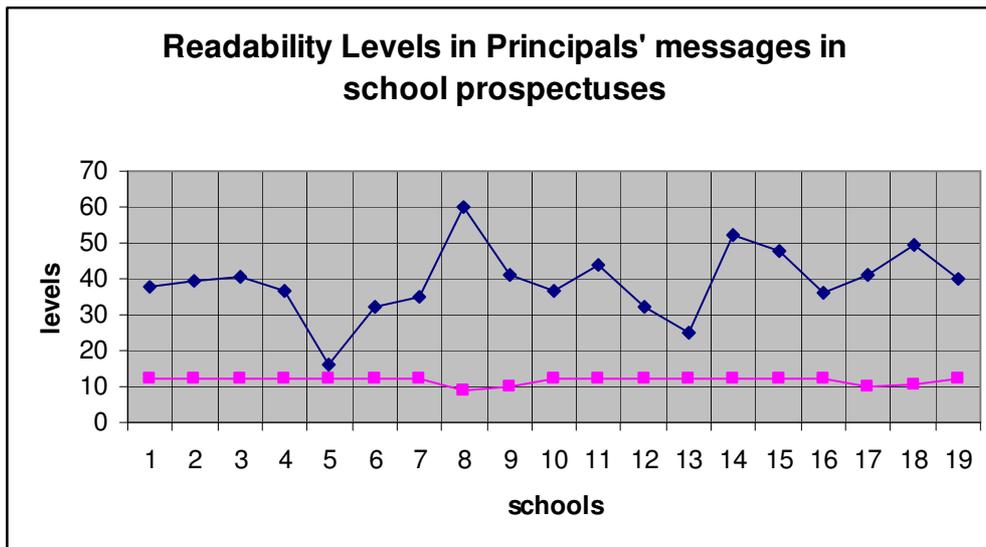


Figure 6: Represents the readability levels in the principals messages for both the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level and the Flesch Reading Ease level

The Flesch Reading Ease level implies that school 5 has a very difficult principal’s message for stakeholders to read; whereas school 8 has a principal’s message that apparently most people can read comfortably. School 8 has a decile rating of 1 indicating that the school is in a low socio-economic area. The principal can be commended for ensuring that the words s/he has used in the prospectus can be read by many of the school’s stakeholders. Below is the principal’s message from school 8:

The Education Review Office wrote in the 2002 report on the college that ‘___ College is a school at the heart of its community....teachers understand their students well and actively support them to achieve their goals’.

This prospectus will explain how ___College caters for the particular needs of individual students. It will help students who enrol at the school find out about the many things that happen about the school.

_____ College is an outstanding school. It is able to attract and retain excellent teachers and has a number of innovations that help students achieve to their potential.

Students are very positive about _____ College. It is their school and they know it. Our students are our best ambassadors for the school. If you want to find out more about _____ College and what it can offer your child, talk to some of our students.

_____ College has a proud history. It will continue to provide students with the skills, experiences and qualifications that they will need in the 21st Century. We are pleased that your daughter/son will be part of our future.

And by comparison, the principal's message from the school with the highest readability ease, school 5 uses more complex vocabulary:

The main focus at the _____ High school is unashamedly academic, resulting in our school having the best public secondary exam success rate in _____city.

The _____ High School is a large, multicultural, state co-educational secondary school with a roll of over 2100 students. The ethnic composition of our students is: European 40%, Maori 19%, Polynesian 20%, Asian 14%, other 7%. For over 40 years our school has offered students in the _____ – _____ area suburb all-round education, characterised by the provision of numerous opportunities to pursue excellence in academic, sporting and cultural activities.

The _____ High School, in support of its excellent academic programme, offers up-to-date facilities and equipment. A 10 room computerised technology block, a 14 laboratory science block, a

commercial training kitchen and restaurant are our newest additions, incorporating the latest in educational technology and equipment. Over 550 computers give students an opportunity to access information on our extensive intranet.

Personal development is also emphasised in our educational goals. The _____ High School expects our students to behave in a responsible, courteous and disciplined manner at all times. There is an expectation that students will take pride in what they achieve for themselves and their school – “achieving our potential, enjoying success – a tradition of excellence”.

Demand for the type of education that is offered at The _____ High School is considerable, with applicants at all levels greatly outnumbering the places available. The school is popular because students and their parents recognise that The _____ High School is geared towards success, and that regardless of academic ability, every student is expected to achieve their potential.

Underlying all of this success are the high expectations that a qualified, committed and dedicated staff have of their students.

Both schools are in the same geographical area. School 8’s principal is succinct and clear using 186 words to deliver the school’s vision and educational ability (quote from ERO report). School 5 has used 288 words, complex language with words such as “characterised, incorporating, pursue, provision, emphasised”. School 5’s message is based upon academic excellence while school 8’s message is about the school as the “heart of the community”, the student being nurtured and cared for in the pursuit of the student’s achievement. The messages articulate different futures for their students and yet they are both accessing students from the same geographical area. This means that parents appear to have a choice of schools: a school that claims to have an academic bias or a school that claims a family orientated education. Although this is a very small

sample, the collected data is indicative of the results that could be obtained from a larger sample group.

The Table 9 below ranks the school prospectuses in terms of their readability levels and infers that the readability levels are not related to decile ratings as the schools come from a range of socio-economic areas, rather the schools and their principals' efforts to market their school.

Table 9: School prospectuses and their principal's messages in rank order

School and decile rating	Rank	School and decile rating	Rank
8 – 1	1	16 – 9	13
14 – no decile rating	2	7 – 3	14
18 – 4	3	6 – 4	15
15 – 7	4	10 – 3	16
11 – 5	5	12 – 1	17
17 – 2	6	13 – no decile rating	18
9 – 7	7	5 – 3	19
3 – 8	8		
19 – 5	9		
2 – 6	10		
1 – 10	11		
4 – 7	12		

The rank order of the prospectuses was from the easiest to read to the hardest prospectus to read. Alongside the school number is the decile rating of the school. Results indicate that decile rating plays little part in the Readability Levels of the principal's messages in the school prospectus.

History and Tradition

Tradition is often regarded as a valued asset along with reputation and these two words are stated and restated within the body of the text in the prospectuses. Sample rural school 2 has a separate section devoted to the historical past of the school from their “humble” beginnings and the journey to their present successes. This utilises the school’s history as a foundation for traditions, but also markets the school as a secure and stable place of learning, which is a powerful symbolic strategy. Other schools suggest the reader visit the school to experience the school’s historic traditions, which can be seen in written form and in visual artistic forms throughout the school; Sample large town school is one example of this. However, 17 out of 19 prospectuses in this study contain references to computer technologies and innovative thinking in new learning initiatives, which might counter any impression that they are old-fashioned.

Words convey connoted as well as denoted meanings. Words such as “Our, we, us” connotes notions that the school is communicating their holistic approach to everyone concerned with education in their establishment. The choice of these words appears to be carefully selected to exude warmth and care of the school’s community. The choice of words used to represent more directly the values and characteristics of social text indicates that the prospectuses bear an imprint of value judgements and particularly that of the principal. One example of this from school 15’s prospectus:

_____ School is a community school. The enrolment scheme has always sought to provide first for local families.

This seems to compliment the school in two ways: it implies that the school is very affected by its local community and takes pride in offering places to locals first. It also suggests that the school is the centre of the community, again exercising emotive values to the written word.

Another example of the value-laden messages in a school prospectus is the school that suggests that theirs is a unique representation of the type of

education in New Zealand and that it alone can deal with a wide range of students' abilities effectively. One school principal in the principal's message said,

By any criterion ours is a unique school with 2300 boys and girls coming from a wide range of backgrounds and with the provision of programmes for the most able students to those with specific learning difficulties.

Such statements can be seen in most school prospectuses and are used to heighten and excite the audience whilst not being able to be legally challenged.

Communication through the school prospectus

By looking at the content of the principals' messages it was interesting to see what the school wanted to communicate to its audience. This thesis believes that the author of the prospectus is more likely to be the principal, so it is not surprising that in many of the prospectuses, the principal's message is in the first few pages of the document. The prospectus becomes important to the school and its community as a means to state the future direction of the school. However, the most common terms employed by principals in their messages appear to be cloaked in political rhetoric, for example, when describing the support of all students' education, principals first affirm to parents of high performing students that they will be catered for and then add a sentence that includes students of all calibre. It is political rhetoric in that history, tradition and values are amplified and are denoted equal importance with uniform, behaviour and care in the prospectus; the sense that the schools know what parents want and state it whether it is deliverable or not. To illustrate this, some examples of sentences as presented in the sampled school prospectuses. These are words which are used consistently by all principals to convey stability of academic prowess whilst at the same time caring for the individual needs of all their students:

- Despite its size, the school continues to recognise and cater for the needs of individual students.

- We welcome students with special and pronounced talents and also those of average ability, whose contribution is no less valuable and whose development is no less important.
- We would welcome your son or daughter into that environment confident that we can offer a top quality education to meet each student's particular needs.
- All students are encouraged and challenged to attain their full potential in preparation for their future.

These statements are indicative of the style of prose and rhetoric used in the messages by principals in their school prospectuses. Vining (2005) refers to the style and rhetoric of the language used in these messages being "reader-centred" (p.32) or not. Principals also use the following words to communicate the quality of their school's service that their school provides:

- History and traditions
- Development of the individual, staff and school
- Leadership opportunities
- Confidence, co-operation, enthusiasm and conduct
- Tolerance and consideration
- Excellence
- High expectations
- Success
- Academic

Principals appear to place a high priority on communicating their school's solid foundation of history and tradition, generating a confident outlook to the school's

future as important features of their intended message. None of the sampled schools used student or parent comments to articulate community values or have any input into curriculum. Rather most of them indicated that they were a school with community spirit; that parents are welcome, and that fundraising was a worthwhile activity in which parents could engage. All the sampled school prospectuses were positive about their school's climate for learning, and had an excellent self-portrait. If the school is communicating these messages to their stakeholders then all schools are to be commended as all but one prospectus was a well presented document.

Logo, Motto and Mission Statement in school prospectuses

Table 10 sets out the logo, motto and mission statements in the school prospectuses in the study. Out of 19 prospectuses 3 did not have a logo and Two out of 19 prospectuses did not have a motto. Out of the 16 schools that had a school logo, 11 schools placed their logos on the front cover of their school prospectus.

Table 10: Analysis of Logo, Motto and Mission Statement in School prospectuses

Logo and Motto, Mission Statement								
Schools	L/FCO – Logo/front cover	L/P: Logo and no. of pages	SM/P – School Motto/no of pages	M/W + (no) – Motto/Words + no. of words	Mission Statement (MS) + no. of words	MS/P- Mission Statement/ no. pages	M/CE- Motto clearly explained (1)	Philosophy – Phy/consistent (1) or inconsistent(0) with MS
1	Yes	22	1	4 Latin	50	1	0	1
2	No	9	7	3 Latin/4 Maori version	36	1	0	0
3	Yes	10	11	3 words Latin	8	12	0	1
4	Yes	0	1	11 – 3 Latin +7 English	68	1	1	0
5	Yes	4	4	3 Latin + 4 English + 5 Maori	34	1	1	1
6	yes	2	0	none	136	1	0	1
7	no	0	0	none	76	1	0	0
8	no	11	11	3 English	8	2	0	0
9	Yes	10	10	2 Latin	0	0	0	0
10	yes	0	0	3 Latin	0	0	0	0
11	Yes	5	5	4 Latin	0	0	0	0
12	No	1	1	6 Maori	0	0	0	0
13		1	19	3 Latin	0		0	0
14		1	10	4 Latin	17	1	0	1
15	No	5	0	0	0	0	0	1
16	Yes	2	2	3 English +4 Maori	0		1	0

17	no	2	yes/2	4 Maori	19	1	0	0
18	Yes	7	yes/7	3 Latin	48	1	1	1
19	Yes	2	yes/2	3 English	10	1	0	0

Out of the 17 schools that had a school motto: four were in Maori and English, two in just Maori, one in English alone, and 11 had Latin words in their motto. Only four schools explained what their motto stood for.

Significantly, only 12 prospectuses printed their mission statement and only seven included their school philosophies. Perhaps the reason for non- inclusion of the school's mission statement is that schools have determined that parents do not need to know this aspect of the school, rather that other details are more important.

Academic delivery in school prospectuses

If New Zealand parents were looking for specific examination results information in their school prospectuses, they would be disappointed. The school prospectus is often seen as one of the means of liaison between the school and the stakeholders. The researcher assumes that stakeholders want to understand the nature of the school before selecting that school for their children. In particular, parents want to know how well the school will best serve the interests of their children. Schools believe that stakeholders are looking for a school that has an excellent academic record.

However, in New Zealand school prospectuses, principals allude to the ability of their school to provide excellence in academic attainment. Apart from three schools in the sample, 16 schools did not reference any details of examination results. School 8 is decile 1 and provided stakeholders with a short description of their recent National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) results as compared with the national statistics. From the sample group, schools preferred to use language to suggest the provision for academic excellence. See Table 11 below for examples of language used in the school prospectuses in relation to academic achievements:

Table 11: Sample of prospectus statements on academic abilities from students at the school

School	Statement from the prospectus
School 19	(From ERO report but printed in the prospectus): NCEA data shows that students at _____ school are achieving at levels similar to those of other students in schools of the same decile Superb university pass rates
School 18	More able students are encouraged to take university papers while still at school An outstanding number of successful graduates
School 17	A fine tradition of academic excellence
School 16	Students from this school have consistently achieved outstanding academic success Particularly high rates of success in seventh form bursary examinations
School 15	Students from this school have consistently achieved outstanding academic success

School 5’s prospectus proclaimed that it, “...is unashamedly academic, resulting in our school having the best public secondary school exam success rate in” , but without statistical validation to back these statements. It appears then that schools are able to claim their ‘excellent’ ability to support high academic achievement whether they are able to do so or not.

Consolidated analysis of the Content Analysis

The findings confirm that the research questions posed in this study were feasible for the following reasons:

- The complexity of language used by principals in their messages;
- The authorship of the prospectus
- The photos of teaching staff were primarily of the principal;
- The diversity and presentation of school prospectuses studied;
- The value and consistency of the information contained in the prospectuses for the school’s publics; and,

- The lack of evidence to support school's proclamations about examination results.

If the school prospectus is written by the principal whose presence dominates the document in the photos (11 out of 19 prospectuses had photos only of the principal), and in the presentation of the school's future aims and objectives, then it does not truly represent the school's community. None of the prospectuses included views of teachers, students, parents and Boards of Trustees which is surprising for a published school document that represents the school.

The research confirmed that there is a wide disparity of presentation and value of information in the prospectus. Prospectuses could not be easily compared with other schools for examination results, school activities, and the basic information that parents want for their children. Some schools did not provide curriculum information which was the highest priority for the parents.

Section 2: Questionnaire Analysis

Analysis of Questionnaire for prospectus users in the sample schools

Five secondary schools agreed to take part in this section of the study. Out of a possible 650 students in Year 9 from the five schools, a total of 98 responses were collected. The number of responses represented 15% of the total number of possible questionnaire returns. The quality of the completed questionnaire returns was generally very good with some interesting observations made.

This research found conflicting evidence in parental views on the school prospectus. It appears from the responses by prospectus users that although the prospectus is a worthwhile publication to produce 51 parents thought it didn't make any difference to their choice of school. Some comments by parents as to why a prospectus should continue to be produced:

- It is often the first experience a prospective parent has of a school
- To inform new families as much as possible
- It gives a hopefully accurate oversight of the school; and
- To give parents an idea of the school's ability.

However, other parents' comments indicate that schools need to provide a 'public image' which genuinely represents their school. 20 parents believed that although the school prospectus may be the "permanent representation of the school" it's the manner in which the school actually deals with educational tasks that is important, the school's "reputation" as a leader in education:

- Chose the school based on reputation and word of mouth. Also ERO review, discipline and extra curricular opportunities.
- A school is a hub of community. Therefore your reference should be the community.
- Reputation + ERO reports more powerful indicator of performance.

- Reputation played a bigger part than the prospectus.
- Practice needs the back up theory. You can't judge a book by its cover

Of the 92 responses for this question, 87 parents stated that a prospectus is worth publishing and five parents suggested that factors other than the prospectus, such as school reputation, and ERO reports played a more vital role in school selection. Three parents stated that some schools are producing school prospectuses on DVDs and encouraging their parents to look at the school's website.

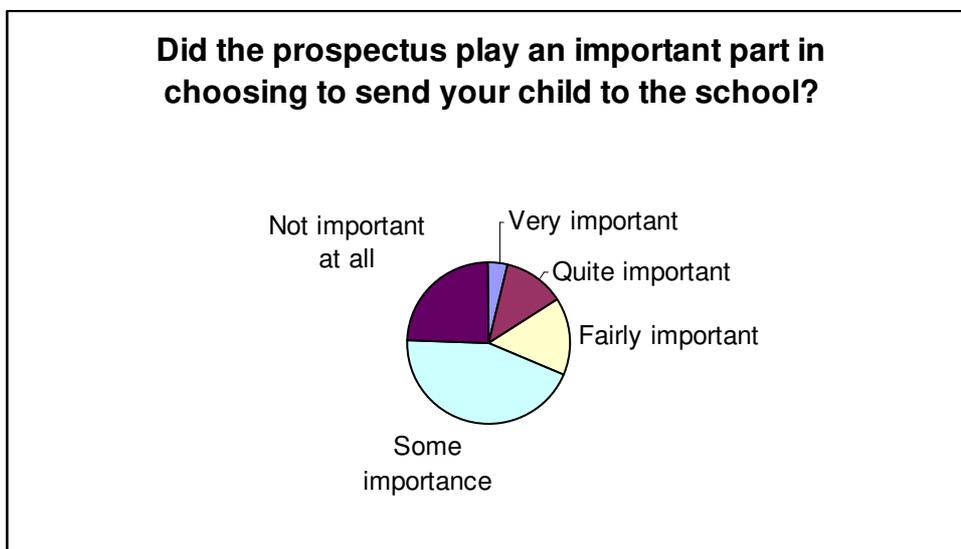


Figure 7: Percentage of parents that consider the prospectus' importance in the selection of school for their child

Of the 72 respondents who replied to this question 44 felt that the prospectus had some importance in their selection of the school for their child, whilst another 25 parents felt that it had no influence at all (see Figure 7). Only four respondents felt that it was a very important part of their choice of school. However, it is interesting to note that just over 69 parents said that the school prospectus played little or no importance in the selection of their child's school:

- It's worth the effort to draw prospective pupils obviously; but should be cost productive – things more worthy than flashy booklet.

- Yes, the prospectus is a good summary of the school. I would look at these if having to decide which college I was sending my children to.
- Yes. Gives new parents a direction and understanding of how the school runs.
- Worthwhile effort it sets the expectations and structure.

It appears that many parents are not persuaded in their choice of schools by reading a prospectus; however, many of these same parents wrote that they still feel that a prospectus is worth publishing.

Communication

Of the 95 responses to this question, 78 parents believed that the school prospectus was written as a means of communicating valuable information to enable their children to make a good start in their secondary school career rather than a marketing approach to recruit new students, and some stated the following reasons:

- Prospective families need a concise document which provides all of the relevant information they need.
- Gives new parents a direction and understanding of how the school runs. Yes, then you know what to expect.
- Good promotion for school – costs need to be reasonable as money better spent on education needs.
- Information accessible to parents/students/communities is vital. I want to know the information in the prospectus – it also gives me a document to measure the school and make the school accountable.

- We live in a competitive era – you need to be in the race to get to the finish line.
- Better image provided by more professional prospectus but not necessarily best school for child involved.

So it appears that for these parents, the prospectus communicates vital information in order for their child to settle into the school. Three parents commented that it communicated a professional image that is important in this era as a marketing tool. From the data collected, it appears parents want a prospectus that: promotes the school's best qualities: their school image, reflect the quality of education offered by the school, the day to day routines and the school's ethos.

Question 5 in the questionnaire asked parents whether they were satisfied with the information provided, and 83 of the 98 respondents said that they were satisfied with the information provided in their school prospectus. What was interesting was the question asking whether parents considered their school prospectus glossy. This was interesting as all but one prospectus was completely glossy; although four respondents considered that there were no glossy parts in their prospectuses. Only one prospectus that was randomly selected to be analysed as part of the Content Analysis data collection was on plain A4 paper, stapled in one corner and had a blue coloured sheet of A4 paper as its cover page. Of the 98 who answered the question on the glossy nature of their school prospectus, 87 respondents claimed that there were some or extensive glossy parts. Only six per cent claimed that their school prospectus was completely glossy. Four of the five schools in this section of the study did not have a school prospectus at hand for their parents when their comments about their 'glossy' prospectuses were made as the questionnaires were completed at a new parents' evening. Just one school in the study ensured that there were some prospectuses at hand if parents wanted to look at them before they completed their questionnaires.

In examining the main concepts or ideas that the school prospectuses intended to communicate to its stakeholders, there was a huge variation in themes and messages from all the schools. The parents’ questionnaires provided valuable information in terms of what they wanted to know about the school (Figure 8).

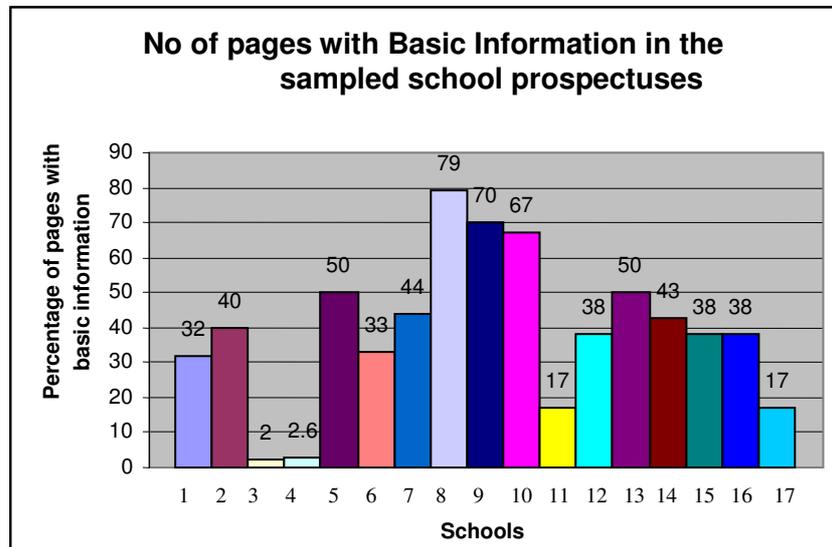


Figure 8: Number of pages containing Basic Information in sampled school prospectuses

Parents indicated that they overwhelmingly wanted basic information about the quality of education offered, academic excellence, day to day routines, and each school prospectus either omitted some of this basic information or chose to talk about their school in terms of vision and goals with no factual information. Three schools were able to provide this information consistently well in their prospectus. Two schools provided parents with less than an eighth of the information they wanted in their school prospectus. Five of the 17 New Zealand schools sampled provided more than half of the information sought by parents. One parent stated, “All I needed was a list of uniform, school fees, timetables and teachers and subjects”.

These areas were high on the list for parents (see Figure 9) yet school 19 chose to talk briefly about their vision, and goals in a very glossy prospectus presentation, and does not provide the information that parents apparently seek,

as one parent stated, “I think it is important for schools to offer a prospectus but it does not have to be glossy. Parents just like to know the facts”.

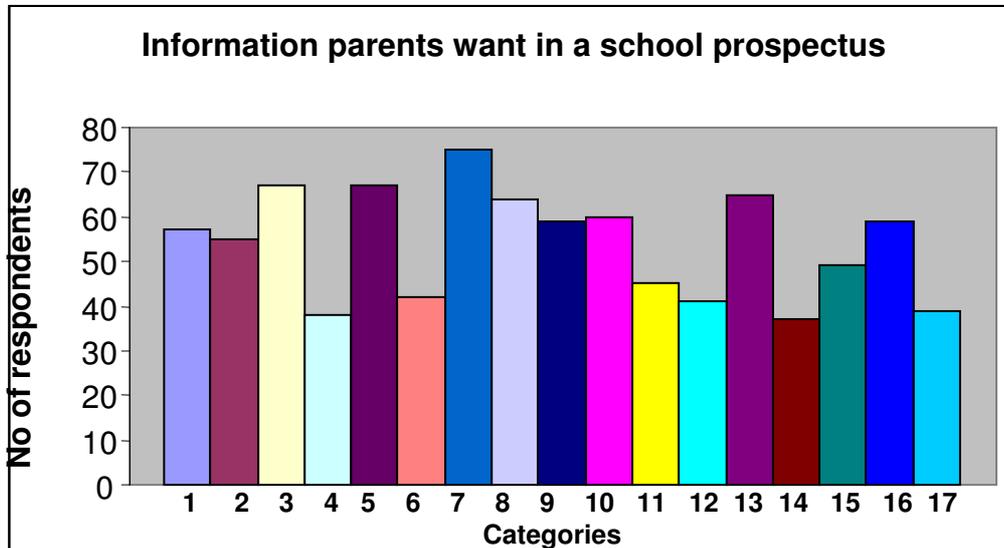


Figure 9: Information parents want in a school prospectus

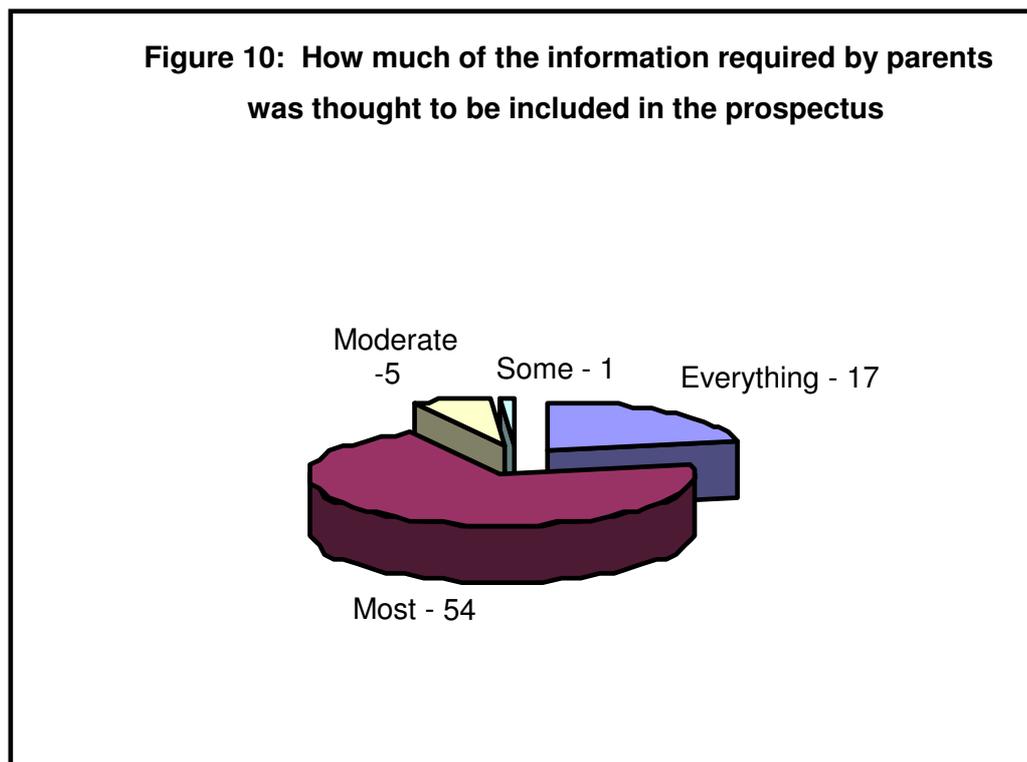
Key to above Figure 14

1.Principal’s message	58%
2.Mission statement	56%
3.School goals	68%
4.School’s charter statement	39%
5.Curriculum approach	68%
6.School motto, logo	43%
7.Subject choices	76%
8.Sports	65%
9.Fees and school donation	60%
10.Uniform issues	61%
11.Stationary	46%
12.Food – canteen and costs	42%
13.Discipline system	66%
14.Special character, e.g. single sex, catholic, etc	38%
15.Qualifications of teaching staff	50%
16.Drugs and alcohol policy	60%
17.Pastoral care	40%

Top of the list was that of subject choices offered by the school followed closely by the school’s curriculum approach and its espoused goals. The next two

important categories of interest to parents are sports and the discipline system in the school. The other categories had fairly high scores but the identified categories indicate that parents are very keen to know about the academic status of a school along with a physical education and sports programme. The discipline and guidance systems in school also deserves special mention as an important topic that parents indicate they want included in a school prospectus. Parents want their children to learn in a 'safe' environment.

The Figure 10 below details the number of parents who thought that the information they required was included in the prospectus. This means that 54 parents thought that the most of the information they required was included in their school's prospectus.



For some parents the presentation indicated that the school had “pride and care” in itself as well as showing, “the effort the school is willing to make for our children”. Others felt that the prospectus should highlight “Past achievements by students, academic excellence achieved, and sports excellence”. One parent thought that although it is very impressive to have a well presented prospectus,

“As a mother with 2 children at high school with large school fees which I struggle to pay, in the big picture it is not important enough and a less glossy one may mean less fees”. This parent is assuming that if the money was not spent on the presentation of the prospectus, it would provide a platform for subject fee reduction.

One school used an A5 booklet as their prospectus with no pictures or photos, and contained all the information that parents wanted: “You can still get the message across and it needn’t cost a lot!” Of the 60 parents that answered the question on ‘glossy prospectuses’ 58 of them believed that although some presentation was important the prospectus should not be an expensive and overly glossy document: “They are necessary – helps you compare what schools are offering and answers questions you and your child (input) have’.

The indications are that the school prospectus was produced to communicate to new and prospective parents an overview of the school and the manner of delivery of the education that their school provides. Two parental views concur with this sentiment stating: “It is the public face of a school” and also because “it is a permanent representation of the school, its goals, etc. I guess gloss sells for some”.

Publishing a document without knowing your audience may imply that the school shows arrogance and a lack of sensitivity. Having said that, 10 parents indicated that it is important to know how much the local community have been asked to contribute to the production of the school’s prospectus, as one parent suggested in the questionnaire for prospectus users, “Get parents honest contributions” whilst another wants to remind the school that, “a school is a hub of community. Therefore your reference should be the community”. Four parents felt that the prospectus should carry parental contributions to the school which in turn would market the school’s community spirit.

The parental responses indicated that although they felt that the school prospectus was an important document that should be published by the school annually, 69 respondents would not use the publication as a means to choose the

school for their child. Parents felt a measure of success was more likely to be the school's reputation through "word of mouth" and inside information about the calibre of the teaching staff. Many agreed that the school has no choice but to enter the competitive market environment but conceded that this was not a measure of the school's success. One parent sums this up well by stating, "A glossy prospectus doesn't mean a better school hundred percent; but a good school usually had good reputation; the students have good appearance; also the school circumstances can tell too." 10 respondents suggested that school selection for them was based on what they had heard from other parents, or because they knew some of the teaching professionals at the school. Some selected the school because it was nearest school. Others suggested that word of mouth and ERO reports were viewed alongside their observations of the way the school operates was the reason for their choice.

Questionnaire analysis of sample prospectus producers

Five schools participated in this study and completed the questionnaire. Not all the questions were answered by the prospectus producers. Perhaps this could have been because the respondents did not have the data, did not understand the question or did not feel it worth an answer. Their collected responses are detailed below.

Principals' reasons for producing a prospectus

In four cases, the principal completed the questionnaire and the other was completed by the deputy principal in consultation with the principal. Principals considered stakeholders as intelligent people who required honesty in the publication of information about their school:

- The feedback we have had in the past is that people make their minds up about the school on other perceptions such as service and how will the kids wear their uniforms
- I believe that stakeholders are quite savvy about what a school has to offer. They often need to justify why they make a particular choice and this can, unfortunately, come down to what the prospectus portrays.
- I believe that the prospectus is akin to a “personal CV...I do not believe parents would look twice at a school that did not have the ability to represent themselves in a professional manner”.

The last comment by sample school 1 underlines the importance placed on the presentation of the prospectus by this school, but the comment also resonates similar responses that were stated by parents in questionnaire one. Sample school 3 stated that their prospectus was used for a wider audience rather than just for prospective parents and one that was shared by several parental responses through the questionnaire:

Our prospectus has been used for multi-purposes. It is usually given to prospective applicants for teaching positions and therefore should confirm

what is on the website and within ERO reports. I think there is an opportunity to develop a web-based version as well.

However, a response from the principal of sample school 5 suggests one reason why some schools produce a school prospectus:

There was a prospectus but it was ‘homemade’ and looked it! In a competitive school environment it stood out as shabby and sent messages about the extent to which we cared – and that was made clear to me in my first year as principal during enrolment season. So it was essential to make a better first impression.

Authorship

It is interesting to see that sample school principals state in their school prospectuses that the document is a ‘tradition’ and must be ‘kept up’ when in fact there is no regulation set down by government to produce one. Sample prospectus producers were asked who was responsible for the content of their school’s prospective. The Table 12 below sets out the teams from the sample schools that are involved in the design and production of the school prospectus.

Table 12: Authorship of sample school prospectuses

Sample school	Authorship of school prospectus
School 1	Principal in consultation with others, e.g. Guidance Network, Sports.
School 2	Principal and marketing person
School 3	Team effort: Principal ,Head of PR committee, and Administrative executive
School	Principal and Deputy Principal
School	Principal and Senior Management with External designer

Note that no-one from the Board of Trustees is included in the prospectus producers team nor any member been asked to contribute towards the content of the prospectus. As a ‘formal’ document coming from the school, the contribution from the Board of Trustees would count as parental input and thereby encapsulating a stakeholders’ perception of the school, (which was one of the responses made by a parent through the parents’ questionnaire). After checking the Ministry of Education’s website and the legal obligations for Boards of Trustees, there appears to be no reference to the Board’s legal input into the school’s published public documentation, and yet the Board is responsible for the strategic marketing management of the school. The school prospectus is often referred to by parents as the school’s ‘formal’ publication and it is surprising that Boards of Trustees do not have any input into its authorship as part of the strategic management and marketing of the school.

Having said this, the Board of Trustees is usually responsible for sanctioning all financial expenditure. Although they sanction the following amounts of money (see Table 13), according to the principals’ descriptions of their prospectus production teams, Board of Trustees do not appear to have any other input into the production of the prospectus.

Table 13: Approximate financial expenditure on the school prospectus in the sample schools

Sample school 1	Sample school 2	Sample school 3	Sample School 4	Sample school 5
\$2501 – 4501	\$2000	\$2501 - \$4501	\$4501 - \$6501	\$4501-6501

Sample schools 1 and 2 are similarly sized small schools, whilst the other three schools are larger. The funding set aside for the prospectus for these sampled schools is not as large as the researcher expected, especially from sample school 5 being a large city school. If this is a true representation of the amount of money spent on a prospectus, and the prospectus is able to deliver the school’s

expectations, and attract more students to the school, then it could be construed as money well spent.

The school prospectus as communication tool

Prospectuses could tell us a lot about the school if they were all mandated to cover the same topics as a tool for comparison between schools. As one sample school put it, “It just means that the school is aware of an important marketing and image making tool”. However, they are public documents and as such project a positive image about the school, albeit a subjective one. Sample school 5 stated that, “Clearly marketing should see close alignment of product and promise, but that may not be the case”.

The school’s perceptions of what the public wants could be seen to naturally shape that sort of subjectivity throughout the prospectus. Sample school 2 stated that their prospectus was a useful marketing tool as, “Parents are not naive, but I believe that they want the information to be professional (to show we do care about how we are presented)”.

It is indicative from the responses to this questionnaire that the school prospectus is a document that schools appear to consider as one that is important to provide information to its community, in the words of one sample school: “I like the personal approach to this, we are a community school and I believe our parents would ‘see through’ a commercial production. It is important to give the essence of the school in the messages contained in the prospectus”.

With so many differences in the presentation and content of the sampled New Zealand secondary school prospectuses it is hard to find one prospectus that clearly provides all the relevant information sought after by stakeholders. If the purpose of the document is indeed to market the public face of the school, then all the sample schools in this study are to be complimented on their school

image! Each prospectus is colourful and well presented to its stakeholders and prospective new parents.

School prospectuses and ‘success’

From the responses given, apart from sample school 3, the other schools appear to believe that their prospectus was successful as a publication, although no school offered a definition of how they judge ‘success’. Their judgement of success was based on the information that was received from their parents. Four schools answered in the following manner:

- At enrolment time, parents will say that they have read it, they understand what is conveyed in it and have very few extra questions to ask about the school or what it has to offer. They are usually happy with what they have read:
 - Parents seem to be well informed although we use a number of other avenues besides the prospectus
 - I do believe that our prospectus is successful but then our prospectus is just one of a number of publications that we give to parents. Our document is an impression of the school not an answer everything document
 - Positive feedback from a range of parents. Staff confident that the “image” of the school presented positively.

Sample school 5 suggested that not only was there a positive response from their parents but the school’s staff were also sure that the school’s image was “presented positively” with sample school 4 indicated that their prospectus is “an impression of the school not an answer to everything document”. This response suggests that some schools may regard the ‘success’ of their prospectus as a document that exemplifies the possibilities that may be offered rather than what is actually offered. Sample school 2 believes that their prospectus provides

information that their parents want. Sample school 1 implied that their prospectus could be judged as being a successful document because when their parents had read it, “they understand what is conveyed in it and have very few questions to ask about the school or what it has to offer”.

The response from Sample school 3 “I don’t know” maybe because the questionnaire was not completed by the principal in this case, but a member of the school prospectus production team. It may indicate a communication issue between personnel in the team or that the person completing the questionnaire did not want to comment. The researcher contends that a comment from senior management in this manner does not make for good publicity and shows a lack of thought or consultation, as all other questions completed by sample school 3 have been answered with care.

Evaluation of the prospectus by schools

All five sample schools review their prospectuses regularly according to their responses (Table 14). The choice of subjects, details of buildings, qualification and staff changes, amongst other topics would be out of date each year and a review cycle is in place for all schools.

Table 14: The cycle of authorship and review of the school prospectus in the sample schools

	Sample school 1	Sample school 2	Sample school 3	Sample school 4	Sample school 5
Last written	2006	2006	2006	2000	
Next review	Annually	Three yearly cycle	Annually	Five yearly cycle	First school prospectus under new leadership

Three schools commented on their evaluation cycle:

- We look at the Charter goals and targets, the programmes in place in the school, current curriculum and extra-curricula opportunities, student achievement data both within the community and contributing primary schools, together with all that we have to celebrate.

- Every year we review the information it contains and up date it or add info on feedback we receive.
- This is our first year – we will work as a team to get feedback and then make changes accordingly.

School 3 responded to this question by requesting the parents' written responses to the questionnaire in this study, specifically the basic information required by parents in a school prospectus to re-write their school prospectus. School 3 had looked carefully at the data collected in this study and determined that their prospectus needed to represent what their stakeholders require.

Consolidated analysis of the two questionnaires

The following points were raised by the responses to the questionnaires, from the parent users and the prospectus producers:

Parent users want:

- To be represented in the body of the prospectus;
- To continue to have a well presented prospectus within reasonable costs; and,
- A good promotional document that accurately represents the school.

The research confirmed that most parents in this study do not use the prospectus as a means to select the school; however, parents want the prospectus to stay as a reference guide and accurately represent the school's activities. A well presented professional document in the current competitive environment is necessary according to most parents in this study.

The prospectus producers' questionnaire identified:

- That schools believe in continuing to produce a prospectus;
- That school's regularly up date their prospectus;

- Use a team approach that included the principal and some members of teaching staff; and,
- That no-one from the Board of Trustees is involved in the production process apart from accepting financial responsibility for the prospectus.

The research confirmed that the principal was the main author of the prospectus although there were one or two other members of the teaching staff included in the process; to what extent the other members of the team actually contributed to the content is not clear.

Summary

This chapter on data findings and results has been produced in two parts: a Content Analysis and an analysis of two questionnaires. The Content Analysis of the sampled school prospectuses looked at the photos and their impact using semiotic analysis. This section also included an analysis of the language used in the school prospectus by studying the principal's messages. The Content Analysis of the school prospectus found a range of quality, and basic information.

The second section looked at the data from the questionnaires. Two questionnaires were used in the study: one for prospectus users in five sample schools and a questionnaire for the prospectus producers in the same five sample schools. The analysis of the questionnaire for prospectus users found parents want to retain the school prospectus but do not want the school to spend large sums of money; basic information and parental input was also desired. The analysis of the questionnaire for prospectus producers found that schools believe that 'tradition' deems it important to produce a prospectus and that it is only one of other avenues of marketing the school.

Chapter five follows and presents a discussion of the findings with reference to other studies.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

Introduction

A discussion of the points raised through the data results is the theme of this chapter. The discussion has been set out in terms of the research questions with comparisons to similar overseas studies. Hesketh and Knight (1998), Symes (1998) and Brett, Palm and Rollison (2005) agree that schools in their respective countries continue to believe in producing a school prospectus but their influence in school selection has declined.

Why do New Zealand schools produce a prospectus?

It appears that schools are expected to produce a prospectus because it has become a 'traditional' document and because stakeholders expect one; even though many will not read it carefully, as one parent said, "every other high school has one!" Principals in this study unanimously agreed that schools require a good quality prospectus to present school image and a culture of care and academic prowess. Hesketh and Knight (1998) believe that prospectuses are formal representations of the schools and, as such, allow inferences to be made about how schools wish to be seen in the educational marketplace. However, Symes (1998) notes that schools are sufficiently aware of their markets not to overplay traditional values if it gives an impression to parents that they are locked into out-moded approaches to pedagogy.

Only one principal in this study mentioned other uses for their school's prospectus, using it to inform prospective employees about the school. This researcher would, however, argue that not all prospectuses contain useful information that would be of significance to a teaching professional, as some school prospectuses did not contain any information of any real value to the reader. The consideration of relevant information in a prospectus for specific stakeholders was not the focus of this study but is certainly a theme for another project on prospectuses.

The data revealed conflicting evidence about how parents viewed their school's prospectus. Although 87 out of the 98 parents who responded to the questionnaire believed that the prospectus was an important document and worth publishing, 51 of the sampled parents did not use it to make their school selection. 20 parents found that the school prospectus needed to provide a positive 'public image' which genuinely represented their school and 83 parents indicated that it contained a quantity of useful information.

In keeping with other research studies completed by Knight (1992), Hesketh and Knight (1996), as well as a semiotic study into school prospectuses by Symes (1998), this research also finds that school prospectuses are still a product that schools consider are an important feature of their strategic marketing plan.

Principals in this study suggested that the prospectus was an important 'traditional' document that stakeholders expect as part of their enrolment pack. One principal of a sample school suggested that parents often use the prospectus to justify their choice of school which may or may not be good for that particular school; a good reason for inserting a prospectus into an enrolment pack. Parent responses suggest that although 83 of the respondents judge that a school prospectus should be produced, 68 parents said that it did not influence their choice of school. One or two alluded to the use of websites as a better way of obtaining information about the school, including looking at recent ERO reports. A study by Brett, Rollins, Mansfield and Palm (2005) found that the school's websites were more often used by parents than the school prospectus for information. However, principals continue to be committed to the production of the school prospectus; although in the future, money and effort could be better channelled into developing their schools' websites.

It appears that for the present New Zealand schools will continue to produce a school prospectus to raise their school's profile in their local community for the present; their stakeholders expect one from the school.

What are stakeholders' expectations of the school prospectus?

Principals in this study state clearly that their stakeholders are not 'naive' and are 'quite savvy' when it comes to school selection for their children. Stakeholders, too agree that they are not taken in by glossy presentations and look to the school's reputation in the community to support their choices. When asked to take part in this study, one principal said of their school's prospectus: "dammed if we do and dammed if we don't".

Of the 98 parents that completed the questionnaire, 54 parents indicated that most of the information they required was included in the prospectus and 17 parents thought that all the information they required was presented in their school's prospectus. This suggests that 71 of those who completed the questionnaire were happy with the information provided by the school prospectus. However, the data from the content analysis section of the study revealed that only three schools provided all the basic information that parents say they want in the school prospectus and five schools provided a little more than half of the information. The researcher noted that only school 13 provided parents with a school prospectus at the time when parents completed the questionnaire. This suggests that parents in the study needed to recall what was in their school's prospectus from memory and were perhaps not aware that not all the information they wanted was included in their school's prospectus. This presents an interesting ambiguity in parental perceptions of their school's prospectus and the reality of its content.

Specifically, parents want a document that contains information that will enable them to ease their children into their next educational journey. Subject choices, sports codes offered by the school and the school's discipline featured high on parent's list of basic information. This together with the manner of delivery of the educational service, i.e. school vision and goals, also need to be included in all prospectuses.

Stakeholders want a publication that is well presented, contains basic information for their child's start to their secondary school career, and one that does not cost huge sums of money. Six parents stated that they would like information on the

school's academic success and this information should be published in the New Zealand school prospectuses. Instead, the 19 sampled New Zealand schools which represent the whole range of decile ratings comment on their school's ability to achieve and deliver high academic success. The researcher implies that schools in the low decile rating do not usually have students who desire a high academic record. These are schools in low socio-economic areas where academic prowess may not be as respected as transferable practical skills. However, the researcher infers that schools would want to paint themselves with a positive image and academic statements from some low performing schools would not support this, arguably turning away potential clientele; so, an 'honest' reflection of the school cannot be made. Parents certainly want a school with a good academic record but they are not able to compare schools as specific academic information is not available generically across all school prospectuses. In Knight's (1992) evaluation of school prospectuses in the United Kingdom he surmised that school's examination results are supposed to be indicative of their success but many schools fail to report their results faithfully to its' stakeholders. Although Knight (1992) suggests that this information is not always presented truthfully, it does present a vehicle for parents to compare schools.

Is the school prospectus a useful communication tool?

Principals taking part in this study were all instrumental in the authorship of their school prospectus. And, in all but one prospectus, the principal's message was displayed at the beginning of the prospectus. 11 of the 19 prospectuses studied included photos of only the principal as representative of the teaching professionals. The principal's message articulated the school's vision and strengths in language that was difficult for the average person to read and understand. School 8's principal's message was the only one in this study to be judged easy to read by the average reader. Perhaps the more difficult the message is to read, the more attractive the school is to the stakeholder who wants an academic pathway for their child.

Every school prospectus examined in this study was different and varied in the information it provided for the stakeholder. The information that was provided by schools was not consistent with what was requested by stakeholders. It is

interesting to note that one school in this study was keen to make changes based on the data gathered from the questionnaire for parents of Year 9 students. Their prospectus was one that contained less than an eighth of the specific information requested by their parents.

According to Krotz (2002) “All too often, when business owners create marketing materials, such as brochures, direct-mail postcards or flyers, print or online ads, billboards, media kits, and the rest, they forget to consider their products from the perspective of their customers”(p.1). The school prospectus is not a business brochure, however, in this hi-tech society, to produce a prospectus with little thought and care (as with school 10) is not effective strategic planning.

Out of 10 parents who provided additional information in the questionnaire, four parents indicated that their voice should be heard in the school prospectus as representative of the parent body: “Get parents honest contributions”. The simplest way a school could include a parent voice in the school prospectus is that of the Board of Trustees. However, the findings revealed that Boards of Trustees were not involved in the construction of the content of the school prospectus. This was left primarily to the principal in consultation with various parties within the school. Even the student body was not involved in the production process of the prospectus. Although the majority of photos in the school prospectuses featured the school’s students engaged in various activities, neither have the students contributed to the development of the prospectus.

The analyses of the photos in the 19 school prospectuses studied showed that all the prospectuses used students as their prime subjects engaged in school and extra-curricula activities. The students were presented as happy, smiling and focused in their activity. Symes (1998) argues that schools’ semiotic awareness is generally of a low level of sophistication but prospectuses can be used in a connotative way to present the school’s standing and status. All the principals in this project have used professional agencies to help organise their data for effective communication to end up with a quality document.

How do schools judge whether their prospectus has been ‘successful’?

Each principal in this study was asked this question and the responses, although varied, concluded that their prospectus was a successful product. These principals claim that they have many parents who feedback frequently with positive comments about their prospectus at different times of the year.

The subject of ‘success’ was a difficult question for principals to answer. However, based on their answers, the school prospectus is one of a number of publications that the school purports to use as a tool for marketing their school image. None of the principals suggested that the number of students attending their school grew as a result of the prospectus. However, a direct implication of a positive school image may go a long way towards a healthy image in the community which may lead to better enrolment numbers. Two parental comments stated that the prospectus enabled them to find out about the schools in their areas in order to select the right school for their children.

This said, 14 parental responses indicated that the reputation, along with ERO reports were more important in the selection of their child’s school rather than the publications sent out by the school. This question was not asked directly in the questionnaire, so the number of parental responses makes it even more interesting. 40 parents thought that the school prospectus as a reference guide for their school was particularly important. This answer is also reflected in the statement by one of the principals that their prospectus indicates their school’s care and concern for professionalism in the marketplace. However, one principal suggested that the use of a number of photos represented their view of the school and provided sufficient information for stakeholders; this could be judged as successful. It is interesting to note that this school’s prospectus did not contain enough of the basic information that parents required; the photos from this prospectus were analysed in depth in an earlier part of chapter four.

Summary

New Zealand schools will continue to produce a school prospectus for the present. Principals are reluctant to stop presenting a school prospectus to their public unless there is another avenue of marketing that will be as effective. Parents expect a school prospectus as part of the enrolment pack and see the prospectus as a reference guide for new arrivals in their community.

Parents expect a certain level of information provided in the prospectus and have especially commented on the lack of reporting of examination results. Examination results information in all prospectuses would allow parents to compare schools for their children.

Parents want a document that is well presented, cost effective and an 'honest' reflection of their school. Parents also indicated that they need to have an input into the content of the prospectus. At present principals and selected members of the school teaching personnel are involved in the decisions made about the content of the prospectus. Neither are members of the Boards of Trustees who sanction the financial outlay for the production of the prospectus involved in the construction of the content of their school's prospectus.

Principals judge that their schools' prospectus is a successful document because regular parental feedback tells them that it is an excellent publication. However, a large number of respondents said that they would not use the prospectus for school selection.

The next chapter will present some recommendations and conclusions to this research study on the school prospectus.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Through the analysis of the data, from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, the following conclusions and recommendations have been made about the importance of the school prospectus as a valued and successful tool to communicate intended messages, market the school, and serve as a reference guide for the school's stakeholders. Using the consolidated analysis as a guide, the conclusions will be presented firstly through the research questions and the recommendations will be made after each research question to either of two parties: firstly, the parent body and secondly, the prospectus producers.

Why do New Zealand schools produce a prospectus?

There is an indication from the data that the importance of the school prospectus maybe in decline. Although the question was not asked in the questionnaire, 20 parents stated that their preference was to use the school website. Additionally, while the school prospectuses have some importance, "word of mouth" and school visits appear to be a more powerful advertising tool.

The research concludes that the school prospectus is an excellent public document that should be providing a means to articulating the school's goals, curriculum statements and all the basic information to their local community. They do need to be well presented, with photos and images that are an 'honest' representation of the school's ethos. However, it is clear that the school prospectus is a document that stakeholders feel contributes to the school image and serves as a useful reference for their community. It is a document that is also used for multi – purposes for schools as a means to provide information to prospective applicants.

If the school wants to be viewed in a positive image, then a well presented publication can clearly be utilised to promote this. Whether this is an 'honest' representation of the service the school actually delivers is to be questioned.

Consider that out of the 19 school prospectuses analysed, each one talked about their high and excellent standards that they provided. If we were to look into all 19 ERO reports of these sample schools, claims of academic excellence could be debated and would likely be contestable.

In the commercial world in which we live, competition has become embedded in our society. Schools need to vie for positive attention and announce their wares in the marketplace. The school prospectus has traditionally been the vehicle for this and will, for the present, continue to be produced.

The recommendation from this research project is:

- Parents need to be aware that as the prospectus is a promotional document, the information in it needs to be verified by the user as to whether it is an honest reflection of the school.
- Prospectus producers need to be aware that parents want a prospectus to be produced. However, they want a prospectus that is cost effective, well presented and is indicative of the value placed on the quality of education service provided by the school.

What are stakeholders' expectations of the school prospectus?

Stakeholders want clear information about the delivery of the service offered in their school. Although the sample size in this study was too small to prove the results statistically, there was a difference in what the schools and stakeholders see as important information. This conclusion was also drawn by Brett, Mansfield, Palm and Rollins (2005) who strongly indicate that school prospectus production teams need to consider stakeholder input into the content of the school prospectus. None of the sample schools invite their Boards of Trustees to participate in the construction of the school prospectus.

Even though a study by Behony and Deem (1994) suggest that there are issues as to the input by school governors into the school prospectus, one of the conclusions of this research study is the importance of Boards of Trustees as representatives of their local communities to have their say.

The recommendation of this research study is:

- Parents want a prospectus that contains basic information for their needs as well as the needs of their children for a good start in their education career.
- Prospectus producers need to include messages from all stakeholders in their community to contribute to the prospectus, the Board of Trustees being representative of the parents of the school.

Is the school prospectus a useful communication tool?

If the school prospectus is to be a useful tool for communicating their intended messages to their stakeholders, the creators of the prospectus need to be aware of what they want to communicate. The variety of prospectuses in the marketplace, containing such a diverse range of information for each community does not provide stakeholders with an ease of contrast and comparison for school selection for their child.

The prospectuses have a professional presentation, more photos and “imply that schools are more purposeful in managing their public image” (Hesketh & Knight, 1998). If the message is about presenting image, then the school prospectuses communicate this well. If the prospectus is about providing information to its public, then due to the wide range of content, it can be argued that it does not communicate this well.

The recommendation from this research study is:

- Parents need to be aware of the diversity of information provided by schools. The research suggests that parents use other avenues of information to verify and check the validity of information presented in the prospectus, for example ERO reports.

- Prospectus producers need to consider carefully the image they want to present, and to whom they want to present the image.
- Prospectus producers need to examine if their prospectus includes information parents require and consider especially the language used in the prospectus; the language needs to be much simpler which is more likely to be user-friendly.

How do schools judge whether their prospectus has been ‘successful’?

The current markets that exist in our society have created schools that are more eagerly sought after by stakeholders than others. As school prospectuses are noted as the ‘public image’ of the school, this will impact on the cost of producing them. Their apparent ‘success’ will lie in their presentation, even though parents comment that glossy publications do not necessarily make a good school. There is comparison between presentations, as one principal stated that one of their school’s image projections was in presenting a reasonable prospectus. Their view was that it had currency in the marketplace.

The ‘success’ criteria that have been used in this study are as follows:

- as an external marketing strategy;
- attraction and retention of students;
- communicating the intended school image; and,
- parental approval and increased parental involvement.

The recommendation to school prospectus producers is that the school prospectus has a better chance of being a successful publication if it becomes an effective guide and reference mechanism for all schools. It would be a useful instrument of communication between the school and its public and if parents contribute to its content.

And finally, the study recommends that new research should be considered on how to help schools understand marketing techniques to provide a professional publication without compromising the content of the prospectus, thus producing effective school prospectuses.

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Appendix I



Consent form for the questionnaire for parents of year 9 students

Researcher: **Asha Peppiatt**

My research topic is:

The school prospectus: Why do NZ schools produce one?

As NZ schools compete for student numbers and promote their school image through publications, this research is concerned with identifying whether the school prospectus, which is not a compulsory document for schools in NZ, is an effective marketing tool and to gauge whether NZ schools really need one.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of the above-mentioned researcher's project for the *Master in Educational Management*. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports unless I agree otherwise, and that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project without penalty of any sort.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I agree to take part in this project

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please note that this consent form is not physically attached to the questionnaire. The questionnaire will remain completely anonymous.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER:

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Information sheet for the questionnaire for parents of year 9 students

My name is Asha Peppiatt.

I am undertaking a research project as part of my study for the *Master in Educational Management* at Unitec New Zealand. My research topic is:

The school prospectus: Why do NZ schools produce one?

As NZ schools compete for student numbers and promote their school image through publications, this research is concerned with identifying whether the school prospectus, which is not a compulsory document for schools in New Zealand, is an effective marketing tool and to gauge whether New Zealand schools really need one.

The research seeks to discover what schools intend to communicate through their prospectuses, what they actually communicate, and whether stakeholders are satisfied with the information provided by the school.

The research will be looking at the content of North Island secondary schools' prospectuses as well as gathering opinions, views and factual information from parents of year 9 students of sample schools. Your school has been selected as a sample school and has agreed to participate in the study.

I request your assistance in helping me to meet the requirements of this research assignment. In particular, I would like you to:

- Complete the questionnaire, which will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You will not be personally identified in the report unless you grant such permission. The report will not be seen by any other person in the organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the report before it is submitted to the lecturer supervising the project and I thank you in advance for your time. Your views are important to the research.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find participation and discussion of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is Eileen Piggot-Irvine, phone 815 4321 ext. 8936 or email epiggotirvine@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER:

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Questionnaire on the school prospectus

To be completed by parents of year 9 students in sample schools

Please answer all the questions. The questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes to complete. This survey is completely anonymous (neither you nor your school will be named in the study) and your consent form, although required, is not attached to this questionnaire.

Please circle the location of the school your child/children attend:

CITY RURAL LARGE TOWN

1. Have you read a school prospectus? Yes No

If your answer is **NO**, answer questions 13 - 16

If your answer is **YES** please answer all the questions up to question 12. how many prospectuses have you read?

- a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5

2. How did you get a prospectus?
 a) Sent to me when my child was at primary school
 b) Sent to me by mail
 c) Called into the local secondary school and picked one up
 d) **Other**

If **Other**, please specify: _____

3. How many secondary schools are there in your area?

- a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5 f) **Other**

If **Other**, please specify: _____

4. What did you want to know about the schools you were thinking of sending your child to from the prospectus? Put ticks against the ones that are relevant to your situation.

Principal's message		Uniform issues	
Mission statement		Stationary	
School goals		Food – canteen and costs	
School's charter statement		Discipline system	
Curriculum approach		Special character, e.g. single sex, catholic, etc	
School motto, logo		Qualifications of teaching staff	
Subject choices		Drugs and alcohol policy	
Sports		Pastoral care	
Fees and school donation		Other	

If **'Other'** please specify:

5. How much of the information that you wanted to know was included in the prospectus?

Everything	Mostly	Generally	some	none
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6. How impressed were you with the prospectus?

Very impressed	impressed	okay	Slightly impressed	Not impressed
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7. How clear was the information in the prospectus?

Very clear	clear	okay	Fairly clear	Not clear at all
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8. How glossy was the prospectus?

Very glossy	Quite glossy	Fairly glossy	Some glossy parts	No glossy parts at all
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9. Do you think a glossy prospectus means a better school?

Yes	No
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Please explain your answer:

10. The prospectus costs a lot of money to produce. Do you think it is worth the effort? Why/ Why not?

11. Did the prospectus play an important part in choosing to send your child to the school?

Very important	Quite important	Fairly important	Some importance	Not important at all
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12. If there is anything that you would like to add that would contribute to the research please write it below:

13. As you haven't read a prospectus, how did you decide which secondary school to send your child to? Put ticks against the ones that you feel best represent your situation.

The nearest secondary school	
The school was recommended by a neighbour	
Recommended by someone I respect and trust	
It was my old school	
I know some great teachers there	
Other	

If '**Other**' please explain below: _____

14. What reasons would you need to use a prospectus?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

15. What would like to see included in a prospectus? Please tick the appropriate boxes:

Principal's message		Uniform issues	
Mission statement		Stationary	
School goals		Food – canteen and costs	
School's charter statement		Discipline system	
Curriculum approach		Special character, e.g. single sex, catholic, etc	
School motto, logo		Qualifications of teaching staff	
Subject choices		Drugs and alcohol policy	
Sports		Pastoral care	
Fees and school donation		Other	

If '**Other**', please specify:

16. The prospectus costs a lot of money to produce. Do you think it is worth the effort? Why/ Why not?

Thank you for your time.
Asha Peppiatt

Appendix II



Consent form for the questionnaire for school prospectus production teams

Researcher: **Asha Peppiatt**

My research topic is:

The school prospectus: Why do NZ schools produce one?

As NZ schools compete for student numbers and promote their school image through publications, this research is concerned with identifying whether the school prospectus, which is not a compulsory document for schools in NZ, is an effective marketing tool and to gauge whether NZ schools really need one.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of the above-mentioned researcher's project for the *Master in Educational Management*. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports unless I agree otherwise, and that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project without penalty of any sort.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I agree to take part in this project

Name: _____

Name of School: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please note that neither your school nor your stakeholders will be named in the study. Stakeholder questionnaires will remain anonymous.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER:

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Information sheet for the questionnaire for school prospectus production teams

My name is Asha Peppiatt.

I am undertaking a research project as part of my study for the *Master in Educational Management* at Unitec New Zealand. My research topic is:

The school prospectus: Why do NZ schools produce one?

As NZ schools compete for student numbers and promote their school image through publications, this research is concerned with identifying whether the school prospectus, which is not a compulsory document for schools in New Zealand, is an effective marketing tool and to gauge whether New Zealand schools really need one.

The research seeks to discover what schools intend to communicate through their prospectuses, what they actually communicate, and whether stakeholders are satisfied with the information provided by the school.

The research will be looking at the content of North Island secondary schools' prospectuses as well as gathering opinions, views and factual information from parents of year 9 students of sample schools.

Your school has been sent a copy of the content analysis of your school prospectus with a comparison to other North Island secondary schools. For confidentiality purposes, only your school is named in the content analysis data sent to your school.

To add to my research findings from your school, I request your assistance to complete the following questionnaire. It will take about 10 minutes of your time to complete. As this is an ecopy questionnaire, I would be grateful if you could send it to me as soon as possible, and before _____(date).

You will not be personally identified in the report unless you grant such permission. The report will not be seen by any other person in the organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the report before it is submitted to the lecturer supervising the project and I thank you in advance for your time. Your views are important to the research.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find participation and discussion of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is Eileen Piggot-Irvine, phone 815 4321 ext. 8936 or email epiggotirvine@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER:

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



Questionnaire on the school prospectus for school prospectus production teams

Please answer all the questions.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please circle the location of the school in which you work:

CITY RURAL LARGE TOWN

1. How many other secondary schools are there in your area?

a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4 f) other (eg. rural, area school)

Other (please specify): _____

2. Here is a list of some topics that are of interest to stakeholders. Put ticks against the ones that are currently in your prospectus.

Principal's message		Uniform issues	
Mission statement		Stationary	
School goals		Food – canteen and costs	
School's charter statement		Discipline system	
Curriculum approach		Special character, e.g. single sex, catholic, etc	
School motto, logo		Qualifications of teaching staff	
Subject choices		Drugs and alcohol policy	
Sports		Pastoral care	
Fees and school donation		Other	

If '**Other**', please specify: _____

3. How impressed were you with your final product?

Very impressed	impressed	okay	Slightly impressed	Not impressed
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4. What was the approximate cost of your prospectus to produce?

- Between \$ 00 - \$ 500
- Between \$ 501 - \$ 2500
- Between \$ 2501 - \$ 4500
- Between \$ 4501 - \$ 6500
- Between \$ 6501 - \$ 10,000
- Between \$10,001 - \$ 20,000
- Between \$20,001 - \$ 30,000
- Between \$30,001 - \$ 40,000
- Over \$40,000

5. Did your school develop the prospectus and then send it to an outside agency for printing?

Yes

No

6. Did your school choose to send it to an outside agency to develop and print your prospectus?

Yes

No

7. If you answered 'NO' to question number 3, why did your school choose to develop it yourselves? Give reasons:

8. If you answered 'YES' to question number 4, why did your school choose to send it to an outside agency for developing and printing? Give reasons:

9. If your school chose to send the prospectus to an outside agency for development and production, what kind of agency did you send it to?

10. How clear was the information in the prospectus?

Very clear	clear	okay	Fairly clear	Not clear at all
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11. How glossy was the prospectus?

Very glossy	Quite glossy	Fairly glossy	Some glossy parts	No glossy parts at all
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12. Do you think a glossy prospectus means a better school?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer:

13. Do you think stakeholders believe that a glossy prospectus means a better school?

 Yes No

Please explain your answer:

14. Do you think your prospectus has been 'successful'?

 Yes No

15. How do you judge 'success'? Please write reasons below:

16. a) Do you think that your school prospectus is a useful marketing tool?

 Yes No

b) Why/ Why not? Please explain below:

17. If an evaluation process is used to update the prospectus, explain how the process works:

18. How does the school decided whether a prospectus is an important document and worth publishing? Please answer below:

19. When was your prospectus written and how often does the school prospectus production team review the content of the prospectus?

Our school prospectus was written in: _____

The review of our school prospectus will be in:

a) 1 year b) 3 years c) 5 years d) Other

If Other, please write down your review time schedule:

Thank you once again for your time.
Asha Peppiatt