Educational Implications for Communities Affected by Transience and Residential Movement

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1. Introduction

This paper outlines the findings of the education module of the wider *Building Attachment* project, and discusses some of the wider issues involved in researching the effects of high levels of student movement between schools.

The research carried out for this module was designed to investigate two main questions: the extent to which frequent movement affects the learning and achievement of individual students, and the extent to which the ability of schools to provide quality education for all students is affected by high levels of student movement. These two questions were looked at against the background of national education thinking and policy on the one hand, and local developments, both at the school level and in the wider community, on the other. The paper surveys other research on school mobility, looking in particular at some of the conceptual difficulties involved in this area of research; describes this project's main findings; and briefly discusses some of the policy implications of these findings as we see them.

2. Previous Research on the Effects of High Levels of Student Movement Between Schools

In the last 20 years or so, students who move often from one school to another have come to be seen as a problem in education circles, both in New Zealand and in many overseas countries. Mobility rates in New Zealand have always been high; however, it is only relatively recently that this has been seen as a problem for schools and, as a result, for policymakers and researchers.[1]

There is some New Zealand and international research on the educational effects of high rates of mobility. In general, however, this is an emerging area of work and, as might be expected, there are some conceptual difficulties. In particular, there is little agreement on definitions and measures, and on the purpose of these measures. Much of the New Zealand work is qualitative, designed to explore principals' and teachers' views on student mobility, as opposed to looking for direct evidence of the educational effects of frequent movement. In this section we outline some of the conceptual difficulties in research in this area. We then attempt to summarise this work's main findings in very general terms because as we explain below much of it is not directly comparable.

The first conceptual issue involves distinguishing between individual *student* movement rates (how many times an individual student changes schools) and overall rates of student movement in and out of a *school* (the proportion of a school's roll that "turns over", over and above normal movement up through the year groups). These are separate questions, with separate effects. However, there is a tendency for them to be conflated. Then, for each of these, a decision has to be made as to how to decide when

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[1] In the international research context, student mobility is not a new issue: however since the 1990s it began to have a higher profile in teacher and policy discussions. It seems likely that this increased concern is linked to the reforms of the education sector in New Zealand and many other countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These reforms changed the way schools were managed and funded. Schools began to compete with one another for students, and a strong focus on performance, "benchmarking", and accountability developed. See Dobson and Henthorne (1999) for a discussion of this issue in the United Kingdom context.

the rate is high and/or "excessive". At what point does it become a problem? How would we know this? If it is a problem, *who* is it a problem for? Why is it a problem, and how could the problem be solved? There is no consensus on any of these questions in the research literature in this area. Moreover, many different measures of both student and school "transience"[2] are used.

For example, individual *student* "transience" is defined variously as: when a student has moved *more than once during the primary school years*;[3] when a student has been to *three or more schools in two years*;[4] where a student has *attended two or more schools in the previous year*;[5] when a child has moved *three or more times before the end of Year 4*;[6] or where a student *joins the school partway through a key* stage.[7] *School* "transience" has been defined as *the total number of children entering and leaving a school at a point other than the beginning or end of a school year*;[8] or as *the number of children joining or leaving a school at a point other than the normal entry or exit point for that school*.[9] Other studies use formulae that measure overall turnover.[10] The use of these very different measures obviously makes it difficult to compare the findings of these different studies.

There is also a tendency to assume that *schools* with high rates of non-standard movement are populated by large numbers of *students* who are moving very frequently. This of course does not necessarily follow (although it could). High overall movement rates could be the result of large numbers of students moving a small number of times, or they could be the result of a smaller number of students moving in and out of the same schools very frequently. It is important to distinguish between these two trends because, while both will probably be problematic for the school concerned, for the individual students there is only likely to be a problem where more than one or two moves are involved.

There are other conceptual difficulties. For example, in general the educational research on student mobility does not differentiate between students who change schools as a result of residential change, and those who change for other reasons — for example, a change in educational preferences, home-school conflict (including school "exclusion"), or school-related factors. This is important in the context of the project being reported on here, in which the focus is on the effects of high levels of residential mobility on communities. In addition, the literature tends to treat mobile students as a

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[2] The word "transience" appears in quotation marks here to draw attention to the fact that, while it is widely used in this literature, most of what is being described is not in fact transience, in the usual sense of this term as meaning nomadic, impermanent, rootless, moving in an aimless or random way. Moreover, in this literature, the term "transience" is generally used negatively, and in ways that conflate it with other, separate issues linked with negative educational effects.

[3] Kariuki, Nash, & College (1999).

[4] Edwards (1997); Fields (1997).

[5] NZEI (1999).

[6] Whalen & Fried (1973).

[7] Strand (2000).

[8] Bruno & Isken (1996).

[9] Neighbour (2000).

[10] See, for example, Johnson (2002).

homogeneous group, looking for mobility's effects on this group, rather than exploring some of the very different reasons why people move.[11]

However, given all these caveats, what does previous research tell us? Very briefly,[12] it tells us that rates of student movement between schools in some New Zealand communities are very high by international standards.[13] This is a concern if we accept the findings of a number of large-scale international studies that show links between high levels of student mobility and reduced educational achievement — both for individual students, *and* in the school as a whole where there are high levels of mobility.[14]

However (and this is important), these studies also found strong links between high mobility and other factors (low income, poor accommodation, family break-up or recent immigration, for example). Other studies[15] have found other "risk factors" (family income, maternal education and ethnic minority status) to be more important than mobility, pointing out that mobility is often confounded by these other factors. A recent United Kingdom study found that students in high-mobility primary schools made similar progress to students in schools with low mobility, when other variables were statistically controlled.[16] This study also found that children who move a lot have similar rates of progress as those who do not move a lot. However, the mobile children's starting point was often at a lower level.

Looking at this another way, the research tells us that schools with high mobility rates (other than those with a high proportion of armed forces children) tend to have high numbers of children from low income backgrounds.[17] It is likely (but very hard to show) that low income (and all that goes with this) produces both the high mobility and the reduced educational attainment. However, from the research evidence we have, all that can be said is that the relationship between mobility and school achievement is not a simple, linear cause-and-effect one. While there is a relationship, it cannot be concluded that high mobility *on its own* causes educational under-achievement.

An interesting aspect of the New Zealand research is that it appears that many very highly mobile students are moving in and out of the same schools (or other schools in the same general area). Thus, it seems high rates of school mobility are not necessarily connected with high rates of residential movement.[18]

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[11] Strand & Demie (2006; 2007).

[12] For a full review of this literature see Bull & Gilbert (2007) and Gilbert (2005a).

[13] Education Review Office (1997), NZEI (1999), Lee (2000), Neighbour (2001), Wylie et al. (2004).

[14] See, for example, Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson's (1997) large-scale study of children's first few years at school in a Baltimore community, and Demie's (2002) study of 5,000 students in an inner London LEA. Both found the educational performance of mobile students to be substantially below that of non-mobile students, sometimes by as much as 50 percent, and, in addition, that high levels of student mobility depress the overall performance of schools. See also Strand (2002).

[15] For example, Wright (1999). See also Wylie et al. (2004).

[16] Strand & Demie (2006).

[17] Wylie (1999); Dobson et al. (2000); Lee (2000); Neighbour (2001).

[18] This is an interesting question for educationists because it is possible that some of this inter-school movement is the result of school-related factors, not due to residential or household factors.

The qualitative research in this area tells us that schools see high mobility as a major problem. Principals say that students who move frequently require a great deal of extra support, which has resourcing issues for their schools. They say that high student mobility adversely affects teachers' ability to plan and implement effective programmes, that it damages teacher morale, and that it adds to their administrative tasks. They also think that it is unfair that they are held accountable for the performance of students who have not been in their school for very long.[19]

In the next section of this paper we outline our study of the educational effects of high mobility in the four communities studied in the *Building Attachment* project. Like other researchers, we found high levels of concern about student mobility in schools. However, we could not find evidence of a significant link between high mobility and lowered educational achievement.

3. The Educational Effects of High Levels of Movement in the Four Case Study Areas

This section describes the findings of a five year (2003–2007) study, by researchers from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), looking at the impact of high levels of student movement on the ability of the case study areas to provide quality education. This study involved two phases of data collection. In Phase One (2003–2004) baseline data was collected in 20 schools[20] in the four case study areas on:

- non-standard movement rates in schools (school "transience")
- how often individual students move (student "transience")
- student achievement and attendance.

Principals were also interviewed for their views on the extent to which mobility was a problem in their school. Student information was collected from school records for all Year 5, 8 and 11 students in the 20 study schools.[21] In this study, students were defined as frequent movers if they had attended more than two schools at Year 5, more than three schools at Year 8, and more than four schools at Year 11. Any move was considered a change of school, so a child who had been only to a few schools could be considered mobile if she or he had multiple enrolments in those schools. The achievement information for these students was compared with that of the non-mobile students in the sample to see if there were any differences. The main findings of the Phase One work were as follows:[22]

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[19]   See, for example, Neighbour (2001, 2003).
[20]   The 20 schools included primary, intermediate, secondary, Māori medium and Area schools.
[21]   We chose Years 5, 8, and 11 as our sample cohorts: Year 5 is near the end of primary school; Year 8 represents the "middle school" years and the end of intermediate; and Year 11 represents the secondary school years. Students begin to leave school from Year 11 and during this year they participate in nationally recognised forms of assessment (Level 1 of the NCEA). The total number of students in our Phase One sample was 967.
[22]   These findings are summarised in the Report of Phase Two (Bull & Gilbert, 2007). However, for full details of the Phase One work, see Gilbert (2005a).

- Rates of school mobility[23] in the study areas were very high, overall around 35 percent.

- About 20 percent of students in the year groups we sampled were frequent movers. A few had been enrolled in 10–15 (occasionally many more) different schools.

- Almost all of the 20 principals we interviewed saw student mobility as a major issue for their school.

- The differences in educational achievement between frequent movers and non-mobile students in the same year groups at the same schools, were very small (and in most cases not statistically significant).[24]

The Phase One findings raised some interesting questions for us. Given that mobility rates were high, and that schools see frequent movers as a problem, why did we *not* find achievement differences? Were the instruments we used to measure educational achievement inadequate, or were mobile students being adversely affected in some other way that we were not measuring? Or, if mobility doesn't affect school performance, then why is it a concern for schools?

In Phase Two of this project (2006–2007)[25] we attempted to address these questions by redesigning our methodology in the following ways:

- We used the same, nationally standardised measures of student achievement in *all* of the study schools.[26] In the Phase One work we had used achievement data collected by teachers, which meant that the data could not always be compared across the study schools.

- We added a *student survey*, which was designed to assess students' sense of "belonging" to, or engagement with, their school.

- We interviewed the *teachers* of the students in the sample year groups.

- We *reinterviewed* the principals of the study schools, probing more deeply for their views on exactly why frequently moving students are a problem.

Our aims in adding these new data sources were to check the Phase One findings on student achievement, to develop another measure of the perceived differences between

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[23] We have used the terms "mobility" and "frequent mover" in this study – as distinct from the more usual (in other work in this area) terms "transience" or "transient student". See Footnote 3 above.

[24] In maths there were small, statistically significant differences between the achievement of mobile and non-mobile Y5 students in Cannons Creek/Waitangirua and Kawerau and Y8 students in Opotiki. In reading there were small, but statistically significant differences between mobile and non-mobile Y8 students in Amuri and Opotiki. However, these results need to be interpreted with caution as the data we were able to use were not from standardised tests, and the sample sizes were very small.

[25] Phase Two of the project involved 18 schools (two withdrew from the study in the intervening period).

[26] In Phase Two we collected achievement data on 695 students. The survey was filled in by 717 students, and we interviewed 35 teachers.

the two groups of students, and to collect more detailed information on exactly why schools experience frequently moving students as a problem. In Phase Two we also collected a second wave of data on school and individual student mobility rates.[27]

The main findings of Phase Two relate to five domains:[28]

- School mobility rates

- Student mobility rates and patterns

- Principal and teacher perceptions

- Educational achievement

- Students' sense of belonging

School mobility

The average rates of mobility in the study schools continued to be high. The mean non-standard movement rates over the three years of the study were 32 percent for Waitangirua/Cannons Creek, 29 percent for Amuri, 45 percent for Opotiki and 39 percent for Kawerau. Apart from Opotiki, where there was an increase, there were only minor changes in these rates. However, the *average* rates of non-standard movement in each area masked large differences in mobility levels in individual schools. For example, one Opotiki school had a non-standard movement rate of 81 percent, while in another this rate was 37 percent.

Student mobility

In three out of the four study areas, the number of individual students moving frequently remained high. Between a quarter and a third of all students in the sample year groups in Cannons Creek/Waitangirua, Kawerau and Opotiki were classified as frequent movers. However, in Amuri, only 13 percent were frequent movers, and two of the primary schools had no mobile students.[29]

As in Phase One, we found that there was a small number of students in each area who were moving very frequently. In all of the study areas except Amuri, there is a pattern of local circulation: that is, movement between schools in the district, as opposed to movement to or from schools in other parts of New Zealand.

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[27] However, we were aware that the information held by schools on mobile students is often incomplete and/or inaccurate which could have led to some students being incorrectly classified as mobile or non-mobile, but, at the time of the study, more accurate information was not available.

[28] For full details, see Bull and Gilbert (2007).

[29] It is possible that the lower rates of mobility found in this phase of the study are an artefact of the time of data collection (early August). This is after dairy cows in the area are "dried off" and some of the mobile students may consequently have been out of the area. However, some school staff told us that they thought mobility rates in the area were dropping.

Across all areas there were no significant differences in the daily attendance rates of mobile and non-mobile students. There were minor differences in the ethnic composition of the two groups, with students identified as Māori being slightly over-represented in the mobile group. Students identified as Pasifika were under-represented in the mobile group.

Principal and teacher perceptions of mobility

The Phase Two interviews with principals were designed to probe more deeply into some of the issues raised in the Phase One interviews. It is worth noting that several of the principals were new. In one area three out of the four principals we interviewed were new. In the second round of interviews, there was a wider range of opinions on the extent to which mobility was an issue. There are many possible reasons for this shift. For example, as mentioned above, many of the principals were different, and the questions (and the interviewer) were also different. It is also possible that the first phase of this project had an interventionary effect, or that recent professional development initiatives had made it easier for schools to find ways to accommodate the needs of mobile students.

There did not appear to be a relationship between the levels of mobility in individual schools and principals' opinions about the impact of mobility on students. Among the primary principals there was a wide range of views, some seeing mobility as a huge problem, while, for others, it wasn't an issue at all. The secondary principals also had a range of opinion. However, in contrast to the Phase One interviews, most said that other issues, particularly behavioural difficulties, were more of a problem for schools than mobility.

In the Phase Two interviews only three principals specifically mentioned the extra administrative work mobile students can bring. Some said there are no additional costs to a school. This differed from the Phase One interviews, in which most of the principals told us that schools with large numbers of students moving in and out have administrative overheads that they cannot budget for.

All except two principals said that poor attendance is more disruptive to programmes than high levels of mobility, and half believed that it is the individual characteristics of some of the students (rather than their mobility) that are disruptive. One college principal felt that only mobile students with a history of behavioural difficulties are disruptive. Another principal said that when teachers are "on top of things" in the classroom, students arriving or leaving has little or no impact. Another felt that because class sizes in their school were small it was easy to cope with changes in the class composition. One principal said that new students coming in were a positive feature in that they bring new ideas and provide leadership opportunities for established students.

Where mobility was seen as disruptive, this, the principals said, was most often because the social dynamics of the class were upset. One college principal mentioned that the arrival of new senior students disrupts work programmes because the class is usually partway through different unit standards. At the primary level the arrival of a new student takes the teacher away from the rest of the class while she or he establishes the learning needs of the newcomer and reorganises instructional groups within the

class. New students can broaden the range of learning needs in the class, which, some principals said, can take the teacher away from the "top" students.

In small schools the unexpected arrival of new children can necessitate the reorganisation of all of the school's classes (to ensure classes are approximately equal in size). Student mobility also causes problems for the effective operation of "special" programmes such as Reading Recovery.

In Phase Two we also sought the views of the teachers of the students in the sample year groups. In general these teachers expressed views that were similar to those of the principals. However, teachers at the senior secondary level[30] and the primary teacher who was a teaching principal said that the administrative tasks associated with new students significantly disrupted their teaching.

All the teachers believed that building effective relationships with students is essential for learning. However, most also said that these relationships can be developed quickly. School-family partnerships were also often seen as important, and these were perceived to take longer to establish with frequent movers. Most teachers felt they could easily work out new students' learning needs. However, many said that students who move frequently tend to miss out on extra-curricular activities, particularly sports.

When asked how they felt when students left their class during the year, nearly all teachers said they felt frustrated. Teachers said that when they had worked hard with students this work felt "wasted" when they left. Other teachers said they felt annoyed at the family, sad, or disempowered. Many of the teachers believed schools are expected to fulfil many of the functions of the family. They build attachments to their students — "I treat the kids like my own" — and, understandably, have feelings when they leave.

One teacher worried that the family was dissatisfied with her as a teacher when a student left. As with the principals, some teachers mentioned that it was hard to track a student's progress over time when the student is only with them for a short period. One teacher said that the current emphasis on "teacher effectiveness" and "evidence-based decision making" in teacher professional development courses is demoralising when your cohort of students is constantly changing.

Educational achievement

In Phase Two we measured student achievement using nationally standardised tests. However, as in Phase One, we found very few differences between mobile and non-mobile students.

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[30] A senior secondary student transferring into a new class during the year may have completed different internal assessments for nationally recognized qualifications at their previous school, or be part way through unit or achievement standards that are not offered in the new school. According to the teachers, new students frequently arrive without records of their learning to date, and accessing these adds considerably to the teachers' workloads.

At the primary level the non-mobile group appeared to be achieving slightly better in reading and maths than the mobile group, but these differences were small and not statistically significant.

At the secondary level there were no statistically significant differences in the number of NCEA credits attempted or achieved. There were also no differences between the groups in the percentages of attempted credits achieved. Non-mobile students were slightly more likely to achieve Level 1 NCEA, but again these results were not statistically significant.

Students' sense of "belonging"

In Phase Two we surveyed all students' sense of belonging to school, to see if there were differences between the mobile and non-mobile groups. Again, we found very few differences.

There were no differences in how each group felt about their teachers and only very small differences in how they felt about schoolwork, or school in general.

The one area where there were consistently small, but statistically significant, differences was where students were asked for their views of the links between school and their families. There were seven statements in this section, and there were small but statistically significant differences in the collated data between the two groups of students on all except one item. The biggest difference was in response to the statement, "My family come to school events".

While this in itself might not be important it seems likely that this could be an indicator for other things, such as the families' overall involvement or engagement with school. This is an area that deserves further investigation, especially given recent research findings linking effective home-school partnerships and increases in students' achievement.[31]

4. Implications for Policy and Research

Our investigation raises a number of issues for future research on student mobility. A major issue for us was the difficulty in collecting quality data that would allow us to accurately compare the progress of mobile students with non-mobile students.[32] Another issue is that because there were no high decile schools or schools with low mobility in this study, we were not able to compare trends, and so we do not have much to add to discussions of the connection between mobility, educational under-achievement and low income. Other questions raised are: would the slight differences in achievement we

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[31] See, for example, Biddulph, et al. (2003).

[32] Much of the information schools have on mobile students is inaccurate or incomplete, and tracking individual students is currently difficult to do in New Zealand. "School" and "student" mobility have proved difficult to define and, because both are linked in complicated ways with a whole range of other factors, any of which could be the "cause" of any measured effect, not especially helpful.

found be statistically significant in a larger data set? Does moving have more of an effect at particular times of the year or stages of schooling than at others? What factors affect how quickly a new student adjusts to a new school? What are the experiences and the perceptions of mobile children and their families of the process of changing schools? Investigating these questions would require a larger project and different methodologies.

Despite this, however, our findings are consistent with those of several recent British studies with very large samples and the ability to control for the effect of other variables, such as socio-economic deprivation. It seems likely that the broad patterns we have identified are robust. However, because we could find no evidence of a connection between student mobility and reduced educational achievement in individuals, in the final section of this paper we explore the notion that frequently moving children are a *school* problem, a problem that is produced by wider ideas about how schools should be organised, and what they are supposed to do. The upshot of this is that the policy implications of this project are rather different from those of previous research in this area.

When analysing the interviews with principals and teachers we were struck by the number of times we were told that schools were like families. Some schools used the term "whānau" to describe groupings within the school, others referred directly to the "school family". Teachers also consistently emphasised the importance to educational success of strong, caring, and ongoing relationships: relationships between teacher and students, between students and other students, and between staff in the school. They talked about their schools' efforts to nurture a sense of belonging, and about the importance of children feeling safe and secure enough to take risks and try out new things. Each school has its own particular set of shared values and ideas about what is important and how things should be done. The family metaphor is useful for schools because it helps unify three very different, and conflicting, ideas about the purpose of education. Schools are supposed to deliver a standardised curriculum to *groups* of students, socialise students to prevailing norms, and, at the same time, to meet the *individual* needs of each student.

The metaphor of the family, with its emphasis on relationships allows schools to reconcile the "meeting individual needs" goal with the "socialisation" goal. The "this is how we do things in this family" idea justifies the group focus that is necessary to deliver one-size-fits-all approaches to individuals from very different backgrounds. Frequently moving children disrupt this metaphor. This would explain why, at a very deep level, they are a problem for schools. The "conventional nuclear family" of the school is forced to become a "blended" or "foster" family. Children who are not the family's "natural" children move in, possibly only for a short time, bringing with them issues and problems that don't really "belong" in that family. Given this, it is not hard to see why it is not a straightforward matter for teachers to develop (what they see as) the necessary sense of attachment and commitment to these children.

Putting all this into the larger educational context, however, the "problem" of mobile students is just one aspect of a much larger issue currently being faced by the education sector: the issue of how to go about reforming, or more accurately, transforming, the current education system to meet the needs of 21st century society.

We could argue (as others have) for administrative strategies that would "solve" the mobility problem, for example, the development of induction programmes; the timely transfer of assessment data; more accurately targeted funding arrangements for schools; or nationally standardised programmes of learning. However, we think a "bigger picture" approach is needed. Rather than developing strategies aimed at "normalising" mobile students, making them appear to fit the existing (20th century) system, we think we need to take a step back, to rethink the system to fit the needs of the students (who, whatever we may think about this, *do* move frequently) *and* to meet the needs of 21st century society. Doing this requires us to rethink some "old" ideas about what schools are actually *for*.

Many recent policy developments in education are beginning this process, and some of these initiatives could, if they were thought about in this way, benefit mobile students. For example, the recently released national curriculum document's directive to schools "to put students at the centre of teaching and learning"[33] signals the importance of developing systems that meet *students'* needs (whatever these may be), not making students fit the existing system. Recent policy developments focus on two approaches to achieving this goal in practical terms: supporting schools to work together in local "clusters" (as opposed to competing with each other, as they have often had to in recent years), and supporting schools to more actively engage students in their learning, an approach which should make students' learning more "portable". While these initiatives have been designed to help schools raise overall standards of achievement, they could also help schools address some of the issues around mobility (and, possibly, to see mobility in a positive light). However, for this to happen, these ideas need to be *put together*.

Some examples of how initiatives could help address issues around mobility follow. The Ministry of Education is currently funding a range of professional development clusters designed to allow schools in particular areas to work collaboratively to improve teaching practice, and or to better meet other community needs.[34] Given that three of the four areas studied in this project had high numbers of students "circulating" between local schools, it is highly likely that the needs of these students could be better met by clusters of schools working in close collaboration. Other current professional development programmes encourage schools to actively involve students in their own learning and assessment.[35] Recent Ministry of Education work on developing successful home-school partnerships[36] potentially allows families to play a more active role in their children's education and to better support the child if they change school.[37]

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[33] Ministry of Education (2007:9).

[34] See, for example, the Ministry of Education-funded Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHAS) scheme or the Manurewa Enhancement Initiative.

[35] For example, the Assess to Learn programme and recent literacy professional development programmes.

[36] See, for example, Bull, Brooking, & Campbell (2008).

[37] It is important to remember though that the purpose of building closer relationships between school and families is to facilitate learning and raise achievement. Teachers need to be clear as to their role. Where mobility is associated with other issues in families, support is required from social services. Teachers cannot be expected to be all things to all people.

At a higher level, the concept of "personalising learning" has been woven into recent policy developments in education.[38] This idea is part of a wider strategy designed to do two important things: to better meet the needs of diverse students by moving away from 20th century, one-size-fits-all models of education, and to provide a framework for developing a 21st century education system characterised by new understandings of the learner-knowledge relationship. Rather than being "stuff" learners need to accumulate, knowledge in the 21st century is something to *do things with*, and "21st century learning" involves developing the skills to do this. Learners need to be seen, not as the passive recipients of knowledge, but as actively involved in "co-constructing" their own programmes of learning.[39]

The "personalising learning" idea is supposed to provide for flexible and diverse learning pathways, and for individualised programmes of learning that have been constructed in student-teacher-family partnerships. In this approach to learning, students would be able to talk about their learning (perhaps supported by portfolios of work[40]) both to their families (thereby giving the family opportunities to build on what the students are learning at school), and to new teachers. The learning would be "owned" by the student, rather than by the school. However, new ways of tracking student progress need to be explored to support this, as most current assessment practices assume a stable school community.[41]

Thus much of the framework for helping schools better meet the needs of mobile students is in development, albeit with other goals. What is needed, we think, is for these ideas to be put together. A 20th century approach to schooling focuses on "normalising" mobile students, on developing administrative solutions that make them (appear to) better fit the system. High levels of mobility are a fact of life in New Zealand, a fact of life that needs to be taken account of in, and built into, educational thinking, not resisted or refused. In this last section of this paper we hope we have provided some starting points for doing this.

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[38] Ministry of Education (2006); Gilbert & Bolstad (2006); Gilbert (2007).

[39] See Gilbert (2005b) for a discussion of the implications of "knowledge society" ideas for contemporary public education.

[40] It is already common practice in early childhood education and some primary schools for students to have assessment portfolios consisting of samples of work.

[41] This is a problem, one that was often referred to by the teachers in the present study. For instance, the common practice in primary schools of collating reading assessment results across classes at various times during the year to show progress only makes sense if the cohort of students remains the same.

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