The management of school based staff development in Australian secondary schools

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THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL BASED STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

GREGG STEWART ROWLAND

Bachelor of Education (Physical and Health Education, with Distinction)

Master of Education

Faculty of Education 1999
DECLARATION

I certify that work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for a degree in any other university or educational institution. This thesis contains entirely my work.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.

Signed

GREGG ROWLAND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Few things in life are achieved without the support and encouragement of others. This project was no different. To my wife Lyn and daughters, Jade and Skye, I say thanks from the bottom of my heart for your support and understanding over the past years. To my good friend and colleague, Professor John Patterson, thank you also for your support, encouragement and guidance.

A special note of thanks is also extended to the late Professor Russell Linke who provided the impetus and guidance in the early stages of this research project and to Peter Keeble for his continual assistance, suggestions and friendship.

Finally, I would like to give special mention to Dr. Norm McCulla (NSW), Althea Hurwood (Queensland) and John Kitt (Tasmania) for their assistance in the formulation of the survey and its distribution. To all the teachers who participated in the piloting and final completion of the survey, many thanks.
Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in Australian education, two consistent themes have emerged, among others, in the professional literature, viz. the need for increased emphasis on the training and development of teachers; and the increased devolution of responsibility for decision making to the school.

Training and development, especially in the education sector, was seen as a part of a national economic readjustment. Improved educational outcomes were considered vital for the economic development and general prosperity of the country. As a consequence, Australian Commonwealth and State governments gave the training and development of teachers a higher priority and contributed substantial funds towards the improvement of Australian schools through teacher training and development programs.

Concurrently, most State governments devolved responsibility for education decision making and resources, including training and development to the school level. Such a shift in responsibilities required that schools develop organisational structures and management practices to ensure effective resource usage and to satisfy accountability mechanisms that were established.

Although the study of best practice with regard to the staff development of teachers has been researched both nationally and internationally for some time, few studies have reviewed the organisational structures and management practices within a school based context that may either have enabled or constrained teachers as they strove to master the complexities of classroom practice.

Given the dearth of information related to school based staff development, four questions which guided this study emerged. Firstly, to what extent was school based staff development regarded by teachers as an integral part of their professional life? Secondly and thirdly, within in each State what are the organisational structures and the range of management practices used by secondary schools for implementing school based staff development? Fourthly, which organisational structures and management practices were
perceived by teachers as being the most effective in meeting their staff development needs?

A research methodology was implemented in three Australian States: New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, to respond to these questions. The theoretical basis of the study and the foundation for the questionnaire were found in key concepts identified from the staff development literature, related government reports, and information provided by state level and school administrators. Distillation of the information from these sources led to seven principles of best practice identified as the basis for the study: teacher commitment to continuous improvement; organisational structures for managing school based staff development; planning for school based staff development; selection of staff development content; strategies for the delivery of staff development; allocation of resources for staff development and the evaluation of staff development.

Two questionnaires were constructed: the Teacher Questionnaire and the Coordinator of Staff Development Questionnaire and distributed to teachers every public secondary school in NSW, Queensland and Tasmania. The data provided by both questionnaires were analysed with descriptive statistics, cross tabulations and the Kruskal-Wallis one way analysis of variance by ranks. Data were also obtained from the analysis of school development planning and staff development policy documents submitted by staff development coordinators.

This study showed that staff development was highly valued by both teachers and school administrators. The majority of schools from all States established extensive and highly structured coordinating mechanisms to ensure maximisation of the staff development enterprise. Schools, even in the initial phases of implementing school based staff development, gave considerable thought to planning and other management practices. For example, schools established effective mechanisms for identifying the content of staff development programs, providing for a variety of delivery strategies to be utilised by teachers, developing criteria by which the budget could be fairly distributed throughout the school and evaluating the effects of specific staff development activities. In this sense, the study provided information about organisational structures and practices which underpinned a large management undertaking by schools, of which very
little was known before the implementation of school based staff development. The findings therefore, represented an important contribution to the staff development literature.

There is nothing in the recent professional educational literature in Australia that suggested school systems will move away from a school based management framework or that staff development will cease to be valued by teachers or schools. Teachers as a part of the education sector have repeatedly been recognised as essential to the quality of schooling and the cornerstone of quality education. In turn, staff development has been seen as the best possible way to enhance the quality of teachers through providing new knowledge and skills.

The results of this study inform practice and provide information to scaffold managerial policies and practices at both the state and school level. The findings assist in macro policy development, leading to state level policies that enable rather than constrain schools. In addition, this study provides information for schools on organisational structures and management practices to be established that lead to better outcomes for teachers and ultimately the students they teach.
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