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Alireza Ghaleei
University of Wollongong

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The Principal's Role in Teacher Professional Learning

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

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

By

Alireza Ghaleei

Bachelor of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration

Faculty of Education

2006

Certification

I, Alireza Ghaleei, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

(Signature)

Alireza Ghaleei

20 August 2006

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ABSTRACT

Little attention has been paid to understanding the principal's role in teachers' professional learning. This study was conducted to investigate ways in which principals implement state-wide policy on teachers' professional learning at the school level in New South Wales (NSW) public schools. The major question in this study was: What is the principal's role in teacher professional learning and its relationship with the *Professional Learning Policy*? Three sub questions framed the study were: Firstly, how do principals implement the state-wide policy on teacher professional learning? Secondly, what kinds of capabilities do principals need for the implementation of the *Professional Learning Policy* at the school level? Thirdly, what constraints do principals face in the implementation of the *Professional Learning Policy*?

The focus of the research was principals, teachers, and all members of the school Professional Learning Teams in three public primary schools, in the Wollongong area of NSW. Case study methodology was applied in investigating the principal's leadership and management approaches, policy requirements, and characteristics of teachers' professional learning. The research utilised a mixed quantitative and qualitative descriptive research design, employing the questionnaire as its primary data-gathering instrument, semi-structured interviews, and document review.

An analysis of these data identified areas where the principals implemented *Professional Learning Policy* in the schools. The findings indicated that both the principals and teachers had welcomed the implementation of the state-wide *Professional Learning Policy* and even in the initial phases of implementing the policy gave considerable thought to planning and other management practices. The findings also indicate that collaboration between the principal and staff was essential for implementation of the policy.

Clearly, the principal as leader of the school Professional Learning Team has the central role in leading and managing teachers' professional learning and the important functions of this role are planning; encouraging teachers to participate;

implementation of programs; and evaluation of programs. This study indicates that there are interactive relationships among these roles and that the principal's attention to one role without concern for the others can result in unsuccessful and ineffective professional learning programs.

The results of this study provide information on leadership and management practices in teachers' professional learning that can lead to better outcomes for teachers and ultimately the students they teach. Additionally, the author makes recommendations on policy implementation; principal's capabilities; constraints; and further research on teachers' professional learning.

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