

**SYSTEMS WHICH PROMOTE
PROFESSIONAL READING
AND ENQUIRY
FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS**

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and Assistant Principals**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of mostly middle managers in some state urban secondary schools in New Zealand and Australia with regard to their responsibility to undertake professional reading and enquiry. The conjecture is that the priority of professional reading and enquiry is never realized and middle managers therefore neglect the curriculum leadership role of subject reading and research to improve teaching and learning. A questionnaire contributed data for this study. The responses explore the hindrances to and distractions from the task of professional reading and enquiry. Middle managers believe the multiplicity of job tasks overwhelm any capacity or personal initiative to undertake reading and research which is an essential task that underpins curriculum development and pedagogy. The professionals who were interviewed explained systems their schools used to promote professional reading and enquiry which showed how it is included as the evidence for school goal development, as a key factor in school leadership for the wider stimulation of all teachers in a school and to enhance individual professional development .

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Introduction

Background

In 2005 I completed a Masters in Educational Management and the main finding from the research project at was that middle managers ranked professional reading and enquiry as their first ideal job priority but ranked it as near the bottom of their actual job priorities.

In appraisal interviews and other conversations middle managers express disquiet with school demands as they struggle to cope with the diversity of tasks expected of them and that the administrative and bureaucratic requirements reduce their capacity to cope with updating themselves and discovering important subject research.

This research increases an awareness of how professional reading and enquiry underpins the development of teaching and learning. It can be thwarted by the plethora of school tasks asked of middle managers and from the setting of too many school goals but there are many simple systems to use professional reading and enquiry beneficially. The literature review component of action research can be used to identify and solve problems. Particular literature can be selected to form the base of a particular school goal development which is filtered throughout the school. One member of staff can be responsible for conducting research and scanning, summarizing and disseminating relevant information. The leadership of a school should model the effective use of reading and enquiry and as this reading culture filters through the school, collegial conversations become mentoring conversations about reading and research. Professional reading and enquiry should underpin all professional development sessions and can be extended through the use of professional reading groups, sabbaticals and the gaining of additional qualifications.

Aims And Research Questions

The aims of the research project are:

1. To examine middle managers' perceptions of their role expectations as to professional reading and enquiry.
2. To examine systems used by some schools to encourage and develop professional reading and enquiry.
3. To provide a review of professional reading and enquiry in some schools to inform schools in New Zealand as to how they might modify management practice.

The key questions of the research project are:

1. What do middle managers believe are the obstacles to professional reading and enquiry?
2. How does an inability to undertake professional reading and enquiry affect the core focus on teaching and learning?
3. What systems facilitate or how might the expectation of professional reading and enquiry be facilitated in schools according to middle managers?

Methodology

This is a qualitative research project. A set of questions (Appendix 1) was employed in interviews to collect data from 25 middle managers, four deputy principals, one tertiary facilitator and two principals at five secondary colleges in New Zealand, one high school and two primary schools in Australia and Auckland University School of Education. Some quantification of the data is presented in Appendix 2. Interviews were recorded onto tape and as written notes. The notes have been placed onto a spreadsheet and are summarized in this report.

Background Information of Those Interviewed

This information is presented as a table in Appendix 2. Almost half of those interviewed have worked for 6 – 10 years as a middle manager. Half of the middle managers are responsible for 10 or more teachers, usually in a department. Hours taught per week were a reflection of the school's structure and the nature of the job so that there is an even spread of teaching hours across the respondents ranging from less than eight to over twenty. The majority of middle managers spent 10 to 30+ hours on management tasks in school and 10 to less than 5 hours on management tasks at home. Their ability to do professional reading and enquiry is evenly spread across the three possible indicators – decreased, about the same, increased. Almost all agreed that the variety and diversity of their jobs had increased over the time they had worked.

Why do Middle Managers Need To Do Professional Reading and Enquiry?

As educational professionals who have trained through the use of reading and research and may teach it, middle managers feel the need to keep up-to-date. A professional attitude is to extend oneself and be at the cutting edge and aware of current trends. Reading and enquiry underpins teaching and learning and forms a base for subject knowledge and development.

The love of learning involves professional reading and enquiry which is so for teachers as well as students. Some middle managers believe that as a central task it should be stated in job descriptions and professional goals. Involvement with professional reading and enquiry builds teacher professional learning communities within and out side of the school.

Hindrances to Professional Reading and Enquiry

Admin Tasks

Middle managers were asked if administration tasks hindered their ability to do professional reading and enquiry. 77% of the respondents agreed and identified that their jobs were firstly filled by day-to-day, multiple urgent tasks with deadlines demanding immediate action and that professional reading and enquiry did not have a deadline and therefore did not receive much attention..

Middle managers' tasks which take precedence are department management, support of staff, paperwork, resource organization, subject development, lesson preparation, NCEA assessment, appraisal outlines, student management, trip organization, meetings, equipment organization and constant interruptions. This can reduce passion for reading and enquiry.

The generalized pre-conception of teaching professionals is that professional reading and enquiry is arduous, irrelevant and uninteresting. The 23% of middle managers who had professional reading and enquiry as a priority stated that they had a personal passion and commitment not to let anything get in the way of keeping up-to-date and their school also fostered professional reading and enquiry.

Teachers can be sarcastic about and critical of reading and research. Teacher training could provide one more year with more emphasis on academic rigour to promote a willingness to carry on professional reading and enquiry.

The Education system has changed with NCEA but no time has been provided for thinking and planning and reading and enquiry

Little Ancillary Support

There was 28% support from middle managers for increased ancillary support but most thought that such support does not reduce preparation and marking, Time is needed to set up and train the ancillary person and middle managers like to be involved in all tasks rather than giving some away.

Class Contact Time

Middle managers were more evenly divided concerning whether to reduce their class contact hours to facilitate some professional reading and enquiry. 40% of interviewees believed that more non-contact time would give them time for reading and should be equal to that of pastoral care managers. Less contact time could afford more time for reflection and visioning which stem from professional reading and enquiry.

One head of department stated that NCEA had brought about a huge change in the education system but that no corresponding time allowance had been given to middle managers to help them cope with that change.

60% of middle managers identified that even if they were given extra time there was no guarantee that it would be used for professional reading and enquiry.

Middle managers have come from success as classroom teachers and do not wish to lose that contact, skill and reward. They feel the responsibility to model good teaching to their department members and to keep teaching and learning a clear priority for them as that is the reason for them being in the profession.

School Development Goals

Middle managers were divided in their opinions as to whether schools had too many development foci and an overly goal-driven culture which might detract from the focus on teaching and learning and its underpinning professional reading and enquiry. Half of the middle managers thought that their schools had too many goals in their development plans and that they were changed too often before initiatives were embedded and consolidated. A common belief from these people is that if the goals of the school are not directly related to teaching and learning then they are not worthwhile. Annual plans should allow teachers the flexibility to focus on a few goals.

One realization is that development plans are large and multi-faceted because the nature of teaching and schools is that they are full of many essential goals. Communities develop school goals and development plans accommodate the values and initiatives of each stakeholder group.

Middle managers are clear that they wish to be consulted regarding any school development or initiatives and that they wish to help develop the schools visions and to be accountable for their part in any developments. My observation here is that middle managers want to be included in all school processes, practices and developments but they still feel that their jobs are overloaded.

Discussion around education when a school is first founded is robust and powerful and this needs to happen each year when school goals are determined. The wider professional discussion around education can stem from and be supported by reading and enquiry.

Holidays - The Only Time for Reading

Half of the middle managers interviewed believed that holidays were an appropriate time for professional reading and enquiry because it is not

possible during the working terms; not for all of the holidays but some time spent looking at textbooks, the internet, university papers, particularly if the reading has been structured by, modeled in and even provided by the school.

The other half of the respondents were clear about the sacracant nature of holiday time for those tasks that could not be done during term time and for family-worklife balance to provide mental recovery from the emotional and physical intensity and long hours of the term time.

Distractions to the Focus on Teaching and Learning

The second question of the interviews with middle managers asked if they believed the core focus on teaching and learning was distracted by a plethora of expectations upon them and therefore the professional reading and enquiry necessary for the focus on teaching and learning was negated. 68% of the interviewees said that this was not so and that the majority of what is involved in their jobs is focused on the core of teaching and learning which is after all the primary focus of a school. One third of respondents agreed that fads, senior management policy and strategy work, pastoral care expectations, administration and staff management did detract from a school's core focus. All agreed that it would be easy to be overwhelmed by all that schools ask of middle managers if they allowed the prime focus to be taken off effective teaching and learning.

Systems To Support Professional Reading and Enquiry

Action Research

Each Head of Department identifies a key curriculum area which needs development and then begins a process of action research with 2-3 periods release per week to dedicate to the research with a reconnoiter of the problem, consideration of the most effective data collection techniques, examination, reading and scanning of relevant literature and a report back to and conversation with the group of middle managers after 4 weeks. The H.o.D. would then prepare a plan of action, implement the plan of action, and think / reflect upon the challenge to current practice evident from evaluation of the results.

Cluster and Integrated Reading & Enquiry

The Executives of the schools (Senior Managers and Curriculum Leaders) as a cluster target a particular goal and then search for usable readings and research to underpin the goal plan. The chosen literature is purchased for all members. The Executive undertake directed reading and discuss the application to teaching and learning in the schools. Curriculum Cluster coordinators discuss that professional reading and enquiry at two one-day meetings which includes discussion around the literature, production of a strategy workbook and planning of on-going support workshops to help knowledge acquisition and application of that knowledge for all teachers. Then directed reading is shared with whole staff of each school as part of a teaching and learning model which will be implemented after cyclic reading and discussion has continued.

Without a specific focus for the whole school, then every leader in the school has a 'barrow' and they push the associated reading.

Consortium Deputy Principal

A cluster of schools uses some of each of their staffing allocation to fund a deputy principal who serves time in each of the schools. The Consortium Deputy Principal researches curriculum initiatives which have a sound pedagogical focus for the benefit of all schools. A curriculum pedagogy assessment toolkit is provided to all schools and can even be sold to other schools.

Goal-focussed Reading

Annual goals for a school provide the impetus for reading and are underpinned by the values of the school. Professional reading and enquiry changes views and opinions by bringing disparate individual thoughts into a more collective understanding of the achievable school goals and direction. Readings start with those related to the generic school-wide goals and from these departments can target readings and enquiry to their specific needs.

Leadership

For professional reading and enquiry to start and flourish there needs to be modeling by senior managers. The first step is for the executive to show their passion for reading by finding important reading through scanning research which is summarized / highlighted to make it easier and more pleasurable. Reading will be referred to as much as once a week at meetings such as staff meetings where time is given for discussion. The offering of articles should whet teachers' appetites. This passion for and directed reading will be filtered down to middle managers and then to all staff, whereupon the culture of the school will change to make professional reading and enquiry part of everyone's practice.

Traditional methods are for principals to put recommended reading into pigeonholes and for HoDs to pass around material to department teachers but this tends to lack effectiveness because suggesting an interest in some reading is not as powerful as modeling and directing interest.

The HoD can also take time out to consider particular reading and research that will be inspirational and then ensure time is provided in department meetings for reading and discussion. Similarly, the Head of Curriculum brings reading to HoD meetings and time is given for discussion.

Mentoring

Mentoring occurs in a natural way as colleagues talk about their current reading and ideas about effective teaching in shared resource rooms and at staffroom tables. This reflective time occurs most often in schools where professional reading and enquiry is part of the culture and conversations steer away from student management and programmes.

Belonging to professional groups promotes mentoring conversations about recent readings and enquiry.

Mentoring can occur through a scheduled programme of meetings between colleagues, perhaps as part of the appraisal system, to discuss current readings and research. This provides a structure to reading and promotes suggestions for good reading as part of the discussion of goals, reality, options and plans. Meetings are for one hour per the prescribed cycle of which half is devoted to professional reading and enquiry and discussion of future directions. If this time is not dedicated to that discussion then the meeting can lose focus and participants begin to feel that the meeting is just another meeting.

Professional Development

Readings provided from senior managers around professional issues are good for middle managers if they have or are given time to think and let the ideas 'brew.' Professional Development should always be conducted with associated reading and a forum for discussion.

Leaders produce material related to initiatives such as Thinking Skills and I.C.T., an essay or a document, and teachers are advised to look at them on the intranet or in a booklet of readings or in a curriculum bank of material and to use them in department time but middle managers need to be aware that the time is not taken over by resource and management issues. This directed reading may prompt further reading.

Professional development speakers encourage reading but the relevance of the reading needs to be obvious so that people do not believe that they are being told what to do. Subject conferences and best practice conferences also provide valuable arenas to discover and be enthused by professional reading and enquiry.

Team Solutions Technology Curriculum Cluster Group focuses on reading as the key to leadership. A 4-day workshop is held each year for middle managers, with a focus on professional reading and enquiry to enhance co-operative teaching. The group serves as a quality learning circle to scan and search for research from the curriculum community / conferences. 1 day per term is used to support middle managers. This structured reflection with an evidential base enables the H.o.D. to take teaching strategies to his/her department.

Professional Reading Groups

Once a week a number of voluntary groups meet to discuss provided reading with also the opportunity to bring other reading because at times the material can be too generic. The time is after school which can interrupt co-curricular commitments and if times are busy then sometimes the group is cancelled. The groups are voluntary because compulsion brings resistance.

The groups are led by the Principal and Deputy Principals who can undertake book reviews of higher level education which can be filtered through to staff through the reading groups.

A reading log is kept and is discussed in appraisal meetings. If 50 hours of both guided and chosen reading is completed then this is noted in any appraisal and may receive a reward.

Study for Additional Qualifications

Such study conflicts with family and a full-time job. Part-time study is best and has relevance if it has been personally chosen. Teachers are encouraged to do extra papers and rather than tackling a whole degree specific subject-related papers can be of huge benefit, challenging, motivating and rewarding. But much post-graduate study is in educational management and for career advancement. This type of study lacks a direct connection to subject development and teaching.

What additional qualification study brings is research of pedagogy and inter-disciplinary transferable skills. The interest in post-graduate study over the last 15 years has brought into schools readings and research into systems which can be applied within schools although trying to share such reading and research with colleagues can be unsuccessful as there is no guarantee that others share any similar interest. Reading for such qualifications can start up an interest in professional reading and enquiry.

Many schools subsidise the fees for post-graduate study and schools and the Post Primary Teachers' Association also help individuals to finish degrees. Although finishing a degree brings a pay level increase, for those who gain additional qualifications there also needs to be the incentive of a pay level benefit.

Research scholarships / fellowships such as this one from NASDAP and from other professional body associations and institutions bring beneficial networking and shared reading and enquiry, and more organizations should consider an annual investment in research and development.

Sabbaticals

Sabbaticals are more widely offered to the teaching profession now and it is my belief that middle managers should be the first priority as curriculum leaders in schools. Middle managers would want a good period of sabbatical time during which they could explore curriculum leadership in a more extended and purposeful way than from single day professional development courses.

School-wide Initiatives

A possible process which uses consensus in a directed way rather than using the one meeting popular vote or direction from 'on high':

1. Middle managers are consulted which includes philosophical discussion of reading and research, particularly if related to curriculum. These can be tabled at Head of Department meetings.
2. Senior Managers drive the initiatives and summarize any investigation from reading, research and discussion.
3. Middle managers also help drive the initiative especially amongst teaching staff to ensure everyone is consulted and to reduce department protectionism. Departments test out scenarios and feedback so that everyone is making a contribution as a leader.

Middle managers cannot be separated from or isolated from all the educational functions of the school. Subject direction is to be balanced with school direction e.g. Junior Learning Programme centred around thinking skills needs to be carefully combined with individual department goals of co-operative learning. There is a danger that good department programmes can be affected deleteriously because middle managers' focus is fractured by a plethora of initiatives.

School Review Prompts Reading

‘Teacher Design Schools’ John Martin and Bill Edwards

One school has undertaken this programme delivered by an outside organization. The scheme is introduced at a conference attended by senior managers. After that the whole staff is involved in a two-day school review with brainstorm and visioning and provided time to think and reflect. From this five themes are produced for the future direction of the school. The next step is the formation of five voluntary staff working groups who investigate those themes by looking at research and readings as part of school action research or individual action research to prepare plans, implement them and evaluate the results.

The only reticence expressed was that initially work for such a review can drag teachers away from the focus on teaching and learning.

Available Research

New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, New Zealand Council of Educational Research

SET, N.Z.C.E.R.

The Research Bulletin, Ministry of Education

Lead Space

Ministry of Education Website Current Research

Schools’ Staff Libraries. The problem can be that research arrives in schools, is labelled ‘Staff Library’ and there it sits without anyone determining its use or application

Conclusion

Professional reading and enquiry should underpin the developments in teaching and learning and be a priority to keep abreast of current research.

Teachers have commented that during the establishment of a new school, the discussion around educational values and philosophies was uplifting. Some research and discussion needs to be on-going in any school so that plans have evidential base. That research is most effective if it focussed on one goal that can be understood and developed without a 'swirl' of other foci.

Senior managers have a curriculum leadership role to model and promote professional reading and enquiry so that it filters through departments to the classroom. When this happens, then conversations in a school change from an expression of unhappiness with students and workload and programmes, to mentoring-style conversations about current reading and its application to teaching and learning. Leaders need to scan incoming research and ensure that rather than being suggested of interest to others, its importance to the school is determined and then discussed widely concerning its application to the school.

Professional reading and enquiry should underpin all professional development. P.d. sessions should contain some aspect of discussion of reading and attendance at courses and conferences should be on the basis of seeking out relevant literature and research which can be disseminated throughout a school for discussion and reflection. Professional reading groups is one way for a school to structure a culture of wider thinking and planning.

If teachers can gain additional qualifications in subject study with a pay level benefit, then this will provide importance to professional reading and enquiry.

Appendix 1

**THE CHALLENGE TO ENCOURAGE
MIDDLE MANAGERS TO AND
ACCOMMODATE THE PRIORITY TO
UNDERTAKE PROFESSIONAL READING
AND ENQUIRY**

Middle Managers' Professional Reading
and Enquiry Questions

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2006

SCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH PROJECT

National Association of Secondary Deputy and Assistant

Principals

New Zealand

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

a. Years as a Middle Manager

1-2 yrs 3-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs 20+yrs

b. Size of Department / Faculty

1-2 teachers 3-5 teachers 6-10 teachers 10+ teachers

c. How many hour periods do you teach in a week?

8-10 hrs 12-13 hrs 14 hours 16-17 hrs 20-21hrs

d. How many hours would you work in your role as middle manager at school?

5 hours 10 hours 15 hours 20 hours 30+hours

e. How many hours would you work in your role as middle manager at home?

5 hours 10 hours 15 hours 20hours 30+hours

f. Over the years, your ability to do professional reading and enquiry:

has decreased is about the same has increased

g. Since you have worked as a middle manager, the diversity and variety of your job:

has decreased is about the same has increased

Questions

1. Is professional reading and enquiry a priority task you cannot put before administration tasks?

2. Is the core focus on teaching and learning distracted by a plethora of expectations?

3. Why is holiday and after-school time appropriate/not appropriate for professional reading and enquiry?

4. Explain how increased ancillary support hours and/or reduced class contact hours would or would not assist professional reading and enquiry.

5. Explain how fewer school development goal foci to make a priority focus on professional reading and enquiry would or would not be beneficial?

6. Would mentoring and/or studying for additional qualifications assist/not assist professional reading and enquiry? Explain.

7. How might a restriction of middle managers to only intellectual input into leadership and school development assist or not assist professional reading and enquiry?

8. What systems or initiatives does your school have which effectively contribute to professional reading and enquiry?

9. What would afford you greater opportunity to do professional reading and enquiry?

10. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 2

Background Data of 28 Managers

- a. Years as Manager?
- b. Size of Department / Faculty?
- c. How many periods do you teach in a week?
- d. How many hours would you work in your role as middle manager at school?
- e. How many hours would you work in your role as middle manager at home?
- f. Over the years, your ability to do professional reading and enquiry
- g. Since you have worked as a middle manager, the diversity and variety of your job

Years as Manager			1-2	3-5	6-10	11-20
			7	4	12	4
			25%	14%	43%	14%
Teachers Responsible for			1-2	3-5	6-10	10+
			1	6	7	14
			4%	21%	25%	50%
Hours Taught Per Week	<8	8 to 10	12 to 13	14	16	20-21
	3	4	5	2	8	6
	11%	14%	18%	7%	29%	21%
Management Hours at Work		5	10	15	20	30+
		3	9	4	3	9
		11%	32%	14%	11%	32%
Management Hours at Home	<5	5	10	15	20	30+
	7	8	9	2	2	
	25%	29%	32%	7%	7%	
Ability to do Professional Reading and Enquiry		Decreased		Same		Increased
		10		9		9
Variety & Diversity of Job Over the Years		Decreased		Same		Increased
				3		25