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Factors that Influence Teacher Appraisal in Primary Schools: Making appraisal meaningful for teachers

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Education

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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I am not an academic, but I wanted my children, Stacey, Lorissa, Frank and Tom to see that even their quirky mother could achieve something wonderful. I hope I have shown them that they too, can achieve whatever they set their minds to.

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Research from a range of countries revealed commonalities in how teachers perceived appraisal. It was common that teachers viewed appraisal negatively, and that appraisal was a process teachers completed because it was mandated to do so.

In order to present a solution to the negativity that is often associated with appraisal, this study investigated teachers’ perceptions of the appraisal process in relation to the purpose of appraisal, the impact of appraisal on student learning outcomes and how appraisal can lead to improved teacher practice. The roles of communities of practice, reflective practice and the impact of leadership on the appraisal process were examined. The key component of effective appraisal was identified as being a quality relationship of teaching colleagues within a school. A school that incorporated improved student learning outcomes through improved teaching practice as a key objective of their appraisal process was examined in depth. This case study illustrated how an effective and purposeful appraisal process resulted in empowered teachers, which led to a positive impact on student outcomes.

The overall findings of this study reveal that there are a set of conditions that need to be embedded into a school’s culture before appraisal can become meaningful. In order for a school to develop an effective appraisal strategy, these conditions must be inherent in the school culture. A four-step process for establishing the conditions is offered, followed by a suggested cycle of appraisal. However, the cycle would be ineffective if the conditions for effective appraisal were not embedded into the culture of the school first.
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