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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MID-CAREER TEACHERS

An Administrative Project submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

The last decade has brought extensive changes to secondary schools and this will continue into the next century. Like the majority of New Zealand teachers, the participants in this study are in mid-life and mid-career, a time when supposedly motivation is at an ebb. This study seeks to identify appropriate and effective professional development which may enable these experienced teachers to change their practice to meet the requirements of new curricula, new qualifications and a new learning environment. This case study of a small integrated secondary school was conducted between July 1994 and August 1995 and found these teachers committed to improving their teaching practice. Professional development based on adult learning theory and meeting developmental needs of teachers was found to be motivating and effective for these teachers. Contrary to the crisis of motivation and self doubt depicted in the literature, teachers in the study were focused, and committed to on-going professional development, particularly in improving their performance of core instructional tasks. While these experienced teachers value autonomy in their work and professional development, including the selection of in-

service training, they also enjoy collaboration with other colleagues over a period of time to implement new instructional practice. It is acknowledged that the nature of a small school environment may have had a very positive effect on motivation.

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STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this
is my own work and that it
is the first time it has been
presented as a Research
Project in partial fulfilment
of the Masters of Educational
Administration degree at Massey .

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1. Introduction

As the New Zealand education system continues to move through extensive change, some of the people who will determine the success of its implementation are the country's secondary teachers who, though well qualified and experienced, need extensive re-training. As they face this upheaval, they are also passing through a difficult life and career stage of development, according to the literature. While teachers may be moving to a more reflective, self-accepting phase, motivation may be at a low and self doubt may have set in.

This case study considers teachers in a state integrated school, many of whom are both mid-life and mid-career teachers. The study examines the kinds of professional development teachers have found motivating and effective as they face major changes. This study may have some wider relevance as the secondary teaching force in New Zealand is composed mainly of teachers in mid to late career, that is, between 40-54 years of age (Education Statistics of New Zealand, 1995, p61).

Renwick (1994,p33) states that in regard to the demographic characteristics of the secondary teaching force, "it is an aging workforce with a large proportion of very experienced and long-serving teachers". This is also characteristic of teaching forces in Canada (Tarrant,1991), the United States (Evans,1989) and Britain (Riseborough & Poppleton 1991). Many of these teachers are on the top of their salary scales with no prospect of incremental increase in pay, minimal chances of promotion and with perhaps 10-20 years till retirement (Everts,1992). Often teachers at mid-career are re-energised by a move or a promotion but with vertical and horizontal opportunities severely diminished (Guskey,1986; Riseborough & Poppleton,1991;Milstein in Lamarre & Umpleby, 1991), there is limited opportunity to motivate teachers in this way.

The teacher is the "ultimate key" (Hargreaves,1992,p.ix) to educational change and school improvement and with the call to improve education in this time of extensive change, the central focus is often on high quality staff development. As funding is often insufficient and access inequitable (Alcorn,1987), it is important to develop activities that best serve the development needs of all staff, especially mid-career teachers. It is also important to note that

individual differences among people increase with age (Cross in Tight,1990; Bents & Howey,1981) and provision for this must be made in the programmes that are developed. Strategies need to be identified which best suit those at mid-career so that these experienced teachers may become revitalised.

The school in this case study is located in a provincial city and has a staff of about twenty five teachers, fulltime and part time. The majority of the staff are women and there are three men who are fulltime teachers. The staff's ages range from the late 30's to 60 and most have been teaching for more than twenty years. The study involved a survey and interview study of nine teachers who were identified as mid-career, having been teaching between 15-25 years and who were in their forties. Their ages and stage of career are typical of most New Zealand secondary teachers at this time (Education Statistics of New Zealand,1995,p61). The study took place over one year.

As this group of staff members is a microcosm of secondary schools nationally, the data acquired in this study may be the basis of improved staff development planning for such experienced teachers. However, further research would be

required to determine the generalisability of the findings.