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**A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
MIDDLE SCHOOLING IN NEW ZEALAND**

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MARGARET ANNE BROWN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the introduction of middle schooling to the New Zealand education system. It is a case study of a school going through the process of introducing the middle schooling concept. It seeks to identify and explain the considerable challenges that this school faced as it sought to implement this change.

This research project began as a study of the factors which hinder and support the implementation of middle schooling structures and practices. It became an analysis of the features of middle schooling that make it such a challenging and problematic innovation.

Middle schooling is a set of philosophical concepts, educational practices and structural arrangements for the education of students between the ages of approximately ten and fourteen years. These concepts and practices are based on the premise that students of this age have academic, social, emotional and physical needs which differ from students on either side of this age group. Middle schooling is generally understood to involve integrated curriculum which is delivered through team teaching. This approach to teaching and learning requires high levels of teacher collaboration, flexible workspaces and timetables and high levels of parental support and involvement.

Ideally, middle schooling provides a separate school environment for children of this age. A number of school communities in New Zealand have gained government approval to restructure as middle schools and are at various stages in implementing this new form of schooling.

The researcher began the study with the intention of developing guidelines to assist school communities to make this transition from the structures and processes of conventional schooling arrangements to those of middle schooling. To this end she initiated a programme of action research in a school that was about to introduce middle schooling arrangements for its middle years students. The innovation began to run into difficulties from an early stage and it became clear that an action research methodology

was unsustainable. Instead, the researcher chose to refocus the research problem to a more analytic study of the factors that were impeding the implementation process.

The research methodology evolved to that of case study. Observational data were collected in the school over two years. From these data, three factors seemed to be affecting the implementation of the middle schooling changes. These were the way in which leadership was being executed, the attitudes and responses of the teachers and the particularly complex and demanding nature of the middle schooling innovation itself. The data were then re-analysed with respect to these three factors. From this analysis, the researcher came to a number of conclusions about the relative importance and impact of these three factors.

In an effort to ascertain whether the experiences of the case school were typical of the difficulties and challenges schools face when implementing middle schooling change, the case findings were cross checked against the experiences of two other schools that were five years or more into the change process. The cross checking found that the experiences of these other schools were very similar to those of the case school. All three found that implementing middle schooling change had been more difficult and demanding than any other innovation they had implemented.

This study identified some aspects of leadership and teacher behaviour that may have slowed the implementation process, but these seem to have been secondary to the sheer complexity and challenges involved with this particular form of innovation. An innovation that requires such a shift in values, behaviour, structures and systems from a school community, and one that requires the sustained commitment of the entire staff over an extended period of time, will always prove to be exceptionally challenging.

The case study identified five requirements that middle school implementers need to consider in order to implement the concept successfully. Failure to consider any of these requirements is likely to threaten the success of the innovation. The five requirements are:

- The need to develop a shared understanding of the concept rationale and principles and how these will be operationalised within the school;

- The need to develop a shared understanding of the complex, multi-faceted and integrated nature of the innovation and how this will impact on and influence the implementation process;
- The need for strong, visionary, shared leadership;
- The need to gain the interest and operational commitment of the entire staff and a high level of interest and commitment from the parent community and to sustain this for the life of the innovation; and
- The need to develop supportive and appropriate infrastructure within the school to support the innovation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Clarification of Terms	1
2. Background to the Study	2
3. Nature of the Study	3
3.1. The Research Problem	3
3.2. The Research Questions.....	3
3.3. Justification for the Study.....	3
4. Overview of Methodology Used.....	4
5. The Context for the Study	5
5.1. Selection of the Case Study School.....	5
5.2. The Case Study School.....	6
6. Research Conditions and Responsibilities	7
7. Thesis Structure	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW – PHASE I.....	11
1. Introduction	11
2. Phase I: Review of the Middle Schooling and Middle Years Literature	12
2.1. The Middle Schooling Movement.....	12
2.2. The US Middle Schooling Movement.....	14
2.3. The Intermediate Schooling Movement in New Zealand.....	17
2.4. Middle Schooling in New Zealand.....	20
2.4.1. The Education Reforms of 1988 and 1989.....	20
2.4.2. The Years Following the Reforms.....	22
2.4.3. The Current Situation.....	23
2.5. Conclusion	24

3. Phase I: Review of the Educational Change and Innovation Literature	24
3.1. Theories of Change.....	25
3.2. Theories of Action/Implementation Theories	29
3.3. Cultural Change Theories: The Human Side of Educational Change.....	37
3.3.1. School Culture and Reculturing Theory.....	37
3.3.2. School Sub-Cultures	41
3.3.2.1. Teachers.....	41
3.3.2.2. Students.....	43
3.3.2.3. Parents and School Community	44
3.4. Conclusion	45
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW – PHASE II.....	46
1. Introduction	46
2. Change Leadership.....	46
2.1. Shared Leadership	50
3. Teacher Subcultures and Teacher Resistance.....	56
4. The Nature of Innovations and the Nature of the Middle Schooling Concept	70
4.1. Re-examination of the Literature on Educational Change and Innovation ..	71
4.2. Re-examination of the Literature on Middle Schooling	72
4.3. Re-examination of the Literature on the Middle Schooling Concept.....	74
4.3.1. Articulation of the Concept	74
4.3.2. Coherence and Completeness of the Concept	78
5. Conclusion.....	79
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	81
1. Introduction	81
2. Research Design.....	82
3. Perspective of the Researcher.....	82
4. Choice of Research Design	85
4.1. Action Research	86
4.1.1. Introduction	86
4.1.2. Key Features of Action Research	86
4.1.3. The Action Research Process	87
4.1.4. Criticism of Action Research Methodology.....	87
4.1.5. Use of Action Research in the Study	88
4.1.6. Shift in Methodology to Grounded Theory	88
4.2. Grounded Theory	90
4.2.1. Introduction	90
4.2.2. The History of Grounded Theory	90

4.2.3.	Key Principles of Grounded Theory	91
4.2.4.	Focusing Questions for Grounded Theory	92
4.2.5.	Action Research and Grounded Theory Data Collection Methods ..	93
4.2.6.	Analysis and Interpretation of Action Research and Grounded Theory Data	96
4.2.7.	Shift in Methodology to Case Study	97
4.3.	Case Study Research	97
4.3.1.	Introduction	97
4.3.2.	Key Features of Case Study Research	98
4.3.3.	The Case Study Research Process	102
4.3.4.	Case Study Data Sources and Collection Methods.....	102
4.3.5.	Case Study Data Analysis and Interpretation	103
5.	Ethical Considerations.....	105
6.	Researcher Considerations	106
7.	Conclusion.....	108
CHAPTER 5: THE CASE FINDINGS.....		109
1.	Introduction	109
2.	Phase I: February 2002 – October 2002.....	109
2.1.	Phase I Data Sources	110
2.2.	February-March 2002	112
2.3.	May 2002 Visit.....	123
2.4.	June 2002 Visit.....	126
2.5.	August/September 2002 Visits.....	129
2.6.	October 2002 Visit	133
3.	Research Review.....	136
4.	Shift in Research Methodology	137
5.	Phase II: November 2002 – December 2003.....	138
5.1.	Phase II Data Gathering Questions.....	138
5.2.	Phase II Data Sources	139
6.	Leadership	141
6.1.	Leadership Model.....	142
6.2.	Critical Leadership Tasks	151
6.2.1.	Critical Leadership Task 1: Vision Building, Sharing and Maintenance.....	152
6.2.2.	Critical Leadership Task 2: Building a Collaborative Change Culture.....	161
6.2.3.	Critical Leadership Task 3: Vision Implementation.....	167
6.3.	Factors which Assisted or Hindered the Leadership Role.....	173

7. Teacher Sub-Cultures and Teacher Resistance.....	180
7.1. Informed Acceptance of the Concept.....	180
7.2. Teacher Resistance.....	187
7.3. Response to the Teacher Resistance.....	191
8. The Nature of the Middle Schooling Concept.....	197
8.1. The Characteristics of the Innovation.....	197
8.2. The Complexity and Challenges of the Innovation.....	202
9. Conclusion.....	204
 CHAPTER 6: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS.....	 205
1. Introduction.....	205
2. Leadership and Teacher Reaction.....	205
2.1. Establishing a Shared Understanding of the Middle Schooling Concept...	206
2.2. Leadership.....	209
2.3. Gaining the Interest and Operational Commitment of all Staff Members and the Interest, Support and Involvement of Parents.....	212
2.4. The Need for Appropriate and Supportive Infrastructures.....	214
2.5. The Need to Foster and Maintain the Operational Commitment of all Staff and Parents for the Life of the Innovation.....	215
3. The Nature of the Innovation.....	217
4. Conclusion.....	219
 CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION.....	 220
1. Introduction.....	220
2. Change Leadership.....	220
2.1. Shared, Empowering, Transformational Leadership.....	221
2.2. Clear Visions, Processes and Structures.....	223
2.3. Knowledge of the Change Process.....	225
2.4. Adequate Resources.....	226
3. Teacher Reaction to Change.....	232
3.1. Cultural and Political Theories of Change.....	233
3.1.1. Evans' Innovation Responsiveness Scale (1996).....	233
3.1.2. Fullan (2004).....	233
3.1.3. Hall and Hord's Concerns Based Adoption Model (2006).....	234
3.1.4. Neville (1992).....	234
3.1.5. Argyris and Schon's Theories-of-Action and Theories-in-Use (1978).....	235

4. The Nature of the Middle Schooling Concept.....	237
4.1. Complexity of the Middle Schooling Concept.....	238
4.1.1. Multiple Elements of the Concept	238
4.1.2. Conditions Required to Support the Concept.....	240
5. Conclusion.....	249
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS.....	251
1. Introduction	251
2. The Research Questions	251
3. Conclusions about the Middle Schooling Implementation Process.....	252
4. Implications for Middle Schooling Implementers.....	255
5. The Contribution this Study makes to the Body of Knowledge on Middle Schooling.....	259
6. Review of the Research Methodology	259
7. Further Research.....	261
REFERENCES.....	263
APPENDICES.....	273
Appendix 1: Memorandum of Understanding.....	273
Appendix 2: Focused Interview.....	276
Appendix 3: Staff Meeting Observations.....	279
Appendix 4: Year 10 Team Meeting	280
Appendix 5: Teacher Questionnaire	281
Appendix 6: Parent Questionnaire.....	282

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

1.1: School Structure and Middle School Team Structure.....	6
2.1: Fullan’s (2001) Typology of the Key Factors in the Implementation	31

Tables

2.1: Literature Review Structure.....	12
5.1: Phase I Data Sources	110
5.2: Summary of Emerging Issues and Research Method Issues	135
5.3: Phase II Data Sources.....	139