



Investigating the relationship between continuing professional development, teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes in the middle years of schooling

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Abstract:

Improving student achievement outcomes is a priority for all who are involved in teaching (Dinham & Rowe, 2007; Hattie, 2012; New Zealand Education Review Office, 2009). Abundant research evidence shows that young adolescent learners have specific educational needs that are best catered for by pedagogies and practices that are responsive to their developmental needs (Middle Years of Schooling Association, 2008; National Middle School Association, 2010; Nolan, Kane, & Lind, 2003; Pendergast & Bahr, 2010), but in New Zealand (NZ) this has failed to result in the provision of specialised initial teacher education (ITE) programs or targeted professional learning and development (PLD) for middle level teachers. While specialised programs of ITE and in-service PLD have been implemented in USA and Australia for two decades or more, NZ-based research has revealed a lack of recognition among NZ teacher educators that effective teaching in the middle years requires specialised pedagogies and practices that are developmentally responsive (Shanks & Dowden, 2013). Middle level teachers in NZ accordingly continue to complete ITE in primary or secondary programs where studies focused on the particular characteristics and needs of the young adolescent learner are largely absent. Furthermore, NZ teachers in middle level classrooms are not supported with appropriate PLD. The aim of this qualitative study was to gain comparative insights from international experts on the middle years of schooling via semi-structured interviews with two key informants based in Brisbane, Australia. The key informants articulated a progressive model of specialised continuous PLD for teachers of young adolescent students. Interpretative analysis of emergent themes was used to create meaning from the interview data. The findings emphasised the importance of targeted and continuous PLD to enhance practitioners' pedagogical knowledge and skills and to improve students' learning outcomes. The model focused on the importance of building middle level teachers' sense of efficacy that is context specific, data-driven and embedded in the day-to-day work of teachers. The key informants were emphatic in stating that middle level teachers require targeted CPD focused on young adolescent development and evidence-based practices. Accordingly, this paper establishes the need for the provision of quality PLD to middle level teachers in the NZ context.

[Back](#)

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