



Exploring teacher transition in New Zealand primary schools: The impact of changing class levels on teacher professional learning

Tracey Carlyon

Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth understanding of teacher transition and the impact of this on teacher professional learning. The focus is on the transition that occurs when a teacher changes from teaching in one class level to another in New Zealand primary schools. Of particular interest is learning more about how teachers' perceptions of transition are developed, the outcomes that are generated for them and other stakeholders, how teachers negotiate transition, and the role of school leadership in teacher transition.

This research uses case study methodology, and although it is primarily qualitative in nature, a mixed methods approach was applied to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected from 536 teachers via an online survey and from four teachers by means of a semi-structured interview. By converging and comparing broad numeric trends that emerged from the quantitative data with the detail from the qualitative data, I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of teacher transition and the impact of this on teacher professional learning.

Findings from this study suggest that there are significant benefits for teachers and other stakeholders when teachers transition. These highlight that transition has a very significant impact on teacher learning, and stimulates the interplay between a teacher's professional learning and professional identity which can result in changes in practice and pedagogy. The influence from these changes is shown to strengthen a teacher's professional identity, bring about more effective teaching and extended professionalism. Those theories which suggest that teacher development occurs in sequential stages and that all teachers progress through these stages in a linear fashion as they become more experienced, are challenged, and the suggestion that teachers require opportunities, such as transition at different times during their careers for professional development and learning, is supported.

There are four major implications for teacher education that have emerged from the findings of this study. First, they suggest that cognisance be taken of the opportunity that transition provides for teacher learning and that transition is conceptualised as a form of professional learning and development. Secondly, they indicate that when tensions are acknowledged and clearly understood, teachers are better placed to see transition as a positive opportunity for professional learning and development. The third set of implications concern teachers being given sufficient opportunities to prepare, both mentally and physically, for transition. Finally, the study shows that the success of teacher transition is fundamentally dependent on the action of school leadership to ensure that school cultures and systems are conducive for teachers to change class levels successfully.



The new information from this study gives support to initial teacher educators, student teachers, teachers, school leaders, schools, boards of trustees and policy makers to ensure all teachers can successfully transition. In an effort to build knowledge about teacher transition, this study advocates that all teachers are given the chance to take full advantage of the unique opportunity for rich professional learning and development that transition between class levels offers.