

University of Tasmania

Teachers' Work in a Time of Major Curriculum Change

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by this University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

Jeffrey R. Garsed

Approval to copy

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perceptions of their work in the context of a major curriculum change initiative in Tasmania, Australia. The thesis was undertaken to present a report that would provide rich data, particularly from the Tasmanian government school context, of teachers' perspectives on their work in this curriculum change context. The major focus of this thesis was on teachers' views of the nature and challenges involved in their work during implementation, at a system-wide level, of a major curriculum change initiative.

Accordingly, the researcher aimed to add substantial detailed material to the extant and emerging literature in this field. The literature underpinning the study was typically broad, yet a comprehensive search revealed few similar Australian studies, and no Tasmanian studies, which provided the depth of description of teachers' work in the current change context which is presented in this thesis.

The data were gathered from 48 teacher and two principal participants from two schools on multiple occasions mainly over the course of one school year. Initial observation in schools was followed by one-on-one interviews, the completion of demographic surveys by each interview participant and two days spent shadowing the two principals by the researcher. Key change leaders were identified and follow-up interviews were conducted up to one year later.

As data were analysed, key categories emerged in the light of relevant areas of the extant literature. The key categories were divided into three themes which addressed the study's two Research Questions:

1. How do teachers and principals in two rural Tasmanian schools perceive their work lives in the context of a major curricular and pedagogical change?
2. What issues arise for teachers and principals in two rural Tasmanian schools in the context of a major curricular and pedagogical change?

The first theme concerned teachers' views of the curriculum change initiative and the second theme was about teachers' self-identities during a time of major curriculum reform. This second theme included: (a) the purposes of teachers' work; (b) teacher professional involvement and commitment; (c) teachers' responses to mandated change; and (d) the emotional aspects of teachers' work and identities. The third theme concerned the influence of the local school culture and leadership in enabling and sustaining educational change.

The final chapter commences with a detailed discussion of these issues and provides a segue into the concluding part of the thesis, a discussion of future directions for policy and research relating to teachers' work and change.