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Reform, standards and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment

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Abstract

Teacher commitment has been found to be a critical predictor of teachers'™ work performance, absenteeism, retention, burnout and turnover, as well as having an important influence on students'™ motivation, achievement, attitudes towards learning and being at school (Firestone (1996). *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(2), 209–235; Graham (1996). *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 67(1), 45–47; Louis (1998). *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(1), 1–27; Tsui & Cheng (1999). *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 5(3), 249–268). It is also a necessary ingredient to the successful implementation, adaptation or resistance reform agendas. Surprisingly, however, the relationship between teachers'™ motivation, efficacy, job satisfaction and commitment, and between commitment and the quality of their work has not been the subject of extensive research. Some literature presents commitment as a feature of

being and behaving as a professional (Helsby, Knight, McCulloch, Saunders, & Warburton (1997). A report to participants on the professional cultures of Teachers Research Project, Lancaster University, January). Others suggest that it fluctuates according to personal, institutional and policy contexts (Louis (1998). *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(1), 1–27) and identify different dimensions of commitment which interact and fluctuate (Tyree (1996). *Journal of Educational Research*, 89(5), 295–304). Others claim that teachers'™ commitment tends to decrease progressively over the course of the teaching career (Fraser, Draper, & Taylor (1998). *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 12(2), 61–71; Huberman (1993). *The lives of teachers*. London: Cassell). In this research, experienced teachers in England and Australia were interviewed about their understandings of commitment. The data suggest that commitment may be better understood as a nested phenomena at the centre of which is a set of core, relatively permanent values based upon personal beliefs, images of self, role and identity which are subject to challenge by change which is socio-politically constructed.



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