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The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Middle leaders in schools provide a critical link between senior leadership and teaching staff. Employing a multi-perspective case study methodology, this study looked at the common themes facing middle leaders at three Victorian secondary schools, Catholic, government, and independent, with regard to their preparation for leadership, their professional and personal development in the role, how their role is perceived by those to whom they report and those they lead, and how they determine if they have been successful in their role.

At each school, the following staff members were invited to participate in the study: senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. The middle leaders involved in this research were actively involved in leading pastoral, academic, and/or co-curricular departments within a Catholic, government, or independent school. Semi-structured interviewing was used for the purpose of collecting their responses.

The participants' responses were analysed, and emergent themes described. A total of 56 themes with 78 sub-themes emerged from the study, covering the dimensions of preparation, development, perception, and success in leadership.

Common themes raised by middle leaders were professional learning, the support provided in their role, career progression, their ability to influence school direction, level of autonomy in the role, departmental management, professional relationships, and their support of students' achievement.

The study indicates that middle leaders' measurement of success in the role was primarily linked to student achievement in academic and social domains.

A leadership development model is offered to support aspiring and current middle leaders.

Statement of Original Authorship

This thesis does not contain material that has been accepted for any other degree in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

This thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, figures, and references.

Signature:

Preface

The author has not presented this thesis at conferences or in publications.

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The Department of Education and Training, Victoria, and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools, for allowing access to their schools.

To my wife and daughters, for their support, patience, and understanding over the life of this work.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Bridget, and our daughters, Ann, Clare, Kathryn, and Tara.

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1 Introduction

The leadership qualities and attributes required by principals to successfully lead schools, to create a vibrant and innovative learning community, have been a topic of great interest over the past two decades (Caldwell, 2009; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Davies, 2009; Dinham, 2005; Duignan, 2006; Gurr, 2008; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2005). During this period, reference to middle leaders and the mechanisms for developing their leadership capabilities has slowly gained interest, particularly the potential for middle leaders to improve school effectiveness and student outcomes (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Bryant, Wong, & Adames, 2020; Dinham, 2007b; Flückiger, Lovett, Dempster, & Brown, 2015; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Odhiambo, 2014).

This study aims to provide insights into the common themes facing middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, with regard to their preparation for the role; their professional and personal development in the role; how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; and how they determine if they have been successful in their role.

1.1 Background

This research was conducted in Melbourne, the capital city of the state of Victoria, Australia. With an area nearly twice the size of England and a population of over six and a half million people, Victoria is Australia's second most populous state and second smallest in area, not including the territories. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020a) records that there are 583 schools in Victoria providing secondary level education (ages twelve to eighteen), incorporating the government, Catholic and independent sectors. Within these schools are 37,524 teachers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020b) looking after the diverse needs of 431,791 students (Department of Education and Training, 2020). What these statistics highlight, regardless of the exact numbers cited, is that matters involving education, particularly when concerned with secondary school education in Victoria, will involve a substantial body of people.

A 2012 Victorian Government (DEECD, 2012, p. 29) comment on the Productivity Commission's draft research report on the Schools Workforce notes that "effective school leadership is key to leading school improvement, and is no longer confined to principal class positions but distributed more widely in schools." Increasingly, school leadership has been a point of interest due to the developing awareness of the roles of school leaders and teachers. How schools effectively deliver quality teaching and the impact of school leadership on this process have been items of considerable significance within education circles and the wider community (Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell, & Weldon, 2011).

Principals, typically, have the responsibility within schools for driving change and classroom teachers have the task of implementing it (Dinham, 2007b). Middle leaders occupy the key connective positions between classroom teachers and principals.

Middle leaders are people in a school who have defined responsibilities for specific areas within the school. These responsibilities are contextual and may involve administrative, pedagogical, and/or pastoral roles within the school, in addition to considerable teaching duties (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves, & Rönnerman, 2015). Middle leaders hold a middle-ranking post in the hierarchy of the school, organisationally placed below principals and senior leaders, such as deputy principals, but above teachers. Examples of middle level school leaders are Year Level Coordinators, Heads of Curriculum, Heads of Faculty, Subject Coordinators and House Coordinators.

For those teachers who are middle leaders, little research has been published regarding their varied roles, their preparation for leadership, or the development of their leadership skills (Foster, 2010; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Turner, 2005; White, 2001). Gurr and Drysdale (2013, p. 1), in their study on middle leaders, note:

> Too often, teachers in these key roles have few expectations or opportunities to exercise leadership. Whilst many have the capacity to be leaders of teaching and learning, others are not sure about their ability to influence teaching and learning.

As mentioned, middle leaders typically retain a teaching role as part of their duties, although the proportion of time devoted to teaching does vary widely. To distinguish middle leaders (e.g. Heads of Faculty, Year Level Coordinators) from senior level leaders, White (2000, p. 26) suggests that "regardless of the focus of the middle manager's position, they are seen as having an administrative role within the school, along with classroom teaching responsibility." The role of middle leader is seen as quite different from that of principal or deputy principal, particularly in a large secondary school, as these senior level positions often do not involve a teaching component. In contrast, the middle leader may be engaged in teaching and developing curriculum in the same way as the members of their learning domain (Keane, 2010) or may be a "leader of pastoral care (responsible for the well-being of particular groups of pupils, sometimes organised into cohorts of children who enter the school in any one year, known as year groups) as well as teach in their subject specialism" (Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, & Turner, 2007, p. 406). Whilst often acting as a head of a learning area, and being responsible for their own teaching, unfortunately "they are often removed from discussions about whole school policy and development" (Keane, 2010, p. 153). The work of these teachers is complex and becomes a juggling act of balancing the different parts. Often, they will describe themselves as being 'time poor', having to manage and prioritise the demands of departmental management, classroom practice and professional learning within a limited time frame.

The role of a middle leader is complex, requiring both leadership and management. As Cotter (2011, p. 9) found, the role has "expectations of practical competence and these were usually prioritised over visionary and improvement focused leadership."

The varied nature of the role undertaken by middle level leaders requires them to spread their attention across multiple areas. Often, as well as undertaking their own teaching duties, they also must deal with staff development, leadership, student discipline issues, and various administrative requirements. Dinham and Scott (1999) found that middle level leaders in schools had lower satisfaction and higher mental stress than principals and classroom teachers. This level of anxiety is of concern when one considers the important role these leaders have in guiding the future of their schools and the relationships they have with their peers, students, and parents. Being able to work for and with others is seen by middle level leaders as the key element of their role (Deece, Dinham, Brennan, Collier, & Mulford, 2003).

In their varied roles, responsible for pastoral or academic concerns, or both, middle leaders are required to collaborate and disseminate information to those in senior level positions and to those for whom they are responsible. This management dimension entails elements of reflection and exposure, as they reveal their thinking and expand the details to clarify their position and course of action. Foster (2010) notes that this openness in thought and action can change the relationship these middle level leaders have with their reporting staff members.

Middle leaders play a vital role in developing and maintaining the quality and type of students' educational experiences, but the manner by which they do this is greatly influenced by their organisational circumstances (Bennett, Newton, Wise, Woods, & Economou, 2003, p. 1). Of those able to significantly exercise leadership in schools, middle leaders are important to improving schools (Dinham, 2005, 2007b; Russell, Marshall, Mackay, & Jane, 2007; Turner, 2005; White, 2002).

Within Australia, short courses and discrete study modules are offered by government, Catholic, and independent sectors to assist the leadership development of middle leaders in their schools. In Victoria, the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership conducts the Talent Management Framework for aspiring middle leaders in government schools, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (formerly Catholic

Education Melbourne) runs a Middle Leadership Programme and a distinct Women's Middle Leadership Programme, while the Centre for Strategic Education, jointly owned by the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (Victoria) and the Independent Education Union (Victoria & Tasmania), is in the process of developing micro-credentialled middle leader modules for the independent sector. In New South Wales, a Middle Leaders programme is run by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW. In Queensland, the Leadership for Middle Leaders programme is conducted by the Queensland Education Leadership Institute, in partnership with Deakin University, to serve all education sectors, while government schools also have access to the Middle Leadership Development programme run by the Queensland Association of State School Principals. In South Australia, the Catholic Schools Middle Leadership Program (MLP) is offered by Catholic Education South Australia. Overseas, the Department of Education in England offers a National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML), following on from the support previously offered by the National College of School Leadership.

With the potential of middle leaders to significantly impact on students' learning, the case for a more intensive examination of the role these leaders play in schools, how they prepare for and support themselves in their role, can legitimately be made.

1.2 Significance of the study

This research into the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools seeks to add to a series of research that is specifically focussed on middle leaders in Victorian schools (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010; White, 2000). Analysis of the perceptions of teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders describes the middle leadership role, establishing varying degrees of support with prior research findings.

Through the employment of purposeful sampling within a multiple case study perspective, this research incorporated the main education sectors within the

Australian context: Catholic, government, and independent. This is an expansion from previous research that focussed only on Catholic (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010) or government schools (Dinham, 2007b; White, 2000). The intention of this study was to analyse the common themes that emerged from the research rather than highlight any perceived differences between the three education sectors.

Expanding upon the type of middle leader researched, this study was not limited to curriculum (Cotter, 2011) or subject leaders (Dinham, 2007b; Keane, 2010; White, 2000), but also included pastoral care and co-curricular leaders. In addition, it responds to the call for further research on the roles and work undertaken by middle leaders (Gurr, 2019, accepted; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford, & Lamanna, 2021), their attitudes (De Nobile, 2018), their leadership development (Fleming, 2019; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014), and their impact on student outcomes (De Nobile, 2018; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013)

1.3 Research Questions

In seeking to research the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, case studies were conducted at three Victorian secondary schools (government, Catholic and independent) using multiple perspective interviews of middle leadership. The following questions were addressed by the study:

1. What are the leadership and other roles of a middle leader as perceived by the holders of the positions themselves and those to whom they are responsible to and responsible for?
2. How are middle leaders supported in their role, including what leadership preparation middle leaders undertake prior to attaining their role?
3. How do middle leaders support their own work?
4. How do middle leaders determine if they have been successful in their role?

1.4 Methodology

A multiple case study methodology was used to research the preparation and development of middle leaders in schools. Participants in the study were invited from three Victorian secondary schools: one government, one Catholic, and one independent school. The selection of the school from each affiliation group entailed criterion sampling.

At each school, the following staff members were invited to participate in the study:

- Senior leaders, such as the Principal and Deputy/ Associate Principals
- Middle leaders, such as, Year Level Coordinators (Years 7 – 12); Curriculum leaders, such as, Heads of Faculty / Subject Coordinators; House Coordinators
- Teachers who report to middle leaders

The data collected from the three schools was a combination of interviews and documents. Both printed and electronic documents were used to establish and compare the theoretical or actual operating parameters of the middle leaders within their individual school context. The documents obtained from each school were role descriptions of middle leader positions, annual reports provided to the school community, curriculum documentation, and organisational charts pertaining to leadership structure.

Semi-structured interviewing was used for the purpose of collecting participants' responses. The participants' responses were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analysed. From these codes, emergent themes evolved, which were grouped according to their shared meaning and the contextual relationship they held with the key research questions. Computer software, NVivo 12 Plus for Windows, was employed to assist with this process.

Analysis of the emergent themes enabled the frequency of each theme to be determined, based on the number of participants whose responses raised the theme. This revealed the dominant themes for each school site, not only in totality, but for each of the specific classification groups: senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. Importantly for this study, the relative frequency and commonality of the emergent themes across the three school sites could then be determined for each specific classification group.

1.5 Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature pertaining to middle leadership in schools. It provides an overview of three theoretical middle leadership models, leading to a review of the contemporary literature with regards to middle leaders' preparation for leadership, their leadership development, perceptions of their roles, and the determination of their success in the role. The review also serves as a means of comparison with the research findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology employed in the study and outlines the participants and schools utilised as part of the case study methodology. Semi-structured interviewing was employed for the purpose of collecting responses.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research, grouped within four areas: preparation for leadership, development of leadership, perception of leadership, and success in leadership. Within these areas the emergent themes and sub-themes, drawn from analysis of the participants' interview transcripts and school documents, are presented.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings in light of the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. A middle leadership development model is offered. Finally, future research directions and conclusion are presented.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the research and literature pertaining to this study on the common themes facing middle leaders in Victorian schools, with regard to how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; their preparation for the role; their development in the role; and how they determine their success in the role.

The chapter commences with a review of the terms 'middle leader' and 'teacher leader'. The next section explores middle leadership models, leading to a review of middle leaders' preparation for leadership, their leadership development, the perceptions of their roles, and the determination of their success in the role. The literature review establishes a base for the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

2.2 Middle Leaders - definition

Defining what is meant by the term middle leader is open to broad interpretation. Within the corporate arena, middle leaders are commonly referred to as middle managers, a leadership position that is situated between the senior leadership (C-level positions) and a junior manager, or first-line manager (Davidson, Simon, Woods, & Griffin, 2009), who oversees employees with limited or no responsibilities (Robbins & Barnwell, 2006; Samson & Daft, 2012).

Defining middle leadership within an educational context is complex. Developed from the notion of middle management, the term 'middle leader' recognises that the middle management roles associated with educational institutions have progressed beyond a managerial focus (Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Rőnnerman, Grootenboer, & Edwards-Groves, 2017) to that of leading, with many roles incorporating aspects of strategic development, increased autonomy due to the

decentralisation of authority from systemic institutions, and a greater accountability to external bodies (Grootenboer et al., 2015; Marks & McCulla, 2016).

Middle leaders are commonly defined as teachers who hold a formal leadership position in a school, while at the same time undertaking a teaching load of significant proportion (Crowther, 1997; Grootenboer et al., 2015). They operate in the realm between teachers, who do not hold any formal leadership role, and principals and deputy principals, who are commonly grouped together and referred to as senior leaders (Busher et al., 2007; De Nobile, 2017, 2018; Dinham, 2016; Fleming, 2013, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Shaked & Schechter, 2018; Wise & Bennett, 2003). This is the view adopted in this research. Some research (Cranston, 2006, 2009) considers the role of Deputy Principal as a middle leader position, however, this is not the dominant perception in the literature (De Nobile, 2017). Other research (Heng & Marsh, 2009; Li, Poon, Lai, & Tam, 2021) suggests middle leaders do not have to have a significant teaching role, if any.

The roles middle leaders fulfil in schools are contextual, typically administrative, pedagogical (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009), and/or pastoral, incorporating responsibility for the management of staff or aspects of strategic importance for the school (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014). These roles are considered as both complex and varied (Bassett, 2016) with middle leaders required to be good managers (Dinham, 2016; Fleming, 2019), able to liaise with a wide range of stakeholders and establish collegial rapport (De Nobile & Ridden, 2014), develop and maintain professional relationships (Bennett, Woods, Wise, & Newton, 2007), manage the departments within their area of responsibility (Ministry of Education, 2012), and take on tasks that can have profound impacts on the students and staff in their care (De Nobile, 2017).

Some examples of leadership positions commonly associated with middle leader roles in schools are Year Level Coordinator, Head of Curriculum, Head of Faculty, Subject Coordinator, and House Coordinator (Crane & De Nobile, 2014; De Nobile & Ridden,

2014). The varied contextual nature of these positions may impact the way middle leaders lead, highlighting a need for the middle leader to place greater emphasis on administrative, pastoral, and/or pedagogical tasks. Year Level Coordinators and House Coordinators would typically place a significant focus on student pastoral issues, while Heads of Curriculum, Heads of Faculty, and Subject Coordinators would generally be focussed on administrative and pedagogical issues involving academic staff.

2.3 Teacher leaders

Teacher leaders and middle leaders are not easy to distinguish from one another in the research literature, though over time some key differences have emerged. Teacher leaders differ from middle leaders in that their "leadership is practiced through a variety of formal and informal positions, roles, and channels of communication in the daily work of schools" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263). While there appears to be some overlap of concepts, teacher leaders and middle leaders are not the same thing (Grootenboer et al., 2015) as "teacher leaders are not always engaged in middle leadership activities" (De Nobile, 2018, p. 3); the key difference is teacher leaders may not have a formal position of responsibility within the school (Lipscombe et al., 2021). In terms of the literature, a lack of clarity in the definition of teacher leaders means the distinction between teachers and middle leaders is not always evident and, as suggested by De Nobile (2018), the terms are becoming interchangeable. However, this leads to a blurring of the research findings and makes it difficult to make recommendations directed at the different roles of teacher and middle leaders (Gurr, accepted).

Moreover, the definition of teacher leaders has evolved over the past thirty years (Angelle & DeHart, 2016) with limited consensus in the literature (Alexandrou & Swaffield, 2012; Neumerski, 2012). The central shared belief is that teachers, due to their primary role in the classroom, should rightly influence key operational and pedagogical operations of a school (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; York-Barr & Duke,

2004) and “that leadership in a school does not need to be invested in a single person but can be distributed among all staff” (Angelle & DeHart, 2016).

Definitional confusion limits the veracity of the findings of the teacher leadership literature. In the early 1980s, particularly in the USA, teacher leaders were considered to be teachers who held formal positions of leadership, such as Head of Department (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Within a decade, the definition had evolved to also consider those teachers who were able to provide instructional knowledge, such as curriculum coordinators (Hart, 1995; Silva et al., 2000) and since the late 1980s and early 1990s, it has included those teachers who provide collaboration, collegiality, and exemplify continuous learning practices (Angelle & DeHart, 2016; Fullan, 1994; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 1988; Silva et al., 2000), who “go above and beyond their typical duties” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 140), and/or influence school culture towards improved educational practice (Angelle, 2017; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Killion, Harrison, Colton, Bryan, Delehant, & Cooke, 2016; Lieberman & Mace, 2009; Tsai, 2015) through the high quality of their classroom teaching (Muijs, Chapman, & Armstrong, 2013; Youitt, 2007). The early definitions are similar to current views about middle leaders, whilst the later research blurs the view of teacher leaders (no formal leadership responsibility) and middle leaders (teachers with a formal leadership role).

In its purest sense, as a formal position of responsibility is not required for teacher leaders, York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggest that it would be more likely to emerge when other leadership concepts, such as distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), participative leadership (Leithwood & Duke, 1999), parallel leadership (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009), or leadership as an organisational quality (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995), were employed within the context of the school.

2.4 Leadership models

There are many views and leadership models that show how leaders can perform their roles in schools, considering the varied nature, tasks and duties assigned to the role, the relational nature of the role, and the outcomes hoped to be achieved (Davies, 2009; Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Three of these models are of particular interest to this study due to their reference to middle leaders: White's Curriculum Area Middle Managers (CAMM) Leadership Model (White, 2000, 2001, 2002), Drysdale and Gurr's Successful School Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr & Drysdale, 2007, 2013), and De Nobile's (2017) Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model. These three models are explored here and show different perspectives over a 20-year period in the way the work of middle leaders is conceptualised.

2.4.1 Curriculum Area Middle Managers (CAMM) Leadership Model

The Curriculum Area Middle Managers (CAMM) Leadership Model stems from a study on middle leadership (White, 2000, 2001, 2002) that looked at the role of eleven English and Mathematics Coordinators across six Victorian government secondary schools. These coordinators, or CAMMs, were found to have leadership roles that focussed on learning area improvement and direction setting, improving collaboration and communication within the learning area, and enhancing the commitment of teaching staff to their classroom practice and their engagement of students. Such roles saw the CAMMs act "as a role model and in a service capacity for their staff" (White, 2000), calling upon a variety of leadership qualities and skills "as deemed necessary under changing circumstances in different settings" (White, 2000, p. 220).

The CAMM Leadership Model (White, 2000, pp. 220-223) is shown in Figure 2.1 and defines four different roles undertaken by curriculum middle leaders in schools:

1. CAMM as instructional leader. In this role the CAMM is directly involved in improving the teaching and learning process in the learning area, categorised into three main groups: classroom teaching and learning, professional

development, and accountability. Classroom teaching and learning has a focus on what is conducive to excellent teaching, the modelling of best teaching practice, the monitoring of what is being taught in the classroom, ensuring that the learning area is adequately resourced, and the appointment and loading of staff. Professional development sees the CAMM identifying the learning needs of individuals and the faculty, encouraging staff to attend activities, and ensuring themselves and their staff are kept up to date of the availability of professional learning in their learning area. Accountability requires the CAMM to take responsibility for the overall performance and functioning of their learning area. It also involves a role in the formal appraisal of staff, monitoring of staff performance, and the understanding that teachers will also have expectations for the CAMM performance.

2. CAMM as curriculum strategist. The CAMM is seen as a curriculum leader setting the direction for the learning area and the school. This requires a CAMM to have a vision for the learning area that provides direction. The vision needs to be mindful of the overall direction the school has set and is communicated in such a way that it offers clarity and support for the change management process undertaken by staff in the learning area. CAMMs are expected to work from a whole-school perspective and not be swayed by personal agenda or bias. At the same time, they are expected to promote their learning area, motivating teachers and students, without adverse implications for other learning areas.
3. CAMM as learning area architect. This aspect of the CAMM role involves developing the staff in the learning area and bringing about positive cultural change. This requires collaborating with learning area staff in the development of a culture of improvement at both the school and learning area level. CAMMs are expected to be team-builders who possess the interpersonal skills to realise the desired learning area culture. Creating and maintaining sound lines of communication, both informal and formal, with learning area staff enables the CAMM to develop a sound awareness of the needs and desires of their staff. Ensuring learning area successes are

acknowledged and celebrated, advice and support is provided to staff, and advocating for their learning area as primary delegate are also key functions. The CAMM may also be expected to take responsibility for matters involving student management.

4. CAMM as administrative leader. As administrative leader of their learning area the CAMM takes responsibility for the managerial aspects traditionally associated with the role. These include budgeting, expense authorisation and monitoring, resource ordering, and maintenance. In some schools, administrative assistance may be offered to the CAMM to reduce the time burden associated with the tasks.

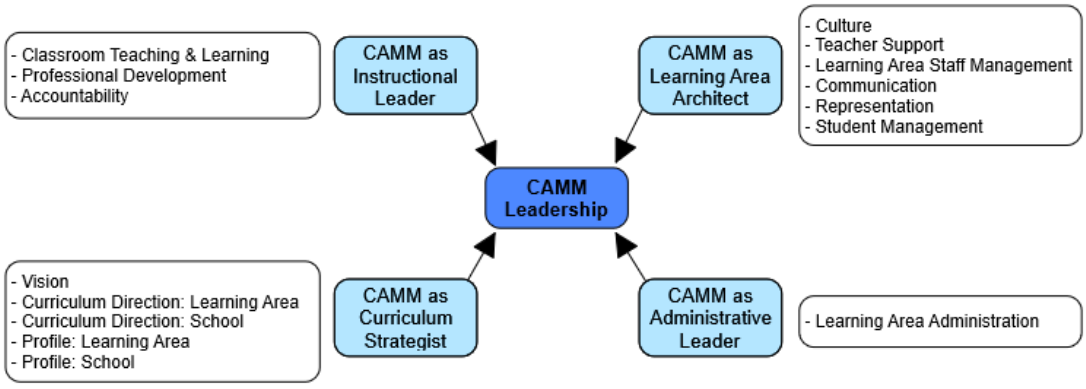

Figure 2.1: Curriculum Area Middle Manager (CAMM) Leadership Model (White, 2000, p. 221)

The four leadership roles defined by White (2000, 2001, 2002) are examples of portfolio leadership (Gurr, 2001), where a number of differing approaches to leadership and skills are available to the CAMM, called upon depending on the context and situation in which the CAMM finds themselves. The model does not assume all CAMMS will possess these skills, nor will they be exposed to all these aspects in their particular role and called upon to act; rather, the model suggests ways "CAMMs may influence educational outcomes in their particular school situation" (White, 2000, p. 228)

2.4.2 Successful School Leadership Model

The Successful School Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr & Drysdale, 2007, 2013) was developed to "capture the characteristics of a leader within a school context and the interventions that they can make to influence student outcomes" (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, p. 357). Based on nine Victorian case studies, part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) that looked at more than 90 case studies from 14 countries, the model primarily focusses on the work of principals, however, it has been suggested that the model is equally adept at providing a framework that can enhance and improve the work of middle leaders in schools (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013).

In the Successful School Leadership Model, Figure 2.2, leaders act within the context of their particular school to implement interventions that will improve student outcomes (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, pp. 357-359). These interventions are ranked in order of their impact on student outcomes, from greatest to least. Teaching and Learning interventions (Level 1) are considered to have the most impact, followed by school capacity building (Level 2), then other influences (Level 3). A leader is able to intervene at any level in the model, including student outcomes.

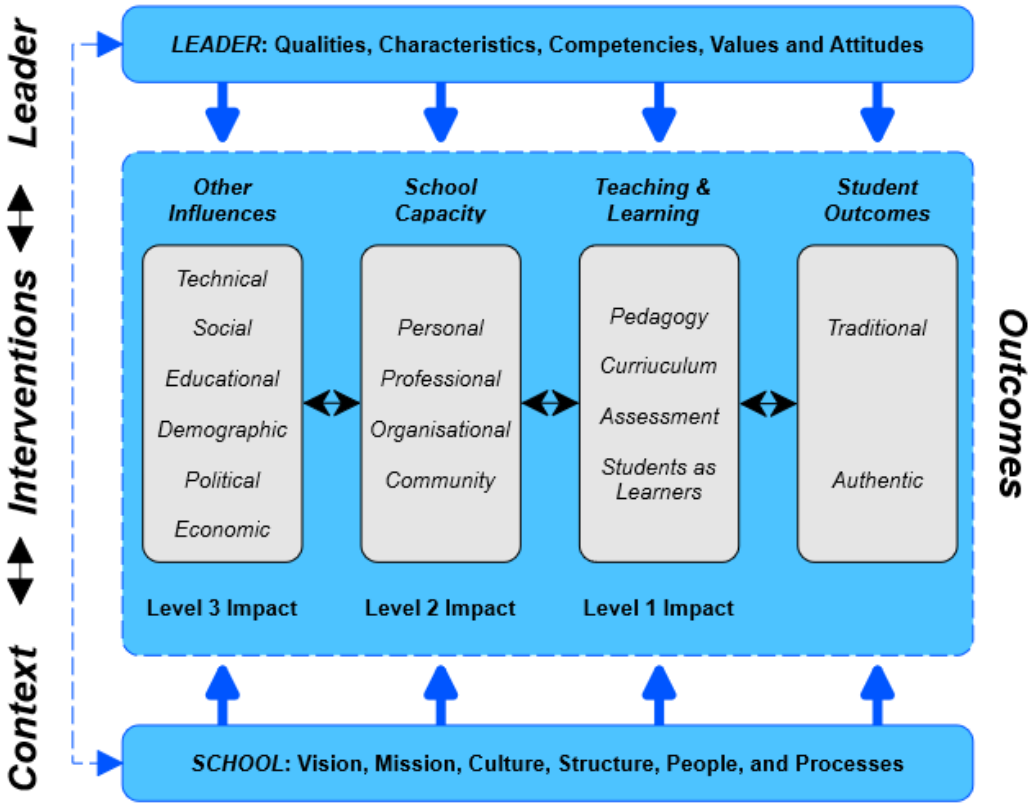

Figure 2.2: Successful School Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011, p. 357)

Gurr and Drysdale (2013) state that middle leaders see the majority of their work take place at Level 1, within the Teaching and Learning area. Typically, the role of middle leader involves some form of curriculum design, overseeing teaching quality and classroom practice, monitoring, and setting assessment, and/or responsibility for student well-being, all having a direct impact on student outcomes. Supported by White (2000) and Keane (2010), effective middle leaders are those who are able to work with teachers at Level 1 to achieve positive student outcomes.

Using the model to provide a framework for middle leader development, Gurr and Drysdale (2013) suggest middle leaders should be required to undertake high quality professional learning in each of the Level 1 areas pertinent to their role. This is to ensure they have attained the required skills and knowledge to be considered highly

competent and influential in their area of expertise. A high level of professional competence and knowledge is crucial for a middle leader if they are to be considered a highly credible and effective leader as "credibility is the foundation of leadership" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 37).

Middle leaders should seek, and be encouraged by senior leadership, to influence and work at Level 2. Being exposed to the elements that build school capacity, for example, by providing or planning professional learning opportunities at departmental level, offers the middle leader greater exposure to school-wide initiatives that can broaden their experience in matters affecting staffing, professional and organisational capacity, and community relations. Likewise, Level 3 opportunities should be provided, allowing middle leaders to contribute at a network, district, or system level.

Rather than these opportunities being offered ad hoc, it is suggested that schools should create structured leadership development programmes. Importantly, there is also the need for middle leaders to set high expectation for themselves and accept responsibility for their own development and professional learning. Such endeavours could possibility be linked to a school's performance review process (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013).

2.4.3 Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model

De Nobile's (2017, pp. 5-15) Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) model was developed from a review of over 250 refereed journal articles, research reports, books, and conference papers dating from 2003, but with some referral to literature published as far back as 1990. The theoretical model aims to explain middle leadership in schools in terms of input, roles, and outputs, and is based on the understanding that middle leadership can also occur outside of formal positions of responsibility (De Nobile, 2014, p. 5). For De Nobile (2018, p. 3), "middle leadership is not just about the positions of authority or hierarchy, but the influence people have in the space between senior leadership at one end and teachers and other staff at the

other." The model was offered as a guide to further research into the operation, influence, and effectiveness of middle leaders.

The inputs of the MLiS model are drawn from organisational and personal factors that may influence the work middle leaders undertake. Five main inputs are presented (De Nobile, 2018, pp. 14-15):

- Principal support. Effective middle leadership requires support from the principal. This support may take the form of empowerment and/or autonomy underpinned by trust. In addition, principal support encourages aspirant leaders to further leadership development.
- Professional development. Professional development may be in the form of training or formal courses, as well as shadowing and mentoring. It is also considered a useful component of succession planning.
- School culture. The school culture should be one that encourages collegiality, collaboration, and promotes participation in decision-making processes.
- Enthusiasm / Drive. Middle leaders should possess a passion for education, for working with students, and a commitment to transforming learning that leads to the best possible outcome for students.
- Knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (C, P & A). Middle leaders should have a comprehensive knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

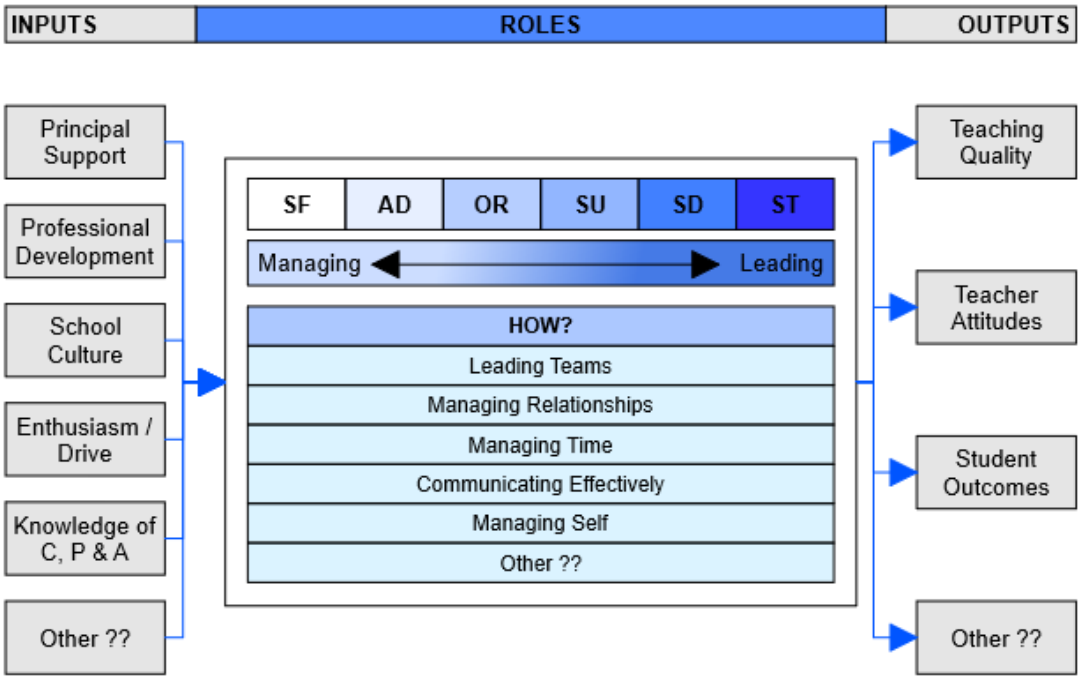

Figure 2.3: Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model (De Nobile, 2017, p. 6)

The roles undertaken by middle leaders are quite varied. The MLiS model (Figure 2.3) proposes that the roles that incorporate student focussed, administrative, and organisational elements are more to do with managerial work than with leadership. This is because these roles are considered to be more concerned with process and order rather than on influencing or developing and sharing a vision. Six role categories are suggested, none of which are considered to be mutually exclusive (De Nobile, 2018, pp. 10-14):

- Student focussed role (SF). The student focussed role works with students in issues involving behavioural concerns, well-being needs, academic progress, pastoral concerns, and liaising with parents/guardians.
- Administrative role (AD). The administrative role requires middle leaders to ensure designated tasks are carried out efficiently and effectively, both in terms of time and resources, and usually requires the development of specific systems and/or procedures.

- Organisational role (OR). Closely aligned with the administrative role, the organisational role focuses on people and the development of duty rosters and timetables. It often requires collaborative planning of events, programmes, and activities.
- Supervisory role (SU). Involving the performance evaluation of staff, the supervisory role requires middle leaders to provide feedback on classroom observations, monitor teaching programmes, and supervise a group of teachers, typically at departmental level. Primarily, the role is focussed on assessing the competency of individuals and the quality of their work.
- Staff development role (SD). This role requires the middle leader to build the capacity of staff members. This may involve encouragement, moral support, direct assistance, mentoring, or coaching. Middle leaders are required to lead by example, be highly competent, and model best practice.
- Strategic role (ST). The strategic role requires middle leaders to create a vision, set goals, and be influential in their area of responsibility. The strategic role may be easier to perform if the middle leader is competent in the other roles listed, such as, staff development, supervisory, organisational, and administrative. This is because they are able to create an environment that enables influence and change.

How middle leaders perform their roles is often influenced and dependent upon contexts. The MLiS model suggests five main ways that middle leaders would perform their roles, which would be expressed across all roles (De Nobile, 2018, p. 14):

- Leading teams. Almost without exception, middle leaders are required to lead teams. Cohesion and the establishment of shared goals are key factors for successful team outcomes.
- Managing relationships. Acting as a liaison between senior leadership and teachers, implementing policies, and implementing change initiatives all require the establishment of positive working relationships.
- Managing time. Establishing a balance between their dual roles of leadership and teaching requires middle leaders to efficiently manage their time.

Managing the competing demands on their time can be a cause of frustration and stress for many middle leaders.

- Communicating effectively. Closely linked to leading teams and managing relationships, effective communication relies upon the establishment of trust, collegiality, and cohesion. Middle leaders need to provide adequate information in a timely and accessible manner, ensuring their staff are kept up-to-date and provided with information that will reduce ambiguity and allow them to perform their tasks.
- Managing self. Managing self involves how middle leaders deal with the pressures, demands, and emotional aspects faced through their roles.

The final component of the MLiS model, the outputs, is concerned with the consequence of middle leaders' activities. The model proposes that, at a minimum, middle leaders may impact school effectiveness in three ways (De Nobile, 2018, pp. 16-17):

- Teaching quality. Middle leaders may influence teacher practice through modelling best practice, focussing staff on student achievement, and supporting innovative learning initiatives.
- Teacher attitude. Taking measures to influence teacher well-being and job satisfaction through positive staff initiatives may diminish staff stress, improve job commitment, increase productivity, and decrease staff turnover.
- Student outcomes. Linked to the previous two outputs, student outcomes may improve should teaching quality and teacher attitude show improvement.

In developing the MLiS model, De Nobile (2017, p. 16) notes it is "not meant to be the definitive representation of how middle leadership operates in all schools." The model is offered as a guide for further middle leader research.

The three models (De Nobile, 2017; Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; White, 2000) presented offer a theoretical representation of the interrelationships and contexts that exist for middle leaders in the performance of their role. The models highlight the importance

of middle leaders' leadership qualities and personal characteristics, their need for ongoing professional development and support, the importance school culture and organisational dynamics play in their effectiveness, and the impact they can have on student outcomes. The following sections will explore these elements in greater depth, considering how middle leaders prepare for leadership, their development in the role, how their role is perceived, and how success in the role is measured, especially for the students for whom they are responsible.

2.5 Preparation for leadership

Dinham, Brennan, Collier, Deece, and Mulford (2000) found that the majority of middle leaders receive little or no preparation for their role, nor did the school, or system, provide any kind of training. Similarly, Carter (2016) suggests that middle leaders in Australia are often appointed due to their recognised administrative skills, garnered from past performance, with few having had formal leadership training. This was also reflected in the tertiary sector in England and Wales, where Inman (2009, p. 417) found that "formal professional development for leadership was relatively uncommon. The majority of what middle leaders do is learnt, self-taught and acquired throughout their life history."

Middle leaders tend to develop their leadership styles and capabilities through on-the-job training and observation rather than through formal training or courses (Deece et al., 2003; Dinham, 2007b), with some of the belief that nothing could have prepared them for the role (White, 2000). This notion is supported by Keane (2010, p. 140), whose research on ten learning area leaders (LALs) across three Victorian Catholic secondary schools found that "most of the LALs received what amounted to on-the-job training, with no formal preparation being offered by the College."

Within member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, there is recognition that teaching qualifications do not provide sufficient skills for leadership roles and that further leadership focussed professional

development is needed (OECD, 2008). Whilst Dinham et al. (2011) predict an increasing prevalence of Australian post-graduate programmes and short courses structured around professional standards and frameworks, Flückiger et al. (2015) found that the level of commitment shown by Australian education systems to providing aspirant middle leaders with relevant professional development is limited. In New Zealand, however, recommendations have been made to the Education Council to ensure teachers aspiring to middle leadership are provided with "formalised professional learning, coaching, mentoring and support" (Highfield, 2018, p. 5) that meets their individual leadership learning needs. Dinham et al. (2011) and Russell et al. (2007) suggest it is critical to create professional learning environments that promote leadership aspiration and development in teachers. Such a call is espoused by Gurr (2019) and Gurr and Drysdale (2013) who suggest aspiring middle leaders, and those in the role, need to actively seek out opportunities to build their effectiveness and capabilities. Importantly, this should be combined with senior leadership support for their development.

Over the past two decades, issues associated with a lack of sufficient and suitable candidates for principalship have been evident in Australia (Cranston, 2006) and overseas (Caldwell, 2009; Cooley & Shen, 1999; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). It is evident that many middle leaders are not interested in principalship. For example, in Queensland, Flückiger et al. (2015) report that two-thirds of middle leaders, respondents in a review of the Queensland Education Leadership Institute's (QELi) Middle Leadership Program, were not interested in advancing their career. Davies and Davies (2009, p. 1) suggest:

> a focus on talent management will contribute to other strategic objectives, such as building a high-performance learning environment and adding value to the school's reputation. This is different from simple succession planning and filling typical hierarchical leadership roles that exist today, but it is a process of providing able and talented people who will create new and different leadership roles in the future. This is particularly important for the schools and their communities that are facing the challenge of developing innovative and imaginative leaders to meet the needs of school transformation.

Issues of succession planning are particularly pertinent for the Australian context as the age profile of the profession is biased towards older groups. For example, in 2011, 27% of Australian secondary school leaders, across government, Catholic and independent sectors, were aged between 51 and 55 years and 23% to 26% were aged 55 years or more (McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon, & Murphy, 2011). By 2018, 30% of secondary teachers in Australia were aged 50 and above and 19% of secondary principals were aged 60 and above (Thomson & Hillman, 2019). The nurturing and encouragement of aspirant leaders, especially by the principal (Crowther & Boyne, 2016; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2015), may deliver the impetus and support required to fill future leadership positions, crucial for organisational (Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003) and student success (DEECD, 2012).

2.6 Development of leadership

For middle leaders to develop into key leaders within their school community, they require opportunities in their formative years that provide school-based professional learning structured around their role and individual needs. They also require support from senior leadership, allocated time and funding, and a desire to support the strategic goals of the school.

Carter (2016) suggests middle leaders need to be provided with the opportunity to grow as leaders, allowing them to then develop the teachers they lead. In turn, the future success of the school is subject to the provision of time given to middle leaders to develop in their formative years. Regrettably, research (Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) indicates that there has been an enduring lack of support for developing middle leaders, with limited and poorly focussed professional development (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

Middle leaders are often appointed to their position of responsibility under the assumption that they have the necessary leadership skills to effectively carry out their duties (Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000). Southworth (2009, p. 13) states that “for

too long, leadership development has been left to chance." While most leadership learning takes place in schools, Southworth (2009) suggests this has not always been of a high quality or a positive experience for those involved. Combating this dissatisfaction requires school-based leadership programmes to deliver personalised programmes, thereby catering for individual needs, supportive of the strategic goals of the organisation:

> A key challenge for developers of school leadership programmes is to identify those factors that are essential in the preparation of school leaders, including the capacity to take on a broad range of responsibilities and facilitate shared leadership, and the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. (Anderson et al., 2008, p. 13)

From their research of leadership development, Walker and Dimmock (2006, p. 125) identified the following aspects as effective means of supporting leadership development:

> Learning linked to real school contexts, substantial involvement of trained and experienced principals as mentors, flexibility to meet diverse needs, multiple opportunities for reflection, and cohort bonding and networking.

Frost, Dutton, Worline, and Wilson (2000) and Grootenboer et al. (2015) found that middle leaders described an interconnectedness between the teaching and professional learning dimensions of their practice, their leading bonded to both dimensions, each informing and transforming the other. Indeed, Furey (2017) notes some schools provide professional learning courses for their middle leaders that explicitly intertwine the teaching and leading aspects of the middle leaders' role.

Without professional development that is targeted to the specific needs of the middle leader and applied in the workplace, middle leaders can face difficulties (Fleming, 2019; Harris, Busher, & Wise, 2003; Sanders, 2006). Foster (2010, p. 19) suggests that senior leaders should take specific responsibility for the leadership development of middle leaders, with emphasis on:

- mentoring: creating formal and informal times for one-to-one meetings between senior leaders and middle leaders,

- professional development: the encouragement of middle leaders undertaking further postgraduate study, supported financially and with time release,
- accountability: middle leaders are accountable for their actions in the role, responsible for developing the members of their team and the management of the department, and
- empowerment: middle leaders need to feel they have the confidence of the senior leadership team, who will support them in challenging times, particularly in the processes of change management.

Typically, schools allocate considerable funding and time for the professional development of their staff. Due to the nature of schools and the demands of the roles undertaken by middle leaders, the professional development opportunities undertaken by middle leaders are usually short term and held at times of the year that least impact on the teaching and learning schedule of the students. The addition of leadership professional learning, supplementing the daily work load of middle leaders, can be seen as an unwelcome burden (Feeney, 2009; Foster, 2010) and there is, at times, reluctance shown by middle leaders to "adapt their role in the light of changing needs and priorities" (Adey, 2000, p. 419). Finding the time in the busyness of school life to build leadership capacity, without unduly burdening the middle leader, may require schools to investigate innovative mechanisms that could be part of the leaders' processes. As suggested by Feeney (2009), leadership should not be seen as separate from learning.

The professional development available for middle leaders can take a variety of forms. These forms can include professional reading, formal courses and training, on-the-job learning, shadowing, internal or external mentoring, placements, secondments, and coaching. In UK schools, middle leaders often consider coaching and mentoring as desirable professional development activities (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

Often, the challenges faced by middle leaders derive from sources largely beyond their control. The skills and competencies required to take on a leadership position

are different from that of a classroom teacher, yet for most middle leaders their first appointment was not preceded by professional development focused on leadership development (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016). In order to improve their own and their team's pedagogical leadership, Flückiger et al. (2015) maintain that middle leaders should pursue professional learning that will enhance and improve their capacities and skills. The learning that middle leaders should undertake involves (Flückiger et al., 2015, p. 66):

- Pedagogy: middle leaders need to remain attuned to current research pertaining to teaching and learning.
- People: middle leaders need to build an understanding of the importance of professional relationships and how best to support the needs of teams.
- Place: middle leaders need to use research findings to guide and form their decision-making processes.
- System: middle leaders need to ensure system requirements, such as compliance and policy, are being met.
- Self: middle leaders need to make a positive difference to the learning and lives of their students.

A moral purpose (Bezzina, 2012), a commitment to education, or the desire to improve the learning environment for students, can be powerful motivators that elicit a personal drive in middle leaders to develop themselves (Dinham, 2007b, 2016; O'Neill, Coffey, Lavery, Oaten, & Thompson, 2010). As middle leaders combine teaching with their administrative duties, some may have the additional responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning within their subject. They have a responsibility to maintain effective teaching of their subject, to gauge the quality of their teaching and level of students' achievements, and to set goals for further improvement. There is also the expectation that middle leaders will "work positively within, and contribute towards the shaping of, whole school policies and priorities" (Adey, 2000, p. 420). The unique school culture in which the middle leader operates can promote, or limit, their leadership development (Simkins, Coldwell, Close, & Morgan, 2009).

The research by Bassett (2016) involving middle leaders from five large urban secondary schools in New Zealand found that the middle leaders readily identified the expectation that they develop the staff they lead, but none made mention of the need to undertake professional development themselves. Some even expressed a sense of injustice with the fact they were expected to develop the staff in their teams but received no support from their senior leaders. At a national level in New Zealand, there is no professional training programme in place to provide information, resources, or tools to build the depth of middle leaders' capacity and capability. Nor is there the ability for the Education Council to "identify the learning needs of middle leaders" in the primary and secondary sectors (Highfield, 2018, p. 5).

There can, however, be a twist in the ongoing development of middle leaders. Such exposure to new ideas and broadening of skills can lead middle leaders to ask probing questions of senior leaders that could leave these senior leaders feeling threatened or challenged (Kirkham, 2005). This misconception would indeed be unfortunate as Senge (1992) espouses that leaders have a responsibility to help those they lead "expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is, they are responsible for learning" (p. 340). The questioning of past processes, of not succumbing to the adage 'but this is the way we have always done it', can bring about cultural change that revitalises a school community.

2.7 Perceptions of the role

How the various roles of a middle leader are perceived differ according to a person's acquired experiences, their reflection and analysis, and the position they hold, whether as a middle leader, senior leader, or teacher, and the resulting formal and informal feedback received from those to whom they report or lead (Irvine & Brundrett, 2019). In essence, the perception is contextual. These perceptions can be driven by teachers' attitudes, as noted in the MLiS model (De Nobile, 2017), where stress, job satisfaction, commitment to the role, and potential burnout can substantially

impede teachers' effectiveness and performance (Day et al., 2009; Wong, Wong, & Peng, 2010).

The unpredictable nature of a middle leaders' role, where combined with an ambiguous role definition, can prove challenging, especially during the middle leaders initial period of appointment (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016, 2019). The change from teacher to formal leadership position can be surprising for middle leaders (OECD, 2008) as a different set of skills is required and they are yet to receive appropriate training or leadership development (Irvine & Brundrett, 2019).

The perception of the middle leaders' role within the literature can be expressed across five broad areas: expected role versus reality, managing, personal qualities, confidence in ability, and relationships. Each of these aspects will be explored in the next section.

2.7.1 *Expected role versus reality*

The role a middle leader expects to undertake can sometimes differ from their reality while performing the role. To minimise perceptual misalignment, a middle leaders' role should be clearly defined (Gunter, 2001), as the fluid nature of roles within schools structures means the boundaries of the roles can be hard to define (Davies, 2009). The leadership roles of middle leaders in schools are also quite diverse, with positions incorporating delegated authority combined with direct responsibility for others (Turner, 2007) and, as previously noted, middle leaders often find themselves caught between the requirements of senior management and the needs and expectations of their department (Bennet, Crawford, & Cartwright, 2003; Bennett et al., 2007; Bush, 2003; Busher et al., 2007),

Finding that the role they thought they were undertaking does not match the realities of their daily duties can be a cause for concern for middle leaders. Dinham et al. (2000), in a study of 26 middle leaders at four government and non-government

Australian secondary schools, found that the middle leaders (Dinham, 2007b, pp. 63-64) took on the role for a variety of reasons and reported that the role was not what they had expected it to be. The middle leaders found much of the role was reactive with little room for discretionary action and felt that the quality of their own teaching was compromised by the role. They also felt that they were under-prepared for the interpersonal aspects of the role, which relied heavily upon relationships, that the lack of time to perform the various tasks of the role was the worst aspect of the position, that they had a wide range of professional learning needs, and that their preparation had been largely ad hoc, with formal preparation little utilised and poorly regarded. In addition, they felt the position was poorly rewarded for the breadth and depth of the tasks involved. On a positive note, the middle leaders highly prized the opportunity to have an influence and to lead other professionals.

Weller and Weller (2002) suggest that, in reality, the daily role of a middle leader is concerned with maintenance rather than leadership or development. This can, once again, lead to tension between senior and middle leaders as the senior leaders expect the development of the department to continue, regardless of the demands placed upon those responsible for their management:

> Senior staff expect middle leaders to become involved in the wider whole-school context, but many are reluctant to do so, preferring to see themselves as departmental advocates. This is exacerbated by the tendency of secondary schools, in particular, to operate within hierarchical structures, which also act as a constraint on the degree to which subject leaders can act collegially. (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003, p. 1)

It is the dichotomy of the preferred role versus reality that creates significant tensions and struggles for those holding middle leader roles, as they endeavour to rationalise their perceptions, their practice, and how these might better be conceptualised in terms of their role preferences.

Shaked and Schechter (2018, p. 14) note that many middle leaders have “very few opportunities to exercise leadership and are scarcely expected to do so”, supporting the view held by Gurr and Drysdale (2013). Where a principal has failed to delegate

effectively, either unwillingly or through the lack of necessary skills, the inability to provide middle leaders with genuine leadership opportunities may, in fact, have a significant effect on the middle leader's practice and overall school leadership culture (Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017), leading to frustration and the realisation that the role is more positional than influential (Gronn, 2009; Gunter & Rayner, 2007; Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017). This lack of effective leadership mentoring can compound within a school with Furey (2017) noting a middle leaders' perception of their role is highly influenced by what has been modelled to them. Those middle leaders who have witnessed administrative duties dominate the role, such as, developing procedures, record keeping, acquiring resources, finance and budget, file management, student management, and inventory checks (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Busher, 2005; Devolder, Vanderlinde, van Braak, & Tonduer, 2010; Flückiger et al., 2015; Tranter, 2000; Wise, 2001) may be bound to perpetuate this behaviour.

Trying to achieve a time balance between the teaching and administrative components of the role has led middle leaders to experience frustration, stress and work-related pressure, resulting in inadequate attention or neglection of their duties (Abdul Razzak, 2015; Harvey, 1997; Herrington, 2004; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014). In a study of Australian department heads, Deece et al. (2003) found the amount of time they spent teaching classes was only slightly less than that of ordinary teachers; a cause of major concern. In addition, middle leaders were late often to their classes due to their leadership responsibilities (Busher, 2005). To alleviate some of the time pressures faced, middle leaders have undertaken professional learning on time management and prioritisation (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014), requested personal assistants to provide administrative support (Abdul Razzak, 2015), and sought a reduction in their teaching load in order to meet the demands of their leadership role (Wise & Bennett, 2003).

Fletcher-Campbell (2003) suggests there is an interesting interplay between the effect a middle leader can have on the development of their staff and the effect the staff can have on the development of the middle leader. Where a new middle leader

joins a well-established and credentialed department and, as such, the middle leader is reluctant to see themselves as a manager of staff, preferring instead to perceive themselves as a manager of curriculum, there can evolve a mentoring and grooming process where the departmental staff reinforce and encourage the behaviours they would like to see in their middle leader. Such a mechanism would have the effect of preserving organisational custom and practice and preserve culture, retaining effective control of the department within the hands of departmental staff.

Where a middle leaders' perception of their role is first and foremost focussed on students, factors that diminish their time in this duty, such as administrative and management task, can be considered a hindrance. Bullock (1988) states that this mind set could see tension rise within a school if staff, in their observation of the middle leader's performance, considered the middle leader negligent in their duty by not treating administration and management tasks as a priority.

Similarly, in established departments where long serving and highly competent teaching staff helped students attain high examination scores (Bennett et al., 2007), middle leaders were seen to perceive themselves as a manager of curriculum rather than as a manager of the staff within the department (Brown & Rutherford, 1999; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Choosing a more collegial approach to working with their staff rather than a supervisory approach (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Ghamrawi, 2010; Mercer & Ri, 2006), however, did not afford the middle leader the right to observe teachers within the classroom.

Cotter (2011), in her case study of three curriculum coordinators at three Victorian Catholic schools, found that the role middle leaders undertook required a "blend of leadership and management capacities" (p. 175). The perceptions of the role, incorporating those of principals and senior leaders, curriculum coordinators, and teachers, were similar when relating to the importance of culture and values, however, they differed in their perspectives on the key work of the role. Cotter (2011) defines this key work within the concepts of educational expertise, providing clarity, engaging

others, and core (or practical) competences. In terms of perspective alignment, Cotter (2011) found that the leadership team (principal and senior leaders) consistently aligned, noting critically that the leadership team "may have differed in the priorities they held for the role of the curriculum coordinator but they showed the greatest understanding of the role in daily school life" (p. 176). Similarly, White (2000, p. i) found that the leadership role of CAMMs, as perceived by senior management, CAMMs and teachers, was similar, inferring that among the Victorian Government secondary schools involved in the study there was a common understanding of the functions and role of a CAMM.

2.7.2 *Managing*

Within the literature (Adey, 2000; Bush, 2008; Busher, 2005; Dinham, 2007b; Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough, & Johnson, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2012; Poultney, 2007), the administrative tasks most frequently undertaken by middle leaders include conducting departmental meetings, budgeting, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluating teacher performance, creating a safe and ordered environment for students and staff, and implementing the wider school vision.

In a study of 37 middle leaders who held a position of curriculum leadership in five large urban New Zealand secondary schools, Bassett (2016) found that recognition of the administrative tasks undertaken by middle leaders in these schools differed according to the role of the observer. Of the middle leaders, over half were able to identify the administrative functions they were required to undertake, while just over one quarter of senior leaders identified the functions assigned to middle leaders.

The administrative tasks undertaken in the management of their department were often considered by middle leaders to be fundamental to their role (Grootenboer et al., 2015). Tasks, such as strategically-linked student programmes (Danielson, 2007) and teacher feedback and appraisal (Ashmore & Clay, 2016; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012; General Teaching Council Scotland, 2012),

that had traditionally been completed by the principal, were now being assigned to middle leaders, resulting in a substantially increased workload. While this increased workload can place greater demands upon them, Lárusdóttir and O'Connor (2017) argue that middle leaders should prioritise their tasks to ensure that they carry out the duties that are essential to the successful leadership of the school and not overindulge in administrative tasks.

During times of leadership and management ambiguity, middle leaders were found to show a disinterest in autonomy. Some thought their educational work would be simpler and more effective if they were provided with clear instruction, professional learning, and, at times, direct supervision in the implementation of their assigned role (Shaked & Schechter, 2018).

A study involving six middle leaders, including both subject and pastoral leaders, positioned in secondary schools in England (Busher, 2005, p. 142) found that the middle leaders considered they had six functional aspects to their role:

1. The requirement to have a vision for their department. This involved outlining how the department was aiming to improve and ensuring their colleagues saw themselves as part of this vision.
2. The will to use the authority appointed to them. This is best achieved with and through colleagues, persuading them of the need for change.
3. The ability to work with staff to implement their vision. This is the core tenet and is reliant upon high quality interpersonal relationships. Though this element can prove challenging, the middle leader could act as an agent for a higher authority and/or provide management support for their staff in testing conditions, such as student management.
4. The ability to effectively coordinate and implement required actions. This requires the middle leader to set an effective departmental framework, including pedagogy.

5. Understand the various contexts they work in and the ability and desire to engage with those in these arenas. This may involve negotiating with senior leaders and advocating for colleagues.
6. Be a successful role model for colleagues, as a teacher and leader. Middle leaders need to be regarded as effective by their colleagues and respect will be gained by being highly proficient in the classroom.

Maintaining or establishing a teaching role within their department allows middle leaders to maintain a legitimacy to their actions through their formal and informal interactions with their departmental colleagues. According to Busher (2005), where middle leaders had a teaching role in their department, colleagues considered them as one of themselves, rather than as a member of the school's management hierarchy. This afforded the middle leaders greater respect within the department.

Serving as a role model for teachers, middle leaders can actively enhance the leadership capabilities of less experienced team members (Dinham, 2007b; Inman, 2009). If supported by the senior leadership of the school, they can have a profound influence on teaching and learning (Gurr, accepted; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013), a major impact on teachers' professional learning (Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2013) and the potential to influence the quality of teacher practice (De Nobile, 2017; Fleming, 2019; Harris et al., 2003; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014).

Middle leaders often have to contend with the differing views held by their line manager and staff they lead. Tension can result when these perceptions are incompatible (Wise, 2001) or there is a belief that the capacity of the middle leader is not being fully realised, nor developed (Brown & Rutherford, 1999; Rutherford, 2002). Glover et al. (1999) and Wise (2001) described this conflict of perceptions as "buffer and bridge" (Bennett et al., 2007, p. 462), where middle leaders have to mediate the expectations of senior leadership and find a way to relate these expectations to the custom and practice exercised with teachers at the departmental level.

Bassett (2016) found there is, at times, a contrast of perspectives between senior leaders and middle leaders, with each blaming the other as to the cause of the tension. Senior leaders feel middle leaders have an inability to appreciate the needs of school-wide goals before the needs of their own department, whereas middle leaders feel senior leaders continue to drive their own agendas without consultation and seek to implement reforms that are unattainable or contradictory to the departmental needs. Some studies (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Siskin, 1994) suggest that the departmental structure of a school may result in teachers have a greater affiliation to the department rather than to the wider school community. Harris and Jones (2017) note this presents middle leaders with two key tensions. Firstly, there is a tension between the loyalty a middle leader has for their department versus their requirement to have a whole-school focus; secondly, the manner in which schools are becoming more hierarchical in their management structure versus the need for middle leaders to show professional collegiality and genuine rapport. According to Bennett, Newton, et al. (2003) and Bennett, Wise, Woods, and Harvey (2003), middle leaders were reluctant to associate themselves with issues that involved a schoolwide context, especially if they felt the issues were "perceived to be divergent from the aims of their department" (Bassett, 2016, p. 105). Preferencing an allegiance to department above school can lead middle leaders to feel "obliged to act as advocates for their departmental colleagues" (Busher, 2005, p. 148), often finding themselves caught between the desires of senior leaders and those of the members of their team (Bassett, 2016).

2.7.3 *Personal qualities*

Their personal qualities, attitude, and abilities, as well as the context of the role, help determine the type of leadership a middle leader will exercise. At times, they may act as instructional leaders (Ng & Chan, 2014; Seong & Ho, 2012; Shaked & Schechter, 2018), primarily drawing upon their professional identity as a classroom teacher, rather than that of a school leader (Scriber & Bradley-Levine, 2010; Shaked & Schechter, 2018; Stoelinga, 2008), to display a contemporary knowledge of

curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, considered key qualities of effective middle leaders (Abdul Razzak, 2015; De Nobile, 2017; Dinham, 2016; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Lai & Pratt, 2004). Having pedagogical expertise and depth of subject knowledge, combined with the ability to convey this to staff through professional learning, are also considered highly desirable qualities for a middle leader to possess (Crowther, 2011; Fleming, 2019; Tranter, 2000). Such considerations are expressed in the formulation of the CAMMs model (White, 2000), where the four key roles defined as part of middle leadership, and their requisite knowledge, skills, and personal attributes, are context dependent. Similarly, the Successful School Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011) draws upon the characteristics, qualities, competencies, values, and attitudes of leaders to impact at various stages across teaching and learning, the attainment of successful student outcomes, organisational effectiveness, and wider community engagement.

Possessing effective communication skills is also regarded as essential if a middle leader is to establish cohesion, collegiality and trust with those they lead (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). Incorporating the timely release of pertinent information that is easily accessible, unambiguous, and current, effective communication will allow staff to fulfil their duties, minimising anxiety and possible frustration (Herrington, 2004; Southworth, 2002).

Duignan and Bhindi (1997) suggest that middle leaders also need to be good listeners and respect the views of others. Personal qualities and attributes, such as empathy (Duignan, 2006; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016), trustworthiness (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, & Rönnerman, 2016; Ghamrawi, 2010; Muijs & Harris, 2007), displaying a genuine interest and enthusiasm for the role, possessing a depth and breadth of knowledge, and being regarded as competent expert teacher were seen as highly desirable qualities (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Dinham, 2016; Koh, 2018).

Whether acting in a supervisory role, offering encouragement, mentoring, or providing direct assistance, middle leaders often have the responsibility for building the capacity and capability of their staff (Danielson, 2007; Fleming, 2019; Liljenberg, 2016). To fulfil this requirement, middle leaders may be called upon to undertake classroom observations in order to provide feedback on teaching programmes, teacher competency and appraisal (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Tranter, 2000), performance management, and subject delivery (Danielson, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2011; Koh, Gurr, Drysdale, & Ang, 2011; Wise, 2001). Middle leaders often have the responsibility for leading the professional learning within their department and ensuring the members of their department engage in school wide professional learning initiatives (Dinham, 2007b; Ministry of Education, 2012) as a crucial element of whole school effectiveness (Kemp & Nathan, 1989). As Cardno (2012) notes, in order for middle leaders to effectively develop an improved teaching and learning capacity of their staff, they must, in turn, develop themselves.

Principals have the ultimate ability to define the reality in a school (Ball, 1987). A principal that is open to new ideas and allows the middle leader to exert leadership is highly valued (Rutherford, 2002; Southworth, 1995). Providing middle leaders the opportunity to express discretion in how they achieve their educational goals, and the time to adapt and deal with any inherent difficulties and obstacles associated with the process (Shaked & Schechter, 2018), are key support mechanisms.

Middle leaders complement the efforts of principals and, therefore, are in the ideal position to comment upon school effectiveness (Halliger, 2011). They are able to use their expert knowledge of content and pedagogy to translate the senior leadership's vision into proposed outcomes at the faculty level, utilising their core skill of developing and cultivating relationships (Carter, 2016).

When developing a vision or set of goals for their department, middle leaders are required to take on a strategic role that has traditionally been the preserve of principals and other senior leaders (Anderson & Nixon, 2010; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013;

Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014). This requires persuasive skills on the part of the middle leader, asking staff to commit to a vision (Busher, 2005; Ridden & De Nobile, 2012) and course of action (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005).

To cope with the emotional demands and pressures they face in the role, middle leaders are typically required to manage their own self-care. There is limited reference to middle leaders' self-care in the literature, though De Nobile (2017) does note self-care can include reflection on professional advice and Fleming (2019) recognises the need for mechanisms for coping with the pressure and stress associated with the role.

2.7.4 *Confidence in ability*

A lack of confidence in their own abilities can impair a middle leader's leadership capacity (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Kirkham, 2005; Saito & Sato, 2012). In a study of 65 middle leaders implementing reform measures in Israeli secondary schools, Shaked and Schechter (2018) found that half of the middle leaders found the creative implementation of the Ministry of Education reform guidelines "excessively challenging" (Shaked & Schechter, 2018, p. 9), critical of the poor support provided by the Ministry. Shaked and Schechter (2018) saw the middle leaders' response as an inability to draw upon their prior professional experiences, instead hoping for increased professional assistance for not only themselves as middle leaders, but also for the classroom teachers for whom they were responsible. The middle leaders sought external guidance rather than have the confidence to rely upon their own experience and knowledge. Similarly, in their research of middle leaders in UK secondary schools, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) found that middle leaders were confident in their ability to raise the standard of teaching and learning within their schools, but far less confident to raise matters of a disciplinary nature with members of their department or to connect with members of the wider school community.

2.7.5 *Relationships*

Relating to and negotiating with colleagues is a key feature of a middle leaders' role, requiring them to possess expert skills in the development of positive professional relationships (Busher, 2005; Crowther, 2011; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006; Liljenberg, 2016; van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007). Middle leadership invariably involves leading a team (Osterman, 2008). To be successful in this role, middle leaders need capabilities that allow them to build cohesion within the team, drawing together the members of the team towards a shared vision and goal (Fleming, 2019; van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007). While some middle leaders may not naturally express this attribute, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) and Sanders (2006) note that middle leaders should be prepared to undertake professional learning to develop and enhance their team building skills.

Relationships within the secondary school environment can be complex, involving facilitation and negotiation between various faculty groups that may compete for limited resources. Bringing together, at times, conflicting departments with their differing views can prove to be a major challenge for middle leaders, thus, highly developed inter-relational skills are of the utmost benefit in order to influence the achievement of the desired educational outcomes (Bush, 2008; Busher, 2005; Dinham, 2007b; Glover et al., 1999; Poultney, 2007). Regrettably, some middle leaders believe they lack the necessary interpersonal skills required for this role (Dinham, 2007b), while some find the negotiating aspect of the role a challenge, especially having to influence others in order to achieve a desired outcome (Busher, 2005).

Middle leaders, who are new to the role, may find the relationship they once held with fellow teachers somewhat changed, either due to resentment of them attaining the role or due to the shift in the relationship's professional power balance (Bush & Glover, 2014; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2015). The informal discourse and language that used to take place between peers may need to be modified, taking on a more formal tone (Gorton & Alston, 2009).

Bennett et al. (2007, p. 463) found that where middle leaders described their department as highly collegial, the middle leaders were more likely to be resistant to monitoring and evaluating their departmental staff. This action reinforced the departmental belief of equal status amongst staff members and their belief they were professionally competent in the classroom. The staff saw their primary responsibility was to their students, then to their colleagues, and finally, to the school. Where a middle leader's role involved dealing with the quality of colleagues' work or performance, resistance was, at times, met (Glover, Gleeson, Gough, & Johnson, 1998), as the middle leader's colleagues felt they were being monitored, altering the balance of trust that existed in the relationship (Wise, 2001).

For those members of staff who resist proposed change, a hierarchical power dynamic may be used by the middle leader to elicit compliance (Busher, 2005), however, Ridden and De Nobile (2012) propose the more productive means for effecting a strategic initiative is for a middle leader to create an atmosphere conducive to change, through sound management, organisation, and collegial staff relationships, steeped in trust (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Duignan, 2006).

According to Shaked and Schechter (2018, p. 4), "the key factors that enable school middle leaders to perform their duties are an official leadership position, access to expertise, support from senior management, and interpersonal synergies among themselves and the higher-level leaders."

The manner in which a secondary school is organised into departments, including its physical layout, may influence the way collegial relations are established and maintained within the school and the cultural implications that ensue (James & Aubrey-Hopkins, 2003). As noted by Bennett et al. (2007), these cultural issues vary in their intensity from school to school, however, the pressure middle leaders are exposed to, mediating a balance between whole-school responsibilities and the demands and expectation of their department, combined with the segregation of the

secondary school curriculum (Metcalfe & Russell, 1997), can lead to the establishment of strong hierarchies, subcultures, and fragmentation of the organisation (Martin & Meyerson, 1987). Teachers in secondary schools would readily identify themselves as a member of one, or more, subject departments; their teaching role closely identified with this membership. Such professional identity creates powerful subcultures within secondary schools (Bennett et al., 2007), to the extent that the subcultures become a barrier to change and the involvement of members in whole-school initiatives, especially where departmental members see themselves as part of a discreet collegium (Dimmock & Lee, 2000).

2.8 Determining success

While there are a number of important capabilities displayed by successful middle leaders (Dinham, 2007a, 2007b), one determinant of success in the role is the improvement of student learning outcomes. However, in their individual studies of research articles and papers pertaining to middle leadership, De Nobile (2017, 2018) and Harris, Jones, Ismail, and Nguyen (2019) note that how successful middle leaders go about doing this, and the strategies they use, is not widely reported. While the literature discusses the influence middle leaders have on their fellow teachers, there is the underlying assumption that this collegial influence goes on to create a positive impact in the lives of students, providing improved educational outcomes (Day & Grice, 2019). Sammons, Thomas, and Mortimore (1997) found that productive staff teamwork is more apparent in effective school departments. It is this promotion and involvement in professional learning and collegial discourse, as a function of leadership, where middle leaders have the greatest impact on student outcomes (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

2.8.1 Effect on student outcomes

In researching the effect middle leaders had on student learning outcomes, White (2000, p. 192) found that the "effect is thought to be indirect, and brought about by

supplying the preconditions for learning in the learning area." Similarly, Keane (2010, p. 131), found that the "effect they have is largely indirect." Such an effect is similar to that found of principal leadership on student learning outcomes (Hill, 2000). Of note is that in both studies (Keane, 2010; White, 2000) the middle leader was perceived to have an effect on student learning outcomes.

Directly attributing significant impacts on student outcomes to the specific leadership qualities of school leaders can prove somewhat problematic (Barker, 2007), if not inconclusive (Miller & Rowan, 2006), as while leadership initiatives can be transformative to the culture of the school, variables that produce a climate associated with high student performance, such as the quality of teaching programmes, competency of teachers, the level of expectation held by teachers for their students' academic achievement, and the quality of relationships between teachers and students, "seem to explain most of the apparent improvement in student outcomes" (Barker, 2007, p. 21). Cotter (2011, p. 214) notes that "overwhelmingly the sense of how curriculum coordinators contributed to whole school improvement was general and relied heavily on their personal qualities."

The research by White (2000), Dinham (2007b), Keane (2010), and Cotter (2011) reveals the potential for middle leaders to make a profound impact on students outcomes and school improvement, however, as Gurr and Drysdale (2013, p. 13) note, "unfortunately far too often this potential is unrealised."

2.8.2 Teaching and learning

Gurr (2019), upon review of the findings of the aforementioned doctoral research concerned with middle leadership (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010; White, 2000) and that of Huerta Villalobos (2018), Koh (2018), and this study, suggests that middle leaders are increasingly being considered as pivotal to improving the provision of teaching and learning within schools. When afforded role clarity and associated support, middle leaders were found to influence student outcomes by setting direction, offering

teachers focussed professional learning, and improving classroom practice. This influence on student outcomes, however, was still based on perception and not formal measurement of improved learning. The common finding of the research is that middle leaders had limited effect on improving teaching and learning, were offered insufficient support from senior leaders, and were hampered by organisational structures within the school.

Dinham (2005, 2007b), in a study named the ÆSOP project, An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project, researched the effect on student learning of the leadership of 50 department-based subject areas and cross-school programmes across 38 New South Wales government secondary schools that were able to exhibit exceptional educational outcomes over a minimum four-year period. Dinham found that principal leadership (Dinham, 2005) and the leadership of heads of department or programmes (Dinham, 2007b) were both important factors in the exceptional outcomes achieved by students. As with the findings of Cotter (2011), the personal qualities possessed by middle level leaders were found to be an important part of their leadership and their ability to impact student outcomes. In addition, Dinham (2007b, p. 67) found that middle level leaders were able to influence student success through:

- a focus on students and their learning
- a high level of professional capacity and strategic acumen
- the promotion and advocacy of their department and the capacity to develop and maintain good relationships, both within and outside the school
- a major influence upon department planning and organisation
- developing a common purpose, fostering collaboration, and team building with their department
- valuing teacher learning, professional sharing, and responsibility and trust amongst department members
- a clear vision of what they want to achieve, high expectations and standards, and build a culture of success

Building upon the qualitative ÆSOP project, a quantitative doctoral study of New Zealand secondary department heads by Highfield (2012) researched the impact of middle leaders on student learning. This three-phase study found that generally, middle leaders made a positive contribution to student learning. It highlighted that for the last two years of students' secondary education, middle leadership practices accounted for important variations in student achievement. Highfield (2012) surmised that regardless of students' ethnicity or socioeconomic status, "middle leaders and teachers in their departments can make a difference to student academic outcomes" (p. 155).

2.8.3 Influence

The extent that "leadership is successful in improving the learning of students would appear to reflect, in part, the amount of influence leadership has on teachers' motivations and related beliefs and feelings" (Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, & Sacks, 2008, p. 215), the quality of the teaching programme (Day et al., 2009; Highfield, 2012), and the middle leaders' direct and positive influence on teachers' practice in the classroom (Fleming, 2013; Leask & Terrell, 2014).

In their study on the connection between school leadership and student outcomes, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that the more school leaders focussed on the core business of teaching and learning, through their own learning, their influence, and their relationships with teachers, the greater the influence they had on student outcomes.

Refining this notion further, Leithwood (2016) purports that it is the middle leader, the department head, that can bring about the greatest positive change on student outcomes, rather than school effects. This is due to the middle leaders' ability to have a closer relationship with the student, through the classroom, and a perceived legitimacy as an expert in the subject area. There is also the assertion held by Leithwood (2016) that an effective department head "provides constant, subtle

pressure for change and improvement in student outcomes" (p. 128) and "that secondary-school principals and department heads, acting in concert, may be especially well-suited to provide both instructional and transformational leadership practices and, as a consequences, make powerful contributions to secondary-school improvement" (p. 136). In considering the context of the middle leaders' role, Leithwood (2016) also suggests the greater impact on teaching and learning comes from those middle leaders concerned with supervision and evaluation of teachers, rather than those aligned with guidance and support-giving. Similarly, Farchi and Tubin (2019) note that successful schools had a propensity to have middle leaders who focussed on pedagogy rather than administration.

2.8.4 Academic and social success

In determining the effectiveness of a school, the measure of students' academic progress and their achievements are commonly accepted as key indicators of success (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016); while significant, such measurables, however, offer a narrow judgement of student outcomes. The attainment of academic success is often linked to the wider ambition fostered by schools of developing students who have a well-rounded social conscience, sound appreciation of the value of good citizenship, and social capabilities (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2011; Putnam, 2002) and demonstrate the personal values and qualities of compassion, integrity, commitment and fairness (Day et al., 2016). School leaders are critical for the creation of a school environment that allows these values and qualities to be developed in their students. Their success in fostering these social outcomes in their students accounts for the variation in student outcomes between schools (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Moos, Johannson, & Day, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011).

2.8.5 Leadership models

In terms of the type of leadership model employed within a school, Day et al. (2016) note that 'transformational' and 'instructional' leadership models are the "most

commonly researched leadership models that have been identified as resulting in success" (p. 224), with regard to student outcomes. As Robinson et al. (2009) suggest, it is somewhat expected that the model of transformational leadership, which traditionally places an emphasis on staff relationship and setting an inspiring vision for the school, would not have as strong an effect on improving student outcomes as instructional leadership, as this model is traditionally focussed upon improving the learning and teaching programme of a school, directly affecting the students. However, this contrasts with the research of Leithwood and Sun (2012) that found that the inspirational nature of transformative leadership enhanced the development of a school environment that spurred the "status of consequential school conditions" (p. 403), such as a positive school culture, thereby leading to improved student outcomes.

2.9 Summary – Chapter 2

The CAMMs model (White, 2000), Successful Schools Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011), and MLiS model (De Nobile, 2017) offer theoretical representations of the interrelationships and contexts that exist for middle leaders in the performance of their role. The models highlight the importance of middle leaders' leadership qualities and personal characteristics, their need for ongoing professional development and support, the importance school culture and organisational dynamics play in their effectiveness, and the impact they can have on student outcomes. These elements are important factors when considering how middle leaders prepare for leadership, develop and perform in the role, and achieve success.

Within the literature, the definition of middle leaders in an educational context refers to leaders within schools who have a defined and acknowledged leadership position at the school, while at the same time undertaking a teaching load of significant proportion (Grootenboer et al., 2015).

In preparation for a middle leadership role within a school, "formal professional development for leadership was relatively uncommon" (Inman, 2009, p. 417) with the majority of middle leaders receiving little or no preparation for their role, either self-directed or through the school or education system (Dinham et al., 2000; Gurr, 2019). Instead, middle leaders tend to develop their leadership styles and capabilities through on-the-job training and observation.

Once appointed, it is often assumed by senior leaders of the school that middle leaders have the necessary skills to perform their duties effectively (Brown et al., 2000). Middle leaders' leadership development often involves on-the-job learning, shadowing of senior leaders, mentoring and coaching, with most of this leadership learning taking place in schools (Southworth, 2009). To enhance their effectiveness, middle leaders' professional learning should be directed to programmes that enhance and improve their capacities and skills (Flückiger et al., 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016), involving pedagogical research, compliance and policy development, and leadership development that highlights the importance of professional relationships and informed decision-making. Combining their teaching duties with their leadership role can be a challenge for some middle leaders, as they balance their responsibility to sustain effective teaching of their subject with the expectation that they positively contribute towards the development of departmental and whole school priorities (Adey, 2000).

How the middle leader is perceived in the fulfilment of their role is dependent upon the role context and the viewpoint of the observer. At times there can appear to be a misalignment between what the middle leader is required to do in their role, what they are actually doing, and what they would prefer to do. This conflict can affect the level of satisfaction the middle leader achieves in the role. Also, the allegiance a middle leader feels for the department they head can create a tension when they are required to exhibit a whole-school focus, especially when the whole-school focus may lead to significant departmental change. This can find the middle leader caught between the demands and expectations of senior leaders and their departmental

colleagues. Managing the administrative demands of the role, positively influencing colleagues, monitoring student academic achievement, all with the desire to exert genuine leadership responsibility, place a middle leaders' effectiveness under the determination of the principal. A principal's unwitting inability to provide middle leaders with genuine leadership opportunities may, in fact, have a significant effect on the school leadership culture and impact upon the middle leaders' practice (Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017).

The link between a middle leaders' successful performance of their duties and improved outcomes for students is a topic requiring further research and discussion in the literature. Middle leaders have been found to influence student success through a focus on student learning, being an advocate for their department, team building, developing positive and respectful relationships with colleagues, having high expectations and standards (Dinham, 2007b), and exerting a positive influence on teachers' practice in the classroom (Fleming, 2013; Leask & Terrell, 2014).

This research into the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools seeks to add to the body of literature on middle leadership, including research that is specifically focussed on middle leaders in Victorian schools (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010; White, 2000); expand upon the type of middle leaders researched by including pastoral care and co-curricular leaders; and expand upon previous research that focussed only on Catholic (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010) or government schools (Dinham, 2007b; White, 2000) by including the independent school sector.

The focus of the research regarding middle leaders is:

- What are the leadership and other roles of a middle leader as perceived by the holders of the positions themselves and those to whom they are responsible to and responsible for?
- How are middle leaders supported in their role, including what leadership preparation middle leaders undertake prior to attaining their role?

- How do middle leaders support their own work?
- How do middle leaders determine if they have been successful in their role?

Chapter Three outlines the methodology employed in this research.

3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology employed in the study and outlines the participants and schools utilised as part of the case study methodology for researching the preparation and development of middle leaders (MLs).

In researching the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, case studies were conducted at three Victorian secondary schools (government, Catholic and independent) using documents and multiple perspective interviews of middle level leadership. The following questions were addressed:

1. What are the leadership and other roles of a middle leader as perceived by the holders of the positions themselves and those to whom they are responsible to and responsible for?
2. How are Middle Leaders supported in their role, including what leadership preparation Middle Leaders undertake prior to attaining their role?
3. How do Middle Leaders support their own work?
4. How do Middle Leaders determine if they have been successful in their role?

3.1 Design

This study was conducted within a constructivist interpretive framework, based in ontological beliefs that an individual's "way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Falling within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, the qualitative case study approach (Stake, 1995, 2000, 2006) focusses on obtaining the multiple perspectives of those associated with the case, with the aim of gathering a varied and diverse range of beliefs. In this research, the ontological belief lies in the multiple realities of the individuals participating in the study and their unique contexts (Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

A multiple case study design was employed in order to cover the breadth, uniqueness, and complexity of the three main education sectors operating in the Victorian context.

3.2 Methodology

The case study method differs from other methods in that the researcher concentrates on the case itself in order to gain the fullest possible understanding. The case can be described as "an integrated system" (Stake, 1995, p. 2) or, as noted by Merriam (1998, p. 27), the case is "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries".

In this study it was important to understand the work of middle leaders in depth and in context, therefore, a study that provides the fullest possible account of their professional role, within their school, is the approach that would be most useful in understanding their leadership preparation and development. Creswell (2013, p. 100) notes that "case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases."

As a research design, case study can embrace both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of a phenomenon. The "case study is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, as well as philosophical perspectives on the nature of research itself" (Merriam, 1988, p. 2). Yin (2009, p. 14) concurs that "the case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method - covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis."

Due to the amount of data collected in a qualitative case study, a rich description of the case is created (Patton, 2002), building an individual portrait of the specific case being studied. The rich descriptions generated through the case study provide insight into what is being studied. "By concentrating on a single phenomenon, the

researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). In this study, the researcher endeavoured to build rich descriptions of the phenomenon of middle level leadership, in a school context and from considered perspectives as outlined in the research questions, from participants with different roles in the schools. This included middle leaders (teachers in charge of significant areas of responsibility), principals and other senior leaders, and those who report directly to the middle leader. A qualitative, interview-based, case study approach was therefore seen as the preferred methodology, allowing the complexities of each context to be represented and portrayed.

In this study, the particular type of case study research undertaken was a multiple case study (or collective case study) approach. Yin (2009, p. 39) suggests that the logic of replication is present in multiple case study design, allowing the researcher to replicate procedures for each case. The work of the middle leaders in each of the schools formed the basis of a case, so that there are three cases in total, representing each of the three major school sectors. This allowed for an exploration of the context in which they work, as well as enabling a comparison of those contexts. While Stake (2006) suggests that the preferred number of cases is between four and ten when conducting multiple case studies, Creswell (2013, p. 101) suggests that "researchers typically choose no more than four or five cases". Yin (2009) and Patton (2002) make no recommendation as to the number of preferred cases. The advantages in using multiple case studies are as "the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). While there is much to be learned from a single case, the advantages of examining a number of cases are significant as "multiple cases can add weight to the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory" (Freebody, 2003, p. 84). In this study, three case studies were examined, allowing for one school to be selected from each education sector (government, Catholic and independent) and in order to maintain the scope and complexity of the study within the resources available to doctoral research.

3.3 Data Collection

Yin (2009, p. 101) identified six types of data that can be collected as part of case study research: documents, interviews, participant-observation, direct observation, archival records, and physical artefacts.

The data collected from the three schools was a combination of interviews and documents. Both printed and electronic documents were used to establish and compare the theoretical or actual operating parameters of the middle level school leaders within their individual school context. The documents obtained from each school were:

- role descriptions of middle leader positions,
- annual reports provided to the school community
- organisational charts pertaining to leadership structure.

Semi-structured interviewing was used in this study for the purpose of collecting participants' responses. In a semi-structured interview, open-ended questions are developed, however, during the interview process the researcher is able to delve into the answers provided to find out additional information. Individually tailored questions for specific participants may also be developed (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington, & Okley, 2006). Employing a completely un-structured interview has the researcher risk not eliciting from the participants the themes more closely related to the research questions. While there are some specific topics that the researcher needed to cover, the researcher also needs to remain receptive to the participants' stories (Rabionet, 2011).

Interview schedules were compiled by a staff liaison at each case study site. A set of questions was developed to provide an initial guide for framing the interview. In practice, the questions were not asked in the order in which they were developed as participants' responses ranged over a number of questions.

Aiming to establish rapport and an understanding of the purpose of the interview, the interview process began with the researcher engaging the participant in a short preliminary conversation, seeking information regarding their professional history, then moving to an initial set of questions.

One interview was held per participant for a duration of 30 minutes. The questions asked of the participants were dependent upon their leadership experience within a school context. Those participants who had been, or who were currently, members of the senior leadership, were provided with the following questions:

- What do you see are the key aspects of the leadership role of your middle leaders? (What can they do / expected to do)
- Do you feel your middle leaders have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how? In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?
- What do you think are the challenges faced (either personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) by the middle leaders at this school?
- What are the connections between the Senior Management Team and the middle school leaders?
- What type of support does the school provide to support middle leaders in their role?
- What expectations, if any, are there from the school that the middle leaders will undertake professional learning with regards to leadership/management development during their tenure?
- What type of support does the school provide to teachers in their preparation for a formal leadership role?
- How do you determine if middle leaders have been successful in their leadership role, particularly with regards to their impact on improving student outcomes?

Those participants who were currently, or had previously been, middle leaders within school were provided with the following questions:

- How long have you been teaching, at this school, in this role?
- What led you to apply for this leadership role at this school?
- Did you undertake any leadership preparation prior to attaining your role? If so, what?
- What do you see are the key aspects of your leadership role (as a middle leader)?
- Do you feel you have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how? In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?
- How are you supported in your role by the Senior Management Team?
- Tell me about the challenges you face (possibly personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) as a middle leader at this school.
- How do you support yourself in this role, both at a professional and personal level?
- How do you help teachers in your area of responsibility to develop professionally, and in particular, how do you help them to improve their teaching?
- How do you determine if you have been successful in your leadership role, particularly with regards to your impact on improving student outcomes?
- What expectations, if any, are there from the school that you will undertake professional learning with regards to leadership/management development during your tenure?

For those participants who were teachers, the following questions were provided:

- How long have you been teaching at this school?
- What do you see are the key aspects of the leadership role of a middle leader? (What can they do / expected to do)

- Do you feel middle leaders have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how? In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?
- What do you think are the challenges faced (either personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) by the middle leaders at this school?
- Do you aspire to the role of a middle leader? If so, what leadership preparation have you taken, or would like to take, to this end?
- To what extent do your middle leaders help you to improve your teaching?
- How do you determine if a middle leader has been successful in their role, particularly with regards to their impact on improving student outcomes?

An active listening technique was utilised by the researcher so as to avoid excessive interjection and thereby interrupt the natural flow of the responses provided by the participants. The questions may have been asked directly or components of the answer may have been provided in previous responses. Once the interview concluded, the participants were reminded of the aim of the study, with the researcher asking if there were any other facets related to middle leaders that they felt had not been addressed during the interview (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews were recorded using a Roland R-09RH audio recorder. This enabled the interview to be saved in digital format. Prior to conducting the interview, a suitable location was sought so as to minimise extraneous noise that may interfere with the recording and that also provided a confidential setting for the interview. Recording levels were set prior to the interview commencing.

The audio files were transcribed, verbatim. The interview transcripts were then sent to the participants for checking, editing, and the inclusion of additional material. Written observations of non-verbal communication and paralinguistic aspects were recorded by the researcher during the interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010).

3.4 Sampling

The study employed purposeful sampling procedures. Patton (2002, p. 230) notes "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry."

As the researcher's intention was to study the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, combination, or mixed, purposeful sampling was used. This sampling strategy is used when one or more sampling strategies are employed in the research. Where one sampling strategy, for example, maximum variation sampling, yields an initial sample size that is larger than the study can handle, an additional sampling strategy may be used to refine the sample to a manageable size (Patton, 2002).

In undertaking case study research, Creswell (2013, p. 100) declares a preference for selecting "cases that show different perspectives of the problem, process, or event" to be portrayed, thus employing maximum variation sampling. In determining the three schools for the multiple case study, the implementation of maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling enabled the study to remain within the resource limitations and scope of a doctoral thesis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020a) records that there were 583 schools in Victoria providing secondary level education, incorporating the government, Catholic and independent sectors. Rather than randomly select the schools for the study, which would have proven to be resource intensive, the schools were selected based on affiliation type, one school from each sector: government, Catholic and independent, thereby allowing for maximum variation by sector. While the study describes the uniqueness of each site, it will also look for common themes across the sites. As noted by Patton (2002, p. 235), "any such themes take on added importance precisely because they emerge out of great variation."

The selection of the school from each affiliation group entailed criterion sampling. Criterion sampling allowed for the "review and study of all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). A school was selected from each affiliation group based on the following criteria:

1. The number of student enrolments may be used as an indicator of the organisational complexity of the school. Schools with a student population greater than 800 provided a sufficiently complex middle level leadership profile.
2. Variables in the calculation of a school's ICSEA value include student-level data concerning the occupation and education level of their parents/carers, their socio-economic demographic, and the school's location, listed as either metropolitan, regional, or remote. Selecting schools of a similar ICSEA value provided an indication of sites with similar resourcing.
3. As a component of the intended research was concerned with how middle level school leaders determine if they are successful in the role, one measurement of this success is their effect on student learning outcomes. The school has attained a Senior Secondary outcomes result that is equivalent in value to the schools in the other affiliation groups. Senior Secondary outcomes results were used as a measure of student learning outcomes, as opposed to NAPLAN results, as NAPLAN results are unreliable in providing statistically sound points of comparison between schools (Khoo, 2011; Wu, 2012).

Table 3.1 lists the schools used as case study sites and their corresponding sector affiliation, student population details (number of enrolments, range of Year Levels at the school, and the gender of students), ICSEA value, location, number of teaching staff, and the percentage of students who, at the completion of their final year of post-compulsory schooling, were awarded their senior secondary certificate. In Victoria, this certificate is known as the Victorian Certificate of Education. The data in Table 3.1 was sourced from the 2011 section of each school in the *My Schools* website (ACARA, 2012). Table 3.1 indicates that the proposed sites met the mixed purposeful

sampling procedure: one school from each education sector [maximum variation sampling], and a student population greater than 800, comparable ICSEA, and comparable percentage of senior secondary certificates awarded [criterion sampling].

Table 3.1: Criteria values of case study sites

Case Study site	Sector	Student Population			ICSEA Value	Location	Teaching Staff	Senior Secondary Certificate awarded (%)
		Enrolment	Year Range	Gender				
School A	Government	1435	7 - 12	Co-ed	1076	urban	103	99
School B	Catholic	1584	7 - 12	Co-ed	1053	urban	135	99
School C	Independent	2820	P - 12	Co-ed	1055	urban	267	99

3.5 Access to Sites

This study involved gaining access to three Victorian schools: one government, one Catholic and one independent sector school.

To gain access to a Victorian government school, an application was made to, and was approved by, the Department of Education and Training's (DET) Research and Analysis Division. Similarly, access was gained to a Catholic school through application to the Catholic Education - Melbourne (CEM). Once approval had been granted, application was made to the individual principals of the schools where the research was conducted. It should be noted that gaining DET or CEM approval did not commit the principals of the approached schools to permit the research to be conducted.

As there is no governing body for independent schools in Victoria, application to conduct research in an independent school was made directly to the principal.

In seeking approval from the principal, the following information was sent:

- a letter to the school principal requesting approval to conduct the research in their school, including the approval for the research from the human research ethics committee (HREC)
- a statement in plain language (no more than two pages) describing the research and an indication of the people who were invited to be participants
- a copy of the letter sent to the participants inviting their involvement in the research
- a statement in plain language (no more than two pages) describing the research, was provided to the participants
- a copy of the consent forms was provided to all participants
- all interview questions

3.6 Participants

At each site, the following members of staff were invited to participate in the study:

- Senior leaders, such as the Principal and Deputy/ Associate Principals
- Middle leaders, such as, Year Level Coordinators (Years 7 – 12); Curriculum leaders, such as, Heads of Faculty / Subject Coordinators; House Coordinators
- Teachers who report to middle leaders

Invitations to participate in the study were prepared by the researcher and presented to the principal, or their representative, at each site. The principal, or their representative, then distributed the invitation to their respective staff. Enquiries related to the study were directed to the researcher, as required. The researcher was unable to directly invite participants or influence the specific role or classification from which the potential participants would be drawn. Each site provided the researcher with a final list of voluntary participants, stating their role and a set schedule for interviews.

Once the interview process commenced at each site, the initial classification of the participant, based on their position as provided by the school, was amended if initial questioning revealed the participant had prior experience in a different classification. Where applicable, this is listed in Table 3.2 by the use of square brackets to record the prior leadership position held by the participant.

Across the three sites, a total number of 42 participants were involved in the study, incorporating the following number of participants in each classification:

- Seven senior leaders
- Twenty-two middle leaders
- Thirteen teachers

Table 3.2 lists the participants who took place in the study, their current role and previous leadership experience in a school environment (as revealed during the interview process), their classification, and the school sector in which they were employed. The abbreviation is a composite of three codes, designed to protect the anonymity of the participant. The first letter refers to the education sector in which the participant was employed, either G (Government), I (Independent) or C (Catholic); the second letter refers to the participant's classification, either M (middle leader), S (senior leader), or T (teacher); the number refers to the participant's unique identifier within the designated sector and classification.

Table 3.2: Participants in the study

Role	Abbreviation	Classification	Sector
Year Level Coordinator	GM1	Middle Leader	Government
Head of Languages	GM2	Middle Leader	Government
Teacher [former Year Level Coordinator]	GM3	Middle Leader	Government
Head of Humanities	GM4	Middle Leader	Government
Head of Literacy	GM5	Middle Leader	Government
Head of Junior School	GM6	Middle Leader	Government
Head of ICT & eLearning	GM7	Middle Leader	Government
Head of Curriculum (Senior School)	IM1	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Science	IM2	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Languages	IM3	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Information Services	IM4	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Curriculum (Middle School)	IM5	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Performing Arts	IM6	Middle Leader	Independent
Chaplain	IM7	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of House	IM8	Middle Leader	Independent
Head of Senior School	CM1	Middle Leader	Catholic
Head of Mathematics	CM2	Middle Leader	Catholic
Year Level Coordinator	CM3	Middle Leader	Catholic
Head of English	CM4	Middle Leader	Catholic
Head of The Arts	CM5	Middle Leader	Catholic
Head of House	CM6	Middle Leader	Catholic
Director of City Campus	CM7	Middle Leader	Catholic
Teacher [former Deputy Principal]	GS1	Senior Leader	Government
Deputy Principal	GS2	Senior Leader	Government
Deputy Principal	IS1	Senior Leader	Independent
Principal	IS2	Senior Leader	Independent
Deputy Principal	CS1	Senior Leader	Catholic
Principal	CS2	Senior Leader	Catholic
Teacher [former Deputy Principal]	CS3	Senior Leader	Catholic
Teacher	GT1	Teacher	Government
Teacher	GT2	Teacher	Government
Teacher	GT3	Teacher	Government
Teacher	GT4	Teacher	Government
Teacher	GT5	Teacher	Government
Teacher	IT1	Teacher	Independent
Teacher	IT2	Teacher	Independent
Teacher	IT3	Teacher	Independent
Teacher	CT1	Teacher	Catholic
Teacher	CT2	Teacher	Catholic
Teacher	CT3	Teacher	Catholic
Teacher	CT4	Teacher	Catholic
Teacher	CT5	Teacher	Catholic

3.7 Data Analysis

For the analysis of case studies, Creswell (2013, p. 101) recommends that the researcher "provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case (within-case analysis), followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis), as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case". As this study involved the investigation of middle leaders across three different schools, finding themes within each individual case, and then across the cases, was vital for highlighting patterns to establish what interviewees have in common, as well as how they differ. King and Horrocks (2010) note that it is important for the researcher to find the right balance between with-in case analysis and cross-case analysis:

> If the with-in case aspect is neglected, your themes are, in effect, treated as variables in the positivist tradition – abstract notion detached from the particularities of personal experience. If cross-case analysis is not properly developed, you are likely to produce a disjointed collection of case studies that do not allow you to effectively address your research question (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150).

With this in mind, the thematic analysis for each case study involved a number of stages:

1. listening to the interviews and transcribing them, verbatim. This involves going back over sections of the interview to ensure accuracy of meaning
2. reading the transcripts to further develop immersion in the data
3. highlighting items in the transcript that assist in understanding the interviewee's views, experiences, and perceptions; using these to define descriptive codes
4. combining descriptive codes that seem to relate in meaning, producing interpretative codes
5. grouping of the interpretative codes into common themes that reflect how they are conceptualised to relate to each other
6. reviewing the themes with regard to the entire interview transcript, and an additional read of the transcript to ascertain if new categories could be created, and
7. using any supporting documentary material pertaining to the transcripts to reinterpret the categories.

One significant benefit of the researcher transcribing the interviews is that it "provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights" (Patton, 2002, p. 441). This immersion in the data ensures that the themes emerge from the transcripts themselves in a process of 'constant comparison' that can be described in this way:

> The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualisation until a theory can be formulated (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 5), "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data." There are challenges involved in managing the data, especially the volume of material generated by interviews (Patton, 2002). Management of this data requires the assigning of coding schema, so as to ascribe meaning to the large volume of data contained in the interview transcriptions. Coding schema are a critical data-reduction tool (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 25). Basit (2003, p. 152) offers that "what coding does, above all, is to allow the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena."

Computer software, NVivo 12 Plus for Windows, was employed to assist with this process. While Patton (2002) argues there are no particular advantages to be derived from the use of computer software in terms of analysis, Basit (2003) notes that the use of computer software, such as NVivo, aid in the sorting and retrieval of data. Computer software also facilitates the analyses to be performed in greater depth with the resulting reports proving invaluable (Basit, 2003, p. 11). In comparing manual to computer assisted coding, Basit (2003, p. 11) notes:

> Nevertheless, coding was an intellectual exercise in both the cases. The package did not eliminate the need to think and deliberate, generate codes, and reject and replace them with others that were more illuminating, and which seemed to explain each phenomenon better.

The defining of descriptive codes was initially undertaken by analysis of each interview undertaken at each individual school. In addition, each interview transcript was assigned metadata relating to the respondent's designated classification and the education sector in which they worked. From this initial assigning of descriptive codes, the validity of these codes was checked and reassessed across the range of interviews for each of the school sites.

Descriptive codes that shared a similar meaning were then grouped together to form interpretative codes. From these interpretative codes, emergent themes evolved, which were grouped according to their shared meaning and the contextual relationship they held with the key research questions.

Using NVivo 12 Plus computer software, analysis of the emergent themes enabled the frequency of each theme to be determined, based on the number of participants whose responses raised the theme. This revealed the dominant themes for each school site, not only in totality, but for each of the specific classification groups: senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. Importantly for this study, the relative frequency and commonality of the emergent themes across the three school sites could then be determined for each specific classification group.

An example of a theme that emerged from each school was the value of holding regular meeting times between middle leaders and their line manager, which were considered important, as expressed by the Deputy Principal at School B:

> Establishing times to meet is important. Well, the Heads of the two schools work directly with the Level Leaders and meet with them on a weekly basis. I work directly with the Learning Leaders although that's going to change next year because there's a Curriculum Coordinator coming in (CS1).

Similarly, the Principal at School C made time to meet with middle leaders at their school:

> I meet with all the Heads of Department on a regular basis and the Heads of Learning and the Heads of Section and Heads of Students (IS2).

The view that regular meeting times offered middle leaders' support in their leadership role was reinforced by the Head of Languages at School A:

> I think they've been good to come and ask me how I'm going in the role. [GS2] is, I guess, my immediate boss and he's invited me to come and meet with him sort of every second week at least and ask how things are going, which has been good (GM2).

Likewise, a teacher at School A commented that they were aware of the meetings their Head of Department held with their line manager:

> For the formal meeting timetable process, my Head of Department typically meets about every fortnight, in a formal sense, with the Assistant Principal (GT2).

Another example of an emergent theme was the feedback middle leaders received regarding their performance in the role. Feedback was not always readily available, or clear to the middle leader who would provide the feedback, as raised by the Head of Science at School C:

> I know that if there are issues, like if students or parents complain about one of the teachers in the Science faculty, they'll generally complain to the Head of Teaching & Learning who will come to me and then I'll go and speak to them and go, "Look, this is the issue. Maybe you could try this instead. Have you thought about doing this kind of thing?" But I've never had anyone come to me. I don't know if that's because I'm an amazing teacher. I don't know who would do that (IM2).

This view regarding the limited feedback to middle leaders was also raised by the Principal at School C:

> Feedback of their work is not enough at the moment. The reason is that the middle managers are given help in how to do things (IS2).

In addition, a Year Level Coordinator at School A also raised the desire for greater feedback on their performance in the role:

> Yeah, so it would be nice to see to be – oh, not appreciated, I guess we are - but receive more ongoing feedback, rather than, "Oh this hasn't been done", or, "Why hasn't this board been updated?", when you feel like you're trying anyway. So, it just may be nice for some more ongoing feedback (GM1).

In this example, a total of 16 participants were found to have raised a concern relating to the feedback received by middle leaders. Using the principles of constant comparison, as espoused by Merriam (1998), further analysis of the themes revealed similarities between themes, not only within the individual cases, but across cases. It was therefore possible to identify over-arching themes that encompassed the overall meaning of the emergent sub themes.

The type of support the school provided for the middle leader's leadership development was considered a key issue by several participants, emerging from several sub themes. Table 3.3 provides a sample table listing the emergent sub themes and the corresponding number of participants who rose the issue. In this sample, the emergent sub themes provided the over-arching theme that corresponds to the support provided by the school for the development of middle leaders.

Table 3.3: Sample table of emergent sub themes and the number of classified participants who raised the issue

Sub Themes: Support provided by the school	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Regular meeting time with direct manager	11	6	4	21
Feedback on performance	9	4	3	16
Recognition of performance	7	1	1	9
Formal training: employer sponsorship	4	1	3	8
Creation of mid-level roles to provide leadership opportunities	2	1	3	6
Limitations in support for leaders	1	1	1	3
Induction process	2	0	0	2
Succession planning	0	0	1	1

This process of comparing and contrasting emergent themes enabled the development of over-arching themes. In turn, this clarified the common themes that emerged from across the breadth of the multiple case studies. Across the multiple case studies, four broad common themes emerged. These were:

1. the leadership preparations undertaken by middle leaders, prior to their appointment,
2. middle leader leadership development, once appointed,
3. the perception middle leaders and others held regarding their role, and
4. the determination of middle leaders' success in the role.

Each of these broad common themes is covered, in depth, in Chapter 4 and discussed in terms of their relationship with the research literature in Chapter 5.

In the following sections the three schools are described. Much of this information was taken from the schools' websites or other internal documents. To protect anonymity, these are not referenced here.

3.8 Overview of School A (Government)

School A is a large government secondary school located in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. Situated on a single campus, the school caters for over 1400 students, with the enrolments evenly distributed between girls and boys. Commencing in Year 7, the first year of secondary studies in Victoria, students come to the school from over 40 different government and non-government primary schools, with the largest intake coming from schools within walking distance of the school. Nearly 60% of students reside in the same suburb, or those immediately surrounding, the school. Enrolment at the school is restricted at a regional level due to high enrolment demand from families and the facilities on offer.

Describing itself on the school's website as a vibrant learning community, possessing a positive culture that is built on strong values for learning and community, the school

aims to provide the foundation for its students and staff to continually strive in the pursuit of excellence in all endeavours. The school's "guiding philosophy is the belief that all students learn best when they are happy, healthy, and resilient."

The school was established in the late 1960s, a time when the surrounding area was transitioning from rural usage for market gardens and orchards to housing and the associated infrastructure of urban development. Nearly 50% of the students enrolled come from a language background other than English. No indigenous students are currently enrolled.

The school's curriculum in Years 7 to 10 is based on the Victorian Curriculum. In Years 11 and 12, the school offers the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Students may also undertake Vocation Education and Training (VET) courses as part of their studies. From Year 9, students commence an integrated technology programme utilising iPads.

The VCE median score is 31, which is slightly above the state median of 30, with 7.4% of VCE students achieving study scores equal to or higher than 40.

The percentage of students who remain at the school from Year 7 through to Year 10 is greater than the median for Victorian government schools. Of those students exiting the school from Years 11 or 12, 94% continue with further studies at university (67%), TAFE or vocational study (20%) or commence full-time employment (7%).

The average days absent per full-time equivalent student is less than the median for all Victorian government schools, with students in Years 7 to 12, on average, achieving an attendance level of 93%.

The school's building infrastructure is a combination of permanent brick buildings and relocatable classrooms. Funding for building construction is predominantly sourced from the Department of Education, though the school's Council has previously funded

the construction of a gymnasium complex. The school grounds are spacious and well maintained.

The number of full-time teachers is 103. Teaching experience ranges from recent graduates to teachers with over 25 years' experience teaching. In general, teaching staff are accommodated in shared office spaces based either on their subject area or, if allocated pastoral duties, within the vicinity of the homerooms of the year level for which they have responsibility.

The principal of School A has been in the role for 16 years.

The school's Leadership Team consists of four senior leaders, five Leading Teachers (LT), and one Education Support Staff (ESS) member:

- Principal
- Assistant Principals (x 3)
- Head of Curriculum [LT]
- Head of Senior School [LT]
- Head of Junior School [LT]
- Director of Student Pathways [LT]
- Director of Student Well-being [LT]
- Business Manager [ESS]

The school website describes that members of the leadership team have a designated responsibility for driving improvement of the school through building the capacity of students and staff. It is expected that members of the leadership team will inspire "staff, students, or parents, to achieve their potential", model "best practice" and "lead by example, coach others to continually improve, show empathy and compassion for students staff and parents", be "responsive to the needs of others, positively connect with their team, advocate for their role in team", be "reliable and supportive", actively collaborate with others, and reflect the "school values in their dealings with the school community."

Beyond the Leadership Team, positions of responsibility within the educational domain were aligned with a teachers' status as either a Leading Teacher or a Learning Specialist.

On the school's website it is noted that to be recognised as a Leading Teacher, a teacher must undergo an accreditation process where they are required to demonstrate a high level of understanding of initiatives in student learning and "the capacity to provide leadership in the alignment of teaching and learning for the Victorian Curriculum." A teacher must also be considered an outstanding classroom teacher, with the "leadership skills and capacity to implement high impact classroom teaching strategies" and "to lead colleagues to continually improve their teaching and learning", thereby enabling "all students to achieve their full potential." In addition, the teacher must also have "demonstrated outstanding written and verbal communication skills, high level interpersonal skills", and "the ability to establish collaborative relationships with parents", colleagues, "and the broader School community." Typically, Leading Teacher status would be required for applicants seeking to be appointed as a Head of School, Head of Curriculum, or the Head of a major faculty, such as English, Mathematics or Humanities; the accreditation panel would consist of members from the school's senior leaders.

The responsibilities assigned to a Leading Teacher, listed on the school's website, include "leading and managing the implementation of whole school improvement initiatives that are related to the school strategic plan and school priorities", the "leading and managing of teacher professional learning, and developing individual and team performance and development plans for teaching staff within the priorities of the school." Importantly, these teachers were expected to contribute to the overall leadership and management of the school, primarily by leading the development of curricula in major learning areas or taking "responsibility for general discipline matters beyond the management required of classroom teachers." At School A, a participant in the study who held Leading Teacher status was the Head of Junior School.

Documentation on the school's website also highlights that Learning Specialists were considered to "be highly specialised classroom practitioners who continue to spend the majority of their time in the classroom delivering high quality teaching and learning." To be appointed a learning specialist, the teacher must demonstrate that they are able "to successfully lead the implementation and evaluation of learning" and teaching programmes, including "evidence-based pedagogical approaches." Learning Specialists also need to "provide expert advice about the content, processes and strategies" that will shape new teachers' professional learning. They also need to provide "evidence-based feedback to teaching staff to inform them of their effectiveness" in the classroom. Above all, Learning Specialists need to model exemplary professional learning practice, by seeking feedback about their own classroom practice from other teachers and fellow leaders, as part of their ability to reflect critically on their own performance. Teachers who hold Learning Specialist status may not always desire to hold a position of responsibility within the school, instead preferring to maintain their focus on teaching within the classroom. This was expressed by several teachers at School A. Typically, however, the majority of Heads of Faculty interviewed had attained Learning Specialist status, noting it was becoming a prerequisite for appointment to the role.

Figure 3.1 outlines the organisational chart for School A, denoting the reporting lines for senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers.

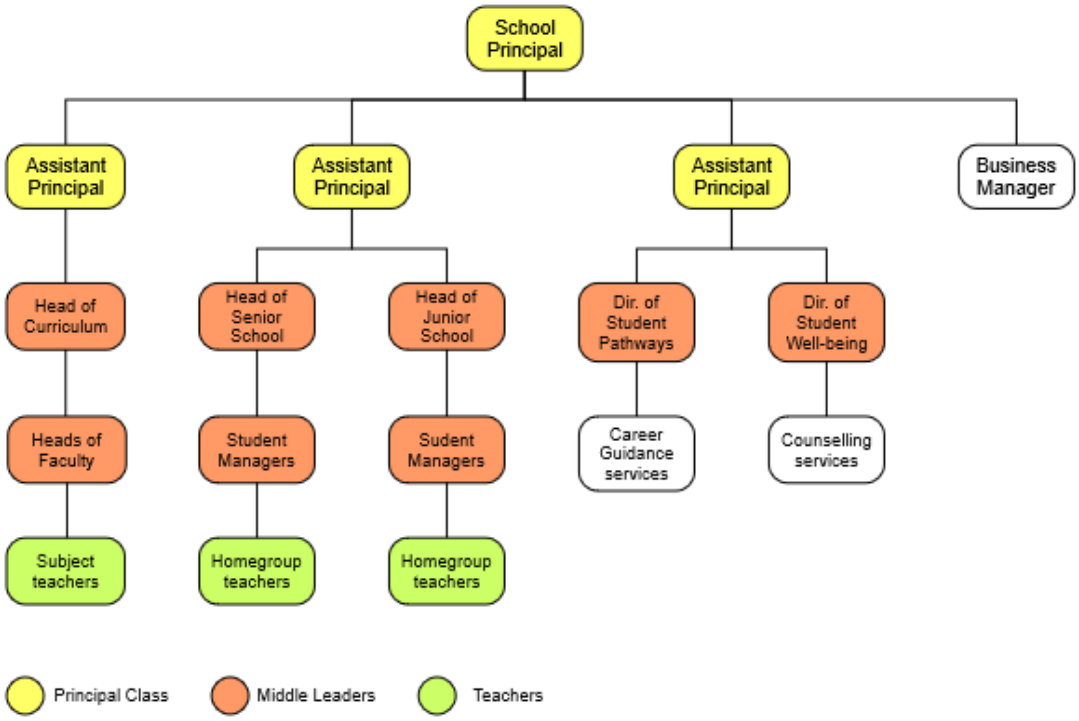

Figure 3.1: Organisational chart for School A

The role of Student Manager was responsible for the pastoral care needs of students in a specific year level. They reported directly to the Head of School, relevant to the year level they managed: Years 7 to 9 reported to the Head of Junior School, Years 10 to 12 reported to the Head of Senior School. Each year level was assigned two Student Managers, ideally one male teacher and one female teacher, to cater for gender related issues or to provide an adult contact that a child may feel more comfortable approaching. Having responsibility for a group of Homegroup teachers in their year level, the Student Manager role is considered one of the initial tiers of middle management at the school:

> I mean it's partly that thing, after you've been sort of teaching for a certain amount of time, as a classroom teacher; there is a level of expectation that you take on something else. It's kind of unspoken, but everybody knows it. You can't just be a classroom teacher forever. I mean, that being said, obviously, I really enjoy student management because I would have left after the first year if I didn't (GM1).

The Student Manager position is only appointed on a year-by-year basis, with applicants interviewed at the end of each year. Tenure for all other positions of leadership is limited to three years, with positions advertised externally and incumbents required to reapply. While accepted as part of the process of working at a government school, it was an issue of concern for some middle leaders, particularly one participant who had recently failed in their bid to be reappointed to a Head of Faculty position, a position they had held for six years. As the new incumbent was an external appointee, they no longer had a teaching position at the school and were expecting to be designated as surplus. Other teachers and middle leaders raised their concern about the appointment and conveyed a sense that a period of trepidation accompanied the appointment process:

> He was Head of Science here for six years and lost that appointment this year to an external appointee - so personally that's disappointing. Life goes on (GT1).

Many of the staff at School A, teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders included, spoke with great pride of the fact that they taught in the Government sector. The Head of Literacy best summed up these sentiments, stating a desire to have good teachers in government schools:

> I wanted to work in the government system. I came from the private system as a student and had the belief that I think that there should be good teachers in government schools and considered myself to want to work hard for that. So, I never looked at the private sector and that was just a belief that I had (GM5).

Overall, the main themes that emerged from School A were:

1. Staff commitment to teaching in the sector
2. Support provided to middle leaders by the school
3. Perception of middle leaders' role
4. Tenure and contract conditions
5. Ability of middle leaders to influence the direction of the school

3.9 Overview of School B (Catholic)

School B is a large, single campus, coeducational Catholic secondary school located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Catering for over 1500 students from Year 7 to Year 12, the school bases its curriculum in Years 7 to 10 on the Victorian Curriculum and in Years 11 and 12 it offers students courses of study from the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Vocational Educational and Training (VET), and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

The school was established as a regional school in 1961 by the local deanery, a group of 13 surrounding parishes. A Catholic religious order, which continues to have a substantial global presence in the education of school aged children, was invited by the deanery to administer the school on their behalf. The school is responsible to the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) through Catholic Education – Melbourne (CEM).

The school aims to promote equality education for secondary school aged children whilst developing an awareness of God in the lives of their students. They also wish for the students to be endowed with "a sense of justice, a hopeful spirit, a love of learning," and an understanding of the "value and connectedness of all human relationships."

The school's curriculum in Years 7 to 10 is based on the Victorian Curriculum. In Years 11 and 12, the school offers the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Students may also undertake Vocation Education and Training (VET) courses as part of their studies. From Year 7, students commence an integrated technology programme utilising iPads. From Year 10, students may select and supply their own technology device.

The percentage of students who remain at the school from Year 9 through to Year 12 is just over 86%. Of those students exiting the school from Years 11 or 12, 89%

continue with further studies at university (53%), TAFE or vocational study (24%), defer from study (12%), or commence full-time employment (10%).

The VCE median score is 31, which is slightly above the state median of 30, with 9.5% of VCE students achieving study scores equal to or higher than 40.

Around 5% of the students enrolled come from a language background other than English, with indigenous students comprising 1% of the student population.

Students in Years 7 to 12 achieved a school attendance rate, on average, of just over 93%. For staff, inclusive of both teaching and non-teaching, the attendance rate is 86%.

The school's infrastructure constitutes an eclectic collection of buildings that reflect the changes in contemporary pedagogy since the foundation of the school to present day. Teaching spaces vary from discrete classrooms designed to cater for individual senior classes to modern, open plan multifunctional spaces, predominantly used by middle years' classes. The school boasts expansive grounds and sporting facilities for both girls and boys.

The number of full-time teachers is 135. Within the teaching staff, experience ranges from recent graduates to teachers with over 25 years' experience. The percentage of staff retained from the previous year was 88%.

The principal of School B has been in the role for three years, having replaced a principal of 25 years standing at the school.

The school's executive team consists of three senior leaders, six middle leaders, and one non-teaching administration member:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal – Learning

- Deputy Principal – Staff/Students
- Head of Catholic Life [ML]
- Head of Senior Years [ML]
- Head of Junior Years [ML]
- Head of Daily Organisation [ML]
- Head of Professional Practice [ML]
- Head of Standards & Accreditation [ML], and
- Business Manager

Members of the school executive team are expected to have a proven ability and experience in developing educational outcomes in both teaching and learning. An expectation is that they have the ability to articulate and action the Mission Charter and strategic plan of the school, particularly as it relates to their specific field of responsibility. They are also required to have a clear understanding and commitment to public policy expectations for the work undertaken by teacher, incorporating as appropriate, the VIT teaching standards, Teaching Australia Charter, CECV/CEM policies, the multi-enterprise agreement, and developing national and state government strategies for education. Excellent verbal and written communication skills, a high degree of professionalism, enthusiasm for a commitment to the position, and the ability to work independently and within a team at an executive level, is also required.

Both within and beyond the school executive team, the roles undertaken by middle leaders lie within three distinct domains, that is, pastoral care, administration, and curriculum leadership. Within these domains, the middle leader is expected to be an expert in their field and offer support to their fellow middle leaders and to those staff that they lead. There is a clear expectation that middle leaders, and the senior leaders, will lead within a sphere of mutual responsibility and collegiality. This sharing of responsibilities requires staff to determine the correct reporting line when seeking advice from a line manager, and can at times require seeking the advice of the principal, as expressed by a head of faculty:

> …the way the school management is at the moment is that the learning area is answerable to the Deputy Principal Learning. Although, if it's particularly more of a staff pastoral issue then it's the other DP, so either of those two, depending if it's more of a curriculum matter, then I go that way. If it's more of a staff personnel issue, then I go that way; then, depending on what it is, together we'll go up to the principal (CM5).

The principal (CS2) was aware that the organisational structure required refinement in order to provide clarity for staff, noting that a forthcoming restructure would "lead to improved role clarity and clarify some of the areas, which at the moment, look a bit murky as to what the chain of command is in the school." The principal also noted that there was ongoing discussion within the school's consultative committee as to what defined a position of leadership. The principal was of the opinion that if a middle leader did not lead a team of people, then it could be considered that they were "not really in a position of leadership", but rather in "a subcategory called 'positions of responsibility'." This definition held by the principal was raised as a point of concern by one middle leader participant, who, as the staff member in charge of a city-based curriculum programme, where students in Year 9 spent time exploring the central business district, was not officially recognised by the school as holding a leadership position; this was due to the fact that they did not have direct responsibility for other staff.

Figure 3.2 outlines the organisational chart for School B, denoting the reporting lines for senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers.

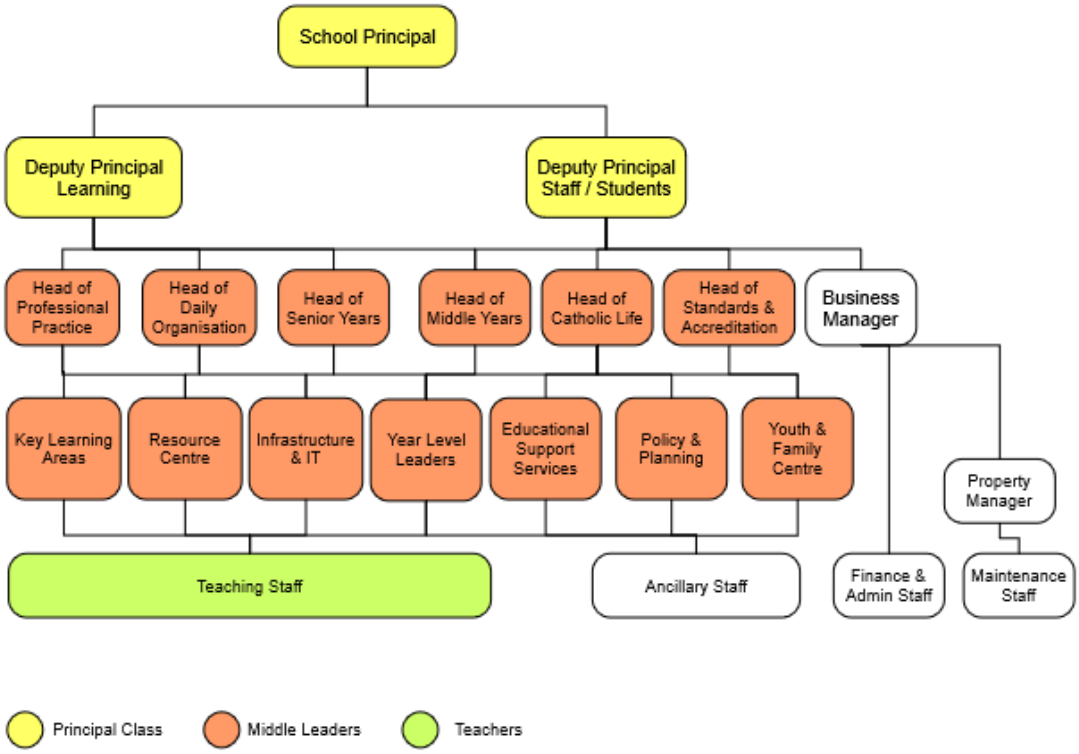

Figure 3.2: Organisational chart for School B

As a rule, staff expressed great pride in their school and especially the sense that staff were committed to not only helping the students, but to helping their colleagues as well. A genuine esprit de corps seemed to exist, particularly around the social justice enterprises the school undertook to assist the marginalised in their local community. Staff were aware that the school was part of a greater association of schools with shared ideology.

Each year, staff are expected to undertake an Annual Review Meeting (ARM) with the Principal or one of the Deputy Principals. The ARM process is prescribed by the CECV and is structured to be formative in nature. Its focus is on affirming achievement and suggesting avenues of professional development; it is not a means of managing employment concerns. Most teachers and middle leaders found these

meetings “a really positive discussion” (CT1) but felt dissatisfied that the discussions were held only once a year and would have preferred the feedback on a timelier basis.

Positions of leadership were tenured, with the appointment period set at three years. Monetary and time allowances were provided, varying with respect to the seniority of the role. Conditions were set as per the Victorian Catholic Multi Enterprise Agreement 2013. At the end of tenure, positions were advertised, both internally and externally, with the incumbent invited to reapply. Unsuccessful reappointments would see the staff member lose their position of leadership but maintain their teaching status, and hence employment, at the school

Finding a balance between professional and personal commitments, particularly professional commitments after normal school hours, was not considered an area of concern by the middle leaders at School B, indicating a manageable separation of demands that afforded an acceptable balance between the middle leaders’ professional and personal life.

Overall, the main themes that emerged from School B were:

1. Support provided to middle leaders by the school
2. Ability of middle leaders to influence the direction of the school
3. Middle leaders’ career progression
4. Staff relational dynamics
5. Support of colleagues

3.10 Overview of School C (Independent)

School C is a large multi-campus, coeducational, independent school catering for students from Kindergarten to Year 12. Located in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne, the school was established in 1982, founded by the local communities of two Christian churches, both of whom still maintain a presence through representation on the School Board.

The school is a member of Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), a not-for-profit organisation that provides professional services to member schools. ISV is not a managing authority, rather, it is an association of over 200 schools formed to promote and develop Independent education in Victoria.

Set across two expansive campuses that are separated from each other by approximately seven kilometres, the school has been structured around five sub-schools: Kindergarten, Junior School, Middle School, Year 9, and Senior School, in the belief that this will promote a strong sense of community and family within the student body. Only one campus has a kindergarten programme.

The school prides itself on offering a holistic education that aims to inspire excellence and nurture confident, independent learners. It sees its mission as ensuring its students are imbued with values that empower them to be responsible, caring citizens in their local and global communities. The school considers itself an innovative learning community that is focused on the core values of integrity, compassion, and respect. Within its local community, the school is regarded as an academic hub, with most families aspiring for their children to graduate at Year 12 and move on to higher learning.

The school's curriculum from Foundation to Year 10 is based on the Victorian Curriculum. In Years 11 and 12, the school offers the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Students may also undertake Vocation Education and Training (VET) subjects as part of their studies. From Year 3, students commence an

integrated technology programme utilising iPads. From Year 9, students may select and supply their own technology device.

Initially, the school opened with only one campus (Campus α); the second campus (campus β) was established in 2003. Both campuses have undergone an extensive building programme, utilising prefabricated concrete and brick structures with sympathetic landscaping around demountable structures to provide highly functional generalist classrooms and specialist spaces.

Campus α hosts a Tennis School of Excellence, offering before and after school coaching, as well as an extensive school holiday programme offering specialist training by international coaches.

The percentage of students who remain at the school from Year 9 through to Year 12 is just over 76%. Of those students exiting the school from Years 11 or 12, 86% continue with further studies at university (77%), TAFE or vocational study (9%), or commence full-time employment (14%).

The VCE median score is 31, which is slightly above the state median of 30, with 5.9% of VCE students, averaged from both campuses, achieving study scores equal to or higher than 40.

Nearly 14% of the students enrolled come from a language background other than English. No indigenous students are currently enrolled.

Students in Years 7 to 12 achieved a school attendance rate, on average, of over 92%.

The number of full-time teachers, combined across both campuses, is 267. Within the teaching staff, experience ranges from recent graduates to teachers with over 25 years' experience.

The principal of School C has been in the role for 15 years.

The school's executive team consists of three senior leaders, three middle leaders, and five non-teaching administrative leaders:

- School Principal
- Campus Principals (x 2)
- Head of Education Planning & Learning Innovation [ML]
- Head of Kindergarten [ML]
- Head of Admissions
- Head of Operations
- Head of Outdoor Education [ML]
- Head of Human Resources
- Head of Marketing & Communications, and
- Business Manager

The key responsibilities of members of the school's executive team focus on their requirement to lead and manage within their designated role. Members are required to demonstrate a commitment to the Christian faith and their alignment with the vision and ethos of the college. Drawing upon their professional strength, personal competence, and pervasive integrity, the executive members are required to be effective managers in an educational context and be able to empathise with the needs of both students and staff. They are required to support and manage the process of change required to keep the school at the forefront of educational development. As such, they are required to have a strong awareness of current educational philosophies and practices and have an administrative style that includes the ability to delegate and consult appropriately. With a commitment to continuing self-education, they are expected to possess drive, energy, and a sense of humour that enables them to maintain a balance, considering the demands of their position, between professional and personal life.

Reporting to their respective campus principal, the eight Heads of School, which includes the Heads of Senior School, Heads of Year 9, Heads of Middle School, and Heads of Junior School, are required to lead, and manage the students and staff of their respective sub-schools. Heads of Learning and Heads of Students exist for each sub-school, as do Heads of House, a role that is considered as the principal carer, both pastorally and academically, of the students.

Of interest at School C is the way in which the traditional key learning areas are managed. The Heads of English, Humanities, Commerce, Mathematics, and Science, of each sub-school, report to their respective Head of Learning. The Heads of Section, which includes the positions of:

- Head of Sport
- Head of Technology
- Head of Physical Education
- Head of Special Education
- Head of Visual Art
- Head of Information Services
- Head of Performing Arts
- Head of Languages
- Director of Cadets
- Career Counsellor
- Head of Information Communication & Technology (ICT), and
- Reports Coordinator,

are not replicated across each sub-school and, therefore, report directly to the campus principal.

Regarded extensively as a separate business unit, the Head of Kindergarten, as a member of the school executive, does not report directly to the campus principal, but to the school principal.

The Head of Education Planning and Learning Innovation has no direct reports; their role is to work in consultation with their fellow school executive members to ensure the school provides high-quality academic programmes that are at the forefront of contemporary educational practice.

Figure 3.3 outlines the organisational chart for School C, denoting the reporting lines for senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers.

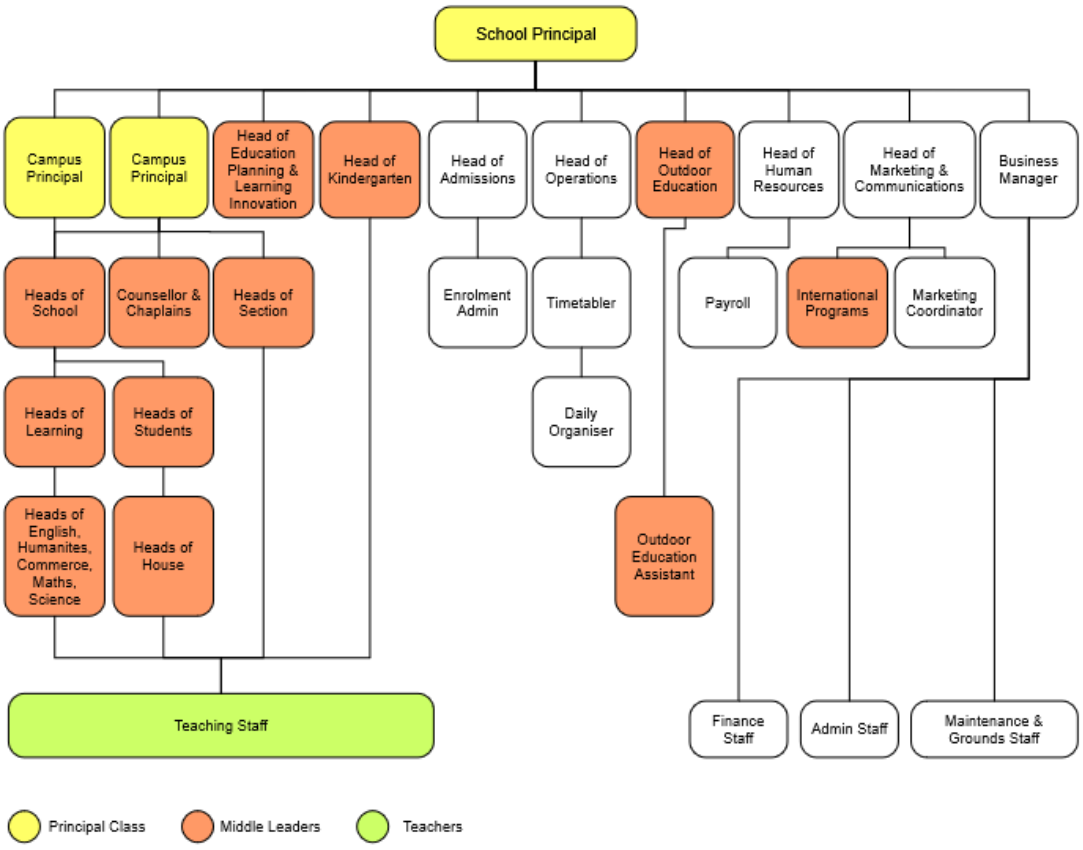

Figure 3.3: Organisational chart for School C

Rising from the dual campus structure of School C, participants in the study based at each campus conveyed a sense of their perception of the difficulties they face working in a multi-campus organisation with a complex management structure. Seeking unity

in decision making between campuses could prove problematic, as expressed by a Head of Learning (IM1), leading to growing tension:

> …the view here is totally different from the view of the other campus and that's where, that's where tension, I think, evolves in terms of, well, you can have your ideas and be supported totally by your students and your staff here, which can be quite contrary to the view at the other campus. How do you actually resolve that? For me, it provides a lot of tension being sort of in the middle because who makes, who makes the ultimate decision? So, there are times when there is, I guess, conflict and who's right and who's wrong? Well, in some cases no-one is necessarily right or wrong.

This sense of tension was also shared by a Head of Section (IM3), noting that small issues, such as the composition of a year level booklist, could lead to confusion for parents and additional expense if there were differences at each campus:

> It's almost like a tennis game between the two campuses, and Heads of Department have that sort of view as well, that is, we want to do this or we want to do this; it could be something trivial, like we don't want a textbook and they want a textbook.

The complexity of the organisational structure of School B led a Head of Section (IM6) to express frustration over their perception of micromanagement by their line manager, the need to keep them appraised, and the lack of consideration of their professional expertise:

> …this is the hardest school I've ever worked in, in terms of real support and understanding and the micromanagement. It's crazy! I'm 41. Everything, pretty much everything, has to be funnelled through [campus principal]. Absolutely everything!

The school principal (IS2) was mindful of the tensions that existed between campuses and the complex nature of the sub-school management structure, notwithstanding the personalities of the various middle leaders and their ability to cope with the diverse nature of the demands placed upon them. A major organisational restructure was planned for next year:

> the next stage is all of the position descriptions are being rewritten away from tasks and management structures…trying to make a very simple model…the expectation that learning will be built in all of those, not just middle managers but others as well. That sounds good but it's going to take a lot.

Overall, the main themes that emerged from School C were:

1. Support provided to middle leaders by the school
2. Ability of middle leaders to influence the direction of the school
3. Middle leaders' career progression
4. Perception of middle leaders' role
5. Working with upper management

3.11 Rigor and Trustworthiness

Although some critics are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009), frameworks for ensuring rigour in this form of research have been in existence for many years. Yin (2009, p. 10) notes the problem of using case studies:

> Perhaps the greatest concern has been over the lack of rigor of case study research. Too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions.

Despite the differences between qualitative research and scientific research methods, it can be argued that:

> Regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualisation and the way in which the data are collected, analysed, and interpreted. Different types of research are based on different assumptions about what is being investigated, however, and different designs seek to answer different questions (Merriam, 1998, p. 165).

To ensure validity and reliability of qualitative research, Merriam (1998) identified six basic strategies which can be used to ensure internal validity:

1. Triangulation – using multiple sources of evidence.
2. Member checks – taking data back to the people from whom they were derived.
3. Peer examination – asking colleagues to comment on findings.
4. Participatory modes of research.

5. Researcher biases – clarifying the researcher's assumptions.

In this research, a number of these strategies were employed, including:

- Triangulation – multiple sources of evidence were used, both within the individual schools and across the three schools. This enabled the researcher to check the themes emerging in each school with themes common across the three schools.
- Member checks – participants were asked to check and review the record of interview.
- Peer examination – this was achieved through dissecting the research with the supervisor for this study.
- Researcher biases – assumptions held by the researcher will be declared.

3.12 Ethics Procedures

In accordance with the guidelines stipulated by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (2012), participants were provided with a plain language statement that outlined the intent of the research and the expectations of participants consenting to take part (refer to Appendix C). Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form and understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time (refer to Appendix D). Participants were provided with the researcher's contact details, and those of the university, in order to make contact should they have any concerns with the study. The dignity, self-esteem and rights of the participants were considered at all times throughout the investigation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) and every effort was made by the researcher to see that these were not compromised during the study. Research integrity and quality was maintained by the study being carried out carefully, thoughtfully and correctly so that an honest, truthful relationship with the interviewees was established and sustained (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The approval number of the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne is 1339261.

This research project ensured that:

- research authorisation was obtained from DET and CEM (refer to Appendix E)
- permission was obtained from the principals of each school before research was conducted
- de-identified samples or data were used, where the identifiers were replaced by a code
- there will be no option of participants being identified in any publication arising from the project
- participants will be identified by pseudonym in any subsequent publications
- access to computer files containing data and information is by password only. Backed-up data will also be password protected and stored for five years
- legal limitations to data confidentiality were described appropriately in a plain language statement to participants prior to their involvement in the project

An area of concern to participants was that their data was kept confidential, in particular, with respect to the following groups:

- DET, CEM, and Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) personnel
- school council members
- colleagues
- the media
- the local school community, including staff, students, and parents
- education unions and professional associations

Participants were made aware, prior to the project commencing, that codes and pseudonyms would be used when referring to the respondents and that the data and information collected will be used for legitimate research only. Importantly, as part of the sampling process, participants were asked to give informed consent and were

given absolute assurances that the promised confidentiality will be maintained (Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.13 Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations refer to the qualifications that are based on the findings of the study; delimitations of research refer to the boundaries that are assigned to the study:

3.13.1 Limitations

- The most common limitation of case study research is the limitation of time. There exists in this study a limitation on the time available to provide the desired level of detail in the research. In this study, single interviews, and documents from three schools were conducted in the available time.
- The integrity, bias, and skills of the researcher. The researcher has over 25 years' experience in secondary education in Victorian independent schools, having been a teacher, middle leader, and now, senior leader. Merriam (1998) identifies three qualities needed by a researcher: 1) tolerance of ambiguity, 2) sensitivity and 3) good communicator. The extent to which the researcher in this study was able to demonstrate these qualities causes a limitation for the study.

3.13.2 Delimitations

- The research is restricted to three Victorian secondary schools and whilst the findings may have wider applicability in the educational leadership literature no such applicability is implied or assumed by the researcher.
- The research also only includes the perspectives of those interviewed in each of the schools and hence other views may have been present at the schools but not discovered by the researcher.

3.14 Summary – Chapter 3

A case study methodology was used to research the preparation and development of middle leaders in schools. Participants in the study were invited from three Victorian secondary schools: one government, one Catholic, and one independent school.

Semi-structured interviewing was used for the purpose of collecting participants' responses. The participants' responses were coded and analysed. From these codes, emergent themes evolved, which were grouped according to their shared meaning and the contextual relationship they held with the key research questions. Analysis of the emergent themes enabled the frequency of each theme to be determined, based on the number of participants whose responses raised the theme. This revealed the dominant themes for each school site, not only in totality, but for each of the specific classification groups: senior leaders, middle leaders, and teachers. Importantly for this study, the relative frequency and commonality of the emergent themes across the three school sites could then be determined for each specific classification group. These findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings generated from the research exploring the common themes facing middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, with regard to how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; their preparation for the role; their development in the role; and how they determine their success in the role. The findings are drawn from the perspective of three key groups within the Government, Catholic and Independent secondary education sectors: teachers, middle leaders (ML), and the senior leaders (SL). The data for these findings were collected using semi-structured interviews, with documents providing a contextual point of reference.

The chapter is divided into four sections, with each section providing details of the themes that emerged from the research:

1. Preparation for leadership
2. Development of leadership
3. Perception of leadership, and
4. Success in leadership

To assist the reader, Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes discussed within each section of the findings.

4.1 Preparation for Leadership

- **4.1.1 Action undertaken to attain leadership position**
  - 4.1.1.1 No prior preparation undertaken for the role
  - 4.1.1.2 Undertook further study to attain higher qualification
  - 4.1.1.3 Undertook short course to enhance skills
  - 4.1.1.4 Membership of professional subject association
- **4.1.2 Circumstance that led to leadership position**
  - 4.1.2.1 Desire to advance career
  - 4.1.2.2 Employer encouragement
  - 4.1.2.3 Position available due to change in staffing
  - 4.1.2.4 Previous unsuccessful leadership role application
  - 4.1.2.5 Recognition of skills by others
  - 4.1.2.6 Informal conversation with senior staff
  - 4.1.2.7 Employer directly appointed
  - 4.1.2.8 Self-doubt to take on a leadership role
  - 4.1.2.9 To gain employment; increased hours
  - 4.1.2.10 Influenced by role models within the school
  - 4.1.2.11 Lack of support mechanisms for role preparation
  - 4.1.2.12 Sole applicant for position

4.2 Development of Leadership

- **4.2.1 Support provided by the school**
  - 4.2.1.1 Formal meeting time with direct manager
  - 4.2.1.2 Feedback on performance
  - 4.2.1.3 Recognition of performance
  - 4.2.1.4 Formal training: employer sponsorship
  - 4.2.1.5 Creation of mid-level roles to provide leadership opportunities
  - 4.2.1.6 Limitations in support for leaders
  - 4.2.1.7 Induction process
  - 4.2.1.8 Succession planning
- **4.2.2 Professional learning**
  - 4.2.2.1 Professional learning: self-directed
  - 4.2.2.2 Professional learning: school directed
  - 4.2.2.3 Professional learning: limited
- **4.2.3 Career progression**
  - 4.2.3.1 Reappointment concerns
  - 4.2.3.2 Career progression via changing schools
  - 4.2.3.3 Career progression unsure
  - 4.2.3.4 Career progression of interest
  - 4.2.3.5 Career relinquishing; stepping down; not renewed
  - 4.2.3.6 Career progression not of interest
  - 4.2.3.7 Career progression via further study
  - 4.2.3.8 Career progression via talent identification
- **4.2.4 Mentoring**
- **4.2.5 Informal meeting times with manager**
- **4.2.6 Develop via time in position; experience through exposure**
- **4.2.7 Formal education: self-directed**
- **4.2.8 Time management concerns**
- **4.2.9 Balance teaching and leadership role**
- **4.2.10 Authentic responsibility in role**
- **4.2.11 Clarity in the role**
- **4.2.12 Leadership networks; involvement in associations**

4.3 Perception of Leadership

- **4.3.1 Influence school direction**
  - 4.3.1.1 Some influence
  - 4.3.1.2 Highly influential
  - 4.3.1.3 No influence
  - 4.3.1.4 Negative influence
- **4.3.2 Negative perception**
  - 4.3.2.1 Poor support in role
  - 4.3.2.2 Poor communication
  - 4.3.2.3 Lack of autonomy
  - 4.3.2.4 Poor management
  - 4.3.2.5 Limited time to perform role
  - 4.3.2.6 Lack of inclusion
  - 4.3.2.7 Poor mentoring, role model
  - 4.3.2.8 Apportioning blame to others
  - 4.3.2.9 Disconnected, out of touch
  - 4.3.2.10 Overwhelmed by role
  - 4.3.2.11 Pedagogical void
  - 4.3.2.12 Poor leadership
  - 4.3.2.13 Difference of process
  - 4.3.2.14 Ego driven
  - 4.3.2.15 Retribution
  - 4.3.2.16 Lack of experience
  - 4.3.2.17 Poor qualifications
- **4.3.3 Professional relationships**
  - 4.3.3.1 Collegiality; team building
  - 4.3.3.2 Changed dynamics
  - 4.3.3.3 Visibility and access
  - 4.3.3.4 Networking
- **4.3.4 Desired personal qualities**
  - 4.3.4.1 Consultative
  - 4.3.4.2 Rapport builder; encourager
  - 4.3.4.3 Active leader; participant
  - 4.3.4.4 Open to change
  - 4.3.4.5 Empathetic; high EQ
  - 4.3.4.6 Decision-maker
  - 4.3.4.7 Communicator
  - 4.3.4.8 Leader developer; nurturer
  - 4.3.4.9 Trustworthy
  - 4.3.4.10 Adaptable
  - 4.3.4.11 Approachable
  - 4.3.4.12 Resilient
  - 4.3.4.13 Appeasing
  - 4.3.4.14 Counsellor
  - 4.3.4.15 Learner
- **4.3.5 Managing the department**
- **4.3.6 Leadership structure within the school**
- **4.3.7 Level of autonomy**
- **4.3.8 Provide support to others**
- **4.3.9 Managing students**
- **4.3.10 Work / life balance**
- **4.3.11 Resistance from peers**
- **4.3.12 Credibility and the role**
- **4.3.13 Seeing self as a leader**
- **4.3.14 Espousing vision**
- **4.3.15 Working within organisational constraints**
- **4.3.16 Remuneration**
- **4.3.17 Favoured; protected**
- **4.3.18 Working with parents**
- **4.3.19 Strategic thinker; forecasting**
- **4.3.20 Exposure to new ideas**
- **4.3.21 Constrained by systemic factors**
- **4.3.22 Acquire skills on the job**
- **4.3.23 Reputation concerns**
- **4.3.24 Access to special events**
- **4.3.25 Geographical barriers**

4.4 Success in Leadership

- **4.4.1 Student focussed**
  - 4.4.1.1 Student grades; academic performance
  - 4.4.1.2 Student feedback
  - 4.4.1.3 Student longitudinal data
  - 4.4.1.4 Student enjoyment
  - 4.4.1.5 Student well-being
  - 4.4.1.6 Student learning seen as a priority
  - 4.4.1.7 Student attendance
  - 4.4.1.8 Student behaviour
  - 4.4.1.9 Knowledge of student
  - 4.4.1.10 Student involvement in community
  - 4.4.1.11 Student gratitude
  - 4.4.1.12 Students subject enrolment
  - 4.4.1.13 Student feels supported
  - 4.4.1.14 Enrolment numbers
  - 4.4.1.15 Student effort
- **4.4.2 Relational dynamics**
  - 4.4.2.1 Influencing colleagues
  - 4.4.2.2 Rapport with colleagues
  - 4.4.2.3 Influencing students
  - 4.4.2.4 Rapport with students
- **4.4.3 Peer feedback**
- **4.4.4 Improved programmes**
- **4.4.5 Not sure what determines success**
- **4.4.6 Defined goals required and achieved**
- **4.4.7 Staff feel content**
- **4.4.8 Being seen to be competent**
- **4.4.9 Personal enjoyment of role**
- **4.4.10 Staff feel empowered**
- **4.4.11 Parent feedback**
- **4.4.12 Timely communication**
- **4.4.13 Staff organised**
- **4.4.14 Staff feel supported**
- **4.4.15 Improved infrastructure**
- **4.4.16 Diminished complaints**
- **4.4.17 Level of programme acceptance**

Figure 4.1: Overview of emergent themes and sub-themes discussed within each section of the findings

4.1 Preparation for Leadership

From the findings emerged common themes relating to the preparation undertaken by middle leaders prior to their leadership role. These results only relate to the preparation established middle leaders had undertaken towards their initial middle level leadership position and do not include the considerable personal concerns teachers voiced regarding their own career progression, nor the personal concerns of senior leaders.

From the emergent themes related to the middle leaders' preparation for leadership, two distinct areas were revealed:

1. actions undertaken by the middle leader in order to attain a leadership position, and
2. circumstances that led to the middle leader applying for the leadership position

4.1.1 Action undertaken to attain leadership position

In their preparation for a middle leadership position, some middle leaders undertook direct action in order to attain a leadership position. Table 4.1 lists the emergent themes, ranked by the total number of participants who raised issues related to the theme. Thereafter, details pertaining to each emergent theme are provided.

Table 4.1: Emergent themes regarding actions taken by middle leaders to prepare for leadership, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Emergent Themes: Preparation for leadership role	ML (n=22)
No prior preparation undertaken for the role	12
Undertook further study to attain higher qualification	8
Undertook short course to enhance skills	1
Membership of professional subject association	1

4.1.1.1 No prior preparation undertaken for the role

Twelve middle leaders noted that they had not undertaken any leadership preparation prior to them attaining their leadership role within a school. All were aware of various professional development opportunities available to them, either specifically related to leadership development within their curriculum area or teaching and learning development within their subject area, but none had taken advantage of these opportunities. In providing an explanation, one middle leader noted that their school provided "a really good structure in terms of support for people who took on KLA roles [Head of Faculty]" (CM4) and the outgoing middle leader was able to provide transition support. Another middle leader noted that they were expediently appointed to the role, due to the removal of an under-performing incumbent, as they were already successfully performing the duties of the role.

4.1.1.2 Undertook further study to attain higher qualification

In preparing themselves for a middle level school leadership role, just over one third of middle leaders undertook a Master of Education degree, either through coursework or research, majoring in leadership, numeracy, or information communication and technology, or as a progression from a post-graduate diploma. Middle leaders in the Catholic system noted appreciatively that they were able to gain sponsorship for their Master's study from Catholic Education – Melbourne (CEM). Depending upon when they undertook their coursework, this sponsorship involved financial support of one-third to one-half of the course fees. This was considered a substantial incentive for undertaking the study, and in part, a stepping-stone to a leadership position, to the extent that one middle leader (CM5) noted they applied for CEM sponsorship "lots of times" until successful.

4.1.1.3 Undertook short course to enhance skills

Only one middle leader stated that they had undertaken a leadership development course, specifically to enhance their leadership skills, in preparation for their

leadership role. The course was conducted within the school, run by the school's professional development network.

> I did a leadership course in 2012…It was called 'Leaders in the Making'. It was run by the network here. (GM2)

None of the middle leaders mentioned having participated in leadership development programmes offered through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership, Catholic Leadership Centre, or Independent Schools Victoria, though some were aware or these organisations as sources of support for their leadership preparation.

4.1.1.4 Membership of professional subject association

One middle leader (IM2) raised the importance of professional subject associations, stating that as a teacher, professional networks and end-of-year conferences were invaluable. However, in their preparation for a Head of Faculty role, membership was not regarded as having been beneficial.

4.1.2 Circumstance that led to leadership position

For some middle leaders, circumstance and prevailing opportunity were the impetus for seeking to attain a leadership position. Table 4.2 lists the emergent themes, ranked by the total number of participants who raised issues related to the theme. Thereafter, details pertaining to each emergent theme are provided.

Table 4.2: Emergent themes regarding circumstance that led middle leaders to apply for leadership, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Emergent Themes: Preparation for leadership role	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Desire to advance career	14	0	1	15
Employer encouraged	9	2	0	11
Position available due to change in staffing	9	2	0	11
Previous unsuccessful leadership role application	7	3	0	10
Recognition of skills by others	6	0	3	9
Informal conversations with senior staff	5	3	0	8
Employer directly appointed	6	0	1	7
Self-doubt to take on leadership role	4	0	0	4
To gain employment; increased hours	2	0	0	2
Influenced by role models within the school	1	0	0	1
Lack of support mechanisms for role preparation	1	0	0	1
Sole applicant for position	0	1	0	1

4.1.2.1 Desire to advance career

Appointment to a formal leadership position in a school was most commonly seen as a means for career advancement. Over half the middle leaders sought the management and leadership challenges that they associated with a leadership position and felt there was an expectation on themselves, an ambitious drive, to take on leadership positions as opportunities were presented.

> I think I wanted a challenge. I wanted to, I guess, take that next step in terms of taking a leadership role. I was already the e-Learning Coordinator, as well. And then that opportunity came up to obviously move into the area that I'm an expert in, so that was something I decided to do. (CM6)

Career advancement, with the notion to increase remuneration and responsibility, was also deemed desirable and an initial inducement for some middle leaders considering their first application for a position of leadership within the school.

> …for me to move from where I was to a leading teacher, it was quite a significant bump up in salary and also in, I guess, responsibility and duties… (GM2)

Moving between schools, or even education sectors, was not considered an impediment to advancing one's career, in so much that the move provided an advancement on a pathway towards a preferred role or aspirational position.

> I was sort of heading in the vice principal, principal area in the government sector because I'd always been in the government sector. So, I was sort of on the steppingstones towards that path but then when this job came up it was a good opportunity to grasp. (IM6)

One Senior leader noted that a staff members' desire to advance their career can be measured by how they participate in the co-curricular life of the school; thereby, through their actions, they identify themselves as possible candidates to be considered for leadership positions as they arise. This desire to be involved in the life of the school singles teachers out for talent identification.

4.1.2.2 Employer encouragement

Over one third of the middle leaders cited encouragement to apply for a leadership position, by their current employer, as one of the key factors that led to them applying for their leadership position.

> I was encouraged to go for the job originally, a few other people were though, I don't think I was tapped on the shoulder like 'This is yours,' but yeah, I think the moulding happened. (CM3)

Most commonly, a direct line manager was responsible for encouraging a middle leader, prior to them attaining the role, to consider applying for a leadership position, or at the very least, encouraged them to begin seeing themselves as someone with the potential to be a future leader within the school.

> I mean I'm only young and I'm only new to this role, but I guess when I started teaching, I sort of thought I started teaching to teach and I didn't

> really see myself doing leadership and I was sort of encouraged to do it by the leadership at my previous school. (GM2)

Two teachers were aware of instances where middle leaders had been encouraged to apply for their position, having been observed by senior leaders as being highly competent in their teaching roles, prior to their middle level leadership position.

4.1.2.3 Position available due to change in staffing

Over one third of middle leaders were provided with the opportunity to apply for their initial leadership role due to changes in staffing. These changes in staffing resulted from a variety of factors, including illness, unscheduled maternity leave (early departure), extended leave, resignation, death of a staff member, and the promotion of an incumbent. In each case, the middle leader recognised this as an opportunity that they had not planned for and was therefore required to make a quick decision regarding their application for the leadership position, that may not have been a consideration prior to the event. As noted by a middle leader, "it was an opportunity, I guess, that was there, and I just kind of went for it and I was lucky enough to get it (CM3)."

As vacancies arose in schools due to predicted staffing changes, particularly scheduled maternity leave and end-of-tenure positions, two teachers made comment that middle leaders in their school found themselves under pressure for the position, either from other middle leaders seeking reappointment or an alternative leadership role, or teachers seeking their first leadership appointment.

4.1.2.4 Previous unsuccessful leadership role application

Nearly a quarter of all interviewees had been unsuccessful attaining a leadership position on their first application, subsequent reappointment, or were aware of a middle leader who had faced such rejection. Middle leaders and teachers noted that on occasions, if an applicant was unsuccessful, particularly if it was an unsuccessful

re-appointment, the person involved may display behaviour that signals their displeasure, which was noted by other staff.

> …all of the Year 7,8 and 9 leaders applied for the Head of Middle Years position; none of them got it and there has been some real outrage at that. You've sort of seen it; even little back ended comments they make in assemblies and things. Naturally, they're human beings, but I think sometimes it's the personalities that are the things that maybe get them away from their job descriptions. (CT2)

On the other hand, the majority of middle leaders who were unsuccessful in gaining their first leadership position recounted that the application and interview process provided a valuable learning experience; for many, it was the first formal interview process that they had undertaken for a position of leadership. Upon reflection, they found the experience offered insights into how they needed to develop their interview technique and how the roles they had undertaken to date had prepared them, or had failed to adequately prepare them, for the position they sought. All interviewed middle leaders were undeterred by their initial failure, going on to attain a middle level leadership position.

4.1.2.5 Recognition of skills by others

Having particular skills recognised and valued by others provided the impetus for five middle leaders to apply for their initial leadership role. These middle leaders shared an awareness, endorsed by their colleagues, that their experience as a teacher, and their post graduate qualifications, provided a sound base from which they could advance their career and apply for a leadership position. Not all of these initial applications were successful, with the unsuccessful attempt seen by one middle leader as an opportunity "to sort of get different people's perceptions and ideas on how the system works and how to do things" (CM6), providing insight into the application process and the confidence to apply for future positions.

Talent identification of future middle school leaders, either through formal school programmes or "witnessing them [teachers] in the most minor of opportunities and their interactions with students" (GS2), was considered by three senior leaders as

important for recognising potential leaders within their staff and "very much about developing the person as a leader" (IS2) and acknowledging their skills.

4.1.2.6 Informal conversation with senior staff

The middle leaders who raised informal conversations with senior staff as part of their preparation for a leadership position often spoke with great warmth and regard for the colleagues who provided time and support. The people sought by the middle leaders for conversation were staff members the middle leaders considered experienced in their particular role and supportive by nature. This, at times, involved "shopping around" (GM3) to find a coordinator or experienced person with whom they could discuss their strengths and weaknesses, how the middle leader's particular skills would fit the forthcoming position, and how to approach the application process. The feedback received would help the middle leader decide if they would apply for the leadership role.

These conversations were deemed informal as no formal mechanism was put in place by the schools to facilitate the discussions. Instead, these conversations were born from the middle leaders' desire to "talk through our ideas and strategies" (CM5) with a "very well respected" (CM5) staff member who "was really good with advice" (IM2).

A small number of teachers acknowledged they were aware of the informal conversations middle leaders had had in preparing for their leadership role, noting middle leaders "chatted to a variety of people to try and cover different aspects and different skills they might need" (GT2). Similarly, the informal conversations these teachers had with middle leaders made them aware of the pathway the middle leader had taken to their leadership position, having the same conversations, and establishing an informal mentor relationship.

4.1.2.7 Employer directly appointed

Gaining their position through direct appointment by their employer was cited by six middle leaders, appointed to positions, such as: Head of Junior School, Year Level Coordinator, and Head of Faculty. These appointments, on five occasions, were made by the principal directly approaching the middle leader with an offer of position, whereas one appointment was made through the teacher approaching the principal on the odd chance that a position was available. This approach was made as the middle leader (GM6) was feeling increasingly frustrated in their teaching role and acknowledged that this scenario wasn't positive for the school, nor themselves.

The one senior leader interviewee also attained their initial middle leader position through the principal directly appointing them as a Curriculum Coordinator.

4.1.2.8 Self-doubt to take on a leadership role

Questioning one's ability to perform competently in a leadership role, prior to taking up the role, was not listed as a major concern by middle leaders, with just over one-sixth raising the issue, however, concern was expressed that, once appointed, and undertaking a leadership role, the middle leaders' capacity and capability in the role may be an indicator of their management and/or leadership ability. This raised doubt about their prospects of advancing their career.

> But that's the thing, like do you sort of then go, 'well is that as good as I'll be?' Like, is that the level that I'm good at? Because I know I do a good job down there, but is that as far as I'll go? (CM6)

Important to middle leaders, feedback on their performance in their current role was considered highly desirable, if not vital, especially from those who would have direct influence on their career progression.

4.1.2.9 To gain employment; increased hours

Two middle leaders cited the desire for full-time employment as their reason for applying for a middle level leadership role. Both middle leaders commenced their roles by moving to a new employer, one transitioning from a part-time position at an

early learning centre, the other from a part-time position at another secondary school. Their motivation for applying for the positions was to increase their hours of employment.

4.1.2.10 Influenced by role models within the school

The influence of role models within the school, someone whom a future middle leader wished to emulate, was minimal with only one middle leader mentioning the effect a previous coordinator had had on their decision to apply for a middle level leadership position.

> I think I saw role models that I really looked up to; I had a coordinator who I was in her team and she just sort of exuded care, pastoral support, strength, leadership, and I kind of wanted to be her. (CM3)

4.1.2.11 Lack of support mechanisms for role preparation

The lack of formal support mechanisms for teachers wishing to prepare for a leadership position within the school was deemed a concern by one middle leader, suggesting that their school, due to its size, should have a leadership preparation programme in place.

> I had to seek out some feedback, and in terms of any support to help me get to that, no. In fact, I don't think it's really a second thought for anyone and yeah, like I said, that's something that's really lacking in a school this big. (CM6)

4.1.2.12 Sole applicant for position

One teacher (GT1) made comment that a middle leader at their school was, to their understanding, the only teacher who applied for a specific middle level leadership position and was, therefore, appointed to their initial leadership role unopposed, though they were required to undergo an interview for the position.

4.1.3 Summary – Preparation for leadership

In their preparation for commencing a middle leadership position, over half of the middle leaders interviewed did not undertake any preparation, over one-third

undertook further study to attain a higher degree, while only one undertook a short course to enhance their skill and another joined a professional subject association.

Of interest, a desire to advance their career provided the impetus for two-thirds of the middle leaders to seek their first middle leadership appointment. Employer encouragement and the opening of a position due to changes in staffing stimulated two-fifths. One-third stated that they have been unsuccessful in their attempt to gain a middle leader position.

4.2 Development of Leadership

This section, Development of Leadership, is concerned with how middle leaders develop themselves whilst established in their middle leadership position. From the semi-structured interviews conducted with middle leaders, teachers, and senior leader participants, the themes that emerged were collated and frequency recorded. Table 4.3 presents these emergent themes and ranks them according to frequency. Each theme is then elaborated.

Table 4.3: Emergent themes regarding middle leaders' development in the role, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Emergent Themes: Development of leadership	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Support provided by the school	20	11	6	37
Professional Learning	22	7	6	35
Career progression	19	6	6	31
Mentoring	13	4	3	20
Informal meeting times with manager	11	3	2	16
Develop via time in position; experience through exposure	7	2	2	11
Formal education: self-directed	10	0	0	10
Time management concerns	8	1	1	10
Balance teaching & leadership role	7	1	0	8
Authentic responsibility in role	2	0	3	5
Clarity in the role	1	0	4	5
Leadership networks; involvement in associations	4	0	0	4

4.2.1 Support provided by the school

Nearly all participants raised issues relating to the support provided by the school in the development of middle leaders. Within this theme of support, sub-themes emerged which are listed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Emergent sub themes regarding support provided by the school, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Themes: Support provided by the school	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Formal meeting time with direct manager	11	6	4	21
Feedback on performance	9	4	3	16
Recognition of performance	7	1	1	9
Formal training: employer sponsorship	4	1	3	8
Creation of mid-level roles to provide leadership opportunities	2	1	3	6
Limitations in support for leaders	1	1	1	3
Induction process	2	0	0	2
Succession planning	0	0	1	1

4.2.1.1 Formal meeting time with direct manager

Half of the participants in the study raised the issue of support offered through a formal meeting time between the middle leader and their direct manager. Depending upon the middle leader's role, this direct manager may be a member of the senior leadership or another middle leader. These meetings may be formal in nature, being managed through a set agenda, or as was more commonly the case, the opportunity to have "one-on-one time with [the direct manager] to be able to talk about whatever happens to be" (CM5). The most important factor for this meeting was that the time was set and calendared, and/or timetabled, as a scheduled meeting time.

The senior leadership also regarded these meeting times as crucial for it offered the support middle leaders require, particularly those middle leaders with a curriculum role, as these "leaders are the people who are the ones that are going to make a difference in the classroom by helping people" (CS1), therefore, providing support time for middle leaders to meet with their direct manager is "a pretty important element to helping them" (CS1).

4.2.1.2 Feedback on performance

Having a system within the school that provided performance feedback to the middle leader was considered important by two-fifths of the middle leaders and nearly half of the senior leaders. This feedback could be in the form of an annual appraisal, such as the Annual Review Meeting (ARM) conducted by Catholic schools, or feedback from a direct manager regarding a complaint received from a parent or student. Importantly, this feedback could be positive or negative, as both were regarded as meaningful to the middle leader's development. Some middle leaders regarded the performance feedback they received as a means of alleviating personal doubts they may have about their ability, particularly whether senior staff "see me [the middle leader] as actually having the skills and the ability to take on those roles" (CM6).

The senior leader participants who raised this issue realised the supportive effect middle leaders gathered from performance feedback, however, all acknowledge that they sought "a more robust sort of feedback mechanism" (CS2) to assist those middle leaders who were underperforming.

4.2.1.3 Recognition of performance

Recognition of performance saw one third of middle leaders acknowledging that they are concerned that the work they perform in their role is noticed by others in their learning community, either by students, parents, and fellow staff, and, importantly, the senior leaders or direct manager.

This recognition was seen as two-fold: firstly, some middle leaders valued what they saw as public recognition of their performance, where they felt the school has rewarded them by supporting their attendance at special professional learning events, interstate or overseas, for example. They have received something that is valued by their peers, and this has been expressed publicly. Secondly, this public recognition fuelled a sense of self-worth in some middle leaders, promoting "a positive point of view, reinforcing that I am doing an alright job" (GM7). This sense of self-worth was associated with a sense of gratitude to the school, tempered by the belief that they had earned the recognition.

4.2.1.4 Formal training: employer sponsorship

Employer sponsored training opportunities were valued by four middle leaders, with systemic schools providing complete or partial funding towards select courses offered through Australian Catholic University or the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership. The courses were chosen by the middle leaders but required approval from the relevant school executive for the funding. As noted by one senior leader participant (GS1), not all middle leaders are afforded this sponsorship, however, where budgeting allows, some middle leaders are offered the opportunity and financial support to commence further study:

> most of the staff now who hold middle level positions have either commenced or have a plan to commence to do some masters level study if they haven't already started, on the understanding that the school provides a one-third of the cost support to them to help them out with the financials. (CS2)

4.2.1.5 Creation of mid-level roles to provide leadership opportunities

In order to assist the development of middle leaders, all of the schools involved in the study created additional middle leader positions that involved working directly with another middle leader in a similar or equivalent position, either as an assistant to a middle leader or in a joint leadership role where middle leaders were appointed in pairs. Middle leaders in these paired leaderships positions found the sharing of responsibilities less stressful and learnt to value and rely upon the complementary

skills and qualities their co-leader brought to the position. Shared experiences also allowed for shared reflection in the role.

Alternative middle leader positions were also created, involving smaller leadership responsibilities, often based on a coordination function, such as managing the student representative council or organising school camps. These positions allowed less experienced middle leaders the opportunity to develop their management and organisational skills and gauge their desire for a role with greater responsibilities in the future.

4.2.1.6 Limitations in support for leaders

Only one middle leader stated there were limitations at their school regarding the support offered to middle level leaders, claiming "I don't think there's a big leadership structure or development structure in place at all. It is a mad house. It is a mad, mad place" (IM6), emphasising the complexity of their role, one which bore responsibility for three complex and diverse departments. The other concern raised by both the teacher and senior leader participants was a sense of inequity in that some middle leaders had better access to, or had accessed, professional learning opportunities that had been denied, or had not been offered to, other middle leaders.

4.2.1.7 Induction process

The two middle leaders who raised this issue faced similar experiences at different schools. In the first few weeks of their new middle leader position, both were given the support of their direct line manager, experienced leaders whom the middle leaders credit as giving them an excellent introduction to the role. However, once the initial support withdrew, their further understanding and development in the role slowed due to a lack of knowledge of processes and limited documentation, leading one middle leader to feel "things were maybe a little bit assumed that we'd know, that we'd just come in and sort of pick-up by osmosis somehow" (GM2). There was a

sense that after the initial period of support the middle leader should "know what you're doing" (IM2).

4.2.1.8 Succession planning

One senior leader participant noted their school had a system of appointing assistant middle leaders to 'shadow' the middle leaders with duties pertaining to student management or Head of School. The assistant middle leaders offer assistance to the position, providing support to the middle leader and allowing the middle leader to develop their mentoring skills. The school consider this succession planning as should the middle leader fall ill or depart the school unexpectedly, the assistant middle leader could then fill the role.

4.2.2 Professional learning

Professional learning was raised by all middle leaders participating in the study, covering topics such as quality, access, timing, duration, relevance, and cost. In terms of middle leaders' leadership development in the role, three sub-themes emerged from the views, listed in Table 4.5. These sub-themes relate to the middle leaders' desire to access professional learning, either through self-direction, reliance upon the direction of senior staff, a combination, or a lack of interest.

Table 4.5: Emergent sub themes regarding professional learning, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Themes: Professional Learning	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Professional Learning: self-directed	17	3	3	23
Professional Learning: school directed	16	1	5	22
Professional Learning: limited	2	0	1	3

4.2.2.1 Professional learning: self-directed

Over three-quarters of the middle leaders and over half of the total participants noted that middle leaders directed their choice and frequency of the professional learning events they attended. This self-direction stemmed predominantly from two reasons: firstly, the middle leaders desire to develop their leadership and/or specific subject-based knowledge and skills, including updating their curriculum knowledge due to course changes, their desire to attend or present at a conference, examination assessing, professional reading of books and websites, and building proficiency in the use of technology in the classroom. The second reason, to a lesser extent, rose from the middle leaders' need to direct their own professional learning when they considered the direction provided by their senior leaders was inconsistent or lacking in timeliness. For example, where the senior leaders did not alert the middle leaders to specific subject related events or failed to assist in planning the attendance of middle leaders at scheduled events throughout the year. One middle leader noted that budgetary constraints could restrict the forward planning by middle leaders to determine the number and type of professional learning they attended. The three senior leader respondents noted that the self-directed professional learning undertaken by the middle leaders tended to focus on subject content rather than on their leadership.

4.2.2.2 Professional learning: school directed

A majority of middle leaders were engaged in school-directed professional learning, predominantly related to specific programmes the school was introducing or continuing to support, for example, positive psychology. The directive offered by the school to attend professional learning was not regarded as a 'demand' but as an 'encouragement' to attend, except where compliance issues were raised, such as briefings on Ministerial Orders, or the school-directed professional learning consisted of an event on a student-free day, such as those held at the commencement of the year, semester, or term. Of those middle leaders who raised this issue, all were appreciative of the school's provision of professional learning, but consider it an expected part of the profession, as did the senior leadership respondents who saw

school-directed professional learning for the middle leaders as “an expectation of everyone to learn, everyone to be coaches and everyone to train” (IS2). The school-directed professional learning for middle leaders was also seen as a way to develop middle leaders understanding of self-development, with one senior leader respondent stating, “if you’re going to get better; if our job is about getting better, they [middle leader] need to learn how to do that” (CS1). One teacher felt that their school was selective in selecting which middle leader was offered professional learning when others, in the same role, were excluded, suggesting it was the expectation that the middle leader would come back to the school and conduct an in-service for staff, which has yet to eventuate.

4.2.2.3 Professional learning: limited

Two middle leaders stated that they have not engaged in professional learning for an extended period, up to 12 months. One stated that the demands of the position are too great to afford the time, though they did recognise that this did not allow them to develop extra skills. The other middle leader withdrew from an executive position with a professional association 12 months ago and did not feel the need to make the school aware, with the belief the school would not make demands of them while it understood they were making this external leadership commitment.

One senior leader respondent was aware that a middle leader placed a geographical constraint on themselves and would not attend professional learning activities if it meant ‘going across the city’.

4.2.3 Career progression

Career progression was a topic raised by middle leaders, which they saw as closely linked to their development in the role and their growth in understanding of their role within the leadership structure of the school. Being seen as successful in the role was considered the most obvious measure to assist in progressing a middle leader’s

career, whether that be continuing in the same role, another middle level leadership role, or attainment of a senior leader position.

Within this theme, a number of sub-themes emerged, as listed in Table 4.6, with a particular emphasis on tenure and reappointment, either at their current school or elsewhere.

Table 4.6: Emergent themes regarding career progression, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Themes: Career progression	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Reappointment concerns	10	3	3	16
Career progression via changing schools	8	2	2	12
Career progression unsure	8	0	1	9
Career progression of interest	7	1	0	8
Career relinquishing; stepping down; not renewed	4	1	2	7
Career progression not of interest	3	0	0	3
Career progression via further study	3	0	0	3
Career progression via talent identification	0	0	1	1

4.2.3.1 Reappointment concerns

Nearly half of the middle leaders expressed concerns regarding their possible reappointment at the end of their tenure, either due to: a lack of feedback regarding their performance to date and therefore they were unsure if they will be reappointed, a sense of exclusion and isolation in that they were not included in discussions about the future of the position within the school's leadership structure, or the understanding that the system they work within automatically deems the position void at the end of their tenure and they will be required to compete, state-wide, against other teachers and middle leaders for reappointment. Should they be unsuccessful, the possibility exists that they could lose their teaching position at the school.

These concerns had a bearing on the actions middle leaders took towards their development whilst in the role, with some noting that should they lose their appointment at the end of tenure they would resent themselves and the school for a

return to full-time teaching and "losing control" (IM6) over their previous area of responsibility, especially those with over 20 years of middle level leadership experience. Most middle leaders felt the pressure to perform to a high level in the role in the hope of attaining a positive appraisal, therefore giving themselves the best opportunity for reappointment. This pressure to attain a positive appraisal was accepted by the senior leader respondents as a necessary consequence of leadership structures within the school, with one noting such pressure was important in promoting an understanding amongst their staff that the most committed and able person will be appointed to the position and that all staff who aspire to leadership will have the opportunity to be interviewed.

4.2.3.2 Career progression via changing schools

Attaining a middle level leadership position at another school was considered by eight middle leaders as a valuable step towards developing their leadership experience with some stating it was an imperative due the length of time they had held the same position at the one school, seven years for one middle leader, or the fact that they were a past student of the school and had not had an alternative school experience. Exposure to a different school with different procedures was thought to bring a different perspective to their understanding of leadership in a school. A different school was also a considered an option for those middle leaders who felt that their current school was not open to projects they wished to implement, thinking that a new school would be more open to their ideas, or, in the case of one middle leader in the Catholic system, as they were not Catholic they had been advised that should they aspire to a senior leadership position they would need to move to the Independent or Government sector. Senior leader respondents also highlighted the need for some middle leaders to change schools in order to broaden their leadership experience and exposure to different school models.

4.2.3.3 Career progression unsure

Nearly one third of middle leaders were unsure of whether they wished to continue in their current role, seek another middle level leadership position, or apply for a senior leadership position. For some, this lack of decisiveness was based on personal decisions, whether they would be starting a family in the near future, or relocating to decrease travel time or to be closer to an ailing parent; for others, the thought of moving to a higher position was, at this stage, unappealing as they wished to remain in the classroom and were of the belief, somewhat realistically, that the higher the position in the school the less time was available to teaching. Also, one middle leader noted that they were unsure if they wanted to take on the burden, "the intensity", of having to influence change in the school, under pressure from the government, when they were concerned that they may not have the resources to make the change authentic.

One senior leader respondent offered that the unsureness expressed by middle leaders is due to the limited number and type of positions available to middle leaders at any one time, due to the staggered nature of the tenure and specific roles. This creates unease in the mind of middle leaders, perhaps a concern that they will fail in gaining an appointment, as the competition for specific positions intensifies during these periods.

4.2.3.4 Career progression of interest

Almost one third of middle leaders expressed a direct interest in progressing their career and developing their skills. The majority expressed a motivation, stemming from an enjoyment of their current role, to seek different opportunities and challenges that allowed them to exert their energy into a new role. The pathway was not always explicit, though two middle leaders did aspire to principalship. One middle leader shared that they believed there was "an expiry date on my career" (GM5), stating that they were preparing for the time when they may not be renewed in their current position, and they were endeavouring to ensure their knowledge and skills afforded them a variety of alternative leadership positions to pursue.

4.2.3.5 Career relinquishing; stepping down; not renewed

Three middle leaders revealed that they will be aiming to relinquish part of their current role or stepping down once their tenure was complete. Reasons for their choice included they had been doing the role for an extended period and now desired a change, they wished to reduce their hours of employment and this reduction was not compatible with the role, and the work demands placed on them in the role were too great. One middle leader was not renewed in the position at the end of their tenure. This had been a major set-back for the middle leader, their understanding was that their failure to be reappointed was not due to poor performance but was political in nature and beyond their control. A teacher was aware of this non-renewal and was concerned about the middle leader's career prospects, as was a senior leadership member, with the additional concern of how the middle leader will react with staff and the possibility of negative interactions.

4.2.3.6 Career progression not of interest

Three middle leaders were not concerned about progressing their careers stating that they were content in their current leadership role, especially as it allows them to continue teaching in the classroom. One middle leader noted that they were aware that their development may be affected by their decision to "not see other schools and to be in other systems and work in that" (CM2) but their enjoyment of working with their current colleagues and friends took precedence over thoughts of applying for another similar or higher position.

4.2.3.7 Career progression via further study

The explicit desire to further their careers saw two middle leaders undertake tertiary studies during their tenure: one commencing a Commerce degree with the hope of attaining an upper management position, preferably within the tertiary sector, the other completing a Master of Education in ICT, supporting their classroom teaching and their provision of learning resources on iTunes U. Within the next five years, one

middle leader plans to commence doctoral studies with the intention of teaching at tertiary level.

4.2.3.8 Career progression via talent identification

One senior leader noted that their school was intending to instigate a leadership development programme for middle leaders that focussed on developing the person as a leader, not specifically for the benefit of the school, but with the desire of making leadership development an important personal factor in the middle leaders' career development.

4.2.4 Mentoring

For those middle leaders who raised the issue of mentoring, great value was stored in having a professional relationship with an experienced colleague who could provide timely advice and guidance in an environment of trust that invoked honest reflection, but whose judgement of their efforts had no bearing on their employment. Not all middle leaders were able to establish, or were offered, such a relationship in their current workplace, with some preferring to seek advice from a former trusted colleague. As stated by a middle leader who had no mentor, their initial experience in a middle level leadership position was considered a "baptism by fire" (GM7), having to make decisions without someone to consult. Only one middle leader considered their current direct manager as their mentor.

Calling upon the service of a senior leader or critical friend in a mentoring capacity was seen as a key component in their development as a middle leader. Having honest conversations, feeling supported, and exposure to experienced leaders were means for the middle leader to voice ideas, share opinions, and plan approaches to tasks without exposing themselves, what they felt were their inadequacies in leadership, to those who report to them and to those to whom they report.

Such mentoring relationships were formed either officially, in that a middle leader could request the services of a mentor from the school or a mentor was assigned to them by the school upon their appointment to a leadership position, or unofficially, where the middle leader approached a trusted colleague who was a fellow staff member or external to the school. Typically, school appointed mentors were an experienced middle leader or a member of the senior leadership. Most commonly, where an experienced middle leader was assigned, this person did not work in the same faculty or department as the middle leader, providing a degree of separation from the reflective environment shared with the mentor and the everyday workspace.

Some teachers were aware of the mentoring of middle leaders that took place, with one respondent noting they envied the valuable relationships the middle leaders formed with great leaders, which they considered a talent pool of experience. They regretted that this was not available to teachers, with one teacher noting "you're likely to make fewer mistakes if you've got someone to chat things through" (CT3).

The senior leader respondent saw considerable value in the mentoring relationship middle leaders formed, seeing this a substantial support mechanism, however, concern was voiced over the amount of time internal mentors were required to spend with middle leaders, in some cases a quarter of a timetabled weekly cycle. The benefit of this time and personnel commitment was seen to outweigh any deficits, with the school taking great effort to assign mentors who were nurturing and could develop the middle leader.

4.2.5 Informal meeting times with manager

Impromptu meetings, ad hoc discussions, or simply 'just walking in' to a manager's office was considered valuable by half of the middle leaders. Middle leaders saw these informal meetings as a chance to 'run things by', gauge an opinion, or seek advice from their direct manager, predominantly at a time of their choosing, though this was naturally dependent on whether the manager was at their desk or free to see

them. 'Dropping in' on a manager was also an opportunity for these middle leaders to vent their frustrations and when, at times, one or more middle leaders also 'dropped in' at the same time the informal discussion gave the middle leader a greater idea of the range of issues that were present in the school community and helped "develop an awareness of what's happening in the school" (GM3). The informal meetings also helped strengthen a positive relationship between the middle leader and their manager, building a camaraderie through sharing thoughts and actions, and exchanging cordial pleasantries. In a number of instances, the middle leaders shared an office space with their manager and other teachers; informal meeting times, therefore, were inherently easier to establish. Teachers in these rooms noted the conversations that took place between the middle leader and manager, with one appreciating that they "kind of bounce ideas off each other" (IT1), which they thought was beneficial to all members of their team. Two senior leaders commented that these informal meeting times were important for building relationships and for providing timely support, allowing time for the professional growth of the middle leader.

4.2.6 Develop via time in position; experience through exposure

Learning the role over time, whilst in the position, was expressed by a third of the middle leaders as the favoured means by which they chose to develop their skills and acquire knowledge. This preference for experiential learning did not exclude other means of development, such as tertiary study, rather, it acknowledged the depth of knowledge and experience available to middle leaders through experienced colleagues and supportive senior staff. Hearing experienced colleagues share their past experiences resonated with some middle leaders, making sense to those who had faced, or were about to face, similar experiences, hoping to either emulate the successes or avoid the described pitfalls. For some, the sense of 'learning from your mistakes' gave credibility to the knowledge and understanding they acquired in their role; they were exposed to the elements, having to undergo a "baptism by fire" (GM7) that was sometimes referred to, colloquially, as 'sink or swim' - if found to be incompetent, you were unlikely to remain in the position, competent, you continued

in the role. This continual development through experience had the effect of building resilience in some of the middle leaders and a growing awareness of their own coping mechanisms, often incorporating fruitful relationships with other middle leaders, with whom they have shared the experiences the role provided.

The notion of attaining a senior leadership role by "working your way to the top" (GM2) held sway with one middle leader and one senior leader as they were of the belief that a person cannot realise the responsibilities these senior roles entail unless they have had a sound grounding in middle level leadership positions. Two teachers supported this idea, in principle, stating that learning on the job was the ideal way to develop leaders.

4.2.7 Formal education: self-directed

Almost half of the middle leaders raised the issue of self-directed study of a formal nature, the majority having completed a Master degree, or undertaken courses on emotional intelligence and well-being. This study was undertaken on the middle leader's own volition, with some middle leaders in the Catholic sector receiving sponsorship for their study, some commencing a degree but not completing it, and some stating their intention to enrol in a tertiary course within the next few years. One middle leader, a Head of Senior Years, noted that they commenced a Master of Education as they found there were 'gaps' in their knowledge and understanding whilst preforming the role.

One middle leader commented that they were not interested in any further formal study, stating that they were happy to undertake professional learning in the area of technology so as to try and stay up to date.

4.2.8 Time management concerns

In terms of their development in the role, almost half of the middle leaders expressed that allocating time to their development presented a challenge. This development

time was considered as separate to performing in the role, rather, it was seen as allocating time to professional reading, attending professional learning, and study obligations. As noted by one of the senior leaders, middle leaders can find "if they don't really make a genuine attempt to focus on that, it tends to be that there are plenty of other things they can be doing" (CS1). Middle leaders found that the time demands associated with performing their duties often left little time for self-development unless the middle leader specifically planned to set aside some time. Some stated, however, that as pressures in their role increased or events of the days required more of their attention, this reserved time was often sacrificed. In response, some middle leaders felt the need to be efficient in what they did, trying to find a balance between their professional learning needs and the execution of their daily duties.

Not all described themselves as time poor, with one middle leader believing that the time allocation they received was fair for their role, though they did go on to state that their school did not give middle leadership enough time.

4.2.9 Balance teaching and leadership role

Finding a balance between the teaching component of their position and the leadership dimension was an issue nearly one third of middle leaders raised. All of them found this element challenging in that they were committed to their classes and the needs of their students, while at the same time performing their leadership duties. During the school day, timetabled classes consumed the time allocated to their teaching component, leaving tasks, such as parent and student meetings being undertaken after school hours, and class preparation and correction performed at home. The other part of the school day was allocated to their leadership role, with little remaining for development. As shared by one middle leader:

> I do feel that, I actually honestly feel that, my own self, personal development has been stunted for a couple of years because I'm just head down, bum up, just trying to keep up with the requirements of the college and of our department. (IM6)

Another middle leader noted that to continue their own leadership development would be to give up the already limited time they have that is not already devoted to marking and planning, which is something they were not willing to do. However, the same middle leader also stated they felt the need to develop themselves further in their curriculum area, which they would be willing to do, as they felt they had neglected this side of their role. This tension of competing demands was not unique, often with the converse sentiment, with some finding it was easier to commit to the teaching component of their role in deference to the complexities of the leadership component, particularly in the early stages of their leadership appointment. One teacher felt this was compounded, expressing concern for middle leaders who were allocated new classes each year, suggesting that this lack of continuity and additional preparation of new content was stressful and time consuming, reducing the time middle leaders had to be an effective leader.

4.2.10 Authentic responsibility in role

Authentic responsibility in the role considers the middle leader is empowered in their role. They are not micromanaged by a senior leader nor are they required to seek approval for managerial or leadership decisions. Having authentic responsibility in the role was seen by two middle leaders as a declaration of trust, made by the senior leaders, in their ability to lead. For these middle leaders, it provided their motivation to develop themselves in the role, knowing that they had the confidence of the school to implement programmes. This sense of trust was echoed by the senior leader respondents who recognised the importance of empowering middle leaders with the ability to lead. They believe that middle leaders must feel they have the confidence of the senior leaders to implement projects that lead to improved student learning outcomes, without worrying that they are going to be deemed to have been reckless or to have been not well-researched enough, should the desired outcomes not eventuate in the short term. It was felt that it was better for middle leaders to try something, and it fail, than not try something at all. Giving middle leaders this sense

of trust prevents possible inertia in schools with complex leadership structures, where decision ratification can be a drawn-out process.

4.2.11 Clarity in the role

A lack of clarity in the role was raised by one middle leader, as in their current role they were unsure of the expectations assigned to the position; they required clarification of their responsibilities. This affected how they performed in the role and caused difficulties in determining what professional learning they should plan for, causing frustration. The middle leader's school was considering a restructure of leadership positions, which included the middle leader's position, creating a level of anxiety.

A middle leaders' understanding of their role was also raised by three members of the senior leadership, who noted that it was crucial that a middle leader have clarity in their understanding of their responsibilities. Without this understanding, the middle leader will be unable to set priorities and, thus, allocate their time appropriately. A middle leader who is unable to discern what their role is will be unable to make decisions that will have positive implications for the school, therefore, the senior leaders saw it as their responsibility to ensure middle leaders were aware of their responsibilities and bring clarity to their role.

4.2.12 Leadership networks; involvement in associations

Involvement in professional networks, either subject associations or leadership networks, such as the Association of Senior Staff in Independent Schools (ASSIS), were found to be beneficial to four middle leaders. They noted that leadership networks offered the opportunity for the middle leaders to hear about recent innovations and hear from a diverse range of speakers, while also allowing them to share projects they were undertaking at their own school. One middle leader noted it was their opportunity to give back to the professional community, something that is encouraged at their school.

4.2.13 Summary – Development of leadership

In the development of their leadership, over 90% of the middle leaders raised the support provided by their school. This support most commonly took the form of formal meeting times with their direct manager, where they had the opportunity to raise matters that may be of a general or role-specific nature. Regular feedback on their performance was also considered beneficial to their development (41%), as was recognition of their performance (32%), offering acknowledgement within the public arena and a sense of personal achievement.

Nearly all middle leaders considered professional learning, both self and school directed, as a crucial part of developing their leadership skills and content knowledge in their particular field of specialisation.

Contact with senior leaders, either through informal meeting times or mentoring, was considered beneficial by over half of the middle leaders, as was the need to undertake some form of formal tertiary education, commonly at Master level.

Career progression was considered by nearly all the middle leaders, with half concerned about matters related to their reappointment at the conclusion of their tenure. Over one-third chose to advance their career by accepting a middle leadership role at another school and almost one-fifth did not continue with their middle leadership role, choosing to relinquish, step-down, or were not renewed at the end of their tenure.

Over one-third of middle leaders had time management concerns, finding the demands of their role left little time for self-development. In addition, one-third found an imbalance in the time spent in their teaching and leadership roles, with the majority of their school time being devoted to timetabled classes, subject preparation, and the correction of student work completed after school hours.

4.3 Perception of Leadership

The way in which the middle leaders' leadership role was perceived by themselves, by the teachers who report to them, and by the senior leaders to whom they report, elicited candid responses from the participants. The themes that emerged from the interviews are listed in Table 4.7, where they are ranked by the number of respondents who raised the issue.

Table 4.7: Emergent themes regarding perception of middle leaders' leadership role, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Emergent Themes: Perception of leadership role	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Influence school direction	22	7	6	35
Negative perception	18	8	2	28
Professional relationships	14	6	7	27
Desired personal qualities	10	9	5	24
Managing the department	7	6	2	15
Leadership structure within the school	5	4	4	13
Level of autonomy	6	2	4	12
Provide support to others	2	6	2	10
Managing students	5	3	1	9
Work / Life balance	6	0	2	8
Resistance from peers	4	4	0	8
Credibility in the role	2	5	1	8
Seeing self as a leader	6	0	0	6
Espousing Vision	4	0	2	6
Working within organisational constraints	3	1	2	6
Remuneration	1	3	0	4
Favoured; protected	1	2	1	4
Working with parents	1	2	1	4
Strategic thinker; forecasting	1	1	1	3
Exposure to new ideas	1	1	1	3
Constrained by systemic factors	1	0	1	2
Acquire skills on the job	0	1	1	2
Reputation concerns	1	0	0	1
Access to special events	0	1	0	1
Geographical barriers	0	0	1	1

4.3.1 Influence school direction

All participants in the study were asked to what degree they felt the middle leaders at their school had the ability to influence school direction. From the responses provided, four sub-themes emerged that are listed in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Emergent themes regarding middle leader influence of school direction, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Influence school direction	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Some influence	16	5	5	26
Highly influential	3	1	2	6
No influence	2	2	0	4
Negative influence	0	0	2	2

4.3.1.1 Some influence

Nearly three-quarters of the middle leaders stated that middle leaders have some ability to influence the direction of their school, either referring to themselves or fellow middle leaders. It is felt the main thrust of their influence is directly related to their faculty or department, with one middle leader noting that they have got full responsibility and autonomy for their area, but they are also aware that they cannot make decisions that aren't in line with the rest of the school. They found this confusing, for at times they found themselves wanting to take a direction that did not fit with the wider school model. Several middle leaders made comment that they have the ability to share their opinions with senior leaders, and as such, they felt their opinions were listened to with respect. They also acknowledged the diverse range of opinions senior leadership had to bring together to form a solution, therefore, there was the understanding that their thoughts on a particular issue might not always influence an outcome or the direction the school may take. Having an advocacy role for their area of responsibility was seen as important for some middle leaders as they thought it was their duty to bring forth the ideas of their department into a wider school forum. This act in itself was seen as having influence on the direction of the school, for whether

or not the position offered was explicitly denoted as being influential, the middle leader felt the view of the department could implicitly affect the direction the school took on a particular issue.

The five teachers who believed middle leaders had the ability to have some influence over the direction of the school were similar in the degree to which they believed that influence could take effect. The teachers' perception was that the middle leaders had some limited ability to influence the direction of the school, citing that middle leaders, particularly faculty leaders, lacked the ability to support each other with issues and provide a united front to the senior leaders. This lack of influence was compounded in curriculum issues due to the middle leader being perceived as not teaching enough in their subject area because of the time allowance provided for their leadership role; they were no longer considered an expert teaching practitioner. In addition, teachers described instances, which they described as frustrating, where the middle leader from one campus was unable to implement a programme that was thought beneficial by the teachers of that campus due to the middle leader, who led the same department at another campus, not wishing to implement the programme on their campus. There was an inability of either middle leader to establish a new programme on their individual campus unless there was consensus of implementation. The teachers perceived the extent of the positive relationship that the middle leader had with their immediate manager, or managing senior leader, was, at times, proportional to the amount of influence the middle leader was able to exert.

The five senior leaders linked the middle leaders' ability to influence the direction of the school with their approach to the role and their ability to form relationships. They noted that the middle leaders' role was often multi-faceted, with the hope of building productive links with staff, students, and parents – their success, as a group within the school, affecting the running of the school, the morale of staff, and the morale of students. Succinctly stated by one senior leader, "some of them do and some of them don't" (IS1), thereby, some are influential, and some are not. Others did not see this as such a simple matter, for they felt that for the middle leader to have influence, there

must be a shared vision between themselves and those whom they hope to influence. Often the influence they are able to exert does not project beyond their area of responsibility, limiting their effectiveness in promoting a vision across multiple domains that could affect the direction of the school. Another senior leader felt the middle leaders' influence was limited as they did not have the expectation of leading change written into their position descriptions. Without them leading this process the middle leaders are unable to have an influence over people's attitudes and behaviours, nor by the example they set. It was felt that the middle leaders' ability to influence change "depends on the person and whether they lift their eyes above the horizon or whether they are just in their little section" (IS2), that is, is the middle leader able to see the wider context of the school or just the context of their department? If they could see beyond their department the possibility of greater influence existed.

4.3.1.2 Highly influential

Three middle leaders, unequivocally, stated that they were able to influence the direction of the school, holding the positions of Head of School, Year Level Coordinator, and Head of Faculty. The middle leaders noted that they felt actively involved in their schools and were of the belief that their actions had a big impact on a day-to-day basis. The provision of pastoral care and an improved learning culture for students were cited as areas where the middle leaders had had direct influence. Within the curriculum realm, the middle leader noted that the size of the school's curriculum committee, seven members, of which the middle leader was one, enabled them to "definitely have a voice" (GM4).

One teacher commented that they had the impression that middle leaders make "quite a big impact" (GT2) in the direction of the school, particularly for home group teachers and student managers.

Two senior leaders thought middle leaders were able to influence the direction of the school, with one stating that they had purposely instigated a "fairly distributive leadership model" (CS2) so that the decision-making authority could be delegated.

They did not feel the need to be party to every decision made at the school, in fact, most decisions. The other senior leader, while acknowledging the definite influence the middle leaders possessed, noted that the increased activity associated with a person's ability to exert influence posed a dilemma for the senior leadership as they wanted middle leaders to feel like they have a say in the direction of the school, "over their own destiny" (CS1), but they do not want them acting autonomously, beyond the strategic parameters the school has set.

4.3.1.3 No influence

Two middle leaders perceived that they had no ability to influence the direction of the school, with one stating that their position was seen as "fairly low in the pecking order" (IM8), that is, lowly ranked in the leadership hierarchy of the school, and that the school appointed people to the position knowing that they would not be decision-makers.

Two teachers agreed with the perception of middle leaders not being able to influence the direction of the school, noting that this was not through any lack of ability in the middle leaders, but a consequence of the organisational structure employed at the school. The teacher was unable to elaborate on this organisational structure, except to reveal that they felt a 'top-down' management style existed at the school.

4.3.1.4 Negative influence

Two senior leaders expressed their concern that middle leaders could influence the direction of the school in a negative way. One noted that middle leaders, while highly skilled professionals, have "an enormous ability to undermine any system" (IS2), that is, the middle leader makes the decision not to work in a collaborative manner and is unable, or unwilling, to create productive relationships with their colleagues. The other senior leader raised that middle leaders, who may be performing incompetently, draw other staff away from their responsibilities in an attempt to compensate for the

inadequacies of the underperforming middle leader. This could affect the direction the school may take due to diminished staffing and intellectual resources.

4.3.2 Negative perception

A negative perception of the middle leaders' leadership role drew a wide variety of responses from the middle leaders themselves and the teachers who report to them, with a more limited response from the senior leaders. From these responses, seventeen sub-themes emerged, which are listed in Table 4.9, ranked according to the total number of times the sub-theme was raised by the respondents.

Table 4.9: Emergent sub themes regarding negative perceptions, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Negative perception	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Poor support in role	6	5	2	13
Poor communication	5	4	1	10
Lack of autonomy	5	3	1	9
Poor management	4	3	2	9
Limited time to perform role	4	4	0	8
Lack of inclusion	6	1	0	7
Poor mentoring, role model	3	3	0	6
Apportioning blame to others	0	3	2	5
Disconnected; out of touch	1	3	0	4
Overwhelmed by role	3	0	0	3
Pedagogical void	0	3	0	3
Poor leadership	0	2	1	3
Difference of process	1	1	0	2
Ego driven	1	0	0	1
Retribution	0	1	0	1
Lack of experience	0	0	1	1
Poor qualifications	0	0	1	1

4.3.2.1 Poor support in role

Nearly a quarter of the middle leaders cited a perceived lack of support from the senior leaders, particularly when issues had arisen of an administrative or organisational nature that have hindered the efficiency and/or effectiveness of the middle leader's role. Middle leaders have approached the senior leaders with their concerns, but assistance had not been forthcoming, at least to the level the middle leader had anticipated. While all acknowledged support had been given at some point in their leadership, they felt more could have been given, particularly in the specific circumstance.

Five teachers raised their concerns about a perceived lack of support middle leaders received in their role from members of the senior leadership. Examples where they felt support was poor included: lack of attendance by senior leaders at the middle leader's department meetings, which was meant to be an initiative in one school but was never realised; failure to attend scheduled meetings with the middle leader or rescheduling the meeting when unable to attend; an inability or unwillingness to support new initiatives or programmes, for example, a sustainability programme after three years of negotiation.

Two senior leaders acknowledged that middle leaders are not always provided with the level of support they required, nor are they afforded the resources that the middle leaders would like to have. One senior leader noted they are sometimes restricted in the level of support they can provide to middle leaders due to the limited autonomy they hold in their education system.

4.3.2.2 Poor communication

Poor communication was cited by five middle leaders as a concern in the practice of their leadership role. This poor communication affected how information was received from the senior leaders and how information was relayed, through the middle leaders, to the teachers. Some middle leaders found that communication channels were either slow or non-existent from some senior leaders. This was especially

frustrating for middle leaders when written communication to a senior leader goes unanswered or unacknowledged and the delay gives the impression to teachers that the middle leader is untimely in their response to them. This was not always the cause of untimely communication from middle leaders to teachers, as noted by both the middle leaders and some teachers. As described by one teacher, even multiple attempts to contact the middle leader by email and phone went unanswered. Raised by four teachers, poor communication from middle leaders was not uncommon, particularly the dissemination of administrative requirements related to school events, such as NAPLAN testing, or the sharing of common assessment tasks within a faculty area.

One senior leader suggested the communication pathways in the school, between senior leaders and middle leaders and through to the teachers, were "particularly bad" (CS3), noting a lack of openness and transparency; however, this was deemed unintentional as the senior leaders were "so focussed on what they're doing" (CS3).

4.3.2.3 Lack of autonomy

Over one fifth of middle leaders felt they had a lack of autonomy in the role, listing concerns about micromanagement by senior leaders and expressing the feeling that they do not have any leeway in the actual direction of their department. One middle leader, concerned about a deficit in programme staffing that they believed was outside departmental guidelines stated, "I've lost my independence and autonomy…I'm waking up at 3 o'clock every morning wondering how I'm going to manage that" (CM7). The middle leaders who raised this issue perceived that all decisions were made at the senior leader level, leading one middle leader to comment upon the interviews they undertook as part of their performance development process. During this interview, the middle leader was asked what their vision was and where they wished to take their department. This was an issue for the middle leader as they felt the senior leadership was disingenuous by asking for this information without allowing the middle leader to enact it.

Three teachers observed that some of the middle leaders they reported to were disempowered, with one teacher noting that they felt "the bigger decisions are taken away from them" (CT3), going on to say that it must be horrible to be a middle leader in that you are led to believe you have a certain role, only to find that you do not have any control over it and that "you are just another cog in the machine" (CT3), referring to the middle leaders' place in the school's organisational hierarchy.

One senior leader recognised this lack of autonomy, noting that most of the decision-making at the school is "done in senior management level here. So, the middle managers are not very powerful" (CS3).

4.3.2.4 Poor management

A perception of poor management by middle leaders was voiced by four middle leaders, three of whom cited concerns about micromanagement by a middle leader, who demanded all facets in the running of the department be approved by them before implementation. This was described as very frustrating and disempowering for the team members. The other middle leader spoke of a middle leader who had recently failed to be reappointed to their position, at their end of tenure, due to poor management concerns.

Three teachers spoke of their department being poorly organised, with the perception that the middle leader was inefficient in organising and running meetings. Similarly, two senior leaders recalled instances where a middle leader had failed to follow-up on the special needs of a new enrolment, causing parental concern, and how the middle leader responsible for the school timetable was incapable of managing the creation of the yearly timetable to take into account new parameters for a desired mentoring programme.

4.3.2.5 Limited time to perform role

Four middle leaders felt that they were not given enough time to perform their role within the time allocated to the position, with one middle leader claiming that the lack of time was a barrier to them bringing about greater change in their area. Four teachers concurred with the middle leaders stating that middle leaders were time-poor and that they were not given enough time to do their job or perform at a high level.

4.3.2.6 Lack of inclusion

Perceiving a lack of inclusion by the senior leaders, nearly one quarter of the middle leaders and one teacher mentioned that middle leaders were not being involved by the senior leadership in decision making processes that affected departments or staff within the middle leader's responsibility. These decision-making processes included the appointment of new staff, allocation of budget, timetable creation, and the allocation of teaching spaces. A concern raised by a middle leader was that the senior leaders were making decisions based on incorrect information, which could be easily remedied if the middle leader were included in the decision-making process. The lack of inclusion prompted the middle leaders to believe there was a lack of transparency in the deliberation process, inferring a lack of respect, unintentional or not by the senior leaders, for the decision-making abilities of the middle leaders.

4.3.2.7 Poor mentoring, role model

Three teachers felt that their middle leader offered little mentoring to themselves or their fellow staff, with one teacher describing how their middle leader, with whom they shared an office, would continue to wear their headphones when staff came in for assistance and would grunt responses to the questions they asked. Not surprisingly, this middle leader was not considered a role model by the staff who reported to them.

Three middle leaders mentioned that they rarely had one-to-one conversations with their staff outside of their scheduled meeting times, with one mentioning that they

were aware that it was an expectation of their role to support their staff in this way, but as the senior middle leaders they reported to did not model this behaviour, they did not feel the need to model it to their staff.

4.3.2.8 Apportioning blame to others

The apportioning of blame to others when there has been an error, or a programme has not achieved the desired outcomes, was perceived as a character flaw of some middle leaders by three teachers. The teachers recalled instances when middle leaders have blamed other middle leaders for poorly organised events or low success rates in academic programmes, stating the outcome was a poor reflection on the middle leader or, at times, the teachers. This apportioning of blame by some middle leaders was also noted by two members of the senior leadership, who were aware of instances where a middle leader has focussed blame on another middle leader or a senior leader.

4.3.2.9 Disconnected, out of touch

Perceived as out-of-touch with members of their department, three teachers commented that some middle leaders were disconnected from the staff for whom they were responsible, unaware of the issues the staff face on a day-to-day basis. One teacher noted they were responsible to three middle leaders, none of whom meet with this teacher on a regular basis. The teacher revealed that in the last three years they have only met with one of the middle leaders once and that had been at the request of the teacher due to a student issue, which the teacher believes to have occurred due to the inaction of the middle leader.

One middle leader commented that a fellow middle leader was known to be inattentive to his department, stating “to see [middle leader] down there is an unusual thing” (IM2), but also added that he had never seen the principal visit the department.

4.3.2.10 Overwhelmed by role

Three middle leaders described themselves as being overwhelmed by their role. One middle leader found the behaviour management demands of the students immense, especially in the first two years in the position. Another middle leader, also in their initial years in the role, was allocated more time to fulfil the responsibilities of the position because they could not manage in the time originally provided. The third middle leader took three weeks stress leave after feeling overwhelmed by the position. The middle leader discussed their concerns with the senior leaders, but no changes have been made to the role, leaving the middle leader disillusioned.

4.3.2.11 Pedagogical void

Three teachers shared their concerns that the middle leaders leading their faculties were unable to offer curriculum leadership, to the detriment of the academic programmes and the staff under their responsibility. Teachers in the departments were undertaking the curriculum leadership role, however, without the time release afforded the middle leader the recording of curriculum documentation was inconsistent. Part of the concerns held by one of the teachers was that the middle leader was trained in a different method to themselves, believing the middle leader incapable of providing pedagogical support or leadership.

4.3.2.12 Poor leadership

Poor leadership was raised by two teachers. The first related to a middle leader who was a Head of Faculty. The middle leader, not highly regarded by their colleagues and perceived as being lazy, was disengaged with their staff and inattentive to their needs. At the end of their tenure the middle leader was reappointed to the position as they were the only applicant. This left the teacher incredulous, as this middle leader had a record of not being committed to leading their staff, citing the example that the middle leader only chaired one faculty meeting per year, whereas other faculties have two meetings per term. The second teacher, also directed towards a middle leader who led a faculty, perceived this person as a very weak leader who was

'work shy'. The middle leader was relieved of the position before the completion of their tenure.

One senior leader cited the "dreadful leadership" (CS3) of a senior middle leader, who, during a bomb threat evacuation that they were managing, entered into an argument with another middle leader in the presence of a parent. The middle leader then left the scene, leaving the evacuation process in disarray.

4.3.2.13 Difference of process

One middle leader, the head of a multi-department faculty, experienced frustration when dealing with a senior middle leader, to whom they reported. Both middle leaders had competing visions for how the organisational constraints that existed within the school should affect the running of the faculty. An uneasy tension ensued, with staff in the faculty becoming aware of the impasse, holding the perception that the senior middle leader did not understand the 'big picture' of the complexities they faced and was inattentive to their concerns.

In a similar vein, a teacher, who reported to two middle leaders in different departments, was required to provide a report to each middle leader. The two departments have the same administrative procedures, however, each middle leader required different styles of reports, which doubled the work the teacher had to perform when compiling the reports. Upon approach by the teacher, neither middle leader was willing to alter their reporting requirements, leaving the teacher frustrated.

4.3.2.14 Ego driven

One middle leader noted that they have observed a negative change in some MSLSs when they first come into a leadership position, stating that they become ego driven and absorbed by their job title and badge, forgetting why they initially came into teaching.

4.3.2.15 Retribution

One teacher recalled the behaviour of some middle leaders, which appeared to be based in retribution. The teacher was aware that the middle leaders had applied for a Head of School position, however, none of the middle leaders were successful, with the appointment going to an external candidate. In perceived retaliation, the middle leaders made backhanded comments about the senior leaders at year level assemblies and amongst staff, making their "real outrage" (CT2) known. For the teacher, this revealed a side to the personalities of the middle leaders that they had not experienced in the past, even though this teacher had worked with these middle leaders for the past three to four years.

4.3.2.16 Lack of experience

One senior leader felt that some newly appointed middle leaders were "too young" and "don't have enough breadth of experience for the jobs that they do" (CS3), going on to state that they thought some middle leaders did not have the life experience to deal with some of the issues they faced, nor the sort of experience gained from wider reading. As a result, some of the middle leader's actions tended to be reactionary.

4.3.2.17 Poor qualifications

One senior leader commented that in their experience, some middle leaders did not have the educational qualifications that supported them in their role.

4.3.3 Professional relationships

Having the ability to form and sustain sound professional relationships with colleagues, both with those to whom you were answerable and with those whom you lead, was perceived as an important factor when considering the leadership of middle leaders, with over four-fifths of middle leaders and all of the senior leaders referring to these relationships in their discussions. It was also considered by two-thirds of the teachers. The four sub-themes that emerged are listed in Table 4.10, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Table 4.10: Emergent sub themes regarding professional relationships, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Professional relationships	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Collegiality; team building	10	5	6	21
Changed dynamics	3	1	1	5
Visibility and access	4	0	0	4
Networking	2	0	0	2

4.3.3.1 Collegiality; team building

Across the three participant groups, half of the respondents raised the need for middle leaders to be collegial in the role, seeking to build their team. Some middle leaders found that by being open to their team, taking conscious steps to build a relationship with staff, being approachable and supportive, and having an 'open door' so that staff can talk freely with them, their ability to establish and maintain a sound rapport with their colleagues improved. The five teachers who raised collegiality also saw the need for middle leaders to have well-developed interpersonal skills, with one noting "if you can't form a connection with people…it's just going to be incredibly difficult" (GT2). Collegiality between middle leaders was noticed by teachers, with special mention made of those middle leaders who had personalities that matched, creating a strong bond. It was also noticed when there was a clash of personalities, leading some teachers to find that dealing with these differing personalities was time consuming and distracted the middle leaders from their professional duties.

All but one senior leader raised the importance of middle leaders creating, sustaining, and promoting a collegial atmosphere within their department and across the wider school community, with one senior leader stating, "the key aspect that I'd be looking for would be their [middle leader] capacity to be able to bring a cohesive team together" (CS2). Another senior leader saw how the relationships middle leaders established with their fellow middle leaders evolved over time, with those evolving relationships leading to different opportunities for the organisation.

4.3.3.2 Changed dynamics

When they entered into a leadership position, three middle leaders noticed a change in some of the existing relationships they had with colleagues; the dynamic had altered. The middle leaders found, in one instance, that their previous colleagues called them a 'traitor' as they had moved to another campus. Another found that one of the relationships they had with a colleague, who was now required to report to them, deteriorated to the point where mediation was required. There was a feeling that some of the middle leader's previous colleagues were unable to adjust the parameters of the relationship to include the altered professional dynamic. This was also expressed by a teacher, concerned that a newly appointed, first-time middle leader would be challenged by staff and not treated in a cordial manner. One senior leader was aware of these changed relational dynamics, suggesting that people do not like change, they have a set way of interacting with colleagues and they do not want this to alter. In advising new middle leaders, the senior leader alerts them to the change in relationship that will occur with some colleagues, saying, "be careful of what you're going to lose when you try to make things different" (CS1).

4.3.3.3 Visibility and access

The need for middle leaders to have a visible presence and make themselves accessible to staff was seen as a crucial factor by four middle leaders. Being seen in the schoolyard, attending formal presentation nights, moving around the staffrooms, and chatting to people, were all considered necessary for building relationships within the community.

4.3.3.4 Networking

Attending network events, such as those offered by Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM), or the Department of Education and Training Victoria, were considered by two middle leaders as a means to build relationships with other middle leaders. One middle leader attended a network event,

which they found beneficial; the other middle leader has yet to attend an event, but thinks it is something they should do.

4.3.4 Desired personal qualities

The perception of the personal qualities a middle leader should exhibit in their leadership role was an area in which almost four-fifths of teachers had a view and half of the middle leaders and senior leaders, resulting in fifteen emergent sub-themes. These are listed in Table 4.11, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Table 4.11: Emergent themes regarding desired personal qualities, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Desired personal qualities	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Consultative	6	5	1	12
Rapport builder; encourager	6	4	1	11
Active leader; participant	4	0	2	6
Open to change	3	2	1	6
Empathetic; high EQ	3	1	1	5
Decision-maker	2	0	3	5
Communicator	1	3	1	5
Leader developer; nurturer	2	0	2	4
Trustworthy	2	0	0	2
Adaptable	1	0	0	1
Approachable	1	0	0	1
Resilient	1	0	0	1
Appeasing	1	0	0	1
Counsellor	1	0	0	1
Learner	0	0	1	1

4.3.4.1 Consultative

Being consultative in leadership was considered desirable by six middle leaders, who saw their role as being open to conversations that share ideas, building consistent

communication. Five teachers saw a consultative middle leader as a person willing to empower them, being able to communicate and liaise effectively, and not just dictate directives that have been sent from the senior leaders. One senior leader simply stated, “if they need to consult, they consult” (IS2), inferring that middle leaders should consult with others, as required.

4.3.4.2 Rapport builder; encourager

Encouraging and building sound relationships with people was seen as desirable traits in a middle leader. Four teachers spoke of how encouragement from a middle leader gave them confidence in their role. The act of a middle leader stopping to chat in passing, rather than just walking by, was considered an act of caring. The senior leader suggested that a good middle leader “gets people pulling together, gets them onboard” (CS1), building rapport within the team. To build rapport, middle leaders offered the need for timely, honest feedback, and drawing different people into conversation, really listening to what they say, to show them that you are truly interested in them and how they feel.

4.3.4.3 Active leader; participant

Being seen as an active participant in the school community was espoused by four middle leaders, noting that they endeavoured to attend all events relating to their area of responsibility. Events were attended, such as, school camps, school productions, staff vs students sporting fixtures, even though the middle leader may not have a direct responsibility for the function, promoting the notion that the middle leader was proactive and interested in the running of the school. Two senior leaders stated it was important for middle leaders to be seen as contributors, with one claiming middle leaders should be seen "as people who get out there and do it" (CS1), providing leadership.

4.3.4.4 Open to change

The ability to lead and be open to change, whether it be in the form of pedagogical reform, organisational restructures, or financial management, was considered a desirable quality for middle leaders by six respondents. Some middle leaders saw the teaching and learning process embedded in change, seeing this as the reason they came into teaching in in the first place, wanting to change children's lives for the better. For these middle leaders, being a change maker in leadership was seen as a natural extension of the role they performed in the classroom. Two teachers recognised this trait in middle leaders they considered good leaders and one senior leader stated it was a quality they were aiming to develop in their current middle leaders.

4.3.4.5 Empathetic; high EQ

Three middle leaders thought having empathy, high emotional intelligence, was highly beneficial for a middle leader. The ability to successfully manage relationships with staff, that at times can become emotionally charged, and/or the ability to assist students during the emotional peaks and troughs of adolescence, allows the middle leader to understand what is important to the person they are listening to and how they feel. Having empathy, as stated by one teacher, means the middle leader "wants to connect" (GT2), that they like people and want to work with them. One senior leader saw middle leaders with high emotional intelligence being able to understand the direction in which the school culture was heading and was able to use this information to the advantage of the community.

4.3.4.6 Decision-maker

Being able to make decisions was seen as an important trait for middle leaders by five respondents. One senior leader saw the need for middle leaders to be able to make tough decisions, from time to time, and being able to stand by that tough decision, stating "I don't want people pleasers" (CS2). Preferably, the decision-making process would be a cooperative one, where the middle leader would be able to bring the group together in a spirit of collaboration. One middle leader agreed with the senior leader

in that a middle leader needs to be prepared to make tough decisions and must be prepared to justify those decisions.

4.3.4.7 Communicator

Consistent communication was regarded by one middle leader as a means to connect with staff that form a middle leader's department. The middle leader must be open to dialogue. While three teachers agreed with the middle leader's view on communication, they went further to stipulate that the middle leader must be an effective communicator, "able to communicate adequately with both school community, parents, and students" (GT2). One senior leader stated that a middle leader must "have significant communication skills" (CS1).

4.3.4.8 Leader developer; nurturer

The need to nurture staff and develop their leadership capability was recognised by two middle leaders who understood that staff regularly moved through their departments, either moving to other schools and/or attaining leadership positions elsewhere. They saw it as important for middle leaders to help their staff realise they have a voice and a purpose and that their contributions are valued. One senior leader wanted middle leaders to understand empowerment and what it means to try and get people to realise that if a decision is able to be made by them, then allow them to make it.

4.3.4.9 Trustworthy

Holding people's trust, to be considered trustworthy was a crucial personal quality offered by two middle leaders. One middle leader determined that this was a defining character feature for a leader, for without trust they felt a middle leader could not instil confidence in those whom they led, and without instilling confidence they would not be able to lead effectively or with any authority.

4.3.4.10 Adaptable

One middle leader considered that being adaptable, or flexible, in your decision making would be desirable for a middle leader. Whether the decisions related to policy development, procedural actions, or matters of student well-being, having the ability to be adaptable and open to advice was considered to be beneficial.

4.3.4.11 Approachable

One middle leader observed that good middle leaders have the characteristic of being approachable, whether that be to staff, parents, or students.

4.3.4.12 Resilient

Being resilient in adversity was a desirable trait nominated by one middle leader. Developing "a bit of thick skin" (IM5) allowed the middle leader to cope with the demands of the position, that is, not allowing aspects of the role that may see insulting or highly critical behaviour from others, to be burdensome.

4.3.4.13 Appeasing

One middle leader suggested that having the ability to appease others was a desirable personal quality. This was suggested as the middle leader often found themselves caught in the middle between parents placing demands on teachers and the teachers opposed to the demands. The middle leader, wishing to "keep everything going and keep everyone happy" (IM5), saw appeasement as a strategy, though it was acknowledged that this was not always a successful strategy.

4.3.4.14 Counsellor

Having the ability to deal with people, often at times when they are emotional, was seen as a desirable trait by one middle leader. Working with distraught parents, frustrated staff, and disengaged students, the middle leader found they often took on a counselling role with members of their community.

4.3.4.15 Learner

One senior leader stated that middle leaders should regard themselves as learners. At present, they did not feel this was always the case as some middle leaders passively executed their role and proved reluctant to use school holidays as a time for professional learning.

4.3.5 Managing the department

Managing the department, which includes staff, finance, resources, and infrastructure, often involved a large learning curve for middle leaders, with seven middle leaders noting that these responsibilities, while accepted as part of the role, do place demands on time and the requirement to quickly develop sound management skills. One middle leader suggested that the staff in their department do not realise the level of responsibility that comes with the role, maintaining relationships with parents and staff, based around the students' needs, and then "trying to find a happy medium between what is expected of us and how we can put that into practice" (CM6). Two middle leaders said they found the management of difficult staff the most challenging, especially having conversations regarding their behaviour or poor work ethic.

Six teachers commented on the managerial aspects of the middle leaders' role with some noting the pressure middle leaders would feel trying to motivate staff and organise their department, all within time constraints that are usually determined by the senior leaders. Other teachers thought that the middle leaders could be relieved of the administrative tasks associated with the role, allowing the middle leaders to use their expertise in areas where it would be of more use, for example, dealing with parents and students. One teacher saw the role of middle leaders varying in complexity, with those middle leaders dealing with students considered as undertaking a far more complex role.

Two senior leaders recognised the difficulty some middle leaders had in managing their department, particularly when dealing with recalcitrant staff.

4.3.6 Leadership structure within the school

The leadership structure within the school was raised by thirteen respondents, five of whom were middle leaders. Some of the middle leaders saw their role as a segue between the students, the teachers, and the rules and procedures the senior leaders have put in place. One middle leader described, quite frankly, that "there were too many chiefs and not enough Indians" (IM1), sharing their perception that the school had too many middle leadership positions and that the delineation between these roles was blurred, resulting in confusion and duplication of tasks.

Of the four teachers who share their views, while comments were made about the complexity of the schools, no one mentioned confusion about their reporting line. Mention was made by one middle leader about a perceived inequity between the senior years and middle years sections of their school, with the teacher concerned about the lack of middle years based middle leaders being appointed to the school executive and therefore a lack of voice for issues related to the middle years.

The four senior leaders were mindful of the complexities associated with the leadership structures in the school. One senior leader referred to two leadership models in a school: the real one and the structural one. Rather than being based on an organisational chart of hierarchical logic the school has attempted to develop an organisational chart based on the different interactions people have in the daily duties. This proved not to be an easy task as the interpersonal dynamics, personal egos, world view people held, and their career path development, created a very different organisational chart from that expected from an official hierarchical chart. This proved to be very challenging for those in the middle level of leadership as it was clear to see which middle leaders were being avoided, perhaps due to attitude or competency, and those middle leaders who faced greater demands on their time as people preferred to deal with them.

4.3.7 Level of autonomy

Six middle leaders discussed their desire to increase the level of autonomy experienced by the staff in their departments, with four teachers recognising that some middle leaders aim to empower their staff, which they thought was fantastic. The middle leaders spoke of the trust they felt the senior leadership has placed in them and they felt obliged, in some instances, to share that sense of trust with the staff under their responsibility. One of the middle leaders shared that "there's probably a little bit of a sink or swim element to it" (GM2), inferring that while teachers appreciate the autonomy offered, the reality is that not all teachers respond in a high performing manner and may require greater reporting mechanisms to remain productive; a point raised by one of the senior leaders. Those senior leaders who raised the issue of autonomy sought for the middle leaders to be empowered in their role, conscious of the satisfaction and confidence the middle leaders gained from their understanding that they have be placed in charge of an area and have been challenged to lead.

4.3.8 Provide support to others

While almost one third of middle leaders were able to talk with gratitude for the support they received from senior leaders, only two middle leaders were able to talk of the support fellow middle leaders provide to their staff. Two middle leaders referenced the support offered by middle leaders, coordinators within the student well-being area, who offered guidance and welfare strategies to homeroom teachers and class mentors who dealt directly with students.

Three teachers recalled the support they received from middle leaders, offering that their direct line managers were highly supportive. The most effective form of communication between these teachers and the middle leaders was email, rather than in person discussion, due to the lack of mutually free time when they were not teaching.

Two senior leaders thought that middle leaders provided a "reasonable amount of support" (GS1).

4.3.9 Managing students

Five middle leaders spoke of the need to show tolerance and understanding when dealing with students. The issues the middle leaders faced were quite broad and, at times, emotionally taxing for all involved. Social issues are most commonly addressed, adolescents dealing with friendship issues, and safety concerns where a student does not feel safe in the school environment or at home. Middle leaders commented that they had access to student support services and support mechanisms for themselves, such as fellow middle leaders or a psychologist.

Three teachers perceived the work middle leaders do managing students as a cause of stress in the role. Dealing with the students, and with their parents, was seen as a lot of work, enough for some teachers to discount a middle level leadership position that had responsibility for the well-being of students. Conversely, the one senior leader saw the care and management of students as the responsibility of all staff, not just the middle leaders designated to pastoral care, but also the middle leaders with faculty responsibilities as the senior leader believed "one teacher can wreck a subject for a Year 9 kid within the first week" (GS2), with the student focussing their dislike of the teacher onto the subject.

4.3.10 Work / life balance

Seeking a balance between life outside of school and work commitments was raised by six middle leaders. Allocating time to the various elements that filled their day was considered an ongoing challenge. The majority of middle leaders spoke of balancing family commitments and the care of their children, others spoke of social commitments outside of work, all spoke of the increased hours spent working in their middle level leadership position. The middle leaders did not portray a sense of bitterness that they found themselves pulled between the demands of competing

responsibilities, though some did mention they find it hard and, at times, stressful, others dealt with the demands by being "really well organised" (CM1). One middle leader, trying to find a way to take his children to after-school sport commitments, said a senior leader advised him "if you step down from this role then you could just be allocated to any position, any load that needs filling" (IM6).

The two senior leaders provided no solution to the competing demands experience by the middle leaders, principally because each middle leader has circumstances unique to themselves, offering "there will be up times and there will be down times" (IS2).

No teachers raised concerns regarding the work / life balance of middle leaders.

4.3.11 Resistance from peers

Four middle leaders mentioned the difficulty they have faced in the role dealing with resistance from peers. This resistance can be quite hurtful at a personal level and discouraging at a professional level, with middle leaders endeavouring not to be reactive; in their response, middle leaders aimed to put their emotions 'to one side', maintaining a state of professionalism.

The four teacher respondents cited the resistance they have witnessed the middle leaders received from their peers. At times, the teachers have felt the resistance was based on legitimate concerns, regretful that the fellow teacher was incapable of communicating their needs in a more productive and positive manner. Middle leaders have been known to assist these resistors in private, away from the other team members.

4.3.12 Credibility and the role

Commencing in their new role, two middle leaders found that they had to establish their credibility as a competent leader to be accepted in the role, with one middle

leader, who believed they were a contentious appointment as they were selected in preference to a long serving staff member, declaring half the faculty opposed his appointment, affecting the faculty's productivity and development cycle.

Of the five teachers who spoke of middle leader credibility in the role, two raised the belief that the middle leader must earn their credibility to be respected, as that is the way things are done here, referring to the culture of the school. The other teachers expressed an openness to accepting middle leaders in their role, believing, with a default sense of professional respect, that the middle leader has been appointed by the senior leaders due to their skill, knowledge, and/or expertise. Failure to perform credibly, however, would see the middle leader by-passed as staff would take their concerns to the management level above the middle leader.

One senior leader suggested that in their sector middle leaders are generally of an older age, having an inferred credibility due to their greater life experience.

4.3.13 Seeing self as a leader

Reaching the self-realisation that you are a leader was discussed by six middle leaders, sharing how they understood that it was through their efforts, their management skills, and their belief in themselves that they can make a difference to the department they lead and to the school. One middle leader spoke of the increased confidence they have to raise matters directly with the principal; another middle leader spoke of the expectation of high performance and realising this was something they needed to address in themselves. All of the six middle leaders saw this realisation of self as a personal journey, but not one that had to be travelled alone. Seeking and accepting the assistance of senior leaders and teachers was considered necessary.

4.3.14 Espousing vision

The four middle leader respondents spoke of their need to share the vision of the school with their team. While all were comfortable delivering this vision, one middle leader commented they were aware "a lot of middle level leaders have not been allowed to relay what their own vision is for the school" (GM4). The reason for this is unclear to the middle leader, though they are of the understanding it is to maintain the clarity of the school's vision, which has been set out for all staff, almost like a motto. The two senior leaders considered the propagation of the school's vision as an essential part of the middle leader's role. It was seen as a key element in creating group cohesive and bringing about the change that was felt needed to be brought about.

4.3.15 Working within organisational constraints

Working within organisational constraints was considered a natural part of the role of a middle leader. One of the middle leaders voiced that there is always going to be upper management decisions that you disagree with, "they're immovable, but the reality is you work around them" (GM3). Another middle leader noted that organisational constraints are also placed upon the senior leaders in that they are responsible to the School Board and the goals they wish the school to pursue. Some experienced middle leaders were of the understanding that organisational constraints are always open to some negotiation and it was their role to find the best outcome for the department, mindful of the needs of the students.

One teacher raised the issue of organisational constraints, commenting that budget restrictions on professional learning hindered some middle leaders and teachers from attending events that they thought would be highly beneficial.

Both of the senior leaders acknowledged the frustration that working within organisational constraints could cause middle leaders, however, both stated that

these restrictions were necessary and were part of any large organisation with the reality being the school “needs to be able to make this work” (IS2).

4.3.16 Remuneration

Remuneration obtained for a middle level leadership position was not seen by one middle leader and three teachers as being commensurate with the amount of work and commitment of time demanded to satisfactorily fulfil the role. The middle leader noted that at their previous school they were being paid the same amount of money they currently receive, but now their workload and the pressure they feel in the job has increased five to ten times due to their perception that their current school is more prestigious.

4.3.17 Favoured; protected

One middle leader commented that staff perceived them as being favoured by the principal, as the principal had a particular personal interest in the work performed by the middle leader’s department. This perception led staff to comment that the middle leader’s department received preferential treatment, such as additional resources or funding. The middle leader found these comments hurtful as they had worked quite hard to build the department.

A senior leader respondent found schools can become very political if staff perceive there are limited opportunities for leadership positions; people can become marginalised if they are perceived as a threat.

Two teachers also raised concerns about some middle leaders being in a favoured position. One teacher made the observation that a number of the middle leaders at the school were past students, causing them to have the genuine belief that, as they were not a past student at the school, they would not be considered for a position of leadership. The other teacher felt that there were special allegiances formed within the school, between some in the senior leaders and middle leaders, and to test those

allegiances would limit one's access to special payments, time allowances, and other privileges that were bestowed by the principal.

4.3.18 Working with parents

While comfortable dealing with parents, one middle leader commented on the fact that some parents will choose to 'leap-frog' them and go directly to their manager or senior leader. One senior leader and two teachers noted that working with parents is an obvious part of a middle leader's role. One teacher emphasised the difficulty some middle leaders face when a parent does not consider the matter they are discussing with the middle leader with the same seriousness as does the middle leader, for example, a student's late attendance or school refusal.

4.3.19 Strategic thinker; forecasting

Recognising the competency of some middle leaders as strategic thinkers, with the ability to forecast the needs of their department or area of responsibility, was commended by one member from each of the participant groups. The middle leader cited a colleague who was an Assistant Head of Faculty, noting that this person had a particular skill in critical thinking, drawing other members of the faculty into the planning process, supporting the Head of Faculty. The teacher also praised a Head of Faculty, who was acknowledged for "looking at the big picture…seeing what works and what doesn't work" (GT3).

The senior leader discussed the tension facing many middle leaders, finding a balance between solving the immediate needs of their staff – and being judged as attentive – or, building a longer-term framework that may not solve the immediate needs of staff – and perhaps being judged inattentive - but will develop in their staff the skills required to find the solution independently. The senior leader judged this ability in a middle leader as highly desirable, requiring confidence and strength to deal with those who were demanding their attention.

4.3.20 Exposure to new ideas

Having the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas was considered an attractive part of the middle leaders' role. Meeting other educational leaders external to the school and being able to discuss matters in depth with members of the school leadership, were considered beneficial to the middle leader's own development.

4.3.21 Constrained by systemic factors

One middle leader, who had held the position of Year Level Coordinator, had the perception that middle leaders in a Head of Faculty position were constrained by what they were able to undertake in their faculty due to the need for the school, overseen by the senior leaders, to ensure academic standards were of a similar standard as other schools in the system. While not supporting the view held by the middle leader, one senior leader felt that senior leaders in the Government system did not have the flexibility to act as autonomously as was perceived possible in the Catholic system.

4.3.22 Acquire skills on the job

One teacher believed that the skills a middle leader required for their role, specifically those of a Head of Faculty or student manager, could be acquired in the role. The teacher saw running student meetings and the various procedures followed by middle leaders as something that could be learnt. One senior leader concurred with this observation.

4.3.23 Reputation concerns

Having passion for the role and, at times, displaying this passion in a boisterous or heated manner with colleagues and/or members of the senior leaders concerned one middle leader, who felt that their reputation has been tarnished because of past outbursts. The middle leader also noted that other middle leaders' reputations were considered by staff, which were not always regarded as flattering.

4.3.24 Access to special events

Gaining access to special events, such as an award ceremony for a student or attendance at a school play, was seen by one teacher as a special privilege offered to middle leaders. They believed some middle leaders got "to do some cool stuff" (GT3).

4.3.25 Geographical barriers

Having the expectation that middle leaders will communication and engage with colleagues on another campus or with teachers that are located at different schools within the same system was seen as a "huge issue" (IS2) by one senior leader. Even though technology is in place, such as email, phones, Skype, or FaceTime, to make communication simple and efficient, the relationships the middle leaders need are created through building close connections with people, who are often very close. Geographical barriers, such as distance, disrupt this process.

4.3.26 Summary – Perception of leadership

All middle leaders commented about their ability to influence school direction. Neary three-quarters felt they were able to exert some influence, chiefly through the actions of their department, while a small number felt they were highly influential, the seniority of their position affording them the sense that they were actively involved in their school. Conversely, those middle leaders who perceived that their position was lowly ranked within the school's hierarchy felt they had no ability to influence the direction of the school.

The act of middle leadership was perceived as having some negative attributes, the most common being the lack of support, poor communication, and micromanagement by senior leaders. There was also the concern that senior leaders excluded middle leaders from major decision-making processes involving their

department, such as budgeting, staffing, and infrastructure allocation. This lack of inclusion was perceived as disrespectful and detrimental to the school in that the information used to make decisions could be incorrect or outdated. This could be remedied if the middle leader were included in the decision-making process.

Having the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships, both internally and externally, within the school community was perceived as an important quality for a middle leader to possess. As was the ability to be consultative, empathetic, and encouraging to staff and to be seen to take an active role in the life of the school. Being collegial, thoughtfully managing change, and being able to build a team were perceived as useful skills.

Managing the department often involved a steep learning curve for middle leaders. Having to come to terms with staffing, finance, resource and infrastructure allocation, some middle leaders considered such demands burdensome, especially in terms of the amount of time they had to allocate to the tasks. Manging difficult staff was also seen as challenging, especially conversations focussing on their professional conduct or poor work ethic.

Coming to the realisation that you are a leader, with the role changing your self-perception, was raised by nearly one-third of middle leaders. This led to an understanding that their efforts in the role could make a difference to their department and the school, and that such efforts were transformational for themselves.

4.4 Success in Leadership

Determining the success of middle leaders in their role was, at times, difficult to define for some of the participants. This included describing how middle leaders were able to improve student outcomes. All of the middle leaders, at some point in their response, focused on the effect their actions had on students. A number of themes emerged from the responses gathered from the middle leaders, the teachers, and the senior leaders. Table 4.12 lists the emergent themes, ranked by the number of respondents who raised the issue.

Table 4.12: Emergent themes regarding middle leaders' determination of success in the role, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Emergent Themes: Success in leadership role	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Student focussed	22	11	5	38
Relational dynamics	14	8	5	27
Peer feedback	11	1	3	15
Improved programmes	9	2	4	15
Not sure what determines success	6	2	2	10
Defined goals required & achieved	2	4	4	10
Staff feel content	5	3	1	9
Being seen to be competent	3	5	0	8
Personal enjoyment of role	7	2	0	9
Staff feel empowered	2	2	3	7
Parent feedback	6	0	0	6
Timely communication	2	3	0	5
Staff organised	1	3	1	5
Staff feel supported	3	0	0	3
Improved infrastructure	0	2	1	3
Diminished complaints	1	0	1	2
Level of programme acceptance	0	0	1	1

4.4.1 Student focussed

As mentioned previously, all middle leaders cast their focus upon the students when seeking to determine whether they have been successful in their role. Similarly, nearly all teachers and senior leaders did the same. As students are central to the core function of a school, this level of response is somewhat expected. Fifteen sub-themes emerged from their responses. The emergent sub-themes are listed in Table 4.13 and are ranked by the number of respondents who raised the issue.

Table 4.13: Emergent themes regarding student focussed, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Student focus	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Student grades; academic performance	18	7	4	29
Student feedback	9	7	1	17
Student longitudinal data	8	3	3	14
Student enjoyment	6	6	0	12
Student well-being	5	3	0	8
Student learning seen as a priority	5	2	1	8
Student attendance	4	2	1	7
Student behaviour	3	2	2	7
Knowledge of student	5	0	1	6
Student involvement in community	4	0	0	4
Student gratitude	3	1	0	4
Student subject enrolment	2	1	1	4
Student feels supported	2	0	0	2
Enrolment numbers	1	0	0	1
Student effort	0	1	0	1

4.4.1.1 Student grades; academic performance

Over four-fifths of the middle leaders referenced improved student grades or improved student academic performance as means of determining if they had been successful in their role. Some middle leaders regarded these improved student grades as a tangible means of showing students and parents that the changes they have implemented in academic programmes have proven to be beneficial. Similarly, those middle leaders responsible for the students' pastoral care cited improved academic performance as a means for demonstrating that the student well-being programmes they led have been successful in providing improved student outcomes. When considering improved student grades, nearly all middle leader respondents referenced Year 12 results, the final formal year of secondary schooling in Victoria. Some middle leaders measured their success by the number of students that surpassed a pre-determined mean study score in their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) results or by the number of students that attained an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) over 90 (with the highest ranking at 99.95) or attained a VCE study score over 40 (where, typically, the highest score achievable is 50). Improved student academic performance at the VCE level was seen as a validation, with one middle leader stating, "at the end of the day, at the Year 12 level, obviously the results speak for themselves; we get some very good results" (CM5).

Over half of the teachers and the senior leaders nominated improved student grades or improved student academic performance as means of determining if the middle leaders had been successful in their role. One senior leader noted that they measured the success of middle leaders "in terms of improvement of student outcomes, using only traditional methods of identifying the teachers, via VCE results" (IS2). In this regard, the middle leaders' measure of success was determined by the number of teachers in their faculty who had students in their classes who had performed well in their VCE studies.

4.4.1.2 Student feedback

Over two-fifths of middle leaders regarded student feedback as a means of determining their success in having improved student outcomes. The feedback from students was gathered from formal surveys administered by subject teachers, informal conversations between students and teachers, and conversations between middle leaders and students. One middle leader stated that "the kids give you really good feedback, I think. They're really honest, they'll tell you if you're doing a really good job, and they'll probably tell you if you're doing a bad job" (CM3). Over half of the teachers and one senior leader also saw student feedback as a way of determining a middle leader's success in the role, with the senior leader emphasising that the development of the student voice within the school was an important part of the school's improvement strategy.

4.4.1.3 Student longitudinal data

Students' longitudinal academic data, incorporating the tracking of students' results in the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the Australian Council for Educational Research's (ACER) Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT), and/or school-based subjects over a number of years was used by eight middle leaders as a way of determining their success in the role. In tracking the data, the middle leaders were looking for trends in the data, either a student's results improving or declining, as an indicator of the success of specific programmes they have initiated. In addition, year level wide declining results were commonly used as the impetus for instigating programmes to reverse the downward trend.

Three teachers considered the trends in students' longitudinal data as a valid way to determine a middle leader's success in the role, though one senior leader stipulated that the trends in students' longitudinal data could not be fully attributable to the success, or otherwise, of middle leaders.

4.4.1.4 Student enjoyment

Six middle leaders and six teachers considered the level of student enjoyment as a means of determining a middle leader's success in the role. While subjective in nature, the assessment of a student's enjoyment was determined by some middle leaders and teachers by observation of the students' faces; did the students look happy? One middle leader gauged this level of enjoyment by "the feel of the year level" (GM3) as they walked through the corridors. If students greeted the middle leader, gave 'high fives', or shared details of a game they were playing on an iPad, the middle leader deduced that they were approachable, that the students were happy, and that was their "measuring stick" of success. Other middle leaders regarded students telling them that they enjoy their class, or a particular unit of study they had completed, as an indicator of success. One teacher, stating why they thought student enjoyment was a valid measure, offered, "We can't base everything on student data because some year levels are different than others…asking the kids 'Did you enjoy English, Maths, Science? Why, why not?' Kids are so honest" (CT1). The responses offered by students to such questioning allowed the middle leaders to also gauge the student's overall well-being. For middle leaders holding a position responsible for students' pastoral care, teachers rated their success in the role through the answers student gave in an annual well-being survey. If the student indicated that they enjoyed being a part of the school community, then the middle leader was regarded as being successful.

4.4.1.5 Student well-being

In regarding student well-being as a measure of a middle leaders' success in the role, attention was directed to the effectiveness of the monitoring and assistance students received as part of the management of their social and emotional welfare. For middle leaders to be considered successful in the role, there needed to be the belief, held by staff, that the students under the monitoring of the Well-being department were being cared for successfully, and that the number of student referrals to the Well-being department were declining, with the assumption that students were therefore coping better. Five middle leaders and three teachers raised student well-being as a

measure of middle leaders' success in the role. The respondents' ability to measure the success of the role played by the middle leader in the students' welfare management, by their own admission, was not always feasible or accurate, rather, it was the perceived level of care and concern the middle leader offered to students experiencing social and emotional trauma that was being gauged.

4.4.1.6 Student learning seen as a priority

Middle leaders who were seen to make student learning a priority in their deliberations and planning were considered to be successful in their role. Five middle leaders and two teachers, focussed on the role of middle leaders who have responsibility for a year level or groups of year levels, such as a Year Level Coordinator or Head of School, thought that middle leaders who emphasised student learning as a priority minimised disruption to scheduled learning times and worked with teachers to build a learning culture in the school. This learning culture was measured by how often conversations between teachers with other teachers, teachers with students, teachers with parents, were about student learning and teaching practice. One senior leader, who considered those middle leaders who placed student learning as a priority as a success, did so because they saw student learning as one of the strategic priorities of the school and having a middle leader promote this strategic objective amongst staff and students was highly beneficial.

4.4.1.7 Student attendance

Middle leaders were considered successful in the role if students attended scheduled classes within the middle leader's area of responsibility, that is, truancy levels were down, student absenteeism, excluding illness, was down, and tardiness minimised. As one middle leader stated, "just getting them to turn up to class" (IM8) could, at times, be seen as a measure of success. Three middle leaders, two teachers, and one senior leader considered student attendance a measure of a middle leader's ability to improve student outcomes.

4.4.1.8 Student behaviour

Student behaviour was raised as an indicator of the level of success a middle leader has had in the role. A significant improvement in student behaviour was seen to enhance student outcomes by three middle leaders, two teachers, and one senior leader. Some middle leaders felt that if students are not expressing poor behaviour in the classroom then there is a greater chance they will be engaged in their learning. For this to occur, complex planning needs to take place involving the expertise of middle leaders and teachers across departments concerned with the academic and pastoral needs of students. One senior leader expected middle leaders to "talk with subject teachers about how best to engage students" (GS2) and help them "modify what they are doing in class" (GS2) in order to maintain student interest and, therefore, induce positive student behaviour.

4.4.1.9 Knowledge of student

Having a knowledge of students, knowing their names, the subjects they study, the sports they like, making the student realise that they are known at the school, were raised by five middle leaders as important factors for engaging students and to help improve student outcomes. The middle leaders considered it a duty to know their students, a primary responsibility of their role. Building this knowledge showed the student that they were respected as an individual and that the middle leader cared about them. For some, measuring the ability of the middle leader to build this relationship with students was considered a valid indicator of their success.

4.4.1.10 Student involvement in community

The level of student involvement in the community, whether it be in compulsory school events such as house sporting carnivals, or involuntary activities, such as a gap year programme (commonly based on a community assistance project, undertaken by post-secondary students before commencing their tertiary studies), was seen by four middle leaders as a measure of how successful middle leaders had been, especially

those responsible for student services and management, in fostering a sense of community within the students and a willingness to be of service to the community.

4.4.1.11 Student gratitude

Students showing gratitude for the time and care middle leaders and teachers had shown them during their studies was considered a measure of middle leader success by three middle leaders and one teacher. Affirmations from the students, either delivered in person or via social media, were values by these middle leaders, indicating to them that they have been helpful and "struck a chord with the student and made some impact" (GM3). Expressions of student gratitude also provided the middle leader with feedback, enforcing their belief, that they were making a positive difference to a child's life.

4.4.1.12 Students' subject enrolment

Increases in subject enrolment indicated to two middle leaders that the faculty programmes they had put in place were considered valuable to students and, therefore, successful in meeting student needs. One middle leader thought the increased student enrolments in a specific VCE subject was a great measure of success, as within this school faculties vie for teaching spaces based on the number of student enrolments. One senior leader agreed with the middle leader's belief in their success.

4.4.1.13 Student feels supported

Two middle leaders considered that making students feel that they are well supported, either by themselves or by staff within the faculty, was a way in which to measure their success in the role. Both middle leaders spoke of a system they had put in place that allowed students to know when they were available for discussions outside of class time. They found that they were able to monitor the student's progress, while at the same time, impressing upon the student that their academic progress and well-being was of importance to the school.

4.4.1.14 Enrolment numbers

Increased enrolment numbers across the school were considered by one middle leader as a way in which to judge the success of the middle leaders at the school. Their belief was parents would not enrol their child at the school if there was not the belief in the community that the school offered exceptional student outcomes in the form of exceptional VCE results.

4.4.1.15 Student effort

One teacher regarded the amount of effort a student put into a task as a way of determining the success of a middle leader. A student displaying greater commitment to their studies, or co-curricular endeavour, could be attributed to motivation provided by student well-being programmes initiated by the middle leader.

4.4.2 Relational dynamics

The relationships developed and fostered by the middle leader, between themselves and their staff and between themselves and the students, was believed by over half the total respondents to have a bearing on improving student outcomes. From their responses four sub-themes emerged. These emergent sub-themes are listed in Table 4.14 and are ranked by the number of respondents who raised the issue.

Table 4.14: Emergent themes regarding relational dynamics, ranked by the total number of participants who raised the issue.

Sub Theme: Relational dynamics	ML (n=22)	Teacher (n=13)	SL (n=7)	Total (n=42)
Influencing colleagues	8	5	4	17
Rapport with colleagues	5	5	3	13
Influencing students	5	2	1	8
Rapport with students	4	1	1	6

4.4.2.1 Influencing colleagues

The ability to exert influence on the members of their department was seen by eight middle leaders as an important factor in the development of programmes that improved student outcomes. This ability to influence their colleagues was not considered a form of manipulation, rather, it was an acknowledgement by the middle leader that they were able to articulate a vision that their colleagues were willing to accept and put into practice. This ability of the middle leaders to bring people on board was confirmed by the responses from the five teachers, who described the positive influence the middle leader had on developing the teaching and learning strategies that were employed. One teacher described the profound influence the middle leader had had on their team sharing that three of the six Teacher of the Year nominations from the past two years had come out of their department.

The four senior leaders acknowledged the influence middle leaders had on their department; specifically, their ability to influence the teaching in the classroom, either through direct instruction of teachers or by sourcing valuable professional learning opportunities for the department.

4.4.2.2 Rapport with colleagues

Establishing a good rapport with colleagues, building a sense of collegiality, was considered a measure of a middle leader's success in the role by one third of the respondents. Fostering sound professional relationships within the middle leader's department was seen as very important by a number of middle leaders. One middle leader relayed that the teachers in their team worked very hard. Teaching involves a lot of additional roles, aside from the classroom component, with teachers required to write reports, undertake yard supervisions, attend meetings with students and parents, to name but a few; all of these things add pressure to an already demanding role. At times, when teachers are feeling stressed by the workload, the middle leader revealed it is the relationship they have with the staff, and that the staff have with each other, that keeps the department operating smoothly. As mentioned by one teacher, "everything just comes down to relationships; if you have a good relationship with your

team leader and they support you and you feel positive around them, they've been successful" (CT1). Some middle leaders organised special departmental events, such as dinners or sausage sizzles at lunchtime. These were appreciated by teachers and helped to build camaraderie.

Of the three senior leaders, one offered that they build a picture of the middle leaders' leadership competency and skills based on how well they observe their teams operating and how well the members of their team interact with the school community. Another senior leader saw success in a middle leader if they related well to staff in a non-political way. The third senior leader was not sure if improved student outcomes could be linked, as readily identifiable, to the middle leader's rapport with their colleagues, however, they wished to stress the importance of collegial relationships between staff and their necessity for the harmonious running of the school.

4.4.2.3 Influencing students

Five middle leaders spoke of their ability to influence students directly and indirectly. Directly, some middle leaders found they had the ability to encourage students in the subject, by either dropping into the subject classes and taking an interest in their work or talking with them outside of class about topics related to the subject that might spark their interest. Students may come directly to the middle leader seeking advice, especially when students are required to make their subject selections for the following year or are seeking career counselling.

Indirectly, middle leaders commented on the conversations they had with the students' parents, either at information evenings or when the parents contacted the middle leader seeking assistance. In these conversations with parents, the middle leader would convey the importance of the student continuing their reading, researching a particular topic, encouraging the student to get to school on time, or to seek assistance from their teacher if they are encountering difficulties.

One teacher thought the students looked up to some middle leaders as role models and that the middle leaders definitely had an influence on students through the relationships they formed with them. Another teacher mentioned that some students went on to become chefs or follow their interest in the hospitality industry due to the influence of a middle leader.

One senior leader believed some middle leaders were successful because they had enabled "the culture of the student who wants to learn, who wants to work, who wants to improve as the most significant thing" (CS1).

4.4.2.4 Rapport with students

The building of good relationships between students and middle leaders was regarded as pivotal by one teacher who suggested that "it doesn't matter how good you are at leading, if you can't form good relationships with the students you teach, you won't be successful" (CT1). This necessity for middle leaders to have a rapport with their students was endorsed by four middle leaders. Being able to call a student by their name and being friendly by offering a greeting when you meet was the way one middle leader builds rapport with their students. The middle leader considered this a process of building trust with the student; this trust was important as the student shared an interdependency with the middle leader to attain the results the student sought to achieve, particularly in the final year of their VCE studies. As noted by one of the senior leaders, if the relationship with the teacher is positive then the student is much more likely to work well and like the subject.

4.4.3 Peer feedback

Half of the middle leaders raised the issue of peer feedback as a way of judging their success in the role. Some middle leaders had undertaken a 360° performance review as part of their appraisal process. One middle leader noted that they had found the feedback supplied by their fellow middle leaders, which was somewhat confronting in places, valuable in opening their eyes to aspects of their performance they had

considered they were managing well, but their colleagues' perception was that this was not the case. Other middle leaders said they received feedback from staff surveys, while some middle leaders stated they received little feedback from other middle leaders at this school, which was a contentious issue amongst the staff.

One senior leader said that they rely heavily on the feedback they receive from a middle leader's team to determine if they have been successful; to date, they have not considered drawing on feedback from other middle leaders.

4.4.4 Improved programmes

The ability of the middle leaders to introduce new and improved programmes to the department during the period of their tenure was considered a key measure of success by nearly half the middle leaders who raised the issue. Several middle leaders saw teaching and learning as one of the key aspects of their role, therefore, instigating programmes that examined teaching and learning within the Department was considered highly beneficial and, as regarded by three middle leaders, a necessary requirement if the best interests of the students were to be kept at the forefront of their thinking.

Two teachers also saw the introduction of improved programmes to the faculty as a mark of success for the middle leader with one teacher seeing it as a way to "freshen up the curriculum" (GT1) and increase interest and career opportunities for younger staff.

One senior leader saw the improvement of programmes in a department as a sign that the middle leader was leading strongly. Such leadership, they thought, tends to lead to actions that give confidence to the team that they are being effective.

4.4.5 Not sure what determines success

Nearly one quarter of the respondents, comprising six middle leaders, two teachers, and two senior leaders, indicated that they were not really sure what determines if a middle leader has been successful in their role. Some middle leaders offered that the accountability of the role is often not quantifiable, therefore, any assessment of success would be purely subjective and open to interpretation. One middle leader said the success of some middle level leadership positions cannot be determined until some years after the student has left the school, as middle leader's success in the role is dependent upon the growth of the young person. Another middle leader commented that it was hard for them to see if they were doing a good job because they are not 'on the outside looking in', they are often just 'head down' thinking that they have got to complete the task.

Two of the teachers were not able to offer any suggestion regarding the determination of success in the role of a middle leader. Two of the senior leaders offered that they did not have processes in place to determine success of middle leaders, that is, they did not have any defined key improvement strategies, nor indicators, nor the ability to gather evidence to determine if any specific criteria had been met.

4.4.6 Defined goals required and achieved

Two middle leaders saw the need for defined goals to be set at the start of their tenure and for the level of achievement of these goals to be used as a determinate of their success in the role. Similarly, the four teachers who raised this issue also saw the establishment of goals as a way of measuring the success of the middle leader and the effective running of the department; as did the four senior leaders, who considered the setting of achievable goals, in conjunction with the senior leaders, as a way of determining accountability in the role and setting the middle leader's key responsibilities.

4.4.7 Staff feel content

Eight respondents shared their view that the level of contentment felt by staff could be an indicator of a middle leader's success in their role. The notion of staff feeling content can conjure thoughts of complacency, however, five middle leaders suggested middle leaders can bring about positive change in a department through "gently and softly" (GM2) introducing the change so that staff in the department feel comfortable about the pace of change and "that they feel that they've got what they need to do their job and that they're supported" (CM4).

Three teachers also raised the sense of staff feeling content, saying that it was the sign of a responsive and concerned middle leader who was determined to promote sound relationships with their staff. These teachers would consider such a middle leader successful. Similarly, one member of the senior leaders commented that such actions by a middle leader would be considered sound management practice, indicating a high level of emotional intelligence and an understanding of what it takes to motivate people.

4.4.8 Being seen to be competent

Being seen to be competent in the role was considered a hallmark of a successful middle leader according to three middle leaders, who outlined that a middle leader who is organised, wise, creative, communicative, punctual, informative, collegial, and accepting of advice was worthy of being thought of as competent.

Over a third of the teachers consider competency a sign of a successful middle leader. One teacher saw it as the ability of a middle leader to "prioritise and prioritise effectively" (IT1). When a middle leader is not considered competent, some teachers reacted by 'working around' the middle leader and sought the assistance of people of higher authority.

4.4.9 Personal enjoyment of role

Enjoying their time in the role was seen by a third of the middle leaders as a measure of their success during their tenure. The responsibilities linked to the role, the relationships they established with colleagues, and their association with the students were all seen to bring enjoyment to these middle leaders. One middle leader shared that their measure of success in the role was in the fact that they can still jump out of bed each morning and drive to school thinking about how much they love their job and how they love working with children. Another middle leader stated that there are negatives in the role, but they are far outweighed by the positives.

4.4.10 Staff feel empowered

Three middle leaders raised the idea that a middle leader who empowered staff to make decisions and have a voice within the department, conveyed to their staff a feeling that they had the trust and respect of the middle leader. Therefore, a department where staff felt empowered was regarded as an indicator of successful leadership by a middle leader. Two teachers recognised this ability in middle leaders to whom they reported, with one stating the distribution of leadership within their department was very welcomed.

The three senior leaders recognised the need for middle leaders to empower the staff. One senior leader spoke of the need of middle leaders to instil confidence in their staff to express their ideas, another spoke of the need of middle leaders to understand they have a group of professionals around them who must be empowered to do the best job they can. This is the essence of leadership, to grow other people.

4.4.11 Parent feedback

Receiving positive feedback from parents was seen as an indicator of a middle leader's success in their role. Receiving these positive comments via email, telephone, letters, and in person, middle leaders were given the impression that the parents were

happy with their performance and, where applicable, were pleased with the level of support afforded their child. Nearly one third of middle leaders indicated that they were buoyed by the receipt of positive feedback from parents, giving them the sense they have been successful in their duties.

4.4.12 Timely communication

Providing timely communication to members of their department, wider staff, students, and parents, was considered sound management practice by two middle leaders and a measure of middle leader success in the role. One middle leader thought this communication should include positive feedback to members of the middle leader's department, while the other middle leader recognised the importance of ensuring the communication contained current information that teachers required to ensure students were kept up to date with details pertaining to academic and cocurricular pursuits.

One quarter of the teachers recognised timely communication as a success indicator, with one teacher noting that timely communication promoted equity within the staff as all were communicated to at the same time with the same information.

4.4.13 Staff organised

One middle leader thought a department having well-organised staff was a measure of the success of a middle leader. The middle leader was of the opinion that a well-organised staff will be more efficient and effective and therefore more likely to have a positive effect on student outcomes. Three teachers also saw the benefits associated with a well-organised department, as did a member of the senior leaders who labelled such well-organised departments as "purposeful" (CS2).

4.4.14 Staff feel supported

Instilling staff with a feeling they are supported was seen by three middle leaders as a means for building confidence within a department. Providing staff with a level of support that allowed them to feel well-provisioned was considered, by these middle leaders, as a mark of success in the role for a middle leader.

4.4.15 Improved infrastructure

Improving the infrastructure available to the department was considered, by two teachers, as a way of determining the success of a middle leader. While the middle leader may not hold a leadership position that allows them to instigate a new building or refurbishment programme within the school, the provision of new adaptable classroom furniture and break-out spaces for students' collaborative work was considered a measure of success. One senior leader thought the improved infrastructure was a visual reminder to the school of the dynamic and future-focussed agenda being promoted by the department, supporting the strategic vision the school had embraced. This was seen as successful management by the principal.

4.4.16 Diminished complaints

One middle leader suggested that middle leaders could be considered a success in their role if the number of complaints lodged against the staff in their department diminished during their tenure. A decrease in complaints would indicate that the middle leaders was effective in their leadership. One senior leader stated their belief that when departments work 'too much in the negative' then this is when complaints are received, therefore, a decrease in complaints indicate a positive feel within that department, which could be an indicator of successful leadership by the middle leader.

4.4.17 Level of programme acceptance

One senior leader indicated that the measure of success of a middle leader may be determined by the level of programme acceptance within the school, that is, by the

cohesion of the staff working within the department and by the number of students wishing to partake in the programme. These factors would be an indicator of the positive administration of the department.

4.4.18 Summary – Success in leadership

All middle leaders focussed on their students when considering if they had been successful in their role. Their determination of success was reliant upon a number of factors, including: the academic performance of students, student feedback, student longitudinal data indicating academic improvement, student enjoyment of their studies, and student engagement in the school community. Knowledge of the students, their well-being and behaviour were also measures of success.

Middle leaders were also concerned about the quality of the relationships they fostered with colleagues and students, seeing improved student outcomes where these relationships deepened professional engagement, strengthened support mechanisms, and enforced a sense of unity. Where applicable, a department that was well organised and where staff were content and achieving strategic goals was also considered a means to evaluate success in the role.

Feedback from parents and colleagues that indicated a level of trust and competency in their performance was valued by some middle leaders. Likewise, feedback that offered constructive critique was also considered valuable by some, especially those middle leaders who had not realised colleagues' perceptions differed from their own.

Over one-quarter of middle leaders were unsure of how their success in the role could be quantified, feeling any determination of success would be purely subjective and open to interpretation.

4.5 Summary – Chapter 4

In their preparation for commencing a middle leadership position, over half of the middle leaders interviewed did not undertake any preparation, over one-third undertook further study to attain a higher degree, while only one undertook a short course to enhance their skill and another joined a professional subject association.

Of interest, a desire to advance their career provided the impetus for two-thirds of the middle leaders to seek their first middle leadership appointment. Employer encouragement and the opening of a position due to changes in staffing stimulated two-fifths. One-third stated that they have been unsuccessful in their attempt to gain a middle leader position.

In the development of their leadership, over 90% of the middle leaders commented on the support provided by their school. This support most commonly took the form of formal meeting times with their direct manager, where they had the opportunity to raise matters that may be of a general or role-specific nature. Regular feedback on their performance was also considered beneficial to their development (41%), as was recognition of their performance (32%), offering acknowledgement within the public arena and a sense of personal achievement.

Nearly all middle leaders considered professional learning, both self and school directed, as a crucial part of developing their leadership skills and content knowledge in their particular field of specialisation.

Contact with senior leaders, either through informal meeting times or mentoring, was considered beneficial by over half of the middle leaders, as was the need to undertake some form of formal tertiary education, commonly at Master level.

Career progression was considered by nearly all the middle leaders, with half concerned about matters related to their reappointment at the conclusion of their

tenure. Over one-third chose to advance their career by accepting a middle leadership role at another school and almost one-fifth did not continue with their middle leadership role, choosing to relinquish, step-down, or were not renewed at the end of their tenure.

Over one-third of middle leaders had time management concerns, finding the demands of their role left little time for self-development. In addition, one-third found an imbalance in the time spent in their teaching and leadership roles, with the majority of their school time being devoted to timetabled classes and subject preparation and corrections completed after school hours.

All middle leaders commented about their ability to influence school direction. Nearly three-quarters felt they were able to exert some influence, chiefly through the actions of their department, while a small number felt they were highly influential, the seniority of their position affording them the sense that they were actively involved in their school. Conversely, those middle leaders who perceived that their position was lowly ranked within the school's hierarchy felt they had no ability to influence the direction of the school.

The act of middle leadership was perceived as having some negative attributes, the most common being the lack of support, poor communication, and micromanagement by senior leaders. There was also the concern that senior leaders excluded middle leaders from major decision-making processes involving their department, such as budgeting, staffing, and infrastructure allocation. This lack of inclusion was perceived as disrespectful and detrimental to the school in that the information used to make decisions could be incorrect or outdated. This could be remedied if the middle leader was included in the decision-making process.

Having the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships, both internally and externally, within the school community was perceived as an important quality for a middle leader to possess. As was the ability to be consultative, empathetic, and

encouraging to staff and to be seen to take an active role in the life of the school. Being collegial, thoughtfully managing change, and being able to build a team were perceived as useful skills.

Managing the department often involved a steep learning curve for middle leaders. Having to come to terms with staffing, finance, resource and infrastructure allocation, some middle leaders considered such demands burdensome, especially in terms of the amount of time they had to prioritise to the tasks. Manging difficult staff was also seen as challenging, especially conversations focussing on their professional conduct or poor work ethic.

Coming to the realisation that you are a leader, with the role changing your self-perception was raised by nearly one-third of middle leaders. This led to an understanding that their efforts in the role could make a difference to their department and the school, and that such efforts were transformational for themselves.

All middle leaders focussed on their students when considering if they had been successful in their role. Their determination of success was reliant upon a number of factors, including: the academic performance of students, student feedback, student longitudinal data indicating academic improvement, student enjoyment of their studies, and student engagement in the school community. Knowledge of the students, their well-being and behaviour were also measures of success.

Middle leaders were also concerned about the quality of the relationships they fostered with colleagues and students, seeing improved student outcomes where these relationships deepened professional engagement, strengthened support mechanisms, and enforced a sense of unity. Where applicable, a department that was well organised and where staff were content and achieving strategic goals was also considered a means to evaluate success in the role.

Feedback from parents and colleagues that indicated a level of trust and competency in their performance was valued by some middle leaders. Likewise, feedback that offered constructive critique was also considered valuable by some, especially those middle leaders who had not realised colleagues' perceptions differed from their own.

Over one-quarter of middle leaders were unsure of how their success in the role could be quantified, feeling any determination of success would be purely subjective and open to interpretation.

5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4, generated from the research exploring the common themes facing middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, with regard to: how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; their preparation for the role; their development in the role; and how they determine their success in the role. The findings were drawn from the perspective of teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders at a Government, Catholic and Independent secondary school.

The chapter has two main sections. The first section answers the research questions, while the second section presents a middle leadership development model, based on further analysis of these findings. Finally, recommendations for practice and research directions are offered.

5.1 Research questions

This study researched the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools, conducting case studies at three Victorian secondary schools (government, Catholic and independent) using multiple perspective interviews of middle level leadership. The following questions were addressed:

1. What are the leadership and other roles of a middle leader as perceived by the holders of the positions themselves and those to whom they are responsible to and responsible for?
2. How are middle leaders supported in their role, including what leadership preparation middle leaders undertake prior to attaining their role?
3. How do middle leaders support their own work?
4. How do middle leaders determine if they have been successful in their role?

5.1.1 What are the perceived leadership and other roles of a middle leader?

This section discusses the leadership and other roles of a middle leader, as perceived by the middle leader themselves and those to whom they are responsible to and responsible for. It explores the roles that were directly raised by middle leaders, teachers, and senior leaders in this research, namely the ability to influence school direction, creating and maintaining professional relationships, managing staff, providing support to others, managing students, espousing a vision, and strategic planning. As these findings are reported, connections with existing research findings will be noted.

5.1.1.1 Influence school direction

This research supports findings in the literature that middle leaders have the ability to influence the direction of their school (De Nobile, 2017; Dinham, 2007b; Duignan, 2006; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). The influence was chiefly exerted at the department or faculty level through the middle leader's ability to model best practice for teachers and promote innovative practice (Dinham, 2007b), and positively influence teacher attitudes (Day et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2010), teaching quality and student outcomes (De Nobile, 2017; Fleming, 2019; Huerta Villalobos, 2018; Keane, 2010; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014).

Also evidenced in this research is the notion that the degree of influence a middle leader is able to yield depends upon the level of support offered by senior leadership (De Nobile, 2017; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) and the middle leader's own attitude and skills (Cotter, 2011; Dinham, 2016).

Day and Grice (2019) note senior leadership has the ability to hinder or progress the work of middle leaders, particularly when the middle leader is seeking to expand their influence beyond departmental boundaries. In this research, the support of senior leadership proved a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of a middle leader's attempt to influence the direction of the school. Consistent with the research

of Grootenboer et al. (2015), senior leaders in this research were found to be more likely to offer support when the middle leader was perceived as building productive links with the school community and saw their departmental leadership role integral to a wider school vision.

Similar to the middle leaders' personal qualities that were valued as important aspects of leadership in Dinham (2007b), the most valued personal qualities of middle leaders in this research were a consultative and encouraging demeanour. These were followed by, in order of desirability, active participation in the school community, the ability to lead change, empathy, decisiveness when faced with difficult decisions, effective communication, nurturing of staff, trustworthiness, adaptability, approachability, resilience, the ability to appease demanding colleagues and parents, counsellor, and learner. Some participants in the research found it easier to cite the qualities that they did not want to see in middle leaders, such as, in order of frequency, being a poor manager, failing to include others, poor role modelling, apportioning blame to others, being disconnected from community, being overwhelmed by the role, ego driven, and seeking retribution.

In this research, the breadth and quality of collegial relationships was seen as having an effect on the level of school-wide influence a middle leader was able to exert, as also noted by Duignan (2008). Those middle leaders who were able to work collaboratively with other middle leaders and provide a cohesive and united front to senior leadership were seen by these senior leaders to be more effective in influencing school direction than those who focussed solely on their department. Conversely, teachers perceived middle leaders, especially curriculum leaders, who failed to support their fellow middle leaders as having a limited ability to influence school direction due to their inability to present a unified stance to senior leadership. The majority of these middle leaders' influence was directed to the proficient functioning of their department or faculty, within the strategic vision of the school.

The three middle leaders in this research who were considered to highly influence the direction of their schools had the belief they did so on a daily basis, having direct responsibility over programmes that improved student learning culture or the provision of pastoral care. These programmes involved working closely with and motivating teachers who, in turn, witnessed these middle leader acting effectively within the school and providing sound expertise (Duignan, 2006; Fleming, 2019), encouraging the leadership capacity of staff (Dinham, 2007b). Such influence was fostered by their senior leaders, though these senior leaders were also conscious they did not want the middle leaders working beyond the strategic parameters the school had set.

In this research, across the three schools, where senior leaders were perceived to employ an autocratic management style, middle leaders were unable to influence the direction of the school and held the view that their role was considered lowly ranked within the hierarchy of the school (Crowther & Boyne, 2016; Harris, 2008a, 2008b). This perception was also held by some teachers in the schools, directing their concern towards the management style of the senior leaders rather than on any perceived leadership shortcomings displayed by the middle leaders.

5.1.1.2 Creating and maintaining professional relationships

Busher et al. (2007) state that a key feature of a middle leaders' role is relating to, and negotiating with, colleagues. Other studies (Connolly, James, & Fertig, 2019; Farchi & Tubin, 2019) have also commented on the importance of this leadership aspect for middle leaders, especially where they use these relationships to achieve a desired educational outcome or reform initiative (Bush, 2008; Crowther, 2011; Glover et al., 1999; Poultney, 2007). In this research, the participants saw the need for middle leaders to have well-developed interpersonal skills that enabled them to develop and maintain positive professional relationships with their colleagues (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). Such relationships, as noted by senior leaders, helped build a support culture within the school and provided the impetus for organisational initiatives that may not have otherwise taken place. Where such

collegial rapport did not exist, teachers experienced difficulties in their dealings with these middle leaders and found interactions were time consuming and detracted from professional duties.

Like previous research (De Nobile, 2017; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Keane, 2010), the senior leaders in this research regarded the need for middle leaders to bring people together to form cohesive teams as a key imperative. Having a visible presence in the community, attending school events, moving around staffrooms and offices, and being seen in the schoolyard with the students, were considered ways for middle leaders to show staff that they were readily approachable, accessible, and working in the best interest of the students and the school. This strengthened the sense of camaraderie and spirit of generosity among members of the department (O'Neill et al., 2010). Having established such relationships, there was limited evidence in this research that middle leaders were concerned that their monitoring of teachers in their department, as encountered by Wise (2001), would damage their existing positive working relationship with teachers.

The adoption of informal processes, when providing feedback or mentoring, and the fostering of collegial interactions were considered by Day and Grice (2019) as a means for middle leaders to build trust in their relationships. For Dinham (2007b), trust was a cultural element linked to shared responsibilities. In this research, the notion of collegial trust did not appear to have great relevance to middle leaders, being explicitly expressed as important by only two. For these middle leaders, however, it was a vital element, like Dinham (2007b), crucial to leading effectively and with authority, instilling confidence in those they led.

In their professional interactions with parents, middle leaders in this research experienced varied levels of support, finding the level of parental response was often proportional to the level of concern the parents placed upon the information received. This proportional response proved problematic when parents did not judge the matter to hold the same urgency or severity as the middle leader. Similarly, the type of

feedback middle leaders received from parents was considered, in some part, a measure of their success in the role. Positive parental feedback buoyed the middle leaders' belief in their effectiveness in the role.

The majority of middle leaders in this research also considered the professional relationships they established with their students as crucial to their success in the role. Similarly, students regarded these relationships as crucial, especially senior students who considered a positive, trust-based relationship with their middle leader as a key element for attaining grades they hoped to achieve. Middle leaders sought feedback from students through formal surveys or informal conversations, considering the responses received as a measure of their effectiveness in the role, the quality of the relationships, and level of trust achieved.

5.1.1.3 Managing staff

For some middle leaders, managing staff involves administrative functions, such as the allocation of classes, finances, and curriculum planning (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Glover et al., 1998), but also, importantly, managing the professional goals and aspirations of staff and the inherent relational dynamics that ensue, within departmental and wider school structures.

As found in the research of Harris et al. (2019), the middle leaders in this study acknowledged the pressure they faced when dealing with the complexities of managing staff under their responsibility, whilst also remaining accountable to senior leaders who may not provide them with the support required to be effective in their role. Dealing with recalcitrant staff, motivating and inspiring teachers, and maintaining and fostering departmental relationships were found to be time consuming, but accepted parts of the role. In particular, as found by Cotter (2011), the importance of establishing and cultivating positive working relationships with, and amongst, members of their department was seen as a crucial task for middle leaders in this research. Building a personal connection with departmental staff gave the middle leader a possible negotiating advantage, with their established personal

rapport potentially alleviating any perceived lack of delegated authority provided by senior leadership.

As noted by Fleming (2019, p. 3), the effective management of people and resources is a major component of middle leadership, as is the need to provide a clear vision, a high level of professional competence, and the ability to be an efficient and effective administrator. In this research, middle leaders were immersed in the complexities of their roles, at times embroiled in challenging poor teaching practice, solving problems, planning future programmes, and trying to find a balance between organisational and departmental tensions, and personal demands.

The management of staff required middle leaders to not only be attuned to the needs of their staff, but also to be perceived by staff as mindful of their needs. Aligning with the Successful School Leadership Model's (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011) concept of beneficial leadership dispositions, teachers in this research commented on the characteristics and qualities they wanted to see in their middle leaders. They valued middle leaders that were consultative in their decision making, were able to communicate and liaise effectively, were highly empathetic, encouraging, and able to build rapport between themselves and other team members. In addition, middle leaders were expected to model good practice and have the ability to lead change, whether it be in the form of pedagogical reform, organisational restructures, or financial management. Teachers in this research also noted that middle leaders were expected to be more than a mouthpiece for senior leaders, having the ability to convey the directives from senior leadership while at the same time allowing teachers the opportunity to voice their opinions and listen to their needs. This was a point of tension for some middle leaders in this research, as also reported by Bassett (2016) and Harris and Jones (2017), finding themselves positioned between a senior leadership that does not communicate in a comprehensive or timely manner, and teachers who wish to be informed of developments and may hold the belief that any delay in communication lies solely with the middle leader.

5.1.1.4 Providing support

Middle leaders in this research, like those in Dinham (2007b), provided support for their staff in a number of ways, primarily through encouragement, effective communication, empathy, and the positive management of relationships. The encouragement provided by these middle leaders developed confidence in their staff to satisfactorily perform their duties (Dinham, 2007b; Edwards-Groves et al., 2016; Fleming, 2013; Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2005), which, in turn, enabled the middle leader to provide honest and timely feedback.

Effective communication was not just seen as the timely and concise dissemination of information by the middle leader, but also the manner by which they received information from their staff, such as their ability to be a good active listener (Dinham, 2007b). Such skill conveyed to teachers in this research that not only was the middle leader welcoming of input, but that they valued the person conveying it (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Duignan, 2006; Tam, 2010). It also signalled an empathetic nature and a willingness to connect with staff, indicating that the middle leader is interested in their concerns and their success (Dinham, 2007b; Fleming, 2019).

In this research, senior leaders' organisational and administrative support of middle leaders was, by their own admission, not always forthcoming, even when directly approached by the middle leader. This lack of support was noted by teachers, particularly where senior leaders missed scheduled departmental meetings, had minimal presence within the department, and gave limited support for new initiatives. Such limited support from senior leadership can diminish the effectiveness of the middle leader (Crowther & Boyne, 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012), though in this research, middle leaders realised increased support for their leadership at a departmental level when teachers were aware of the poor support provided to the middle leader by senior leadership.

5.1.1.5 Managing students

For those middle leaders with a student focussed role, issues involving students' relationship concerns and child safety issues, either related to the school or home environment, were most common. The management of these issues, particularly at an individual level, was often time consuming, as asserted by Wise and Bennett (2003), and required effective and detailed communication between parents and other staff, as found by Crane and De Nobile (2014).

Middle leaders in this research found they had access to student support services, such as psychologists, student counsellors, and other middle leaders who held a similar student-focussed role. This support helped the middle leaders deal with the broad and varied student issues they faced, particularly those that were especially emotionally taxing, allowing them, as considered crucial by Harris (2014), to care for their own emotional needs in order to remain effective in their role.

The emotional investment associated with the middle leaders' role was considered a source of stress by some teachers in this research, making the role less appealing. Fleming (2019) and Harris (2014) note that this potential for stress is almost inevitable and middle leaders, potential and existing, needed to be aware how to manage their own stress and how to avoid behaviours that could induce stress in their colleagues.

In this research, tolerance and understanding were considered necessary personal dispositions for middle leaders when dealing with students, as was a pastoral framework that catered for students' individual needs (Lodge, 2006) and had the expectation that all staff (Crane & De Nobile, 2014) carried a responsibility to remain attuned to student wellbeing and act upon concerns, either directly or through wellbeing support channels.

5.1.1.6 Espousing a vision

The Curriculum Area Middle Manager (CAMM) Leadership Model (White, 2000) regards the middle leader as a curriculum strategist, required to have a vision for the

learning area that provides direction and is supportive of the overall vision of the school set by the senior leadership. Such a departmental vision provides clarity to the overall organisational change management process. While capable of sharing the school's vision with their departmental staff, some of the middle leaders in this research raised their concern that they were not allowed to voice their own vision for the school to their staff. It was unclear to these middle leaders why this was the case, but there was the general understanding it was to ensure the school's vision was delivered with clarity. Senior leadership expected middle leaders to share the vision of the school, as this vision provided a context for middle leader interventions that would have a direct influence on student outcomes (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). The disconnect for these middle leaders, as with previous research (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017; Shaked & Schechter, 2018), lay with the lack of genuine leadership opportunities provided by senior leadership, which affected the middle leaders' practice and school culture.

5.1.1.7 Strategic planning

Recognising the need for middle leaders to forecast and think strategically, the CAMM Leadership Model (White, 2000) and the Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) Model (De Nobile, 2017), both outline the strategic elements required for middle leadership: creating a vision, setting goals, and bearing influence within the area of responsibility. In this research, those middle leaders who exercised these skills were recognised by their peers for their critical thinking abilities and the manner by which they drew their departmental members into the planning process.

Senior leadership in this research particularly valued those middle leaders who displayed these qualities and noted, as raised by Busher (2005) and Bassett (2016), that these middle leaders found themselves facing the tension of having to balance the immediate needs of their staff against the longer-term requirements of the school. Such strategic planning, when focussed on building staff capacity and capability, exposed the middle leader to a perception of failing to meet the immediate needs

within their department, yet gained appreciation from senior leadership in targeting the strategic objectives of improving staff problem solving and lateral thinking ability.

5.1.2 How are middle leaders supported in their role, including what leadership preparation they undertake prior to attaining their role?

This section discusses how middle leaders are supported in their role and the leadership preparation undertaken before accepting the position. It explores those areas where middle leaders experienced support, such as that provided by the senior leaders, professional learning, mentoring, informal discussions, and time balance. It also looks at the preparation middle leaders undertook before their appointment to the position.

5.1.2.1 Senior leadership

The quality of the support provided by senior leadership was a common issue voiced by middle leaders in this research, with the need for a formal meeting time with their direct line manager, and recognition and feedback of their performance, as most eagerly sought.

In this research, the provision of a formal meeting time with their direct line manager allowed middle leaders to discuss faculty related issues and provided a surety that they have scheduled access to either seek advice, discuss pertinent issues, or as succinctly described by one middle leader, the chance to check-in. This regular contact also allowed some middle leaders to build a genuine rapport with their line manager and affirm that they had the support of senior leadership. Such support is a key factor in the MLiS model (De Nobile, 2017), encouraging middle leaders to undertake further leadership development.

Some middle leaders in this research sought feedback on their performance, believing this to be important for their leadership development. The feedback did not

have to be always positive, as some middle leaders considered all feedback as an opportunity to assess how they were perceived by senior leadership and by those whom they led. Such reflection saw these middle leaders question their own abilities and whether teachers perceived them as having the skills to undertake the role, prompting them, as espoused by Gurr and Drysdale (2013), to take responsibility for their own development and professional learning.

Consistent with the findings of Day and Grice (2019) and Grootenboer et al. (2015), having their performance recognised was valuable to some middle leaders in this research for two reasons. Firstly, it provided them with a public recognition of support that their performance was valued by the school, and secondly, that this public recognition offered a personal commendation, bolstering their feeling of self-worth and the sense they were performing at a satisfactory level. This support from senior leaders was also crucial for encouraging aspirant middle leaders, as found by McCulla and Degenhardt (2015, p. 569), to consider taking up a leadership position, which is vital for succession planning. Such findings are reflected in this research, with the encouragement provided by senior leadership cited as the second highest motivator for middle leaders to seek their first leadership appointment, second only to an intrinsic desire for career progression.

Not all middle leaders in this research affirmed the level or type of support provided by senior leadership, as similarly expressed in the literature (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Gurr, 2019, accepted). In order of most frequent to least frequent, limited support manifested through poorly used communication channels, particularly where senior leaders failed to reply to questions or concerns raised by middle leaders in a timely manner, organisational or administrative structures that hindered the middle leaders' effectiveness or efficiency in the role, micromanagement by senior leaders that resulted in diminished autonomy, and a lack of inclusion by senior leaders in decisions that affected departments or staff within the middle leader's responsibility. It is important to note, however, that like the research of Day and Grice (2019), none

of the senior leaders in this research where unsupportive. The difficulties lay in the varied nature of the support and its impact on the work of middle leaders.

5.1.2.2 Supported professional learning

In this research, professional learning was recognised by all middle leaders as a necessary requirement for their development in the role, with almost equal proportions undertaking self-directed or school-directed opportunities.

Middle leaders in this research described engaging in self-directed professional learning opportunities for two main reasons: one, they were able to target specific learning opportunities that met their immediate needs (Fleming, 2019; Harris et al., 2003; Sanders, 2006), such as subject related workshops and conferences; and two, they considered the support offered by the school lacked timeliness, was inconsistent, or poorly provisioned. Those who undertook school-directed professional learning opportunities did so under the encouragement of the school for specific school related programmes, or they were done compulsorily for compliance related issues, with most able to articulate the clear link between their leading and teaching role and the learning activity (Furey, 2017; Grootenboer et al., 2015). It was not uncommon, however, for middle leaders to suggest an alternative learning activity more focussed to their needs, which was generally accepted by the school. This suggests that the need for middle leaders to take responsibility for their own professional learning and develop their own personalised learning plan, as proposed by Gurr and Drysdale (2013, p. 12), is still pertinent.

Previous research (Bassett, 2016; Fleming, 2019; Grootenboer, 2018; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012; Harris et al., 2003; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Sanders, 2006) highlights the need for senior leaders to target professional learning to the middle leaders' specific needs and its application in the workplace. Middle leaders in this research were appreciative of the school's provision of professional learning, however, such provision was also considered an expectation of the school's professional responsibility to develop its staff, particularly in the context of teachers needing to

meet annual registration renewal requirements for professional development decreed by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2021). From the senior leaders' point of view, while not strongly voiced in this study, there was the belief, like that found in Day and Grice (2019), that the professional learning invested in their middle leaders was a necessary part of their school improvement strategy.

The support offered to middle leaders through participation in peer networks and professional learning opportunities, as provided through membership of professional subject associations, was not widely adopted in this research. This lack of engagement with professional networks and subject associations denied middle leaders, as suggested by Leithwood (2016), avenues to improvement initiatives that may be independent from other sources of professional learning.

5.1.2.3 Mentoring

Accepting a middle leadership role has been compared to taking on an apprenticeship, where the required skills are acquired on the job (Su, Gamage, & Miniberg, 2003). An alternative to this apprenticeship development model, offered by Gurr and Drysdale (2012, p. 414), involves combining collegial networks, coaching, experience, and mentoring, throughout the middle leader's career. Accepting the guidance of a mentor was highly regarded by 13 of the middle leaders in this research, offering the opportunity for them to connect with an experienced colleague who was willing to offer their knowledge and time. Providing purposeful assistance, 12 middle leaders in this study chose mentors or accepted an invitation from mentors who were either a principal, deputy principal, or an experienced senior colleague; only one had a mentor that was their direct line manager, who had been appointed to the role rather than chosen by the middle leader. Nine middle leaders had no mentor.

The senior leadership in this research took partial responsibility for the mentoring process, with some providing opportunities for their middle leaders to request the service of a mentor, or simply offered themselves (Foster, 2010). Where this offer was not forthcoming, three middle leaders sourced a mentor of their own volition, as

espoused by Robertson (2005) and De Nobile (2018), choosing a trusted colleague who worked at the school or was external. Such an arrangement offered the middle leader a source of guidance that did not expose their fallibilities or uncertainties to their line manager.

Of the nine middle leaders who did not have a mentor, five could see the value in having someone they could work with and with whom they could share ideas, while four, who could appreciate the usefulness of a mentor during the early phase of appointment, felt that the need for a mentor would diminish as their experience in the position increased.

5.1.2.4 Informal discussions

In this research, the ability for middle leaders to have informal discussions with their manager was considered valuable by those who engaged in the practice. It provided an opportunity for the middle leader to 'drop in' and seek assistance and gauge opinion at a time that suited their need, though it was dependent upon the manager's availability. Where middle leaders shared an office with their manager, or the manager's office was in close proximity, the opportunity for informal discussion was more readily present, enabling the development of a collaborative culture, considered by Busher et al. (2007, p. 142) as a key functional aspect of middle leaders' work.

These informal meetings helped build a positive relationship and camaraderie between the middle and senior leaders, allowing the exchange of pleasantries associated with the course of the day and the sharing of ideas and experiences. It also broadened their understanding of the complexity of the school and the range of issues present in the community. In addition, these exchanges provided modelling for the middle leader, observing how the senior leader dealt with colleagues, fostered professional relationships, supported their team, displayed empathy, and utilised their problem-solving and strategic thinking skills (Cotter, 2011; Flückiger et al., 2015), which, in turn, they modelled for their team.

5.1.2.5 Time balance

Balancing the division of time allocated to their leadership responsibilities, as opposed to their teaching commitments, was a considerable challenge for some of the middle leaders in this research, as also expressed in the literature (Bassett, 2016; Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010). Typically, this division of time was determined by the school and stipulated in the middle leader's role description, with the amount of time allocated to the role usually dependent upon the tasks entailed. Four middle leaders, two with a pastoral role and two with a faculty role, noted that they did not have enough time to fulfil their leadership duties. One middle leader with faculty responsibilities declared they had ample time, simply because their teaching load was under allotted. What the majority of middle leaders found challenging was that this division of time rarely reflected their practice, also noted by Deece et al. (2003), compelling them to prioritise the demands on their time, stating that their teaching responsibilities and support of staff consumed their time during the school day, parent and student meetings dominated the time after school, forcing all teaching preparation to be undertaken at home. This led to frustration, stress, and a feeling they had neglected a part of their duties (Abdul Razzak, 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014).

Seeking the support of the school, some middle leaders in this research sought to renegotiate the time allocated to the role, or to obtain release time for a specific project. While this was not always successful, very few middle leaders chose to relinquish their role, accepting that the competing demands of the leadership role and those of teaching, within a finite time frame, were part of the position.

5.1.2.6 Prior preparation

Over half of the middle leaders in this research did nothing to prepare themselves for a leadership position, whether by undertaking a formal post-graduate qualification in leadership or in a field related to their area of teaching, a short school-based course, or joining a subject association relevant to their teaching domain. These findings support the research (Deece et al., 2003; Dinham et al., 2000; Gurr, 2019; Gurr &

Drysdale, 2013; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Keane, 2010; White, 2000), conducted over the past two decades, that indicate that the majority of middle leaders undertake little or no preparation for their leadership role, with some also failing to see the necessity.

Those middle leaders in this research who were motivated by a desire to progress their career revealed that personal ambition led to their initial leadership application and appointment. Once in the role though, only one third sought to further progress their careers, echoing the sentiment of middle leaders in Flückiger et al. (2015) and the belief that Australian education systems provide limited professional development opportunities for aspirant middle leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2015). Of the middle leaders who had undertaken preparation for their initial leadership position, only a small minority in this research had participated in a leadership development course offered by their education sector.

By gaining their initial leadership appointment through recognition as a highly effective teacher, or being appointed uncontested by the principal, the middle leaders in this research confirmed, like those reported in Gurr and Drysdale (2013), that the previously discussed apprenticeship model was a successful pathway to attaining leadership.

5.1.3 How do middle leaders support their own work?

This section discusses how middle leaders support their own work in the role. It explores the support obtained through formal education, professional learning, professional networks, career progression, and work/life balance.

5.1.3.1 Formal education

Once appointed to a formal leadership role, completing some form of self-directed formal study was considered a necessity by almost half of the middle leaders involved in this research. This formal study was most commonly a post-graduate degree,

typically a Master's degree that was part-sponsored by the governing systemic body. Senior leaders were seen to direct middle leaders towards courses focussed on emotional intelligence or well-being, accepting, as suggested by Foster (2010), their responsibility to guide middle leaders. The recognition that there were elements of the role that required the middle leader's personal attention to further their knowledge and understanding was a motivating factor, however, not all middle leaders completed their chosen course nor was there any evidence in the study that retention of their leadership position required post-graduate studies.

5.1.3.2 Professional learning

As discussed, the middle leaders in this research all participated in some form of professional learning, either self-directed or school-directed, though not all recognised the value of professional learning to the same extent, with some choosing to limit their level of involvement due to self-imposed constraints, work load concerns (Feeney, 2009; Foster, 2010), or, as also found by Southworth (2009), that past professional learning opportunities had not been of the desired quality or considered a positive experience. Finding a balance between the time spent performing the role and the time invested in developing themselves was problematic for these middle leaders.

As found in past studies (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013), meeting the individual professional learning needs of middle leaders in this research was still a largely self-directed task with the experience gained in the position seen as the leading means of development. While there was a level of understanding that time in the role equated to development through experiential learning, commitment to professional learning was considered most profitable when the middle leader directed the choice and frequency of the professional learning events attended. Considered a priority by Flückiger et al. (2015, p. 61), such self-directed opportunities were predominantly focussed on pedagogical leadership, building specific subject-based capacities and skills or enhancing technology usage in the classroom. Some senior

leaders in this research indicated that they were aware of this subject-based bias, at the expense of professional learning focussed on building leadership skills.

As highlighted by Gurr and Drysdale (2013), most middle leaders in this research favoured self-directed professional learning opportunities as past experience had shown that those provided by senior leadership were ill timed, poorly communicated, or inconsistent in focus.

In this research, where professional learning for middle leaders was directed by the school and primarily focussed on school specific programmes, it was usually of school-wide significance rather than directed to middle leaders' individual needs. As suggested by Huber (2011), there was the hope, expressed by senior leaders, that these school-directed opportunities would be a way for middle leaders to develop a realisation of their own self-development requirements. This desired realisation was not revealed in this research. Middle leaders perceived this 'one size fits all' approach as not meeting their needs, failing to provide the stimulus to promote further learning and transference to their own practice.

A small number of middle leaders in this research noted they did not access either self-directed or school directed professional learning during the year, citing the demands of the role did not allow them time to avail themselves, or they did not want the school to make demands on their time. While recognising that their skill development was disadvantaged, these middle leaders considered, as suggested by Feeney (2009), that the addition of professional learning supplementing their daily work load was an unwelcome burden.

5.1.3.3 Professional networks

Involvement in professional networks and associations expose middle leaders to a broader context outside of their school setting. Such accessibility to contemporary thinking provides professional learning opportunities that encourage collegiality, collaboration, and participation, key factors that influence the work middle leaders

undertake, as presented in the Middle Leadership in Schools Model (De Nobile, 2018, pp. 14-15).

Only a small number of middle leaders in this research indicated involvement in, or membership of, a professional network or association. Those that did noted their involvement was beneficial, enabling them to hear from a diverse range of speakers and be exposed to innovative ideas. It also allowed them to share projects from their schools with a wider community.

5.1.3.4 Career progression

The middle leaders in this research considered their career progression closely linked to their development in their role, and their understanding of how that role operated within the leadership structure of the school. As previous research has highlighted (McCulla & Degenhardt, 2015; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009), being seen to be successful in the role was judged the most important factor for progressing the middle leader's career, whether that be in the current role, a different middle level role, or attainment of a senior leadership position.

Where the middle leader's position was tenured, concerns regarding reappointment at the end of tenure were raised. Typically, reappointment was conditional upon a satisfactory performance review, however, nearly half the middle leaders in this research indicated they had not received feedback from senior leadership on their performance, leaving them unsure about their reappointment. In addition, lack of consultation regarding the continuance of the position within the school's or system's leadership structure and the fear that they could be forced to reapply, potentially competing with a state-wide pool of applicants, left middle leaders concerned that not only was there the potential that they could lose their leadership role, but that they could also lose their teaching position at the school. Some middle leaders expressed resentment at this possibility and felt pressured to perform at a consistently high level in order to improve their chance of reappointment. Such restricted consultation and

hinderance to career advancement can lead, as noted by Rhodes and Brundrett (2009), to a deterioration in the relationship between senior and middle leaders.

In this research, attaining a middle leadership position at another school was considered a means of career progression by some middle leaders and promoted by some senior leaders. Exposure to different schools, with the associated differences in culture, procedures, structures, and relationships, presented new perspectives that helped to develop the middle leaders' understanding of leadership and provided a breadth of experience that may prove attractive to future employers (Halliger, 2011). For a small number of middle leaders, it also provided the possibility to initiate projects they had been unable to instigate at their previous school or presented further opportunities for leadership progression that had been previously limited due to their religious affiliation.

In considering their current role, approximately one third of the middle leaders in this research expressed a desire to advance their career, one third stated they were unsure of whether they wished to progress their career, and one third were not interested in progressing their career or were considering relinquishing their position, reflecting concerns raised in the literature (Dorman & D'Arbon, 2003; Flückiger et al., 2015; Hartle & Thomas, 2003; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2015). Those who sought to progress their career cited their enjoyment of their current role and the desire to seek new challenges, with two middle leaders aspiring to principalship. Two middle leaders, with the explicit intention to further their careers, undertook tertiary studies, as suggested by the OECD (2008). The middle leaders who were unsure of renewal or progression listed factors such as family and time commitments. Also voiced was pending retirement, a reluctance to take on additional leadership demands, and a preference to devote more time to classroom teaching.

Like the middle leaders in the study by Rhodes and Brundrett (2009), middle leaders in this research stated receiving career advice from senior leaders, specifically from

those with whom a close professional relationship had been formed, raised their confidence and their standing for possible promotion.

5.1.3.5 Work/life balance

Finding a balance between the demands of their middle leadership role and those in their life away from school was seen by middle leaders in this research as, predominantly, a time management issue. Middle leaders were conscious of the need to find time for family responsibilities, social commitments, and, generally, time away from the pressures of work. Previous research has highlighted the time constraints experienced by middle leaders in their role (Cotter, 2011; Dinham, 2007b; Fleming, 2019; Grootenboer, 2018; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Keane, 2010; Koh, 2018; Leask & Terrell, 2014; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014; White, 2000), with the middle leaders in this research also finding increased demands on their time and the sense of being pulled between competing responsibilities. These middle leaders, however, considered these competing demands as a part of the role, and while at times stressful, could be managed through sound organisation and preparedness. As noted by Fleming (2019, p. 208), the potential of stress, due to the demands and pressure of a middle leader's role, is to be expected. The management of this stress is an essential life skill, let alone a requirement for successful leadership. Middle leaders in this research managed this stress through various means, seeking outlets such as playing sport, gym membership, remaining socially active, ensuring special family occasions were marked in their calendar, and scheduling afternoons where they arrange an early departure from school.

There was little evidence in this study of senior leadership providing support to middle leaders in balancing their work/life commitments. Rather than offering support, one instance records a senior leader placing pressure on a middle leader to hold their role commitment above the middle leader's family responsibilities.

5.1.4 How do middle leaders determine if they have been successful?

This section discusses how middle leaders determine if they have been successful in the role, particularly with regard to improving student outcomes. It explores their success through a focus on student achievement, relational dynamics, and departmental management.

5.1.4.1 Student achievement

For the middle leaders in this research, their level of success in the role was gauged through the achievement level of their students, measured across a variety of areas. Similar to the research conducted by Dinham (2007b), the middle leaders focussed on the students' academic, pastoral, and social outcomes as their primary determinant. Listed in Table 4.12, the areas where middle leaders were judged to have been successful covered a broad spectrum of student outcomes, incorporating academic performance, feedback, well-being, and behaviour, through to the level of gratitude expressed by students and subject enrolment numbers. This array of situations where students have exhibited positive outcomes reflects the understanding of Day et al. (2016, p. 223) that while the measure of students' academic progress and achievements are gauges for recognising the effectiveness of a school, they do not automatically denote a successful school. Success comes from educating students in areas such as compassion, integrity, and social justice, that promote positive relationships within community (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2011). As described by Day et al. (2016) and Dinham (2007b), the middle leaders in this research equated success not only in terms of improved academic outcomes, but also through the measure of improved social outcomes for students.

How the success of middle leaders could be measured was a point of ambiguity for nearly a quarter of the participants in this research, believing any form of assessment would be subjective and, therefore, open to interpretation. If middle leader success were to be determined by an appraisal of student achievement, then such

assessment, it was argued, could not take place until several years after the student had left the school and had contributed to the community. Within senior leadership, an inability to collect, measure, and analyse data, combined with a lack of key improvement strategies, saw some unable to determine success. While no explanation was offered, these findings are in stark contrast to the research offered in the literature regarding the relationship between school leadership and its ability to influence student outcomes (Day & Grice, 2019; Day et al., 2016; Dinham, 2005, 2007b; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2007; Highfield, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2004).

5.1.4.2 Relational dynamics

Middle leaders in this research were considered to impact positively on student outcomes through the building of collegial relationships and the influence they yielded with teachers and students. The ability of the middle leaders to build and enhance relationships was a crucial skill, as espoused by Carter (2016), enabling them to unite their department under a vision that was accepted by the teachers. This collegiality improved rapport within the team, and combined with the intention of improving the teaching and learning practice, provided the conditions proposed by Highfield (2012) and Leithwood (2016) that realised positive student outcomes. This success was reflected in the high regard teachers and senior leaders in this research held the middle leaders, particular the leader of one department that had three nominees for the Teacher of the Year Award, echoing the culture of success created by successful department heads in the research of Dinham (2007b).

Middle leaders in this research also measured their success through their ability to influence students to make decisions that led to positive outcomes. Influence was exerted through direct interventions such as career counselling, subject selection, or pastoral support, or by indirect means such as providing parental advice or being perceived by students as a role model. These positive interactions realised relationships based on trust, considered by Edwards-Groves et al. (2016) as a crucial condition for bringing about sustainable change. This change, as noted by one senior

leader in the study, was the development of a school culture where students wanted to learn, work, and improve, bolstering teachers' perceptions that students will rise to meet the high expectations demanded of them (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011, p. 88).

For some middle leaders in this research, building a good rapport with colleagues was considered a mark of success in the role. There was recognition by teachers that having a middle leader who was empathetic and attuned to the needs of staff, particularly during times when staff were feeling stressed by workloads, ensured the department continued to run smoothly. Other middle leaders organised departmental dinners and social functions. While certainly building camaraderie within the team, there was an assumption that this led directly to improved student outcomes, however, there was little evidence for this assumption, as observed by one senior leader, reflecting the findings of Day and Grice (2019).

5.1.4.3 Departmental management

Effective departmental management was considered an important measure of success for middle leaders in this research. Leithwood (2016) notes the importance of departmental-level initiatives, as opposed to school-level, as providing the greatest potential to influence students. In this research, where middle leaders expressed this understanding through the implementation of new and improved programmes focussed on examining teaching and learning within the department, teachers acknowledged this action as being highly beneficial for, and in the best interests of, students. While the research literature acknowledges the role middle leaders provide in improving student outcomes through positively influencing teachers' classroom practice (Fleming, 2013; Leask & Terrell, 2014), the success of the middle leaders in this research was being measured, not so much by the quality of the outcome achieved, but by their ability to display personal qualities that were perceived to elicit success. The middle leaders who were seen to bring about change, act decisively, and demonstrate forward-thinking, gave the impression that the department was run by an effective leader, and thereby, inferred to be successful.

As found by Dinham (2007b), successful middle leaders in this research were able to build on existing ideas and demonstrate a passion and commitment for their subject area, enthusing those around them. The teachers and senior leaders in this research, who recognised these traits in their middle leaders, appreciated their ability to be open to new ideas and welcomed the support they offered. Teachers commented that they felt valued and empowered, content by the manner in which the department was run. This contentment was not regarded as a form of complacency, rather, as noted by Leithwood (2016), it indicated the satisfaction felt by the teachers when they are involved in decision-making processes that affect their department, such as the determination of curriculum offerings.

Seeking confirmation that they were regarded as competent, middle leaders in this research valued the feedback received from peers, parents, and students, considering the positive as a measure of success that lifted their spirits, while the negative gave cause for reflection, especially if it challenged how they felt they were perceived by their colleagues.

5.1.4.4 Summary

This research supports findings in the literature that middle leaders have the ability to influence the direction of their school. The support of senior leadership proved a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of a middle leader's attempt to influence the direction of the school. Where supported, influence was chiefly exerted at the department or faculty level through the middle leader's ability to model best practice for teachers and promote innovative practice. Senior leaders were found to be more likely to offer support when the middle leader was perceived as building productive links with the school community and saw their departmental leadership role integral to a wider school vision.

The breadth and quality of collegial relationships was seen as having an effect on the level of school-wide influence a middle leader was able to exert. Middle leaders who were able to work collaboratively with other middle leaders and provide a cohesive and united front to senior leadership were seen by these senior leaders to be more effective in influencing school direction than those who focussed solely on their department.

The most valued personal qualities of middle leaders in this research were a consultative and encouraging demeanour, however, some participants in the research found it easier to cite the qualities that they did not want to see in middle leaders, for example, being a poor manager or failing to include others. Senior leaders regarded the need for middle leaders to bring people together to form cohesive teams as a key imperative. Having a visible presence in the community, attending school events, moving around staffrooms and offices, and being seen in the schoolyard with the students, were considered ways for middle leaders to show staff that they were readily approachable and accessible. In their professional interactions with parents, middle leaders experienced varied levels of support, finding the level of parental response was often proportional to the level of concern the parents placed upon the information received.

The majority of middle leaders in this research considered the professional relationships they established with their students as crucial to their success in the role. Students, too, saw this relationship as crucial, especially students in the senior years who regarded a positive relationship with their middle leader, based on trust, as a key element in their attainment of the grades they hoped to achieve.

Middle leaders in this study acknowledged the pressure they faced when dealing with the complexities of managing staff under their responsibility, whilst also remaining accountable to senior leaders who may not provide them with the support required to be effective in their role. The importance of establishing and cultivating positive working relationships with, and amongst, members of their department was seen as

a crucial task for middle leaders. Middle leaders provided support for their staff in a number of ways, primarily through encouragement, effective communication, empathy, and the positive management of relationships.

For those middle leaders with a student focussed role, issues involving students' relationship concerns and child safety issues, either related to the school or home environment, were most common. Middle leaders found they had access to student support services, such as psychologists, student counsellors, and other middle leaders who held a similar student-focussed role. This support helped the middle leaders deal with the broad and varied student issues they faced. Tolerance and understanding were considered necessary personal dispositions for middle leaders when dealing with students, as was a pastoral framework that catered for students' individual needs.

While capable of sharing the school's vision with their departmental staff, some of the middle leaders in this research raised their concern that they were not allowed to voice their own vision for the school to their staff. Senior leadership expected middle leaders to share the vision of the school, as this vision provided a context for middle leader interventions that would have a direct influence on student outcomes. Those middle leaders who exercised skills, such as, creating a vision, setting goals, and bearing influence within the area of responsibility, were recognised by their peers for their critical thinking abilities and the manner by which they drew their departmental members into the planning process.

The quality of the support provided by senior leadership was a common issue voiced by middle leaders in this research, with the need for a formal meeting time with their direct line manager, and recognition and feedback of their performance, as most eagerly sought. The feedback received from senior leadership did not have to be always positive, as some middle leaders considered all feedback as an opportunity to assess how they were perceived by senior leadership and by those whom they led.

Professional learning was recognised by all middle leaders as a necessary requirement for their development in the role, with almost equal proportions undertaking self-directed or school-directed opportunities. They were appreciative of school-directed professional learning, however, such provision was considered an expectation of the school's professional responsibility to develop its staff. The support offered to middle leaders through participation in peer networks and professional learning opportunities, as provided through membership of professional subject associations, was not widely adopted in this research.

Accepting the guidance of a mentor was highly regarded by 13 of the middle leaders in this research, offering the opportunity for them to connect with an experienced colleague who was willing to offer their knowledge and time. Of the nine middle leaders who did not have a mentor, five could see the value in having someone they could work with and with whom they could share ideas, while four, who could appreciate the usefulness of a mentor during the early phase of appointment, felt that the need for a mentor would diminish as their experience in the position increased.

The ability for middle leaders to have informal discussions with their manager was considered valuable by those who engaged in the practice, providing an opportunity for the middle leader to 'drop in' and seek assistance and gauge opinion at a time that suited their need, though it was dependent upon the manager's availability. These informal meetings helped build a positive relationship and camaraderie between the middle and senior leaders, allowing the exchange of pleasantries associated with the course of the day and the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Over half of the middle leaders in this research did nothing to prepare themselves for a leadership position, whether by undertaking a formal post-graduate qualification in leadership or in a field related to their area of teaching, a short school-based course, or joining a subject association relevant to their teaching domain. Those middle leaders who were motivated by a desire to progress their career revealed that personal ambition led to their initial leadership application and appointment.

Once appointed to a formal leadership role, completing some form of self-directed formal study was considered a necessity by almost half of the middle leaders involved in this research. This formal study was most commonly a post-graduate degree, typically a Master's degree that was part-sponsored by the governing systemic body.

Finding a balance between the demands of their middle leadership role and those in their life away from school was seen by middle leaders as, predominantly, a time management issue. Middle leaders were conscious of the need to find time for family responsibilities, social commitments, and, generally, time away from the pressures of work.

For the middle leaders in this research, their level of success in the role was gauged through the achievement level of their students, measured across a variety of areas, such as the students' academic, pastoral, and social outcomes. Where middle leaders were judged to have been successful covered a broad spectrum of student outcomes, incorporating academic performance, feedback, well-being, and behaviour, through to the level of gratitude expressed by students and subject enrolment numbers.

This study also realised limited replication of some findings evident in the literature. The concern held by middle leaders that monitoring teachers will damage the positive working relationship with them was not raised, nor was the importance of collegial trust emphasised, being considered important by only two middle leaders. In addition, it was found that senior leaders offered little support to middle leaders trying to balance their work/life commitments and were, at times, incapable of determining the level of success middle leaders achieved in their role.

5.2 Middle Leadership Development Model

From the discussion on the preparation and development of middle leaders, there are a number of key elements that are suggested by this research. First, middle leaders have the ability to influence the direction of their area of responsibility and the school, however, the degree to which this occurs is dependent upon the support and encouragement provided by the senior leadership, particularly the principal (De Nobile, 2017; Dinham, 2007b; Duignan, 2006; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Jarvis, 2008; Koh et al., 2011). Second, to be successful in their role, middle leaders require a clearly defined role description and the trust of senior leaders that it will be competently fulfilled (Farchi & Tubin, 2019; Gunter, 2001; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016, 2019). Third, communication between senior leaders and middle leaders must be timely and responsive to the needs of either party (Fleming, 2019; Gurr, 2019; Herrington, 2004; Southworth, 2002). Fourth, middle leaders benefit from inclusion in whole school decision making processes, broadening their understanding of their role in the school and demands faced by senior leadership (Bassett, 2016; Busher, 2005; De Nobile, 2017). Fifth, in leading their department, middle leaders who were consultative, empathetic, encouraging, and open to change were considered successful by teachers, however, they were most effective in improving student outcomes when this was an explicit departmental focus (Dinham, 2007b; Fleming, 2019). Lastly, sixth, middle leaders need to consider their own career and skill development a priority and be responsible for their professional learning (Flückiger et al., 2015; Gurr, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Arranging or accepting the support of an, especially where the mentor has no influence on the middle leader's reappointment (Foster, 2010).

This research provides support for the leadership models offered by Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and De Nobile (2017) in that: middle leadership is highly relational and reliant upon the support of senior leadership, the qualities and characteristics of both senior and middle leaders, having a supportive school culture and structure, balancing of the managerial and leadership aspects of the department within a whole

school context, and the level of interventions undertaken to affect teaching quality and student outcomes.

From the findings in Chapter 4, it is evident that middle leadership entails a complexity that not only affects the middle leaders themselves, but those to whom they report, lead, and educate. Drawing upon this research, its support within the middle leadership literature, and the leadership models referred to previously, a model for middle leadership development has been created and is presented in Figure 5.1.

Reflecting the key findings that emerged from this research, the model highlights the importance of a clearly defined position description for middle leaders, also noted by Gunter (2001) and Gurr and Drysdale (2013), and the provision of adequate time to fulfil it, as raised in previous studies (Abdul Razzak, 2015; Herrington, 2004; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014). The model emphasises the desire of senior leaders to clarify middle leaders' roles and to share the role expectations held by middle and senior leaders (Bassett, 2016; Cotter, 2011; Dinham, 2007b; Keane, 2010; White, 2000), thereby presenting opportunities for authentic responsibility. The model also incorporates those leadership functions and attributes that the middle leaders in this research perceived as beneficial to their role. Collegiality within teams, and between middle and senior leaders, was considered advantageous (Jarvis, 2012), as was middle leaders' requirement for senior leaders to demonstrate inclusiveness, targeted support (Fleming, 2019; Harris et al., 2003; Sanders, 2006), clear and timely communication (Hoy & Miskel, 2012), consultative processes (Foster, 2010), and the sharing and provision of resources (Cotter, 2011; Gurr, accepted). In addition, the model identifies that the support of a mentor was deemed a valuable service by nearly two-thirds of the middle leaders in this research, and by almost half of the senior leaders.

The model considers the development of middle leaders to comprise five interrelated stages, within a mentored environment, where each stage consists of associated leadership skills and functions drawn from this research. These stages are titled:

enable, reflect, enact, assess, and inform, with the purpose of improving teaching and learning as the central tenet. The associated leadership characteristics and functions are listed in the corresponding colour-coded box. The five interrelated developmental stages, with their associated leadership components, are detailed in the following sections.

The cyclic nature of the model is intended to direct senior and middle leaders through a series of stages, where each of the associated leadership skills and characteristics elicit a response in aid of the middle leader's development and execution of their role. While this design considers the enabling of middle leaders as a starting point, it is not prescriptive, and the model may be accessed at any stage.

The model also attempts to indicate the focus of activity of middle and senior leaders at each stage and is not intended to be a 'top down' model, rather, it should be considered as a collaborative endeavour to both develop and empower the middle leader. While middle and senior leaders are active throughout the stages of the model, at certain stages either the middle or senior leader may take a more active role. This increased focus by a specific leader is indicated by the text, and applicable arrows, at each stage.

The following sections provide clarity about each stage and whilst the text is based on this study and related literature, for the sake of clarity it does not repeat referencing.

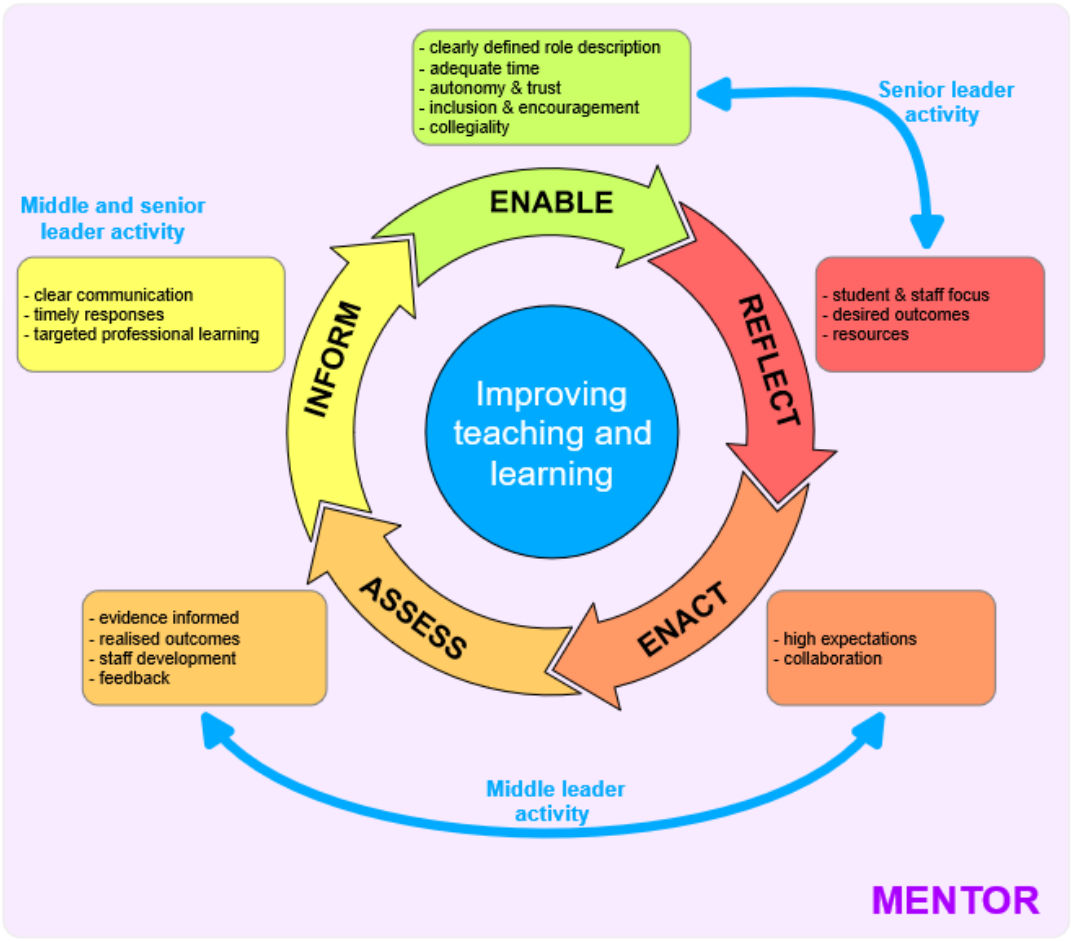

Figure 5.1: Middle Leadership Development Model

5.2.1 Enable

This stage focusses the senior leader on enabling the middle leader. In order to empower the middle leader to fulfil their duties, five leadership components are to be considered and implemented by the senior leader. These components are ensuring the middle leader's role is clearly defined, providing adequate time to fulfil the role's duties, providing autonomy and developing trust, extending inclusion and encouragement, and collegiality.

To avoid middle leaders experiencing frustration, senior leaders could ensure that the role the middle leader undertakes is unambiguous and clearly defined. This role description could clearly outline the position title, the main duties associated with the role, how the role fits within the organisational structure of the school, who the role reports to, any direct reports and key liaisons, review process and timeline, and the length of tenure, including the terms for renewal. Ideally, the role description should outline the time allowance provided by the school for the performance of the role. The time allowance assigned to the position may be adequate for the fulfilment of the described duties, with the opportunity for the middle leader to discuss the time allocation as part of an annual review process.

The role description may also provide an indication of the proportion of time allocated to leadership and management responsibilities. Such clarification provides surety to the middle leader, the senior leader, and those to whom the middle leader is responsible for. It also provides key information and conditions for those teachers who may consider applying for the role in the future, highlighting areas for targeted professional development and growth.

The provision of autonomy in the role allows the middle leader to develop in confidence and affirms the trust placed in the middle leader by their appointment to the position. Avoiding micromanagement by senior leaders minimises possible stifling of innovative approaches instigated by the middle leader and stimulates conditions to effect further change.

Including the middle leader in discussions that affect their department ensures there is a high level of transparency in the decision-making process. It is also a vital part of the leadership modelling expected of senior leaders, allowing the middle leaders to be exposed to the thinking behind deliberations and the complexities associated with staff appointments, budget allocations, timetable creation, and the allocation of teaching spaces. Where possible, senior leaders should endeavour to expose middle leaders to the issues explored within the senior leadership team. Such knowledge at

times, within the bounds of confidentiality, would provide an appreciation of factors that affect the school as a whole. It would also have the benefit of signalling explicit trust in the middle leader's role within the school. An understanding of wider school issues could also have a bearing on their level of influence within the school, demonstrating to colleagues an ability to fit the direction and needs of their department within the strategic foci of the school.

Sharing collegial experiences models to the middle leader the important benefits of positive professional relationships. Building rapport establishes the conditions where formal and informal conversations can take place, allowing for the exploration of ideas, voicing of concerns, providing and receiving advice, and the sharing of everyday experiences that build camaraderie.

5.2.2 Reflect

This stage has the senior leader assist the middle leader to reflect upon the leadership functions that will guide their future action. Responsible, considered planning that draws upon previous experiences and knowledge is the implied obligation for the middle leader, with the leadership functions providing reflections points for determining the staff and student focus, the desired outcomes, and the required resources.

Whether planning for minor programme or a new major initiative, middle leaders need to determine the focus group of projects and who will be affected by the proposed change. Senior leaders are invaluable in guiding middle leaders through this process, especially to those who are new to their role, giving insights from past experiences or providing detail that may not have been readily accessible to the middle leader due to organisational restrictions.

Establishing the focus of the programme also directs attention to the intended outcomes. While middle leaders should have a sound understanding of the outcomes

they wish to achieve, there might not always be an awareness or understanding of the unintended outcomes that may arise. In these instances, the experience and knowledge of senior leadership will be a valuable asset to the middle leader, especially where unintended consequences of the programme could affect other departments, student bodies, or community groups.

Determining the resources required for the programme will be reliant upon the scope of the project and projected timeline. With the middle leader having knowledge of current resources within the department, in terms of both plant and personnel, liaising with senior leadership could alleviate any perceived shortfalls that could limit the effectiveness, or even completion, of the project. It would also help prevent overreach, where the scope of the programme is beyond the resource capacity of the department or school.

5.2.3 Enact

This stage focusses on the middle leader bringing the proposed action to light. Two leadership functions are offered for consideration: high expectations and collaboration.

Having a clear direction and high expectations of those involved in the action, including themselves, can see middle leaders set the preconditions required for building a culture of success within their department. Senior leadership also set high expectations for the action, inclusive of the expectations already established with the middle leader in the execution of their role. In saying this, senior leadership should be mindful of the accountability pressure associated with high expectations and assist the middle leaders to maintain perspective.

Collaboration requires the inclusion of others in an action, with the benefit of building a sense of team. It moves beyond collegiality in that the group is drawn together to work towards a desired outcome, thereby increasing the chance that the outcome

will be successfully achieved. The leadership of successful collaborative teams requires middle leaders to exhibit personal characteristics conducive to building and sustaining productive relationships. Having a senior leader working with the team, under the leadership of the middle leader, would help break down a sycophantic culture, if present, and instill confidence in the middle leader's abilities and bolster their perceived standing in the school.

5.2.4 Assess

This stage invites the middle leader to assess the action, focussing on four leadership functions: evidence informed practice, realised outcomes, staff development, and feedback.

Evidence informed practice sees the middle leader undertake critical reflection, drawing upon any information and data that can be used, to assess the effectiveness of an initiative, programme, or policy. Such analysis offers confidence to middle leaders in their decision-making, knowing that future directions derived from the data are grounded in evidence. Senior leadership can assist middle leaders in this practice by providing time or resources that allow an evaluation of the contextual relevance and rigour of projects run across different faculties of the school, thereby establishing an effective comparison base. Providing professional learning to upskill middle leaders in the use of evidence informed practice may be required.

Evidence informed practice enables middle leaders to determine whether the desired programme outcomes have been realised. If so, and successful, the middle leader can be confident that the programme is meeting the needs, as designed. If not, then appropriate measures can be taken to rectify any errors in the planning phase or prepare to make adaptations due to contextual variations during implementation. This assessment of the outcomes is an important part of the cyclic development model, allowing the middle leader to make the necessary adjustments in the Reflect

stage. Such modifications based on experience are crucial in dealing with unforeseen consequences, both positive and negative.

Remaining observant for areas where staff need further professional development is part of the leadership function of middle leaders. New contexts provide the opportunity for teachers to trial and evaluate their skills. While teachers may not be entering into these programmes for the sole purpose of assessing their abilities, such circumstances do provide the opportunity for middle leaders to review areas where individual and group development would be beneficial. Incorporating these developmental opportunities as part of a future project would minimise frequent criticism from teachers that professional development is often ill-timed, detracts from the task at hand, and lacks relevancy.

Receiving feedback, in a myriad of forms, from teachers, students, parents, and the wider community would rightfully be considered part of evidence informed practice. It is listed as a separate leadership function at this step to remind the middle leader that the act of gathering feedback is an important part of relational dynamics, conveying a level of respect and trust to the provider that their input and opinions are highly valued. Feedback should also include advice and comments emanating from the middle leader to their team and from the middle leader to the senior leader, and vice versa.

5.2.5 Inform

This stage promotes the importance of gaining knowledge and information, which is shared between senior and middle leaders, and to those who report to them. Three leadership functions relate to this step: clear communication, timely responses, and targeted professional learning.

Clear communication encompasses not only clarity, but also accessibility. Senior leaders need to instigate regular formal meeting times that allow free discussion and

the exchange of ideas between the parties. These formal meetings do not always need to be agenda driven, but they do need to allow for confidential one-on-one time. The key to these meetings is that they are scheduled. Where regular face-to-face meetings cannot be held due to distance, online video meetings would be a viable alternative. Also, regular communication via email, text, or the school's learning management system is to be encouraged. These exchanges ensure that the lines of communication remain open, allowing the middle leader to share information garnered from the Assess step that could be used to inform the Enable stage. In addition, senior and middle leaders are accountable to those to whom they report and those they lead. Remaining informed through clear communication enables these leaders to meet their fiducial, regulatory, and administrative responsibilities, and obligations to their school.

Middle leaders need timely responses to their queries. They are reliant upon senior leaders acknowledging their requests and providing prompt answers. Delays in responses can be problematic for middle leaders, especially where the query emanates from the teachers in their department. A delayed response can leave teachers with the impression the middle leader is unresponsive, choosing to prioritise other matters in preference to their concerns. Middle leaders also need to be responsive to each other, ensuring a timely flow of information between departments.

Targeted professional learning involves sharing specific knowledge in order to address a particular need or requirement. Whether it be a middle leader providing an individualised programme for a teacher, or a senior leader assisting a middle leader scope their learning programme, specific knowledge is required to be communicated in both directions so that specific needs can be considered and met. While the timely provision of the professional learning may not always be accommodated, due to the availability of external providers or conflicting events within the school calendar, the type and content of the professional learning should be agreed upon promptly to allow the recipient to prepare and make any adjustments to their professional schedule. Middle leaders need to be aware that while schools will provide professional

opportunities for their staff there is a need for them to take responsibility for their own professional learning and source appropriate opportunities that meet their needs.

5.2.6 Mentor

In this model, the overlay of mentor emphasises a supportive process with the importance of middle leaders establishing a mentoring or coaching arrangement with a trusted experienced colleague. Whether the preference exists to utilise the services of a line manager, source a person who is not involved in their appraisal or reappointment process, or someone who is external to their organisation, middle leaders will benefit from having a non-critical, knowledgeable person with whom to share concerns, pilot ideas, possible strategies, and challenge set notions (Robertson, 2005). Some middle leaders may find it useful to have a mentor who is attuned to the relational dynamics and structure of the school. In such cases, more experienced fellow middle leaders could fulfil the role, adding the dimension of a shared journey.

In instances when the middle leader is unable to source their own mentor, the school may, as part of the contractual arrangements associated with the position, secure an appropriate mentor. Though, due the close working relationship that will ensue, the middle leader will need to approve the nominee before assignment.

It is important for the mentor not to expect the middle leader to replicate their voice. The individual expression of the middle leader should be retained and nurtured (Highfield & Robertson, 2016).

5.2.7 Summary

This middle leadership development model is intended to direct senior and middle leaders through a series of stages, where each of the associated leadership skills and characteristics elicit a response in aid of the middle leader's development and execution of their role. The model design suggests enabling as a starting point, however, it is not prescriptive, and the model may be accessed at any stage.

Complementary to the leadership models presented by Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and De Nobile (2017), the model provides a structure for defining experiences that can progressively improve the practice and develop the leadership capacity of middle leaders.

While not explicitly highlighted in the model, there are three additional considerations worth noting that have the ability to considerably affect the leadership practice and development.

The first consideration is the amount of time allocated to leaders' roles at the school, both at the senior and middle leader levels. The predominantly reflective nature of the model requires the time for the participants to have regular meetings and to form a high degree of mutual trust through their interactions. Other research has shown that middle leaders require space to develop if they are to develop as leaders (Carter, 2016, p. 41).

The second consideration supposes that the senior leader has the aptitude, experience, and willingness to engage with the middle leaders in a meaningful and productive way, and that the middle leader has the coping skills to receive feedback that may possibly be unduly critical, prescriptive, or directed at a personal rather than process level. It is to be expected that senior and middle leaders have attained their positions as they have good interpersonal skills and a high degree of tact and diplomacy, encouraging others to extend themselves. However, should detrimental characteristics and conditions be realised then the development process should be paused, and measures taken to alleviate the points of tension. This may include reassignment or senior leadership receiving training on how best to support the leadership development of middle leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013, p. 66).

Finally, the third consideration is the adoption of this model to assist in the preparation of teachers who may be considering applying for a middle level position. Such adoption could provide an individualised professional development programme within

a school for leadership development, allowing teachers to fulfil professional learning expectations required as a condition of annual teacher registration, as required in Victoria.

5.3 Research directions

From review of the literature concerning middle leaders in schools and the findings from this study a number of research directions emerge. This section describes the research directions concerned with middle leaders' preparation for leadership, exploration of tension points and opportunities in middle leader relationships, analysis of the perceptions of middle leaders' roles, and further exploration of the importance of middle leaders' impact on student outcomes.

This research supports the research literature in noting that too few middle leaders undertake formal preparation prior to attaining their first leadership role. The motivations to be a middle leader are many, with this research finding that the desire to advance their career was the most apparent reason for seeking leadership. There is an incongruity here; whilst middle leaders want to advance their career, they are often not engaged with professional learning that will help them to do so.

The nature and purpose of middle leadership roles are expanding in complexity and breadth of responsibility (Harris et al., 2019). While middle leader roles, such as head of faculty or department, define discrete areas of responsibility, typically grouped by subject content or student age, the last 20 years has seen the creation of middle leader positions, such as Heads of eLearning or Innovation, that have a far broader remit, usually school wide. Future research should explore the intersections where middle leader authority and expertise meet, the points of tension, and opportunities that exist for improving student outcomes, allowing comparison with this research.

The analysis of the teacher, middle, and senior leaders' perceptions of the middle leadership role provided a comprehensive description. Future research would benefit from a broadening of this description to incorporate the perspectives from other members of the school community. Including board members, parents, students, and non-teaching staff could result in emergence of additional leadership themes and a greater insight into the leadership themes in this research.

The current research indicates that middle leaders can impact positively on student outcomes. Future research should explore this impact further. Lipscombe et al. (2021, p. 14) recommend research that explores the relationship between the middle leaders' impact and the development of students and teachers. The research should include student data and students as participants. This would allow students' perception of their learning to be included, as it relates to the middle leadership practices, possibly resulting in the emergence of additional leadership themes and comparison with this research.

5.4 Contribution to knowledge

This study has made a number of contributions to the knowledge base concerning the preparation and development of middle leaders. Without unnecessarily repeating findings of the research in detail, this section will highlight five contributions.

a) Comparison with the educational leadership literature

This research is part of a series of research that is specifically focussed on middle leaders in Victorian schools (Cotter, 2011; Keane, 2010; White, 2000). Perceptions of teachers, middle leaders, and senior leaders were used to describe the middle leadership role. Varying degrees of support were established with prior research findings. Evidence was found for leadership development and impact on student outcomes.

b) All education sectors in Australia

The purposeful sampling employed in this research incorporated all the main education sectors within the Australian context: Catholic, government, and independent. This is an expansion from previous research that focussed only on Catholic or government schools.

c) Type of middle leader researched

This study expanded upon the type of middle leader researched, not being limited to curriculum or subject leaders. Pastoral care and co-curricular leaders were included, in addition to academic leaders.

d) Description of a leadership development model

Comparing the research findings with the middle leadership literature, a leadership development model was created. The model comprises five interrelated stages, each stage consisting of associated leadership skills and functions drawn from this research. The cyclic design of the model, with stages: enable, reflect, enact, assess, inform, with improving teaching and learning providing a central core, directs senior and middle leaders through associated leadership skills and characteristics that elicit a response in aid of the middle leader's development and execution of role.

e) Research directions

This study suggested a number of directions for future research, an important contribution of any research. Important research directions include further investigation of middle leaders' preparation for leadership, exploration of tension points and opportunities in middle leader relationships, analysis of the perceptions of middle leaders' roles, and further exploration of the importance of middle leaders' impact on student outcomes.

5.5 Conclusion

This research, employing a multi-case study methodology, has demonstrated that the preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools is complex and multi-dimensional. A total of 56 themes with 78 sub-themes emerged, covering the dimensions of preparation, development, perception, and success in leadership. The middle leaders involved in this research were actively involved in leading pastoral, academic, and co-curricular departments within a Catholic, government, or independent school.

Professional learning played an important part in the middle leaders' ongoing development, once they were in the role. The support provided to middle leaders was in the form of feedback and recognition of performance, professional learning, and mentoring, with most placing great value on scheduled formal meeting times with their line manager. Their ability to influence the direction of the school was linked to the quality of their collegial relationships and the support provided by senior leadership. Most found their influence came through sound management of their department. Common challenges faced in the role included poor support and communication from senior leaders, and a lack of autonomy. Managing difficult staff was also a point of concern. Teachers valued middle leaders who were consultative, encouraging, active in the department, and a good communicator. Senior leadership valued middle leaders who could lead their department within a whole school context. The measurement of success in the role was primarily linked to student achievement in academic and social domains, with quality relationships considered a precondition for success. At their end of tenure, middle leaders were concerned about their reappointment, having not always received timely feedback on their performance.

A number of possibilities were suggested for future research, including the further investigation of middle leaders' preparation for leadership, exploration of tension points and opportunities in middle leader relationships, analysis of the perceptions of middle leaders' roles, and further exploration of the importance of middle leaders' impact on student outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guides

Interview guide for Middle Leaders

1. How long have you been teaching? At the school? In this role?
2. What led you to apply for this leadership role at this school?
3. Did you undertake any leadership preparation prior to attaining your role? If so, what?
4. What do you see are the key aspects of your leadership role (as a middle leader)? (What can you do / expected to do)
5. Do you feel you have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how?
   In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?
6. How are you supported in your role by the Senior Management Team?
7. Tell me about the challenges you face (possibly personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) as a middle level leader at this school.
8. How do you support yourself in this role, both at a professional and personal level?
9. How do you help teachers in your area of responsibility to develop professionally, and in particular, how do you help them to improve their teaching?
10. How do you determine if you have been successful in your leadership role, particularly with regards to your impact on improving student outcomes?
11. What expectations, if any, are there from the school that you will undertake professional learning with regards to leadership/management development during your tenure?

Interview guide for Teachers

1. How long have you been teaching? At this school?

2. What do you see are the key aspects of the leadership role of a middle leader? (What can they do / expected to do)

3. Do you feel middle level leaders have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how?
   In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?

4. What do you think are the challenges faced (either personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) by the middle leaders at this school?

5. Do you aspire to the role of a middle level school leader? If so, what leadership preparation have you taken, or would like to take, to this end?

6. To what extent do your middle leaders help you to improve your teaching?

7. How do you determine if a middle leader has been successful their role, particularly with regards to their impact on improving student outcomes?

Interview guide for Principals

1. What do you see are the key aspects of the leadership role of your middle leaders? (What can they do / expected to do)

2. Do you feel your middle level leaders have the opportunity to influence the school's direction, and if so, how?
   In terms of improving teaching and learning at the school?

3. What do you think are the challenges faced (either personnel, time allocation, staff composition and/or organisational structure) by the middle leaders at this school?

4. What are the connections between the Senior Management Team and the middle leaders?

5. What type of support does the school provide to support middle leaders in their role?

6. What expectations, if any, are there from the school that the middle leaders will undertake professional learning with regards to leadership/management development during their tenure?

7. What type of support does the school provide to teachers in their preparation for a formal leadership role?

8. How do you determine if middle leaders have been successful in their leadership role, particularly with regards to their impact on improving student outcomes?

Appendix B – Letter of invitation to schools

<Principal>
<School>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<Suburb> <Postcode>

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Dear <Principal>,

RE: The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools

I am writing to explore the possibility of involving <School> in a research project run by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne. This project will form part of a Doctoral thesis and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr David Gurr and will form an important addition to a decade long program of research.

The leadership qualities and attributes required by principals to successfully lead schools, to create a vibrant and innovative learning community, have been a topic of great interest in recent years. In contrast, during this period, little reference has been made to middle leaders and the mechanisms for developing their leadership capabilities.

Middle leaders are teachers in a school who have significant responsibility for specific areas within the school, holding a middle-ranking post in the hierarchy of a school. Typically, their responsibilities entail an administrative role within the school, along with a classroom teaching responsibility. They are neither senior leaders, such as principals or deputy principals, nor teachers without departmental responsibility. Examples of middle leaders are Year Level Coordinators, Heads of Curriculum, Heads of Faculty, Subject Coordinators and House Coordinators.

This study aims to provide insights into the common themes facing middle level school leaders in Victorian schools, with regard to: their preparation for the role; their professional and personal development in the role; how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; and how they determine if they have been successful in their role. These insights may assist schools in re-evaluating the support structures offered to middle level leaders, and those aspiring to the role, leading to further school improvement.

A total of three schools across Melbourne will take part in this project. These schools will be invited from the Independent, State and Catholic sectors. Within each school, the principal, several middle leaders, and several teachers will be interviewed individually. Up to 14 staff members will be interviewed.

Subject to legal limitations, confidentiality will be maintained, although, as the number of participants in this school may be less than twenty, the extent to which anonymity is possible is limited. Nevertheless, anonymity will be enhanced through the use of pseudonyms for schools and participants. Data will be kept securely in password-protected files on the researcher's computers and in locked storage cabinets. Data will be kept for five years and then destroyed according to University guidelines.

Participation is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed identifiable data previously supplied. Risk to participants is minimal but should there be concerns participants can contact the supervising researcher, Dr David Gurr, or the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, University of Melbourne (Ph: 8344 2073; Fax: 9347 6739).

The project has received clearance from the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 1339261).

I would love the opportunity to discuss with you the possibility of involving <School> in this research project. This project involves nominated teachers undertaking an interview, at your school, at a time convenient to participants and the organisational requirements of your school.

I will contact you in the next fortnight to find a suitable time to meet with you to discuss this further. I have attached some additional information for your perusal.

Yours respectfully,

Peter Cooper
Phone: [redacted]
Email: p.cooper2@student.unimelb.edu.au

Dr David Gurr
Phone: [redacted]
Email: d.gurr@unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne Victoria 3010 Australia
T: +61 3 8344 8285 **F:** +61 3 8344 8529 **W:** www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au

Appendix C – Plain language statement

<Participant>
<School>

Dear <Participant>,

RE: The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project run by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne. This project will form part of a Doctoral thesis and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr David Gurr and will form an important addition to a decade long program of research.

The leadership qualities and attributes required by principals to successfully lead schools, to create a vibrant and innovative learning community, have been a topic of great interest in recent years. In contrast, during this period, little reference has been made to middle level school leaders and the mechanisms for developing their leadership capabilities.

Middle leaders are teachers in a school who have significant responsibility for specific areas within the school, holding a middle-ranking post in the hierarchy of a school. Typically, their responsibilities entail an administrative role within the school, along with a classroom teaching responsibility. They are neither senior leaders, such as principals or deputy principals, nor teachers without departmental responsibility. Examples of middle leaders are Year Level Coordinators, Heads of Curriculum, Heads of Faculty, Subject Coordinators and House Coordinators.

This study aims to provide insights into the common themes facing middle level school leaders in Victorian schools, with regard to: their preparation for the role; their professional and personal development in the role; how they, and those they report to and are responsible for, perceive their role; and how they determine if they have been successful in their role. These insights may assist schools in re-evaluating the support structures offered to middle level leaders, and those aspiring to the role, leading to further school improvement.

A total of three schools across Melbourne will take part in this project. These schools will be invited from the Independent, State and Catholic sectors. Within each school, the principal, several middle leaders, and several teachers will be interviewed individually. Up to 14 staff members will be interviewed.

Due to your current role at your school, your Principal has nominated you as a possible participant in this project. Included with this invitation are further details of the project. Your involvement in the project will consist of an individual interview of between 45 to 60 minutes duration. The interview will be taped, and a transcription of your interview will be provided for you to check.

Subject to legal limitations, confidentiality will be maintained, although as the number of participants in this school may be less than twenty, the extent to which anonymity is possible is limited. Nevertheless, anonymity will be enhanced through the use of pseudonyms for schools and participants. Data will be kept securely in password-protected files on the researcher's computers and in locked storage cabinets. Data will be kept for five years and then destroyed according to University guidelines.

Participation is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed identifiable data previously supplied. Risk to participants is minimal but should there be concerns participants can contact the supervising researcher, Dr David Gurr, or the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, University of Melbourne (Ph: 8344 2073; Fax: 9347 6739).

The project has received clearance from the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 1339261).

Should you wish to be involved, please let <school contact> know. I will contact you in the next fortnight to find a suitable time to meet with you to discuss your further involvement. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Yours respectfully,

Peter Cooper
Phone: [redacted]
Email: p.cooper2@student.unimelb.edu.au

Dr David Gurr
Phone: [redacted]
Email: d.gurr@unimelb.edu.au

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Appendix D – Letters of consent

Note: Completed consent letters not shown so as to protect identity of participating schools.

(print on Letterhead of School giving permission)

Mr Peter Cooper
c/- Dr David Gurr
The University of Melbourne
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
234 Queensberry Street
Parkville
Victoria 3010

<insert date>

Dear Mr Cooper,

RE: The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from <School> for the research project, *The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools*, run by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne.

I have read and understood the information provided regarding the research project HREC 1339261 and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

<Please include any stipulations / clauses the School may have about recruitment of participants>

Yours sincerely,

<insert signature of Principal>

<insert name of the above signatory>
Principal

Consent form for persons participating in research projects

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

PROJECT TITLE: The Preparation and Development of Middle Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools

Name of participant: _____

Name of investigator(s): Peter Cooper and Dr David Gurr

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which - including participation in an individual interview - have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher to conduct an individual interview with me and I understand that the interview will be audio-taped.

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) the data I provide will be kept confidential, subject to any legal requirements, and stored on a password protected computer, separate from information that may identify me to the data;

   (b) participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed identifiable data previously supplied;

   (c) the project is for the purpose of research;

   (d) as the number of participants in this school may be less than twenty, the extent to which anonymity is possible is limited. Nevertheless, anonymity will be enhanced through the use of pseudonyms for schools and participants.

   (e) this consent form will be retained by the researcher.

Signature _____ Date _____

(Participant)

Email: _____

Appendix E – Letters of approval

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000
DX 210083
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2013_002112

Mr Peter Cooper

Dear Mr Cooper

Thank you for your application of 19 August 2013 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *The preparation and development of middle level school leaders in Victorian secondary schools.*

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Joyce Cleary
Director
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch

28/10/2013

enc

Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

GE13/0009 Project# 1933

14 August 2013

Mr P Cooper
c/- Dr D Gurr
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
The University of Melbourne
234 Queensberry Street
PARKVILLE VIC 3010

Dear Mr Cooper

I am writing with regard to your research application received on 12 August 2013 concerning your forthcoming project titled **'The Preparation and Development of Middle Level School Leaders in Victorian Secondary Schools'**. You have asked approval to involve a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, as you wish to involve teachers and principals.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the standard conditions outlined below.

1. The decision as to whether or not research can proceed in a school rests with the school's principal, so you will need to obtain approval directly from the principal of the school that you wish to involve. You should provide the principal with an outline of your research proposal and indicate what will be asked of the school. A copy of this letter of approval, and a copy of notification of approval from the organisation's/university's Ethics Committee, should also be provided.

2. A copy of the approval notification from your institution's Ethics Committee must be forwarded to this Office, together with any modifications to your research protocol requested by the Committee. You may not start any research in Catholic Schools until this step has been completed.

3. A *Working with Children* (WWC) check – or registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – is necessary for all researchers visiting schools. Appropriate documentation must be shown to the principal before starting the research in the school.

James Goold House, 228 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne VIC 3002 Tel: (+61 3) 9267 0228 Fax: (+61 3) 9415 9325
Correspondence: PO Box 3, East Melbourne VIC 8002 Email: director@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au
ABN 85 176 448 204

4. Any substantial modifications to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.

5. Data relating to individuals or the school are to remain confidential.

6. Since participating schools have an interest in research findings, you should consider ways in which the results of the study could be made available for the benefit of the school community.

7. At the conclusion of the study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. It would be appreciated if you could submit your report in an ***electronic format*** using the email address provided below.

I wish you well with your research study. If you have any queries concerning this matter, please contact Ms Mirya ni Maegwin of this Office.

The email address is km@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Anna Rados
MANAGER ANALYSIS, POLICY & RESEARCH