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Formal Middle Leadership in NSW Public Schools

FULL REPORT, DECEMBER 2020

Commissioned by the NSW Department of Education
School Leadership Institute

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Foreword by Andy Hargreaves

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the NSW Department of Education.

"I love my job as an Assistant Principal. I love that I am making a real difference at my school across all stakeholders but it is an incredibly hard job. I feel the importance of the position very deeply and I feel that many other areas of my life have been sacrificed to do my job well. I feel a constant pull, and often guilt, about not being able to give enough of myself to my own class because I am often spending my time managing and leading my team and other projects. It's a balancing act every day, but incredibly rewarding"

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Foreword

I am delighted to have been invited to write the foreword for this much-needed report on leadership in the middle of our schools and our systems.

This important study for the NSW Department of Education School Leadership Institute, the largest educational organisation in the southern hemisphere, and its findings point to the attraction of middle leadership to many teachers. Only in some cases is this due to teacher's interest in promotion to principalship. Mainly, teachers in NSW want to get up close to other adults inside and sometimes outside the school, to get closer to the learning and wellbeing of their students, and to exert a stronger impact with more of their students that way.

More than 20 years ago in Canada, we asked high school teachers about who were the teacher leaders in their school, they always came up with the same three or four names. Asked what defined these individuals as teacher leaders, the answers were very consistent. They work really hard, they treat their colleagues with respect, and they are in it for the kids and not for themselves. This is clearly also the case among the majority of respondents in the NSW sample. Many teachers want to step forward, to work with colleagues, and to advance the interests of the students they came into the profession to help. They are not just eager to ascend up the escalator of advancement. They want to make a greater difference.

Historically, though, the educators we have called teacher leaders, middle leaders, or middle level leaders, have, despite their dedication and idealism, found their positions stressful and conflicted. They may be caught between other teachers and the school administration, being made to feel they are neither fish nor fowl; not yet on a par with senior leadership, nor trusted by former colleagues any more who they now seem to have moved above. This was the reported fate of many Australian Advanced Skills Teachers in the past, for example.

In addition, the report documents the enduring problems of all educators almost everywhere these days – time, workload, and difficult colleagues. The typical response to these problems is to commission a workload study (which never reports that teachers need more workload) and make recommendations about reducing paperwork and other administrative responsibilities. These are things that systems can pledge to do and to make policies out of. A much harder job is to create better work rather than reduce bad work, and this requires changes in leadership at the top as well as in the middle. It's a cultural change, as this report makes clear on several occasions, not just a structural change.

Very recently, my colleague Dennis Shirley and I published our report on Leading From the Middle (LfM), among ten school districts in Ontario, Canada (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2020). First, similar to the findings of this report, it's important not to see the middle as a level or a link, as an intermediary position. In Western culture, this kind of middle is often not well regarded – think middle child, Middle Ages, or middle age spread, for example. It's the bit that gets left out or whose only purpose is to join up two more important things.

Rather, LfM brings educators and their leadership closer to the heart of students and their learning, and involves them directly in the decisions that affect those students' experience. LfM is a *philosophy* of practice; a *structure* of teamwork; with shared values, high mutual trust and respect, and strong support for each other as colleagues as well as for the task that was being undertaken. It is a *culture* of relationships and beliefs. In our own words

> **LfM regards those in the middle not just as a mediating layer that connects the bottom to the top, but as expressing and addressing the heart and soul of leadership at its core..... LfM is not just a level or a tier. It is the heart, the soul, the backbone, and the guts of leadership.**

With these insights in mind, I would suggest that in addition to the report's excellent and much-needed recommendations for more time, better recruitment and increased clarity in relation to middle leaders, that developing middle leadership should also cause the NSW system to think hard about what this will mean for transforming other kinds of leadership at the school and system level. How can middle leaders be empowered by their principals and the wider system to drive and develop improvement, and not only implement improvements that have been handed down to them? How are all teachers encouraged to see themselves as actual and potential leaders from the moment they start their first job? Is teaching still mainly seen as an individual profession, or as a collective profession in which everyone takes the lead and also knows how to follow at different points? And what do leaders at the top need to give away (especially things that they actually like doing rather than tasks they find burdensome) to create space for those below to have a chance to develop things of value?

By addressing these kinds of questions, we can start to combine the important improvements recommended in this report with philosophical and cultural transformations too. In the highly complex world we are now in, that cannot have been any more obvious than during the pandemic, teachers cannot just wait at the bottom for policies to come down from the top. In times of complexity and even crisis, teachers need to be able to be the first responders to their children's needs, but to do this collectively, not individually, and to do it with guidance, clarity and support from those above them. This is ultimately the aspiration for middle leadership. This much needed report by highly regarded Australian researchers, shows us why middle leadership matters, how hungry many teachers are for it, and what changes we can start making in the system right now so that middle leadership work does not drag them down with overwork, but inspires them to pursue the better work that will move all young people forward.

Andy Hargreaves

Director of CHENINE (Change, Engagement and Innovation in Education)
University of Ottawa
August 2020

Use evidence from the text or your prior knowledge to make a prediction about what may happen
I think ___ because ___

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Abbreviations

AITSL .....Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

ALARM .....a learning and responding matrix

AP.....Assistant Principal

FML_NSW.....New South Wales Formal Middle Leadership Survey

HT.....Head Teacher

ILP.....individual learning plans

NAPLAN.....National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NSW DoE .....New South Wales Department of Education

PL .....professional learning

PLAN2.....New South Wales Department of Education Planning Literacy and Numeracy online tool

SCOUT .....New South Wales Department of Education platform for data and analysis

SLI .....New South Wales Department of Education School Leadership Institute

Report purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the research findings from 2608 respondents who participated in the NSW Formal Middle Leadership Survey (FML_NSW).

This project was commissioned by the NSW Department of Education (DoE) School Leadership Institute (SLI) and led by a cross-institutional research team consisting of Dr Kylie Lipscombe (University of Wollongong), Dr John De Nobile (Macquarie University), Dr Sharon Tindall-Ford (University of Wollongong), and Dr Christine Grice (The University of Sydney) (see Appendix A for project team description).

Report structure

The report is divided into six parts.

Part A presents an executive summary of the FML_NSW study, including the aim and background of the research project and a brief overview of the methodology, findings, implications and recommendations.

Part B provides a discussion on middle leadership in Australian schools and how formal middle leadership in the NSW Department of Education is positioned within research and practice across educational organisations.

Part C includes a detailed explanation of the methodological design and approach of this research study, including a description of the research participants, data collection and analytical approach.

Part D reports on the findings for each research question.

Part E details the implications and recommendations from the empirical findings for policy and practice.

Part F provides a brief conclusion to the report.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all the educators who gave their time and energy to participate in this research project. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our research assistants, Paul Gardiner, Iliana Skrebneva and Yoke Berry and our editor John Revington for their contributions to this important work.

Part A: Executive summary

Background to the Study

This study is a research project commissioned by School Leadership Institute (SLI), a dedicated leadership unit within the New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DoE). The NSW DoE is one of the largest and most diverse education systems in the world, with 2207 schools supporting approximately 798,000 students in 2018 (CESE, 2019). The SLI is responsible for the ongoing investment in current and future school leaders across their careers. The SLI's vision is to create a future that enables all educational leaders to influence positively the learning of teachers and students in NSW public schools. Its mission is to design and implement world-class, evidence-informed, future-focused leadership development programs and initiatives to make a difference in public education.

In 2019, the School Leadership Institute developed the School Leadership Development continuum. The Continuum illustrates leadership development stages aligned to leadership positions within the NSW DoE. It shows the opportunities that will be supported by the system to develop high-level leadership skills that make the greatest difference to students as per the School Leadership Strategy (NSW Department of Education, 2017). In 2019, as part of the development of the Continuum, the School Leadership Institute committed to examining the needs of formal middle leaders in NSW public schools in order to provide tailored, responsive and evidence-informed support and professional learning opportunities.

In the NSW DoE, a typical formal middle leader is a teaching practitioner who has formal school leadership responsibilities, and whose substantive title is commonly either Assistant Principal or Head Teacher. Assistant Principals are most typically positioned in primary and central (K–10) schools, and generally work in the classroom as well as lead a Stage (e.g., Stage 1= Years 1 and 2). Head Teachers are more commonly located in secondary schools, teach in the classroom, and lead in curriculum and non-curriculum areas. Head Teachers have an allocation of 22 periods per week of face-to-face teaching, six periods less than a regular classroom teacher (Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees) Salaries and Conditions Award 2020 (NSW) s 7.1). The allocation of teaching and time release for Assistant Principals is dependent on school context, with some Assistant Principals receiving two hours of time release, no more than their teaching colleagues.

In 2019, working in partnership with scholars at the University of Wollongong, Macquarie University and The University of Sydney, the NSW Formal Middle Leadership research project (FML_NSW) was established. Its aim is to provide a deeper understanding of middle leadership in order to proactively support the professional learning of this important school leadership position across NSW public schools. This large-scale study is the first research project undertaken by the NSW DoE to examine middle leadership.

The findings of this study have the potential to enable the NSW DoE to further understand and support NSW public school middle leaders by providing targeted professional learning and increased support. The findings aim to inform the School Leadership Institute's development of long-term strategic goals aligned to school leadership in NSW public schools. These strategic goals are evident in the 2018–2022 strategic plan (NSW Department of Education, 2018). The plan values excellence, service and accountability, and aims to create an environment in which "every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year" (Goal 4). The two key actions outlined in the NSW DoE School Leadership Strategy are: 1) to provide quality leadership preparation and development; and 2) to strengthen collegial support for school leaders (NSW Department of Education, 2017).

Aim of the study

The aim of the NSW Formal Middle Leadership research project (FML_NSW) is to build an understanding of, through a strong empirical foundation, formal middle leadership and middle leadership professional learning needs across NSW DoE schools. The study seeks to provide data and insights to inform future NSW public school middle leadership initiatives.

Six research questions guide this project:

1) Which teachers are being appointed to formal middle leadership positions?
2) What are the roles and responsibilities formal middle leaders are enacting?
3) What perceived impacts are middle leaders having on student learning?
4) How are middle leaders collaborating with and influencing others?
5) What are the professional needs and preferences of formal middle leaders?
6) What are the leadership trajectories and aspirations of formal middle leaders?

Taken together, the research findings provide an understanding, based on empirical evidence, of the current responsibilities, practices, professional learning and career trajectories, and aspirations of formal middle leaders in NSW public schools.

Methodological overview

The research was conducted in Term 4, 2019. Data were obtained from responses to an online survey developed for this study and sent, via invitation, to 7751 middle leaders across 1697 NSW public schools. A total of 2608 (34% of those invited to participate) educators responded to the survey. The survey sample makes it the known largest research project devoted to middle leadership nationally and internationally.

The 59-item survey questionnaire comprises six sections designed to address the six research questions. Items include closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions were used predominantly to identify the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. Thirty-six of the 59 items were derived from the Middle Leadership in Schools Questionnaire – School Edition (MLRQ-SE) designed by De Nobile (2016). The questionnaire reflects a model of middle leadership research based on a review of more than 250 reports, institutional policy documents and peer-reviewed research articles. It is based on six role categories (De Nobile, 2018a). Each role category represents a discrete aspect of middle leaders' work as reported by research studies and other literature. Further, open-ended questions were designed in consultation with the SLI in consideration of their policies, contexts and needs. These other items were designed to investigate other aspects of middle leadership aside from roles. The open-ended questions were thematically analysed using random sampling, where a sample size for each question was calculated based on a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. This method aimed to minimise bias of results and support saturation point being reached when thematically analysing only a sample of open ended question data. Quantitative data were analysed using factor analysis to empirically identify groups of items that best represented role categories for middle leaders, and to make comparisons (e.g., between Head Teachers and Assistant Principals) of those measurements that would further inform understanding about middle leadership roles.

Research findings overview

This executive summary provides an overview of the findings according to each research question. A detailed response to each research question is available in the Findings section of the full report.

Research Question 1: Which teachers are being appointed to formal middle leadership positions?

Most of the respondents to the survey were female (74%) and most were aged between 41 and 60 (64%). Forty-five per cent were currently Assistant Principals and forty-two per cent were Head Teachers. Ninety-two per cent of participants had at least 10 years' teaching experience but less leadership experience. Most (65%) middle leaders have 0–9 years' leadership experience and only 14% have 16+ years of leadership experience. Many (39%) middle leaders are new (0–5 years) to their roles. Three percent of respondents were currently accredited as having 'highly accomplished' or 'lead teacher' status.

Research Question 2: What are the roles and responsibilities formal middle leaders are enacting?

Formal middle leadership positions have existed in NSW public schools for some time. However, until recently the exact nature of the roles they have performed have not been well documented, apart from the general duties outlined in documents such as selection criteria. The results of the survey identify seven role categories. These role categories, referred to in this report simply as 'roles', comprise activities oriented to particular aspects of middle leading in the school. The seven roles identified were:

- *Developing staff*
- *Student-centre*
- *Administration*
- *Organising people*
- *Curriculum-centred*
- *Supervising staff*
- *Leading learning and change.*

Comparisons of the means for each of the seven roles revealed that, overall, people in middle leadership positions were engaged most frequently in:

- *Supervising staff*
- *Student-centred roles*
- *Curriculum-centred roles*

It is worth pointing out that the other four roles were also substantive ones for these middle leaders. A comparison of the results for Assistant Principals and Head Teachers revealed similar patterns of activity, although Head Teachers appeared to be engaging in administration more than Assistant Principals.

An open-ended survey item offered participants the opportunity to suggest roles that were not addressed by the MLRQ-SE items. The results suggested five potential additional roles that formal middle leaders engage in:

- External liaison
- Staff wellbeing
- Parent liaison
- Leading extra-curricular
- Relieving higher duties

Research Question 3: What perceived impacts are middle leaders having on student learning?

In schools, middle leaders are increasingly being seen as having positive impacts on school teaching practices, with the potential to improve student learning outcomes (Dinham, 2007; Gurr, 2019; Leithwood, 2016). In this survey, 75% of middle leaders perceived they had a high to very high impact on student learning. Analysis of a representative sample of qualitative responses found middle leaders perceived they impacted student learning by:

1) leading and implementing school academic programs;

2) developing colleagues' capacity through professional learning and mentoring;

3) leading general school initiatives; and

4) leading student wellbeing and welfare programs.

A limited number of middle leaders (2%) reported that it was difficult to assess their impact on student learning.

Middle leaders reported that they understood their impact on student learning firstly through feedback from colleagues, students and parents, and secondly from internal school data and external assessment data. Middle leaders were asked what constrained their ability to impact student learning. The most common constraint reported was administrative requirements and workloads, followed by: time; student welfare and behavioural issues; school leadership; and teacher colleagues. Middle leaders perceived that central to their ability to successfully impact student learning was the need to develop and maintain positive, respectful relationships with colleagues, students, parents and the community. This was coupled with middle leaders modelling excellence and expecting excellence in teaching and learning from others within their schools.

Research Question 4: How are middle leaders collaborating with and influencing others?

In schools there is a long history of using collaboration as a strategy for improvement (Harris, Jones & Huffman, 2017). Hargreaves (2019) explains that research since the 1980's has demonstrated teacher collaboration can secure higher student results however, the effectiveness of change depends on the quality of collaboration.

In this survey, collaborating with colleagues was identified as an important and frequent practice by the sample of middle leaders. Stage meetings, faculty meetings and cross-disciplinary teams were the most frequently cited structures for collaboration. Other forms of collaboration, such as co-teaching with colleagues, were not commonly reported.

Related to collaboration, middle leaders reported on their spheres of influence when they led from the middle in schools. Arguably, middle leaders are highly experienced teachers who often have limited authority and power, and as such find it difficult to influence their colleagues (Lipscombe et al., 2019c). The most commonly reported form of influence was team-based influence, where middle leaders both influence and are influenced by their colleagues in team situations. Whole-of-school influence, followed by student, senior leadership and parent/community influence, were also cited. Factors that hindered the ability of middle leaders to influence included: having viewpoints that were not consistent with their school's direction; a feeling they lacked experience; respect or authority among their colleagues; and increase system demands resulting in fatigue relating to continuous change.

Research Question 5: What are the professional needs and preferences of formal middle leaders?

Due to the unique and complex nature of middle leadership roles, it is imperative that middle leaders are provided with leadership learning opportunities to enable them to develop and enact effectively their leadership capabilities (Bassett & Shaw, 2017). In this survey, middle leaders were invited to share information about their leadership development. Analysis revealed five important insights. Firstly, middle leaders reported that peer feedback was used to support professional development. From the 2128 responses, 49% of middle leaders sought feedback frequently to very frequently, however 51% only reported seeking feedback sometimes, rarely or never, indicating that many middle leaders are not engaged in obtaining regular feedback as part of their professional learning. Secondly, analysis of a sample of open-ended responses revealed that nearly a third of middle leaders reported limited to no professional learning specific to leadership. Factors that constrained opportunities for professional learning in leadership included limited availability, lack of financial resources and lack of senior leadership support. Only 5% indicated they had undertaken postgraduate studies in educational leadership. Thirdly, internal leadership programs implemented by the NSW DoE were identified as the most frequent type of professional learning accessed by those who had engaged in leadership development. Fourthly, middle leaders reported that they required dedicated time and reduced workloads to engage more in quality professional learning. Lastly, the most common preferred professional learning theme for professional development was a specific focus on leadership. Engaging in professional learning related to managing conflict, staff performance and administration were also identified as significant professional learning needs.

Research Question 6: What are the leadership trajectories and aspirations of formal middle leaders?

Most commonly, the middle leaders surveyed in this study wanted to gain greater proficiency in their roles so that they could support the outcomes of students. Participants shared that they often became middle leaders because as teachers they were able to identify needs in their schools for improvements in curriculum or welfare. In relation to career aspirations, two thirds of the sample analysed sought to continue in their current role and further develop what they described as *"curriculum leadership"*, including the mentoring of other staff. These middle leaders were seeking to create better educational opportunities for students through providing professional learning opportunities for their teams. The remaining one-third of middle leaders sought promotion to other senior leadership roles. Some were completing the NSW DoE SLI Aspiring Principals Leadership Program and were seeking senior leadership positions. A small proportion was undecided.

In examining the career aspirations of middle leaders in NSW DoE schools, participants were asked to 'explain how [they] became a middle leader in [their] school.' The majority (64% of those surveyed in the sample) responded literally to the question, that they became middle leaders through merit selection opportunities and formal interview processes, as all formal middle leaders have been. Other participants responded to the question by sharing the system and school conditions that enabled their formal appointment. A quarter of middle leaders in the sample were given relieving leadership opportunities prior to their formal appointment. A small proportion (3%) shared that they were identified by senior leaders and supported in their formal applications.

Overview of the implications and recommendations for policy and practice

Middle leaders across NSW public schools are working hard to improve teaching and learning in their schools. Many take on multiple leadership roles that span across areas such as staff supervision, professional learning, student academic and wellbeing development, school administration, and liaising with external organisations. The roles and responsibilities middle leaders are enacting suggest they are architects of teaching and learning improvement in schools, and that they play significant roles in designing, facilitating, managing and transforming school cultures and classroom practice. These middle leaders are driven to make a difference in their schools, with many reporting that they were engaged in a plethora of support functions that enabled them to lead in their schools effectively. These functions included principal support, developing trusting relationships with colleagues, and creating supportive networks.

It was also clear that some current middle leaders have inherited system and school conditions that are not conducive to successful leadership. Middle leaders reported many challenges and constraints that are impeding their capacity to develop, influence and ultimately directly impact student learning in a positive way. The most commonly reported constraints included: a lack of time, increased workloads and administrative burdens. Some reported that these challenges had adverse impacts on their health and wellbeing. These issues are important areas for the Department to consider and respond to. However, providing recommendations about these areas are beyond both the scope of this study as well as the remit of the SLI who commissioned this report.

In reference to the empirical data from this study, we have identified ten recommendations for the SLI to consider in light of the primary purpose of this study: to develop a deeper understanding of middle leadership in order to proactively support the professional learning of this important school leadership position across NSW public schools. We acknowledge that, at the time of this report, the SLI have committed to developing middle leaders through the design and implementation of a system-wide professional development program and have also recently undertaken the redesign and implementation of system-wide middle leadership induction. The recommendations identified below may provide further opportunities for the SLI to continue to understand and invest in middle leadership in NSW public schools.

Three key opportunity areas were identified from the data analysis that are recommended for consideration by the NSW School Leadership Institute (SLI):

- Advancing a system-wide understanding of formal middle leadership;
- Identifying and supporting aspiring middle leaders;
- Developing system and localised professional learning for current middle leaders that is relevant, differentiated and responsiveness to diversity of needs.

The opportunity areas include ten specific and practical recommendations for the NSW School Leadership Institute to consider. It is important to note that each opportunity: Understanding; Identification; and Development is interrelated (Figure 1). For example, the identification of aspiring middle leaders will be supported by advancing an understanding of the expectations and roles of middle leaders in NSW Public schools. Additionally, advancing an understanding of middle leadership in NSW DoE will support development of current middle leaders. In this executive summary we have briefly described recommendations within each opportunity area. A more elaborate response to each recommendation is detailed in the Implications section of the full report.

Figure 1: Recommendations

Advancing a system-wide understanding of formal middle leadership

Similar to international research (Heng & Marsh 2009; Larusdottir et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018), our survey results indicate that in the NSW DoE, understandings of the term 'middle leadership' vary and consequently there are different views about which roles are part of middle leadership positions. This is in part due to the diversity of contexts, job titles and responsibilities across educational systems in Australia and school sites within the NSW DoE. Given the diversity in NSW school contexts, it is recommended that the SLI consider advancing a system-wide understanding of middle leadership as the term is not well documented in Department policy and practice. As research has demonstrated, for middle leaders to significantly and positively impact student learning (Grootenboer, 2018; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) it is critical that their work is defined with clarity.

Three key recommendations guide the consideration of advancing an understanding of formal middle leadership. Firstly, developing an operational definition of formal middle leadership in NSW public schools provides the opportunity to enhance understanding and support of middle leadership by colleagues, prioritise a focus on tasks in specific areas that lead to improved student learning outcomes, and strengthen the applicability and acknowledgment of these important leadership positions in Department policy and documents. Secondly, we recommend that the SLI design a framework and accompanying guidelines for principals to develop localised role descriptions for formal middle leaders in their schools. Our survey findings suggest that middle leaders have many responsibilities and tasks, however, they are struggling to reconcile and manage the varied and manifold responsibilities placed on them from system level and the school level priorities. A framework providing guiding principles that support school principals to develop localised role descriptions as opposed to set descriptors from the system, will acknowledge the diversity of NSW public school contexts whilst providing clarity about middle leader roles and responsibilities that can then be tailored to school contexts. This approach would provide conditions that support middle leaders to work effectively by aligning the expectations of the Department and the needs of individual schools. Lastly, we propose an increased inclusion and support for middle leaders in policy development, influence and enactment. This study identified that middle leaders play an important role in connecting system and school policies and directives to teaching and learning in classrooms, however, constraints surrounding areas such as unclear expectations, limited resources, and a lack of support were evident in many responses. We suggest that the SLI could provide greater support for middle leaders with the skills, knowledge and practices to contribute, co-design, influence, and enact system policies and directives.

> At this point of time in my career, I feel increasingly overwhelmed with the amount of information I am trying to process. The many roles and responsibilities and the high expectations for my role as AP cause me to doubt my abilities as a professional. We constantly talk about "doing less better" but this seems impossible. In recent years I struggled to be a fulltime classroom teacher and an AP leading a team of 8-9 staff (***Assistant Principal***)

Identifying and supporting aspiring middle leaders

Identifying potential middle leaders and enabling them to develop their leadership through professional learning experiences and leadership opportunities could enhance system-wide support for middle leaders in the NSW DoE (Hargreaves, 2019; Lipscombe et al., 2020b). Such an approach recognises that leadership is not a fixed construct but instead can and should be developed and supported over time and is a collective responsibility of the system and school leaders. It is recommended that the SLI consider middle leadership identification as a component of teacher leadership development work, where teachers who are effective in carrying out informal leadership tasks are supported with professional learning that prepares them for possible future positions as middle leaders. Additionally, professional learning for principals could be introduced to ensure that local school environments are enabling aspiring middle leaders to access support and gain experience in teacher leadership, mentoring, and team and school leadership opportunities. This recommendation supports those educators with aspirations to become formal middle leaders to develop their leadership capacity and understanding through the identification and development of goals and resources to support them.

> I have loved my role but am exhausted…I continue in my role for the students and being able to maximise my assistance through leading a faculty of staff but acknowledge that people seeking to take up these middle executive leadership roles are decreasing at an alarming rate. (***Head Teacher***)

Developing system and localised professional learning for current middle leaders that is relevant, differentiated and responsiveness to diversity of needs.

Investing in system-wide leadership support and development ensures middle leaders and their schools are more effective. Systemic professional learning develops shared language embedded in system policies and initiatives so that research and guiding principles can be shared to support work in schools. System-wide support and development recognises that schools and leaders can make a greater difference if they work together and contribute to the system to share, challenge, and transfer expertise and capacity within and

between schools (Fullan, 2019). However, system lead leadership development has been criticised as inadequate if it is too focussed at a system level without careful consideration to individual leadership development and school needs (Lovett, Dempster, & Fluckiger, 2015). This study identified a number of divergent middle leader needs and experiences including diverse school context (e.g., rural, remote, metropolitan, primary, secondary, central, SSP), various teacher accreditation levels (from Graduate to Lead), teacher experience (1-40 years), leadership experience (1-16+ years) and preferred professional learning approaches (e.g. mentoring, networking, formal programs).

Six key recommendations are provided that are derived from survey data and research into leadership development and effective professional learning. Firstly, we recommend that the SLI design purposeful professional learning to cater for different groups and needs of middle leaders. Strategies may include: attention to examining the prior, individual and school learning needs of middle leaders as part of middle leadership professional learning; negotiated professional learning pathways where middle leaders can, in consultation with their principals, choose varying options and learning opportunities to suit school and individual needs; professional learning that is firmly embedded in context and emphasises authentic middle leadership experience; and alignment of professional learning activities to the expectations and processes of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher accreditation to support development of middle leaders who are motivated for higher levels of accreditation.

> Great teachers become middle leaders, but we are not necessarily given the development to become great leaders. We learn to manage on the job but leadership is something else. I have been meaning to complete the leadership modules but never have the time to complete them! (***Assistant Principal***)

Secondly, we recommend the SLI support the development of middle leaders by advancing their knowledge, understanding and resources to utilise evidence informed and student centred teacher collaboration (including co-teaching and peer feedback) as a vehicle to support teacher and leadership development and improvement. The survey identified the significant commitment and dedication of middle leaders to work with their colleagues to improve teaching and learning. Specifically, data from the survey indicates that most middle leaders identify a high to very high impact on student learning and are more influential when they work in teams. However, wide-spread use of student assessment data to understand teacher and leader impact as well as the use of co-teaching and peer feedback as a collaborative professional learning strategies were less evident. We suggest an investment is supporting middle leaders to work together with teacher colleagues in collaborative processes to analyse student learning data in order to best understand how to meet student needs, and to engage in continuous and well-resourced co-teaching, peer observation and feedback to evaluate the impact on teaching and leadership.

> I need to attend more PL around professional dialogue and collaboration (***Head Teacher***)

Thirdly, we suggest that resources are developed to support personalised and localised induction and mentoring for new formal middle leaders in schools. Localised induction and mentoring led at the school site, in addition to centralised support, provides opportunities for leadership practices to be developed within the context where leadership is enacted. In this way, newly appointed middle leaders are orientated in system expectations and resources for their roles. They also have the opportunity to engage with other newly appointed middle leaders, receive site-based support from their senior school leaders, and importantly, have the opportunity to change their identity, from teacher to middle leader.

Fourthly, our data suggests two direct benefits of networking for middle leaders. These relate to school change and professional learning. We therefore suggest that the SLI consider ways they can resource and support all middle leaders by providing them with opportunities to come together in networks with other middle leaders to engage in ongoing professional learning and collegial support.

We also recommend that the SLI design professional learning opportunities that prioritise the collective leadership process. This form of professional learning would bring schools' senior leaders, middle leaders and teacher leaders together for mutual learning with the aim to build a schools' leadership capacity and for middle leaders and teacher leaders to feel supported, credible and empowered to positively impact their school. This supports a distributed leadership approach where leadership distribution is not simply a matter of dispersing tasks from principals to formal middle leaders across the school but rather, it is a partnership and orchestration of the resources within the school community with the common purpose of positively impacting student outcomes.

> I have had the opportunity to be involved in a wide variety of complex situations whilst being a HT. This has expanded my skill set and also provided me with growth opportunities professionally and personally. I have been fortunate enough to have a principal who is willing to guide and support me (***Head Teacher***)

Lastly, data from this study supports the relational component of middle leaders' work with data showing that supervising staff, having responsibilities for staff and student wellbeing, mentoring and collaborating with colleagues, and leading school teaching and learning initiatives were common middle leader activities. Additionally, the data suggest that middle

leaders' perceive they impact student learning through their positive relationships with students, colleagues and parents and their influence is often team-based, with the development of collegial and cooperative relationships foundational to their work. We suggest that the SLI consider professional learning that supports middle leaders to develop their understanding, knowledge and capacity of core emotional social intelligence competencies central to effective leadership through self-reflection, critical consciousness and engaging with peer networks and school leaders in critical reflection and peer feedback. This could be coupled with workshops focused on middle leader areas of concerns such as engaging in difficult conversations and change management. Additionally, expanding the use of 360-degree emotional intelligence assessment tools currently used as part of the Aspiring Principal Leadership Program (APLP) alumni, to include NSW DoE Middle leaders.

> I need a mentor. I need a course on leadership skills that cover conflict management and working with and leading difficult staff (***Assistant Principal***).

The School Leadership Institute is to be commended on making the first steps in understanding middle leadership, the important work middle leaders do, and the current constraints to their leadership. These first steps include investing in the research and co-designing a research instrument to capture the voice of middle leaders in order to recognise and build on the strengths of middle leadership in NSW public schools. Considering, interrogating and implementing the recommendations will take time and investment, but their implementation have the opportunity to make a significant contribution to student learning by enabling middle leaders to lead improvements in their school sites. Without increased support and resources, there is a risk that middle leaders will be unable to make a positive contribution to the provision of world class and equitable education in all NSW public schools.

Part B: Middle leadership in Australian schools

As with other countries across the world, Australia has a national education agenda focused on school improvement, with the goal of improving student learning outcomes. While school principals are central to fulfilling this national agenda, increases in principal workloads (NSW Department of Education, 2017) and increased expectations of senior school leaders (Marks & McCulla, 2016; McCulla & Degenhardt, 2016) have led to the redistribution of leadership roles within schools (Lárusdóttir & O'Connor, 2017; Spillane, 2006). This has resulted in the middle leaders being recognised as pivotal to school improvement and success. Middle leaders are usually teachers who have a substantial classroom teaching role (Grootenboer, 2018), who are positioned between teachers and senior leaders, and whose leadership is different to that of principal leadership (Wilkinson, 2017; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015).

In Australian schools, formal middle leadership positions are subject to jurisdictional requirements (state and territorial) and sectoral permutations (government and non-government) and they are influenced by school type (primary or secondary) (Lipscombe et al., 2020b). This has resulted in a multitude of terms, with some confusion regarding who middle leaders are, and what their roles and responsibilities are. There is general consensus, however, that whatever the nomenclature, middle leaders' work is multifaceted (Forde et.al., 2019), and typically involves classroom teaching in conjunction with 'out of classroom' activities ranging from school management, administrative tasks and strategic initiatives.

Middle leaders in Australian schools hold positions such as year level and subject coordinators, heads of departments and in some cases assistant principals. They often lead teams of teachers in specific areas or projects (Lipscombe et al., 2020b). Primary and secondary school middle leaders may perform different functions, and they may have different responsibilities and areas of influence within their schools. Additionally, middle leaders across different sectors (government and non-government) may have different aspects of their roles emphasised, based upon the historic and traditional purposes of middle leaders within these contexts. It is clear that middle leadership is dependent upon others, and as such the role cannot be easily analysed or defined in isolation from context or in isolation from the leaders that support and co-define middle leading practices (Day & Grice, 2019).

Within national teacher and leadership policy, it is unclear where school middle leadership is placed. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership provides "national leadership for the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership" (AITSL, 2011). What is evident within AITSL's national policy documents is that middle leaders are integrated across three stages in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). These stages are: Highly Accomplished (HA) and Lead Teacher (LT) stages and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Lipscombe et al., 2020b).

Aligned with the need for clarity in middle leader policy is a corresponding need to understand middle leaders' professional learning requirements. There is an understanding that middle leadership needs to be an area of increased focus for professional learning, and that these needs should not be viewed as just part of a leadership hierarchy that prepares leaders on a trajectory for senior leadership. Middle leading professional learning programs typically focus on collaboration, change and influence, and it is evident that middle leaders who work in complex areas such as leading in conflict situations and supporting underperforming colleagues have been given less attention (Lipscombe, et al., 2020b).

While the nature of middle leadership is contested and disparate, both research and practice highlight how in most schools there is at least one teacher who has a middle leadership position, working between their Principal and teacher colleagues with multiple responsibilities for classroom teaching and leading the professional development and the performance management of staff (De Nobile, 2018a). These teachers play a critical role in improving student learning outcomes through their pedagogical leadership (Grice, 2019). They lead collaborative teams (Lipscombe, Buckley-Walker & McNamara, 2019a) and influence site-based teaching and learning through developing teachers' classroom practices (Grootenboer et al., 2015; Grice, 2019; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford & Grootenboer, 2019c; Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford & Kirk, 2019b). Harris et al. (2019) suggests that while there is ongoing interest in understanding middle leadership internationally, predominantly studies are small scale. There is a need for more sophisticated and larger-scale research projects to deeply investigate the impacts and effectiveness of this important school leadership space. This large-scale mixed method study will provide important understandings on NSW public school middle leadership.

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Part C: Research methodology

Research method

The NSW Formal Middle Leadership project (FML_NSW) comprised a mixed method survey sent to 7751 middle leaders across 1697 primary, secondary and central schools, schools for specific purposes (SSP) and community schools. The survey population makes it the largest known empirical project devoted to school middle leadership in any country.

The FML_NSW project used an adapted version of the Middle Leadership Roles Questionnaire - School Edition (MLRQ-SE) designed by De Nobile (2016). The MLRQ-SE was based on the Middlke Leadership in Education (MLiE) model which emerged from a review of more than 250 peer-reviewed research articles, reports and institutional policy documents and is based on six role categories (De Nobile, 2018a; 2018b). Each role category represents a discrete aspect of the work of middle leaders, as reported by research and other literature. A detailed account of the literature relating to each role category is presented in De Nobile (2018a). The MLRQ-SE was first developed as a 36-item instrument to measure the extent to which middle leaders engage in certain roles (De Nobile, 2016).

After consultation with the NSW DoE SLI, the 36-item MLRQ-SE survey was expanded to a 59-item online survey designed using the Qualtrics online survey tool. The survey comprises six sections, outlined in Table 1. Each of the six sections is designed to address one of the six research questions of this study.

Table 1: Survey items

Research Question	Survey Item
Which teachers are being appointed to formal middle leadership positions?	*Section 1:* Seven items relating to gender, age, experience, position and teacher accreditation status
What are the roles and responsibilities formal middle leaders are enacting?	*Section 2:* The adapted MLRQ-SE, comprising thirty-six items using a 5-point Likert scale associated with roles and responsibilities of the current formal middle leadership position. Two open-ended questions asking participants to expand or include additional roles and responsibilities, and comments on current formal middle leadership positions.
What is the perceived impact of middle leaders on student learning?	*Section 3:* Five items (1 closed question using a Likert scale and 4 open-ended questions) on activities, impacts, constraints and reflections on how current middle leadership positions impact on student learning.
How are middle leaders collaborating with and influencing others?	*Section 4:* Two open-ended items on collaboration and influence.
What are the professional needs and preferences of formal middle leaders?	*Section 5:* Four open-ended items on professional learning opportunities and needs.
What are the leadership trajectories and aspirations of formal middle leaders?	*Section 6:* Three open-ended items on career trajectory and aspirations.

Participant recruitment

Participants in this study were recruited from an email distribution list, supplied by the NSW DoE, of formal middle leaders in primary, secondary and central schools, schools for specific purposes (SSP) and community schools, who as at September 6, 2019 were in their substantive positions where the position levels had the codes APR (Assistant Principal) or HED (Head Teacher). While typically participants (as described in the *Findings* section) were formally in Assistant Principal and Head Teacher roles, some were employed under APR and HED through diverse appointments and positions such as Instructional Leader, Deputy Principal, Senior Psychologist and Coordinator.

The research was conducted in Term 4 of 2019. The online survey was sent to 7751 middle leaders across NSW public schools. Initial contact was made via an email on 6 November 2019, inviting formal middle leaders to participate in a voluntary survey through the Qualtrics program. The email included a hyperlink to the Qualtrics software where participants could complete the survey. The initial email informed potential participants that the survey would be closed on 22 November. Two reminder emails were also sent. The 20-day survey period coincided with significant disruption to schools due to extensive bushfires in NSW and the reminder emails encouraged potential participants to complete at least the demographic and multiple-choice questions if they felt unable to commit to the full qualitative and quantitative elements. As such, some participants did not complete all questions (see Table 2). The survey was closed on 25 November. The total number of participants was 2608 (a 34% response rate). The response rate was determined by selecting participants who completed at least Sections 1 and 2 of the survey.

Table 2: Participant response numbers

Responses	Participant number
Audience size	7751
Returned surveys	2714
Rejected due to incomplete responses	106
Total participants	2608

Research timescale

There are three phases of the NSW Formal Middle Leadership project (FML_NSW) (see Table 3):

Table 3: Timeframe of research project

Phases of research	Research activity	Timeframe
1	Instrument development	July – October 2019
2	Administration of survey	November 2019 – February 2020
3	Analysis of data	January – August 2020

Phase 1 involved the research team working with personnel from the School Leadership Institute to construct the middle leadership survey instrument and develop a recruitment strategy for participants in NSW public schools. During this stage, ethics applications were developed and submitted and approved by each of the participating universities.

Phase 2 involved the administration of the survey in accordance with the approved recruitment strategy. Preliminary analysis was completed on sections 1 and 2 of the survey and an internal interim report was disseminated.

Phase 3 included a high-level analysis and dissemination of a full report using the analytical methods described below.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed to achieve three purposes. The first was to be able to describe the sample in some detail. The second was to identify the roles carried out by participants as middle leaders. The third was to make comparisons of those measurements that would further inform understanding about middle leadership roles.

All quantitative data were entered into an SPSS statistical database. Cases with more than 10% of responses missing, or that had only demographic data, were removed from the database. Demographic data relating to the gender, age band, teaching experience, current position, leadership experience and level of accreditation were used to generate a description of the sample and to describe key characteristics of the participants.

The 36 items from the MLRQ-SE were factor analysed to ascertain what the role categories were according to the responses of the participants. The aim was to empirically identify groupings of items that could represent role categories.

A number of empirical statistical methods can be used to establish these participant-oriented groupings. Factor analysis was deemed the appropriate method, given this was the first time the MLRQ-RE had been used to measure aspects of middle leadership. Because the 36 items in the MLRQ-SE are based on a conceptual model (i.e. roles as depicted in the MLiE') the results of the analysis can also be seen as a test of the conceptual model of middle leadership roles (described in the *Findings* section).

Factor analysis is a statistical procedure used to establish manageable structures from large amounts of data. It is particularly useful to help researchers identify discrete constructs or dimensions from groupings of interrelated survey items (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). These groups of items, if interpretable, can represent measurement-scale versions of the constructs (in this case middle leader roles) that researchers are looking for. Factor analysis results are described in the *Findings* section. Tables displaying the actual factor analysis statistics for the whole seven-factor model, as well as the factors themselves, can be found in Appendix A.

In order to compare the roles performed by middle leaders with different formal positions a method of comparing means between groups (such as Assistant Principals and Head Teachers) was needed. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to identify statistically significant differences between means. In cases where it was possible that the distributions of scores for items might be skewed (as is often the case when looking at data from rating scales) the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to account for such variations (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). This also provided a second test of significance for these data.

Qualitative data analysis

To analyse the open-ended question responses, all responses were firstly downloaded to a spreadsheet according to item number. There were a total of 20,746 responses. In consideration of the time and funding associated with this study, each individual response could not be analysed in detail. Therefore, random sampling was used as a systematic, rigorous and fair approach to determine a sample size to analyse. Generating a random sample avoids the bias in the results which would occur from picking a convenience sample, for example the first 300 responses to the survey.

To ensure the random sampling captured significant themes across responses, a sample size for each individual item was calculated based on the population response to each question (Table 4). For example, item 47 resulted in 1607 responses, while there were 1403 responses to item 48. This resulted in a different population size for each item. A sample size was calculated for each question based on a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. The margin of error reflects how many survey results needed to be analysed to accurately represent the view of the overall population. The smaller the error, the closer the results to an exact confidence level. The confidence level is an indication of the probability that the response of the sample is an accurate indication of the population as a whole. The higher the confidence level, the more confident we can be that the responses are representative of the survey population.

Next, a close reading of each of the responses in the sample for each item was undertaken. This included reading each response and completing an initial inductive thematic coding. Inductive coding refers to data analysis that is interpreted from raw data by developing themes. The primary purpose of using an inductive approach is to obtain findings based on the frequent or significant themes identified in the data, without the restraints imposed by, for example, predetermined codes. Importantly, during this process, we checked to see whether we had reached a saturation point, beyond which no new themes would emerge. This meant that the research team could be reasonably sure that the sample size shown in Table 4 provided a high level of confidence for the identified themes. Following this initial coding, a more rigorous and systematic

Table 4: Response and sample size for open-ended questions

Item	37	38	40	41	42	43	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52
Responses	1575	1171	1833	1692	1859	868	1488	1459	1607	1403	630	1759	1745	1657
Response rate of population %	61%	45%	71%	65%	72%	34%	57%	56%	62%	54%	24%	68%	67%	64%
Sample size for analysis	309	290	318	314	319	267	306	305	311	302	239	316	315	312

coding process was undertaken in which responses within each code were further analysed, and initial themes were organised according to similarities and differences. An assessment of the frequency of themes was undertaken based on the number of individual participants who mentioned a particular theme in the sample. This provided insight into the significance of themes emerging from data analysis to aid reporting. Lastly, using the generated themes from the sample analysis, data for each theme was again reviewed to provide qualitative narratives/ stories/ examples from the participants for reporting.

Part D: Findings

The findings from the survey are reported under each of the six research questions.

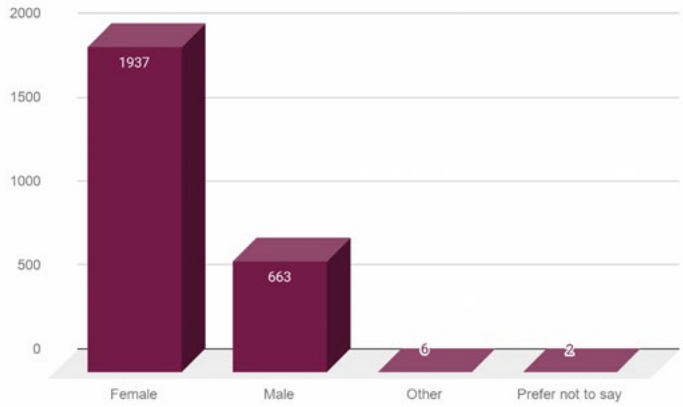
Research Question 1: Which teachers are being appointed to formal middle leadership positions?

This research question was addressed using seven survey items used to identify demographic information of the participants in the survey.

Gender and age

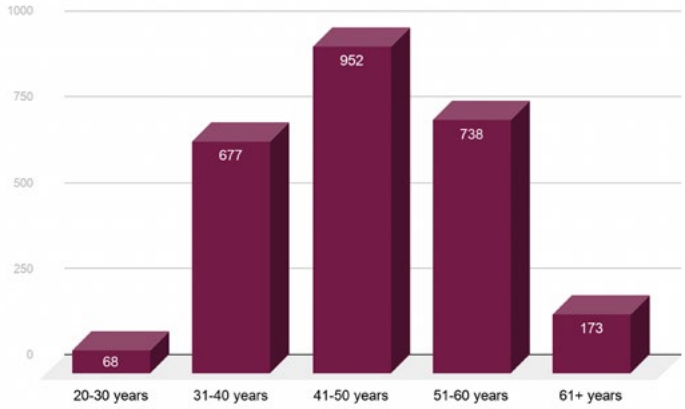
The majority (74%) of participants who completed the demographic items in this survey were female (Figure 2). The high percentage of female responses is consistent with headcount data on Assistant Principals and Head Teachers in NSW public schools where only 34% are male (NSW NSW Department of Education, 2019a).

Figure 2: Gender of participants



The ages of participants ranged from 20 to 61+ (Figure 3). Sixty-eight (3%) were in the 20–30 age group; 677 (26%) were in the 31–40 group, 952 (36%) were in the 41–50 group, 738 (28%) were in the 51–60 group, and 173 (7%) were in the 61+ group.

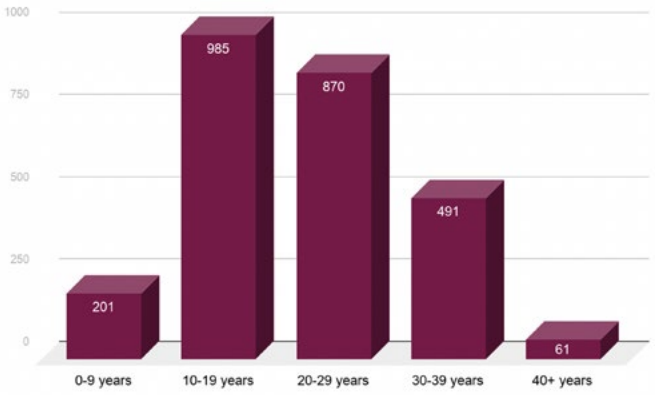
Figure 3: Age of participants



Teaching experience

The majority (71%) of participants had 10–29 years of teaching experience (Figure 4). This indicates that most middle leaders who responded to this survey were experienced teachers with at least ten years of teaching experience. This data is consistent with previous research from Bennett et al., (2007) who examined middle leadership in secondary schools and found that teachers appointed to middle leader positions were expected to have extensive teaching experience and expertise in curriculum development.

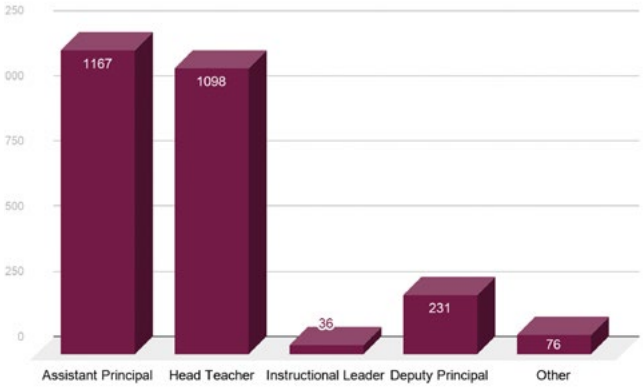
Figure 4: Teaching experience of participants



Current position

Participants were asked to describe their current positions. They reported 864 distinct categories, including different positions (e.g., Assistant Principal, Head Teacher, Coordinator) as well as different ways to describe the same position (e.g., Head Teacher, HT, Head Teacher Mathematics). A thematic analysis was completed to reduce the descriptions to eight distinct positional categories (Figure 5). As expected, most responses to the survey were from Assistant Principals and Head Teachers (87%). The prevalence of these two positions is indicative of the recruitment strategy for the survey. Interestingly, a range of other positions were also identified such as Deputy Principal. One possible explanation for this is that, as they explained, some respondents were currently in a relieving position. For example, a middle leader in a substantive Assistant Principal position may have been relieving temporarily for a Deputy Principal who was on leave. The 'other' category was made up of participants from a variety of less distinct positions such as coordinators, senior psychologists and teaching principals. In NSW public schools, some positions such as an instructional leader or senior psychologist are not typical middle leaders who are classroom teachers with additional leadership responsibilities but are instead leading in the middle through a distinct leadership role.

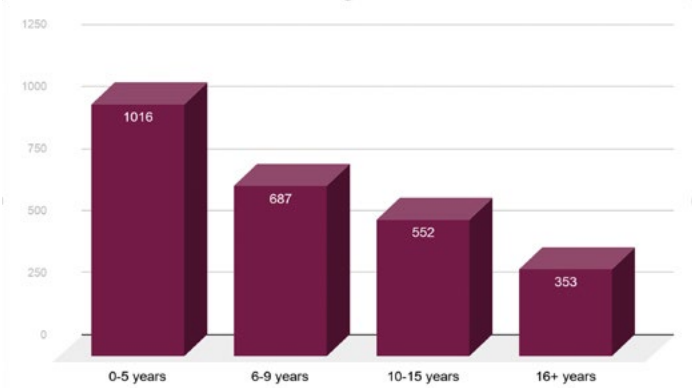
Figure 5: Current position of participants



Leadership experience

Data analysis reveals that the majority of middle leaders had between 0 and 9 years' leadership experience (65%), with only 14% having 16+ years of leadership experience. Many (39%) middle leaders are new (0-5 years) to their role. In contrast to Figure 4, which shows middle leaders had many years of teaching experience, Figure 6 shows they had less leadership experience. This may suggest that there is a need for relatively inexperienced school leaders to be provided with school support and professional learning to enable them to be successful as both classroom teachers and school leaders.

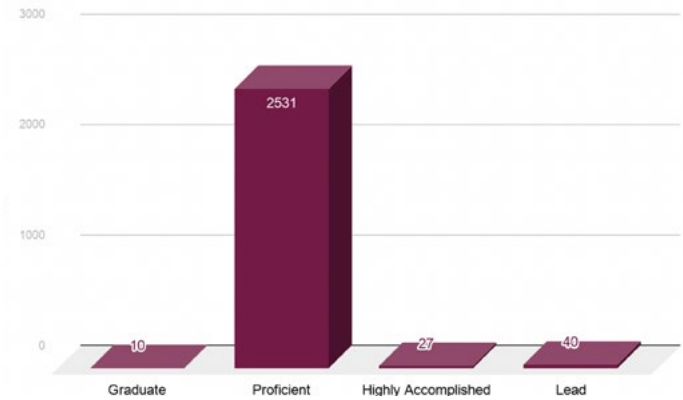
Figure 6: Years of leadership experience of participants



Teacher accreditation

The accreditation level of participants in accordance with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), as shown in Figure 7, indicates that while all participants were in formal leadership roles, only 3% chose to undertake accreditation at the 'highly accomplished' or 'lead teacher' level. This result may not be surprising as teachers who commenced teaching pre-2004 were 'granted' proficient accreditation in 2018, and were commencing the process of maintaining accreditation. This may have applied to up to 92% of the respondents in this survey (teachers with 14 years or more experience – see Figure 3).

Figure 7: Accreditation level of participants



Research Question 2: What are the roles and responsibilities formal middle leaders are enacting?

The roles and responsibilities of formal middle leaders were identified using an adapted version of the MLRQ-SE (De Nobile, 2016). In this survey, six role categories represented key middle leadership roles as revealed by the literature review described in De Nobile (2018a). The six role categories are: 'Student-focused', 'Administration', 'Organisational', 'Supervisory', 'Staff development' and 'Strategic'. To enable ease of understanding of the underlying concepts, these roles are explained below. These six categories constitute a conceptual model of middle leadership roles, described in De Nobile (2018a).

The 'Student-focused' role centres on teachers' work with students in their capacities as middle leaders. This role involves dealing with student behaviour issues, managing data on student progress and helping students with academic or other issues. The 'Administrative' role concerns the development and maintenance of systems that support the other roles. This includes developing databases and other record systems, keeping inventories, and resource inventory work such as ordering and accounting. Databases might be set up to help monitor student behaviour or keep track of subject resources. The 'Organisational' role refers to what middle leaders do when organising people. This may include developing timetables and rosters for a range of things from playground duties to open days. Because many middle leaders have an influence on curriculum, key aspects of the planning of teaching and learning, such as negotiating scope and sequence documents and which cohorts of students cover particular content, are included in this role. The 'Supervisory' role has to do with monitoring and evaluating the performance of other teachers. Key tasks within this role include monitoring the work of a year or stage group of staff or individual teachers, classroom observations and discussing work performance. The 'Staff development' role relates to the work middle leaders do to build the capacity of other staff members. This can be focused on the stage or year they are looking after or a subject area, but could potentially encompass all staff across cohorts and subject areas. This role may be a follow-on consequence of the 'Supervisory' role. The activities in this role can range from informal support and encouragement through to formal professional learning efforts and it may include mentoring and induction as well. The 'Strategic' role concerns influence on staff members and the school through vision and goal setting. In this role middle leaders actively influence the directions of their curriculum or other areas of responsibility. This influence can be on an individual level or through the groups they lead.

The MLRQ-SE component of the survey comprised 36 items that operationalised elements of these theorised roles. The wording of items was designed to capture general and specific elements of the role. For example, under the 'Student focused' role, as well as particular items relating to records and support, there was a general item about helping students. This might mean that items looked similar but the intention was to cater to different possible perceptions of roles. Participants were required to rate the extent to which they participated in any of the activities reflected by each item on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very frequently).

The 'Top-12' middle leadership tasks

In the initial broad look at the data it was decided to rank the mean numbers of occurrences of tasks from highest to lowest, irrespective of the conceptual role for which they were written. The compilation of a definitive 'top ten' was the aim but it became clear that this did not represent a suitable cut-off for analysis of the most frequently executed tasks. The wider separation between Q33 (Mean = 4.20) and the next-lowest, Q34 (Mean = 4.09) determined the cut-off. Therefore, the most frequent tasks of middle leaders are presented as a 'top 12' in Table 5.

Table 5: The 'Top 12' middle leadership tasks

Item	Role statement	Theorised role	Mean
Q01	Helping students	Student-focused	4.63
Q03	Supervising staff in a year/grade or stage	Supervisory	4.56
Q11	Supervising staff members	Supervisory	4.53
Q08	Being responsible for records of student behaviour, academic progress or other student data	Administrative	4.51
Q23	Dealing with student behaviour	Student-focused	4.43
Q18	Creation and/or maintenance of records relating to student behaviour, achievement or other student data	Administrative	4.37
Q19	Implementing curriculum	Organisational	4.35
Q07	Creation and/or maintenance of information/data relating to student progress	Administrative	4.31
Q20	Organising a team or committee	Organisational	4.27
Q14	Mentoring staff members	Staff development	4.22
Q10	Monitoring the performance of staff	Supervisory	4.21
Q33	Helping staff members with aspects of their work	Staff development	4.20

While the most frequently experienced tasks of these middle leaders involved supervisory tasks or administrative work, they also engaged in student-focused work, and helping students was the task with the highest mean of all 36 items. This suggests that, aside from the time they spent supervising the work of other teachers and completing administrative work, these middle leaders were, for the most part, involved in assisting students. Organisational work relating to curriculum and teams (the latter perhaps linked back to curriculum) was less prominent but still a substantial activity.

The 'Bottom-3' middle leadership tasks

As with the top-rated tasks described above, the cut-off depended on looking for a clear separation between means to form a 'lower tail'. This led to the identification of a 'Bottom 3' set of tasks. They are presented in Table 6. As the means of the last two items were the same, the decisions about ranking moved to the distributions of ratings. Question 36 received the lowest rank because a low percentage of responses indicated 'Rarely'. With just three items from different clusters, no clear pattern was identifiable.

Table 6: The 'Bottom 3' middle leadership tasks

Item	Role statement	Theorised role	Mean
Q09	*Organising timetables for relief teachers or guest staff*	Organisational	3.38
Q28	*Heading whole-school policy change*	Strategic	3.30
Q36	*Involvement in staff induction*	Staff development	3.30

Factor Analysis of the MLRQ Items

The previous section presented the results of individual MLRQ-SE items based on the theoretical model of middle leadership roles. These results can be helpful in measuring aspects of phenomena roughly, and it might seem reasonable to combine the results of items from the different theorised roles *a priori* to ascertain to what extent the participants were engaged in the different roles. Such calculation, however, does not account for participant perceptions of the constructs the items were designed to represent. It would be better to have groupings of items that more closely relate to the way participants perceive their roles. To this end, factor analysis was employed as described in the *Methodology* section above.

The factor analysis resulted in the identification of seven factors representing discrete middle leadership roles derived from participant responses. Because only six factors were anticipated (from the theorised MLRQ-SE model), the items from the unanticipated factor were removed from the model and the factor analysis procedure repeated, thereby creating an alternative model. The resulting model was less stable and less interpretable, suggesting that the seven-factor model was the best representation of middle leadership roles for this sample of middle leaders. The identified roles were otherwise similar to the theorised ones but some name changes were necessary to reflect the results for this sample. The seven roles to emerge were: *Developing staff, Student-centred, Administration, Organising people, Curriculum-centred, Supervising staff* and *Leading learning and change*.

Items loaded on each factor (see Appendix A) were combined into unweighted factor scores representing the 'measured' extents of the roles. As seen in the following sections, the reliability of the factors as scales to measure these roles was satisfactory. The overall reliability of the seven-factor model, as measured by the Cronbach's alpha statistic, was quite high (a = .84). The factor solution is detailed in Appendix A. What follows is a description of each of the seven factors representing discrete roles of the middle leaders as measured by the MLRQ-SE.

Developing staff

Definition: Developing the knowledge, skills and capabilities of other educators

Explanation: Factor 1, which was named *Developing staff*, comprised items originally written to represent the 'Supervisory' role (such as 'Providing feedback to staff members about work done') and the 'Staff development' role (such as 'Facilitating professional development for staff'). The eight items clustered in this factor include provision of feedback, demonstrating and other forms of direct assistance, and mentoring. The reliability of this factor as a scale to measure this role was quite high (a = .86).

Student-centred

Definition: Leading and managing student wellbeing and academic growth

Explanation: Factor 2 was named *Student-centred*. The items that clustered in this factor included all of those that were written to represent the theoretical 'Student focused' role (such as 'Assisting students with academic issues') as well as three items that had been written to represent the 'Administration' role ('Being responsible for records of student behaviour, academic progress or other student data'). Closer examination of these three items revealed that these were all to do with aspects of student work and behaviour. This clustering of items suggests that the participants perceived that their work with students included the administrative work associated with them. The reliability of this cluster of items as a scale was also high (a = .86).

Administration

Definition: Developing and maintaining physical and financial resources and processes

Explanation: Factor 3, *Administration*, comprised the three remaining items that were written as aspects of the theoretical 'Administration' role. This factor concerned administrative work relating to resources, including purchases. A typical item was 'Keeping inventory of resources and/or equipment'. The reliability of this cluster of items as a scale to measure the administration role of middle leaders was not as high as the first two factors (a = .66) but this was still acceptable for an exploratory analysis and the lower reliability score could be explained by the low number of items that loaded on it.

Organising people

Definition: The organisation of human resources

Explanation: Factor 4 was termed *Organising people* because it comprised three remaining items that were written as aspects of organising timetables, rosters and itineraries, all of which imply the movement or action of people (for example, 'organising agendas and itineraries for special days or events'). Other items that were elements of the theoretical 'Organisational' role loaded on other factors related to their core dimensions in the overall model. As with *Administration*, the lower but still acceptable alpha reliability (.69) was no doubt due to the smaller number of items.

Curriculum-centred

Definition: Leading the planning and implementation of curriculum

Explanation: Factor 5 comprised two items. Both were to do with curriculum work (planning and implementing). Both were originally written to represent the curriculum-oriented elements of the theorised 'Organisational' role. They do, however, make sense in this configuration. The reliability statistic for this factor as a scale was moderately strong (a = .77) even though there were only two items, largely reflected by the very strong loadings each item had on the factor.

Supervising staff

Definition: Leading the performance of staff

Explanation: Factor 6 comprised the remaining items written to represent the theoretical 'Supervisory' role. Subsequently termed *Supervising staff*, this factor focused on the monitoring performance and supervision of individual teachers as well as grade, or stage-based groups of teachers. The item 'Monitoring the performance of staff' typified this cluster of items. The reliability of these three items as a scale to measure *Supervising staff* as a key middle leader role was high (a = .80).

Leading learning and change

Definition: Leading learning, strategy, innovation and change

Explanation: Factor 7 was the final interpretable cluster of items. It comprised all of the items that were originally written to represent the theorised 'Strategic' role. However, two additional items also loaded onto this factor which was called *Leading learning and change*. The presence of the item 'Organising a team or committee' which was originally written to represent the theorised 'Organisational' role in this cluster, as well as 'Leading staff professional learning' which was operationalised for the 'Staff development' role, necessitated a reorientation of the name away from 'strategic'. The revised name of this factor was felt to better reflect the strong focus on leading people (typified by 'Organising a team or committee') and the implications of that leadership for change or innovation (typified by 'Heading whole-school policy change') and learning (exemplified by 'Establishing a vision for area of responsibility'). The reliability of these eight items as a scale to measure this middle leadership role was very high (a = .86).

Analysis of means for middle leadership roles

A comparison of means for the factor analysis of middle leadership roles was undertaken. The means were based on the survey responses of all participants. The means of each of the seven empirically identified roles are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Means of middle leadership roles from factor analysis (whole sample)

Factor	Middle leadership role	Mean	SD
F1	Developing staff	3.85	.59
F2	Student-centred	4.18	.60
F3	Administration	3.68	.75
F4	Organising people	3.66	.85
F5	Curriculum-centred	4.18	.84
F6	Supervising staff	4.44	.71
F7	Leading learning and change	3.90	.62

(n = 2608)

These results suggest that, overall, the participants were engaged mostly in supervision of colleagues, student-centred and curriculum-centred roles. They were least engaged in organising timetables, agendas and other matters pertaining to the actions of people but with a mean above 3.50, this was still a substantial activity for these middle leaders.

These results were for the whole sample and while they provide an overall view of the extent to which middle leaders are undertaking different roles in general, a more detailed comparison of the different middle leadership positions was needed to provide greater insight in relation to specific positions. We have therefore broken down the means of each role according to the formal positions of participants as Assistant Principals, Head Teachers and Other (representing all other middle leadership positions captured in the survey). These are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Means of middle leadership roles from factor analysis (specific positions)

Role	AP		HT		Oth	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Developing staff	3.91	.59	3.76	.57	4.00	.59
Student-centred	4.25	.59	4.14	.57	3.94	.60
Administration	3.59	.75	3.82	.73	3.63	.78
Organising people	3.88	.83	3.45	.79	3.50	.97
Curriculum-centred	4.32	.73	4.22	.75	3.69	1.01
Supervising staff	4.53	.69	4.37	.70	4.28	.85
Leading learning and change	3.97	.61	3.77	.58	4.02	.64

N = 2608, AP=Assistant Principal, HT=Head of Subject/Area, Oth=Other, M=Mean, SD-Standard deviation

Across all the formal middle leadership positions, the most frequently performed role was *Supervising staff*. Assistant Principals in primary schools appeared to be the middle leaders most frequently engaged in this role. *Student-centred* was another prominent role. *Leading learning and change*, and *Curriculum-centred* were two categories that participants in all formal positions were frequently engaged in.

Administration and *Organising people* had the lowest means. This suggests that, while still a prominent role, there was slightly less focus on that sort of managerial work. Participants in the 'Other' category were the exception, with *Curriculum-centred* being the lowest mean for that group.

Table 9: Comparison of means of roles between Assistant Principals (AP) and Head Teachers (HT)

	AP		HT			
Middle leadership roles	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**ANOVA**	**Mann-Whitney**
					F	**U**
Supervising staff	4.53	.69	4.37	.70	27.64*	54496*
Curriculum-centred	4.32	.73	4.22	.75	11.09*	58300*
Student-centred	4.25	.59	4.14	.57	21.11*	55569*
Leading learning and change	3.97	.61	3.77	.58	67.42*	50773*
Developing staff	*3.91*	.59	3.76	.57	37.60*	53944*
Administration	*3.59*	.75	3.82	.73	53.65*	75376*
Organising people	*3.88*	.83	3.45	.79	153.98*	44128*

N: AP = 1167, HT = 1098, * = significant at p <.001

In order to facilitate comparisons, the means of each role were compared for Assistant Principals and Head Teachers using a simple analysis of variance procedure (ANOVA). The ANOVA procedure determines whether a difference between two means is likely to be due to chance or due to real differences between the two groups being compared (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). In addition, because of the likelihood that the distributions of scores for items within factors would not be normally distributed, statistical significance was also confirmed using the Mann-Whitney U test for each comparison (Gay et al., 2012). The results, ranked from highest to lowest means, are presented in Table 9.

With regard to which roles were carried out the most, the rankings for both formal positions (Assistant Principals and Head Teachers) were identical. The roles that the participants in these two groups reported they were engaged in most frequently were, in order, *Supervising staff, Curriculum-centred* and *Student-centred*. The roles least engaged with differed for the two positions. Assistant Principals were engaged in Administration the least compared to other roles, whereas Head Teachers were least engaged in Organising people. The means for these roles were above 3.00, so these were still substantive roles for these middle leaders.

The differences between the means for Assistant Principals and Head Teachers for each of the roles were generally small (ranging from .10 to .23, with the average difference being .20). The exception was the difference for *Organising people* (MD = .43) which was the largest. Nevertheless, the ANOVA and Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that the differences in the means of roles between Assistant Principals and Head Teachers were all statistically significant.

Assistant Principals were significantly more engaged than Head Teachers in all of the middle leadership roles except *Administration*, in which they were engaged the least. Head Teachers reported being more engaged in *Administration* than they were in *Developing staff, Leading learning and change* and *Organising people*.

The following section reports on what Assistant Principals and Head Teachers indicated they were doing more and less of within each role. For each of the empirically derived roles, the means of the contributor items were compared between the Assistant Principals and the Head Teachers using ANOVA and the Mann-Whitney U statistics. A further comparison of means, including demographic variables such as gender, age group, experience and APST level, was also undertaken but no reportable differences were identified in those analyses, so they are not reported here.

Activities relating to the role of *Supervising staff*

The most prominent element of *Supervising staff* for Assistant Principals was supervision of teachers of a year or stage, while for Head Teachers it was supervision of staff in general (though year- or stage-based supervision was still important). 'Monitoring the performances of teachers' was the least frequently engaged task in both formal positions.

Table 10: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Supervising staff*

	AP			HT				
Item	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**ANOVA**	**Mann-Whitney**
							F	**U**
11 Supervising staff members	1167	4.59	.78	1095	4.50	.75	7.40*	58926***
10 Monitoring the performance of staff	1165	4.23	.86	1095	4.16	.87	4.37*	60292**
03 Supervising staff in a year/grade or stage	1162	4.76	.76	1096	4.45	.93	71.86***	50681***

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

Activities relating to the role of *Curriculum-centred role*

There was no significant difference between Assistant Principals and Head Teachers concerning 'Implementing curriculum'. Means for both groups were similarly high, suggesting that this was an important aspect of the *Curriculum-centred* role. Assistant Principals from primary schools reported significantly more planning of curriculum with teachers than their secondary colleagues.

Table 11: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Curriculum-centred* role

	AP			HT				
Item	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**ANOVA** **A** **F**	**Mann-Whitney** **U**
19 Implementing curriculum	1166	4.45	.82	1091	4.49	.80	2.24	66005
35 Planning curriculum with other teachers	1166	4.20	.83	1097	3.95	.88	48.74***	53357***

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

Activities relating to the role of *Student-centred* role

Table 12: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Student-centred* role

Item	AP			HT			ANOVA	Mann-Whitney
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	U
17 Meeting with students about personal issues	1162	3.94	1.03	1092	3.68	1.02	35.60***	53652***
29 Assisting students with academic issues	1164	3.84	1.01	1089	3.92	.90	4.66*	65390
05 Meeting with students about academic issues	1165	3.60	1.08	1095	3.91	.89	55.41***	73821***
18 Creation and/or maintenance of records relating to student behaviour, achievement or other student data	1165	4.44	.75	1097	4.33	.78	11.05***	58810***
31 Liaison between student's home and school	1165	4.15	.86	1094	3.71	.97	134.62***	47057***
01 Helping students	1164	4.72	.57	1097	4.57	.66	37.80***	56417***
08 Being responsible for records of student behaviour, academic progress or other student data	1166	4.56	.72	1098	4.49	.74	4.82*	60626**
23 Dealing with student behaviour	1165	4.63	.71	1098	4.29	.93	95.30***	51196***
07 Creation and/or maintenance of information/data relating to student progress	1165	4.36	.76	1096	4.32	.76	2.10	61361

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

For both formal middle leadership positions, having responsibility for student records, dealing with behaviour issues and helping students generally were prominent elements of the *Student-centred* role. Indeed, there was no significant difference between the two groups for item 07, and the difference between groups for item 08 only just met the criterion for statistical significance (at p < .05). This suggests that records and data were equally predominant tasks for the two formal positions.

Assistant Principals were involved in meeting with students about personal issues and liaison between home and school much more than Head Teachers. Head Teachers were more involved in meetings with students about their academic issues than Assistant Principals, but when it came to assisting students academically, the differences between the groups were only slight.

Activities relating to the role of *Leading learning and change*

Table 13: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Leading learning and change*

Item	AP			HT			ANOVA	Mann-Whitney
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	U
28 Heading whole-school policy change	1164	3.39	.99	1097	3.10	.94	51.97***	53051***
12 Creating or changing whole-school policy	1164	3.67	.91	1094	3.39	.85	57.20***	51918***
16 Leading innovation and change	1163	4.11	.83	1091	3.88	.82	42.66***	53410***
34 Heading teams or committees	1163	4.28	.80	1095	3.87	.86	138.75***	46229***
22 Establishing a vision for area of responsibility	1166	3.74	.93	1094	3.82	.88	4.10*	66114
20 Organising a team or committee	1166	4.42	.76	1095	4.13	.84	77.91***	50856***
04 Leading staff professional learning	1166	4.14	.77	1096	3.92	.82	40.78***	54813***
06 Establishing goals for area of responsibility	1167	4.03	.86	1093	4.02	.82	.09	62669

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

The elements of *Leading learning and change* that both groups were engaged in to a similar extent, had to do with establishing vision and goals (items 06 and 22). These were not the most frequent tasks though. For Assistant Principals and Head Teachers, leading and organising teamwork were paramount, but this activity was significantly more prominent for Assistant Principals. A similar state of affairs existed for work involving leading change and professional learning (items 16 and 04). The differences between Assistant Principals and Head Teachers for all of these items clearly explain the differences between the two groups for *Leading learning and change* as a role (see Table 13).

Activities relating to the role of *Developing staff*

Table 14: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Developing staff*

Item	AP			HT			ANOVA	Mann-Whitney
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	U
32 Providing feedback to staff members about work done	1162	3.98	.76	1097	3.84	.76	17.20***	57980***
33 Helping staff members with aspects of their work	1165	4.25	.71	1096	4.13	.73	16.76***	57918***
26 Engaging in classroom observations of teachers	1164	3.69	.83	1096	3.46	.85	42.69***	54656***
14 Mentoring staff members	1164	4.25	.77	1095	4.15	.79	11.29***	58677***
21 Discussing aspects of work performance with staff	1165	3.80	.86	1096	3.78	.84	.27	62981
27 Facilitating professional development for staff	1165	3.89	.84	1095	3.70	.81	27.76***	55960***
13 Demonstrating procedures and/or techniques for other staff	1165	4.00	.82	1097	3.83	.81	24.56***	56113***
36 Involvement in staff induction	1166	3.38	1.01	1098	3.16	.97	29.09***	55294***

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

Helping, providing feedback and mentoring other staff members were prominent elements of the *Developing staff* role. Although the differences in means seem slight, Head Teachers were doing these tasks to a lesser extent than Assistant Principals. The result was similar in relation to demonstration of procedures or techniques to colleagues and facilitating professional development. There was no significant difference between these two groups when it came to 'Discussing aspects of work performance with staff members' (item 21), indicating that this may be an equally common aspect of the role across primary and secondary schooling.

The means for both groups indicate that staff induction was the least frequent activity within the role of *Developing staff*. Again, the mean was lower for Head Teachers than Assistant Principals. A closer look at the frequency statistics for item 36 revealed that about half of the participants indicated that they were involved in induction sometimes, while almost a fifth indicated they did this rarely or not at all.

Activities relating to the role of *Administration*

Table 15: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Administration*

Item	AP			HT			ANOVA	Mann-Whitney
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	U
25 Arranging orders and purchases	1163	3.40	.92	1096	3.84	.93	128.87***	80342***
15 Keeping inventory of resources and/ or equipment	1167	3.46	1.02	1095	3.88	1.01	94.12***	78560***
24 Creation/modification of forms, proformas and other admin tools	1163	3.91	.88	1098	3.74	.93	19.80***	57629***

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

Table 15 shows that the role of *Administration* was more prevalent for Head Teachers than for Assistant Principals. The comparisons reported here explain some of the dynamics behind that result. It is very clear from looking at the means presented in Table 15 that Head Teachers were engaged in ordering and inventory work to a greater extent than Assistant Principals. Nevertheless, Assistant Principals were reporting more involvement in the creation and modification of administrative tools.

Activities relating to the role of *Organising people*

Table 16: Item differences between APs and HTs for *Organising people*

Item	AP			HT			ANOVA	Mann-Whitney
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	F	U
09 Organising timetables for relief teachers or guest staff	1163	3.72	1.18	1097	3.08	1.24	159.86***	45152***
02 Organising rosters	1166	4.03	.99	1097	3.81	.98	29.78***	54935***
30 Organising agendas and itineraries for special days or events	1164	3.87	.92	1095	3.48	.94	103.21***	48521***

*** = significant at p <.001, ** = significant at p < .005, * = significant at p < .05

Although there were significant differences between Assistant Principals and Head Teachers, the profiles of activities within the role of *Organising people* were similar. The more prevalent activities for both groups were 'Organising rosters' (item 02) and organising agendas or itineraries. The mean for item 09 was the lowest of all means for any group. A look at the frequencies revealed that almost a quarter of respondents indicated they undertook this task rarely or not at all.

Other possible middle leadership roles

The survey required participants to list any tasks, roles or duties that they felt had not been addressed by the previous 36 items. This produced a great deal of information, which was content-analysed for themes and sub-themes. A sample size of 309 was determined, however analysis was paused after the 253rd participant's comment because no more new themes had emerged.

Many of these comments were further examples of tasks relating to the existing role categories. Some of these could potentially be used as new items for a revised MLRQ-SE, as they were prominent themes and added dimensionality to the given related category. Some examples of these kinds of items for *Student-centred* and *Administration*, for example, are listed in Table 17 below.

Table 17: Additional statements describing leadership roles

Role category	Statements from Item 37
Student-centred	- Head of Student Leadership Team and SRC - Supervision of students who are picked up late from school - Looking after student welfare - Mentoring students
Administration	- Creating class lists for every cohort - Budget for faculty costs - Monitoring assessment and reporting, ensuring the maintenance and adherence to current policies and procedures - Monitoring and implementing HSC documentation for practical submissions

Five potential additional middle leadership roles were suggested from the data. A large number of participants referred to an 'External liaison' role. This was indeed the most popular theme listed by participants as a possible additional role. Statements referring to a 'Supporting staff wellbeing' role comprised the next-largest theme in the data. A 'Parent liaison' role, with a similar number of mentions to 'Staff wellbeing' emerged. This was distinct from references to parents within the statistically derived *Student-centred* role (see Item 31) in that the statements suggested parent education activities, involvement with P&C, and other interactions with parents unrelated to student behaviour or academic issues.

References to a 'Leading extra-curricular' role were also a substantial theme in the data. The other potential category was 'Relieving higher duty'. Table 18 provides examples of activities related to these possible additional roles.

Table 18: Examples of possible additional roles

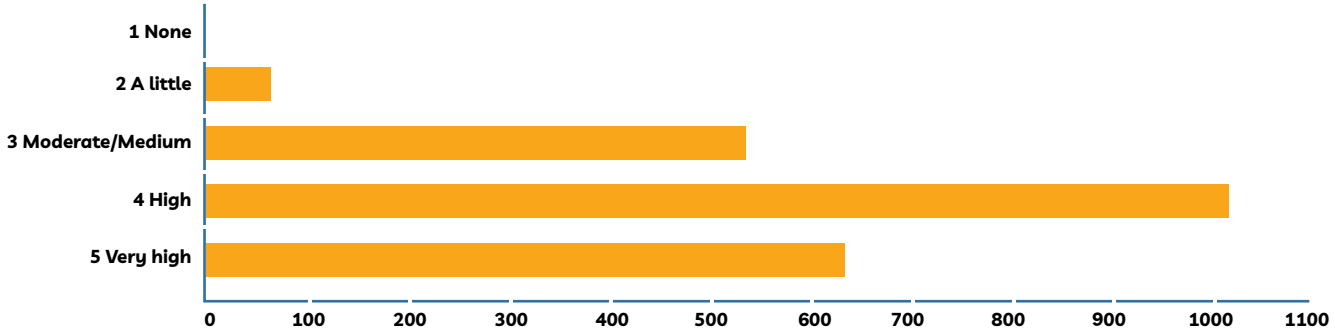
Possible roles	n	%	Sample statements from Item 37
External liaison	46	18	- working with outside agencies - interaction with regional offices -building relationships with community organisations
Supporting staff wellbeing	19	8	- staff wellbeing - welfare of staff - manage Staff mental health in relation to stress
Parent liaison	18	7	- involvement in P&C - dealing with parent complaints - host parent information sessions
Leading extra-curricular	15	6	- coaching sport - running extra-curricular activities - extra- curricular dance groups that run outside school hours
Relieving higher duty	10	4	- relieving for the Principal frequently - relieve as Deputy Principal - relieving in higher positions

N = 252 total respondents, n = number of participants who referred to role

Research Question 3: What perceived impacts are middle leaders having on student learning?

While research has linked school leadership to student learning outcomes (e.g., Dinham, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), there is limited direct evidence of middle leaders' practices improving student learning (Bennett et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2019; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). There is an argument that middle leaders who exercise their leadership close to where learning happens, the classroom, have the greatest potential of all school leaders to improve student learning and attainment (Collinson 2012; Grootenboer, et al., 2015). Results from the survey (Figure 8) show that approximately 75% of the middle leaders perceived they had made a high to very high direct contribution to improving student learning. Conversely, 25% of the middle leaders perceived they had made a 'little to moderate' contribution to student learning. It is possible that middle leaders' perceived contributions to student learning were influenced by their roles and responsibilities within their schools. For example, the school middle leader who leads school welfare may consider their impact on student academic outcomes more broadly.

Figure 8: Survey data on direct contribution to student learning



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Direct contribution to student learning	1.00	5.00	3.99	0.80	0.64	2,258

Activities middle leaders perceive as directly impacting student learning

While school middle leaders' work is diverse, ranging from routine school administrative tasks (timetabling, subject offerings) to leading strategic school improvement initiatives (Bennett et. al., 2007; De Nobile & Ridden 2014; Harris, et al., 2019), there is limited understanding of the activities middle leaders perceive as directly impacting student learning. In this survey, school middle leaders were asked to list activities they had developed and led in their schools which they perceived had impacted student learning. Analysis of the 318 sample responses revealed four activities perceived to impact student learning. Table 19 provides the activity, the percentage of middle leaders who reported the activity, examples of the activity and associated quotes.

Middle leaders in this study perceived developing and leading school academic programs as the most important activity that impacted student learning, followed by developing colleagues through professional learning, mentoring and collaboration. These activities are focused on school improvement, supporting recent research suggesting school middle leaders' work is becoming more orientated towards educational development at the school level (Grootenboer et al., 2015; Lipscombe et al., 2019c). Middle leaders' active engagement in student welfare at the school level is of similar importance, while middle leaders are noted as having an important role in student welfare issues, problem behaviour and academic choices at the individual level (Wise & Bennett, 2003; Dinham, 2007). The data suggests middle leaders are leading whole school welfare and well-being programs. This was also identified in the additional roles analysis discussed in *Research Question 2*.

Table 19: Activities led by middle leaders to directly impact student learning

Activity	Examples programs	Example of open-ended response
Leading & implementing academic programs 40%	Literacy & Numeracy ALARM EAL/D Online learning platform Synthetic phonics & writing approaches	Improved programs, improved assessment task format and delivery, introduced GAT into the school, leading current change of syllabus delivery for Year 7 students, mathematics online programs, introduced spelling competition, leading student program to introduce stargazing community event *(Head of Mathematics, Transition Coordinator)*
Developing colleagues through professional learning, mentoring and collaboration 39%	Professional Learning: Quality Teaching Rounds Visible Learning New pedagogies Formative Assessment Learning progressions	Implemented an agile leadership program that is helping the school executive to refine and target our professional learning. I have led the implementation of professional learning (PL) around the learning progressions and how to improve best practice in numeracy *(Assistant Principal)*
	Mentoring: Early career Co-teaching Classroom observation	Implemented an agile leadership program that is helping the school executive to refine and target our professional learning. I have led the implementation of professional learning (PL) around the learning progressions and how to improve best practice in numeracy *(Assistant Principal)* I have created procedures around program and assessment compliance, as well as quality assurance and evaluation processes that have been implemented across the school. I have led differentiation professional learning and assisted teachers across the school to differentiate in programs and reactively in the classroom. I have delivered PL on assessment design – formative assessment and summative assessment – and assessment and reporting has changed as a consequence. I have led a focus on pedagogy improvement through an action learning research project, with some great examples of student improvement. I have embedded explicit grammar-focused writing strategies into the Stage 6 English programs. I am getting there with the Stage 4/5 programs and across the school, but this is a real work in progress. There are many other things that I can't think of right now, but I think the above covers a fair amount. *(Head Teacher Teaching & Learning)*
Leading & implementing General School Programs 20%	Sporting events/ competitions Creative Arts Events Transition Programs Special school days (STEM, Multicultural) Work experience programs Parent Events Student leadership programs	Establishment and coordination of distance education, coordination of work skill courses such as white card first aid and RSA *(Assistant Principal)*

Table 19: Activities led by middle leaders to directly impact student learning *continued*

Wellbeing & welfare programs or initiatives 18%	Whole school wellbeing programs & frameworks Positive Behaviour for learning Peer support Behaviour management plans, Equity & inclusion Boys at risk Positive mindset and social skills.	As leader of Wellbeing I have a range or programs that I have implemented to help provide basic needs for students so they are ready to learn. I have also implemented skills programs that have assisted in student development and self-confidence, which is then taken back to the class room. I have worked in classrooms and with teachers in the area of mathematics and English to improve practice and have seen positive results in student data. *(Assistant Principal)*

How middle leaders know they directly impact student learning

Research suggests that middle leaders directly impact fellow teachers' practices (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, Hardy, and Ronnerman, 2019) and indirectly impact student learning (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). The survey examined how middle leaders knew they directly impacted student learning. Analysis of 314 random middle leaders' responses showed two main ways middle leaders knew they directly impacted students learning:

1. Feedback (52%)
2. Data (44%)

Feedback

Middle leaders identified feedback from students (23%), teachers (22%) and parents (7%), with formal feedback through surveys and focus groups and informal feedback through collaborating with teachers and students. For example:

> I use student focus groups, student surveys and individual feedback from students and teachers re adjustments for learning and students (***Head Teacher Student Wellbeing***)

Interestingly, in their responses to another question described in Research Question 5, over 50% of middle leaders explained that they engaged in peer feedback infrequently, suggesting that while peer feedback is being used, it is not common practice.

Data

The collection and analysis of data was cited by 44% of middle leaders' responses as a means of monitoring the impact of middle leadership on student learning. There were three common distinct data sets cited by middle leaders:

1. Internal school data 24% (e.g., school assessments, student work samples, data walls)
2. External standardised testing data 10% (e.g., NAPLAN, HSC, SCOUT, PLAN2 etc.)
3. Student Welfare data 10% (e.g., attendance, subject selection, wellbeing data).

Evident from the middle leader responses was that they did not rely on one source of evidence to understand their impact and instead often used qualitative and quantitative data, internal and external school data, and subjective and objective evidence, as methods to understand their impacts. Data was often cited by middle leaders as a tool to support discussions and collaborations with teacher colleagues and students to develop understanding and future planning for student learning. For example:

> Through working with stage and whole school teams to look at data walls and assess impact of programs by triangulating data, being able to see evidence of improvement through work samples, student and peer reflections and teacher observed annotations in guided reading logs and programs as well as diagnostic tasks and assessments such as NAPLAN (***Assistant Principal***)

Additionally, from the survey data, 10% of middle leaders in the sample cited professional judgements and anecdotal evidence as ways of gauging their impact, with 2% of respondents stating that assessing their individual impact on student learning was difficult. For example:

> This is hard to justify as I don't directly teach all students, however, anecdotally, I am certain that I am responsible for the high quality of teaching that happens in my stage (***Assistant Principal K-2***)

What constrains middle leaders from directly impacting student learning?

There is much research on the challenges and complexities of middle leadership (Basset & Shaw, 2018) with time constraints, increased responsibilities, varied support from teacher colleagues and school leaders, and lack of role clarity cited in the literature (De Nobile, 2018a; Duignan, 2012; Gurr, 2019). In response to this question (319 responses analysed), the research found middle leaders identified five main constraints:

1. Administrative requirements
2. Workload
3. Time
4. Dealing with student welfare issues
5. School leadership
6. Teacher colleagues.

Administration Requirements

While the data showed strategic school activities developed and led by middle leaders was perceived to positively impact student learning, 73% of middle leaders reported that administration requirements took them away from this work. Middle leaders' comments on administration requirements primarily focused on the increased compliance, accountability and monitoring measures required by the school and external educational authorities. For example,

> I am in a position to make significant positive changes to student learning in my school. I have already done this within my faculty and am now working closely with other teachers and faculties to develop their capacities to promote student learning gains. Unfortunately, the increase in trivial admin tasks or data collection tasks takes away from my ability to plan my own lessons or effectively support my team in developing their own capacity to promote student learning gains. Middle leadership roles have drifted away from the core business of schools – teaching and learning (***Head Teacher Science & TAS***).

Workload

Congruent with reports of increased administration requirements, 53% of middle leaders said that their workloads had too many roles and responsibilities and a lack of clarity on expectations. The results of the survey align with previous research investigating middle leaders' workloads and the wide-ranging roles and responsibilities of middle leaders (Bennett et al., 2003; De Nobile, 2018a).

> Students' learning can be greatly impacted by a teacher's workload and wellbeing. The greatest impact on this comes from the many extra tasks required. e.g. planning excursions/risk assessments/ maintaining professional learning records/entering data/writing ILP/attending meetings/ documenting all discussions & TIME (***Assistant Principal***).

Time

Aligned with workload, middle leaders discussed the lack of time to do their jobs, with 40% of middle leaders citing time as a constraint. The issue of middle leaders balancing the time required to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in regard to teaching with other aspects of work has been identified as a major issue in the literature (De Nobile, 2018a).

> Teaching a class full time as well as trying to develop and lead new initiatives within the school means that there is never enough time to complete all that I want to achieve (***Assistant Principal***).

Student Welfare and Behaviour

Another constraint reported by 34% of the middle leader sample was the time required to deal with student behaviour and wellbeing issues, and working with parents, as well as the complexity of these issues. Wise and Bennett (2003) reported that middle leaders spend a significant amount of their time working with individual students on issues ranging from personal concerns to behaviour problems.

> Administrative duties usually take up most of my time which means time away from planning lessons and supporting my team in achieving better student outcomes. Welfare/social issues and supporting parents also take up time. Again, this is time taken away from being able to improve student learning (***Head Teacher Secondary Studies***).

School Leadership

Thirty per cent of middle leaders in the sample identified senior school leadership as a constraint. Comments centred on a lack of school leadership vision, support and collaboration, with school leaders perceived as not being sufficiently focused on teaching and learning. Other constraints identified by middle leaders were senior school leaders who delegated their duties to middle leaders and school leaders with limited leadership experience.

> A lack of instructional leadership in the senior executive. I believe that Principals and Deputies need to be authentic instructional leaders with student learning at the heart of any school decision-making. This is not always the case. They are often managers and administrators who have lost their focus on learning. This has an impact on leading any improvement in learning due to competing agendas (***Assistant Principal***).

Teacher Colleagues

One-quarter of the middle leader sample identified teacher colleagues as a constraint. Teachers who lacked experience, commitment and/ or underperformed, teacher workload/ stress and high casualisation of the teaching workforce were seen as barriers to middle leaders impacting student learning.

> Too much time dealing with behaviour issues or supporting junior staff with issues they are struggling with. Balancing teaching outside my subject area with supporting and leading the faculty (***Head of Teaching and Learning***)

Additional reflections from middle leaders on how they impacted student learning.

Middle leaders were asked to share any further reflections on how, as middle leaders, they impacted student learning. A sample of 267 middle leader responses were analysed and two major themes were identified:

1. Fifty-five per cent of middle leaders highlighted the need to develop positive respectful relationships with teachers, students, parents and community to positively impact student learning.

> A middle leader's impact is substantial if they are approachable to staff and students, so they guide, facilitate and mentor teaching pedagogy to teachers and are also available to students (***Assistant Principal***).

2. Thirty-five per cent of middle leaders highlighted the importance of modelling excellence in teaching and learning in conjunction with mentoring and collaborating with colleagues to positively impact student learning.

> I believe that leading a team of teachers who feel valued and supported has a direct impact on both student learning and well-being. We work together to create and evaluate programs, celebrate student success and develop meaningful assessment strategies and then moderating these. We also support each other collegially as willing listeners and by offering support or guidance (***Assistant Principal***).

Research Question 4: How are middle leaders collaborating with and influencing others?

To examine more deeply the responsibilities middle leaders enact in schools, we asked open-ended questions about two common middle leading practices reported in middle leader research: collaboration and influence.

Collaboration

While there is not yet consistency in identifying the most effective collaborative structures for school improvement (Reeves, Run & Chung, 2017), there is evidence to suggest that middle leaders are typically positioned within school structures that require them to work 'up to senior leaders' while simultaneously working 'across and down' with teachers as colleagues (Bassett, 2016). This space has certain affordances for middle leaders to work collaboratively, such as a middle leader's ability to empathise with and understand the development from within their school site by leading innovation and school priorities through collaborative practices (Grootenboer, 2018; Lipscombe et al., 2019a).

The survey examined the collaborative practices of middle leaders. Fifty-seven per cent (57%) of survey participants responded. The analysis of the survey data revealed middle leaders collaborate with their colleagues in very different ways, including teaching team collaboration (e.g. stage, faculty), executive and leadership collaboration, formalised approaches to collaboration (e.g. Quality Teaching Rounds) and co-teaching.

Assistant Principals in the sample typically appear to have worked more in teaching teams than Head Teachers. Data analysis showed that only 26% of middle leaders who reported team-based collaboration were Head Teachers from secondary schools. Stage meetings, faculty meetings and cross teams (e.g. cross-faculty teams) were the most commonly reported forms of teacher teamwork. Assistant Principals appeared to have worked with more formalised collaborative practices when working in teams than Head Teachers, with many reporting on detailed and specific school structures that supported team collaboration. Table 20 overviews the most common team structures from the data analysis and includes examples of participants' responses.

Table 20: Examples of team collaboration

Collaborative Team Structures	Examples of participants' responses
Stage Meetings	- Teacher learning communities are embedded in our professional learning schedule. Teachers work in stage teams to reflect on and discuss formative assessment strategies. They create action plans and then during a three-week period implement their plans and are observed by someone in their group and receive feedback. The group then gets together and reflects on their plans and the cycle continues *(Assistant Principal)*
Faculty Meetings	- Getting faculty members to work together with developing programs *(Head Teacher, Mathematics)* - Our school works in faculty teams *(Head Teacher, Science)*
Cross Curriculum/ Faculty	- Working collaboratively with other stages, especially at transition from one class to the next *(Assistant Principal)* - Participate in cross faculty teams to develop pedagogy/drive change/ introduce new initiatives *(Head Teacher, TAS)*

Executive or leadership meetings were the second-most frequent response when participants were asked to describe the collaborative practices of middle leaders. Most commonly, executive leadership meetings were focused on whole school change and decision-making, and collegial support and reflection. This suggests that middle leaders contribute beyond their designated teams to whole school strategy work. This data supports the data on middle leader roles reported in Research Question 2, where leading learning and change was identified as one of the seven middle leader roles.

Other responses regarding collaborative structures, although less commonly cited, referred to specific collaborative approaches that use student learning data to inform collaborative practices such as Quality Teaching Rounds, Spirals of Inquiry and Learning Sprints. Only 3% of responses in the sample cited co-teaching or teaching together in the same classroom as a collaborative practice. This is consistent with the latest OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey data (OECD, 2020) that reported Australia was below the average in team teaching.

Influence

Middle leaders are often reported as having significant roles in school improvement through their ability to influence students, colleagues and the community. Leithwood (2016) notes the critical influence that middle leading practices can have and explains that distributing leading practice to the middle is likely to have greater influence on students than practices carried out only at the school level. However, limited levels of power or authority are often reported as constraints on middle leaders' ability to influence their colleagues (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Leithwood, 2016). As such, middle leaders often influence colleagues in supportive and collegial ways (Lipscombe et al., 2019a).

In this survey, middle leaders were asked to describe their spheres of influence. Fifty-six per cent responded, and from the data analysed, two common lines of thought were reported:

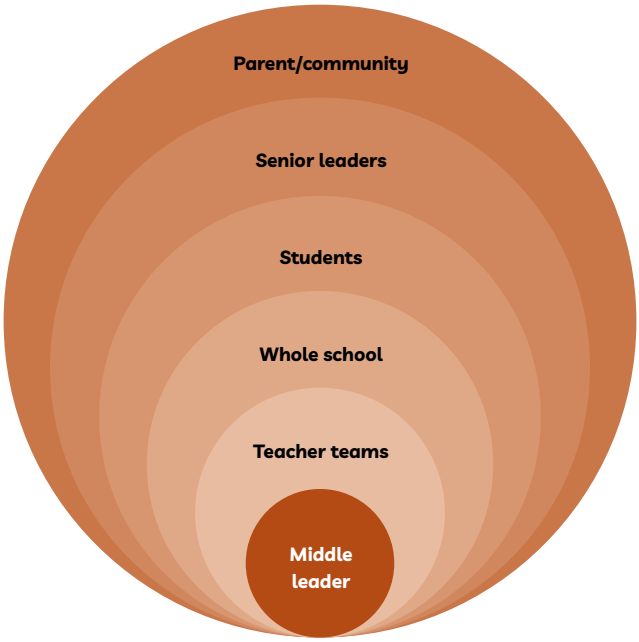
1. Spheres of influence

2. Factors that constrain influencing practices.

Spheres of Influence

Middle leaders in the sample reported various spheres of influence in their schools. Figure 9 overviews the most common spheres of influence reported by the sample group in order of frequency (from inner to outer).

Figure 9: Spheres of middle leading influence



The most commonly reported sphere of influence was teacher teams. These were typically Stage, faculty and cross-faculty teams. Whole school influence was also commonly reported by middle leaders, particularly as many middle leaders have whole school responsibilities and often are called on to perform relieving deputy and principal roles. Working closely with colleagues to influence student learning, although less cited than teacher teams and whole school influence, was also regularly reported, especially in relation to student wellbeing and welfare. However, it should be noted that the work of middle leader influence in teams and whole school focus areas is often associated with student learning, and as such it could be argued that they are influencing student learning from all of the levels shown in Figure 9. Less frequently cited were spheres of influence associated with senior leaders and parents and communities.

Importantly, many middle leaders reported multiple places of influence as they led multiple areas in the school. This is consistent with research on middle leadership and distributed leadership where expertise and authority are distributed across practices in the school (Bush & Glover, 2014; Spillane, 2006). Such multiple roles and responsibilities provide opportunities for multidimensional influence through various collaborative approaches in which middle leaders can influence purposeful action to develop solutions to local issues in local contexts (Lipscombe et al., 2019b). For example:

> Depends on what 'hat' I have on. I directly influence my team with their day-to-day practice, students in my year, but also staff depending on what area of practice I am leading (e.g. ICT and Gifted & Talented) (***Assistant Principal***).

> Initially my greater sphere of influence would be the staff members of the faculty. I also believe that my middle executive colleagues would be included as we support each other throughout the constant turbulence and changes that seem to come about every day. My influence is limited in regards to the senior executive but I believe that my opinion is respected but at times may hold no influence. I also believe that I both directly and indirectly hold the students in my sphere of influence. Directly, they respect me and my role and often heed my advice. Indirectly my creation of a stable and positive faculty as well as my staff's observance of my interactions with students, mean that my influence stems through them to their students as well (***Head Teacher, Mathematics***).

Factors that constrain influencing practices

Factors that hindered their perceived influence included opposing or low priority viewpoints, lack of respect and/or power, and increased system demands. These themes are similar to those cited in the *Research Question 3* where constraints that influence middle leaders directly impacting student learning include school leadership and workload. Table 21 describes these constraints on influence with examples from participants in the sample.

Table 21: Constraints impacting on middle leaders' influence

Constraints	Examples of participants' responses
Opposing or low priority viewpoints	I do not feel that I actually have one. I tend to think independently and am willing to voice my views, which can be construed as being antithetical to the interests of the school direction *(Head Teacher)* Limited. Support Unit continues to be seen by too many staff as a last resort when a student cannot cope in mainstream/ something to be avoided at all costs/ low priority *(Head Teacher, Special Education)*
Lack of respect/ authority/ experience	I feel like, although I take on a lot of roles, my sphere of influence is limited as I don't have the higher title of DP etc. *(Head Teacher, HSIE and Music)* Being new at my school, I am still establishing my 'sphere of influence'…I feel that I am very much at the bottom of the pecking order within the executive team *(Assistant Principal)*
Increased system demands	This has changed as DoE schools become more accountable and more admin based. My staff do not like this and are reluctant to engage in this process and have slid backwards. If I do the work and ask them to try something some will do it, however, their level of personal innovation has decreased. I have increased influence among younger staff who are seeing the problems with how we have been teaching and want to change *(Head Teacher, Science)*

Research Question 5: What are the professional needs and preferences of formal middle leaders?

It has been suggested that middle leaders are typically recruited to their roles as a result of quality teaching and learning (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016) instead of leadership experience, and many middle leaders therefore have limited professional learning experiences in leadership development (Bassett, 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Ng & Chan, 2014). This survey therefore sought to examine the professional learning experiences of middle leaders and their current professional learning needs.

Middle leader professional learning experiences

The professional learning experiences of middle leaders were examined, with 1607 middle leaders responding to this item. Data analysis of the sample revealed nearly a third of middle leaders reported limited to no professional learning experience in leadership. Of those who had experience in leadership professional learning, this learning commonly occurred through formal leadership programs, leadership networks, and site-based experiences. Only five per cent (5%) of middle leaders reported postgraduate studies in educational leadership as professional learning. This section discusses four significant themes reported in order of frequency:

1. Formal professional learning in leadership
2. Professional learning focused on teaching and learning
3. Limited leadership professional learning
4. School-based apprenticeship model.

Formal professional learning in leadership

Scholars involved in middle leadership research continue to argue for increased opportunities for middle leaders to access quality leadership development prior to and during their middle leadership appointments (Ng & Chen, 2014; Thorpe et al., 2019). In this survey, 43% of participants of the sample analysis reported having formal professional learning experiences in educational leadership. Formal professional learning experiences are defined as organised development opportunities in educational leadership. These learning experiences varied widely. They included leadership courses from the NSW DoE and external professional learning such as postgraduate degrees and leadership training from other organisations. Table 22 overviews, in order of frequency, the top six formal leadership professional learning opportunities identified from the data analysis.

Table 22: Formal professional learning in leadership

Order of frequency	Leadership Professional Learning
1	NSW DoE Assistant Principal and Head Teacher induction programs
2	Leadership network meetings
3	NSW DoE leadership courses (e.g., Leadership Development Initiative, Aspiring Principals Leadership Program)
4	Leadership courses from the NSW principal associations (e.g., Art of Leadership)
5	External leadership courses
6	Postgraduate studies in leadership

Leadership programs and courses designed and delivered by the NSW DoE were identified as the leadership professional learning programs most frequently undertaken by middle leaders. The Head Teacher and Assistant Principal induction programs were the most frequently cited form of middle leadership preparation and development, followed by organised leadership network meetings for middle and executive leaders to engage in ongoing professional learning. External professional learning in leadership courses were also frequently cited. They included the Art of Leadership and the Principal Credential delivered by the NSW Primary Principal Association (PPA). Five per cent of respondents reported having undertaken postgraduate studies in leadership.

Professional learning focused on teaching and learning

Credibility in teaching and learning from colleagues and leaders is often cited as critical to leadership effectiveness (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This is because middle leaders are required to facilitate the provision of quality professional learning to teachers in teaching and learning (Grootenboer, 2018) as well as enhance teaching practices. In this survey, 42% of the sample identified that they had attended professional learning focused on teaching and learning. Professional learning was generally curriculum specific (e.g., science), focused on general teaching and learning (e.g., assessment) or a specific program or initiative (e.g., L3 Language Learning and Literacy). Table 23 overviews examples of these three topics of professional learning.

Table 23: Examples of professional learning experiences in teaching and learning

Professional Learning in Teaching & Learning	Examples from participants' responses
Curriculum focused	- Regular attendance at science teaching conferences *(Head Teacher, Science)* - Subject specific professional development courses *(Head Teacher, TAS)*
General teaching & learning	- Thinking and Learning conferences, Literacy and Numeracy Progressions, Year 7 Best Start PL, Formative Assessment workshops *(Head Teacher, English)* - Visible Learning Conference, various courses that impact my roles e.g. literacy (e.g. coach's course for Seven Steps to Writing) *(Assistant Principal)*
Programs/ Initiatives	- I have been trained in Reading Recovery pedagogy and practised this role for 3 years. I am an L3 (Language Learning and Literacy) lead trainer for Kindergarten and Stage 1. *(Assistant Principal Instructional Leader)* - High Possibility Classrooms PL in collaboration with University of Technology Sydney to implement high quality programs in the area of Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics (STEAM) *(Assistant Principal)*

Limited to no professional learning in leadership

Some research studies have argued there is a paucity of leadership development training for middle leaders and it is perhaps more troubling that some middle leaders also fail to see the need for prior leadership development (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). In this survey, 33% of responses to the sample analysed identified limited to no formal professional learning in leadership. Factors impacting on leadership professional learning included a lack of opportunities, financial resources and senior leadership support.

Some middle leaders explained there were limited opportunities for them to engage in professional learning. For example: "not much professional development has been offered specific to the role – induction ended before I was formally appointed to the role" *(Head Teacher HSIE)*. Others shared that their geographical location and school size limited their access to leadership professional learning. This was exemplified by one participant who said: "There are not many available courses to address becoming an AP in a small school" *(Assistant Principal)*. Similarly, some explained that a lack of resources limited their professional learning opportunities:

> Nil, it really doesn't exist or is too expensive. A budget of $1000 for PD, when it costs $550 just for a casual, let alone paying for course, travel and incidentals. Constantly being told that online, and out of hours training should be accessed (***Head Teacher, HSIE***).

Others reported a lack of leadership support for professional learning, *for example*,

> I believe that my Principal overlooks my ability to contribute to the school, beyond my faculty (***Assistant principal***).

School-based apprenticeship model

Some researchers have found that leadership development is at times detrimental to the specific and individual needs of leaders (Lovett, Dempster, & Fluckiger, 2015). As such, there is a call for more localised professional learning that is focused on the unique roles, responsibilities and contexts of particular middle leaders (Bassett & Shaw, 2017; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Results from this survey indicated two forms of site-based development: peer feedback and 'on-the-job' experiences.

The survey invited participants to report on the frequency of feedback from colleagues on their middle leadership practices as a form of site-based professional learning. A total of 2128 participants responded to this item, and 49% said they sought feedback frequently or very frequently. However, 51% reported only seeking feedback sometimes, rarely or never, indicating that many middle leaders are not engaged in regular feedback as part of their professional learning (Table 24).

Table 24: Percentage of responses to feedback by colleagues

Feedback sought by colleagues on middle leadership	Percentage
Never	1%
Rarely	10%
Sometimes	40%
Frequently	38%
Very Frequently	11%

On-the-job learning was also identified as an important form of leadership professional development. In their responses to the open-ended questions, 14% of participants discussed these site-based professional learning experiences. They were identified as important and significant opportunities for leadership development. For example, one Head Teacher explained her growth in leadership that resulted from school-based experience:

> Nothing could have prepared me for my current role. Building a new school, which wants to challenge everything about education, well … nothing can prepare you for that! But I have learnt along the way by being thrown into it all and whilst overwhelming and scary, I feel I've learnt more in this year than I did in ten years at my previous [school] (***Head Teacher, Secondary Studies***).

Another middle leader explained that relieving in a role provided important leadership experience in middle leadership: "I relieved as Head Teacher over the years when positions were available. This enabled me to work in the roles prior to taking on the position" (*Head Teacher, Home Economics*).

Others explained that the exclusive reliance on site-based experience was due to a lack of other forms of training opportunities. For example, "None. There is practically no leadership training in DoE – I've learnt from peers and on the job" (*Head Teacher*).

Future professional learning needs of middle leaders

With limited to no leadership professional learning being identified as a significant constraint in this research and in other studies (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013), it is important to examine the professional learning needs of middle leaders. Fifty-four per cent (54%) of participants responded to the survey item on professional learning needs. Results from the sample indicated three frequent themes:

1. The difficulty in finding time for professional learning
2. Preferred professional learning approach
3. Preferred learning topics and themes for future professional learning.

Difficulty in findings time for professional learning

Finding time to engage in professional learning development was by far the most commonly identified professional learning need for middle leaders:

> I would like to access job-embedded time to work with other leaders of a similar level, possibly forums, sharing and following another person in their position to see how other schools may do things differently. I would also like time and resources to choose my own professional learning to allow me to pursue passions in education to support my school more fully (***Assistant Principal***).

While the need for dedicated time for leadership professional learning to build their own capacity was commonly highlighted in the responses, more typically cited was the need for time to lead the professional learning of others:

> Time is the biggest barrier. If middle leaders were afforded the time to put some of the things they have had from professional learning into practice, there would be greater impact. e.g. coaching and mentoring opportunities, time to provide curriculum advice for other teachers
> (***Assistant Principal***).

Respondents explained that the professional learning of others was a significant responsibility of their position, but their ability to fulfil this responsibility was limited. The most common reason for this was a lack of time due to the hours they had to devote to paperwork and administration:

> I need more time to fulfil the full gamut of responsibilities expected of me in this situation. While, of course, I can continue to hone my ability to manage staff and craft collaborative efforts to build innovative learning programs for students … changing curriculum, new mandatory policies and procedures and the increasingly weighty demands of data collection, analysis and justification (and the planning that must come from this to maintain the expected cycle) all come with a heavy time commitment to be done well (***Head Teacher, English/History***).

Time allocation for professional learning of self and others across schools and middle leadership positions was also identified as a major concern. This appeared to be most significant for Assistant Principals, for whom teaching in class full-time or near full-time is common. For example:

> Some schools release their executive off class for a day a week or a fortnight and some schools such as mine, don't release the middle leaders off class, however, we have the same workload. There needs to be a reform of release time for middle leaders (***Assistant Principal***).

Lack of time, in combination with an increased workload, was identified by many as having a significant impact on their professional and personal lives and their health and wellbeing:

> I love my job because I love my school and its students. I work long hours, and this does negatively impact on my family. They complain that they never see me and that I am always doing schoolwork (***Head Teacher***).

> I think middle managers are going to experience significant burnout if the current situation of time constraints are not addressed (***Head Teacher, TAS, Visual Arts & Music***).

Preferred professional learning approach

The type of professional learning middle leaders would like to engage in was also examined. Mentoring by a senior leader, networking with other middle leaders and formal leadership programs were the preferred professional learning types identified.

Mentoring, both inside and outside the school setting, was the most popular type of professional learning middle leaders identified. Some responses were based on prior experiences, for example:

> The best professional development was with my supervising deputy. She mentored me through day-to-day issues and helped me to strategically plan for better faculty outcomes (***Head Teacher***).

Others discussed their preference for leadership mentoring, for example, "working side by side or mentoring in another school with someone in the same role as mine would interest me" (*Assistant Principal*). Interestingly, some middle leaders said that their current role included coaching and mentoring other members of staff, however, they were not afforded the same opportunities. For example:

> I spoke recently with the exec team as I feel that I am responsible for leaning, mentoring and working with my 6 teachers on my team but I am without the same support for myself. I have asked that next year the DP is the clear mentor for the APs and that we have time fortnightly to sit and meet with her to discuss things that we are needing help with (***Assistant Principal***).

Networking with other middle leaders was also a common form of professional learning referred to by the middle leaders. Some identified the need for networking as a result of the isolating role of middle leader, while others explained the importance of networking to share resources. Some said networking was beneficial but was no longer implemented frequently. Others discussed the importance of networking being organised at a system level instead of relying on individual middle leaders to organise:

> Networks support middle leadership. To function, networks need support through funding and scheduled, regular opportunities to meet. Currently these opportunities are totally reliant on middle leaders to operate and facilitate. This model does not work. We need the Department of Education to facilitate these opportunities and support staff to attend and contribute (***Head Teacher***).

Formal programs in educational leadership were identified as an important professional learning need. Examples of formal programs included postgraduate educational leadership, for example, "I would like further study to achieve a Masters of Educational Leadership degree at university" (*Head Teacher*), as well as other leadership programs run by the DoE and external organisations:

> I really enjoyed the academic rigor of my Masters. The connection with research and the opportunity to connect it to my practice was brilliant. What I would value is further learning of this nature, without having to undertake it in a tertiary context (***Assistant Principal***).

Preferred learning themes for future professional learning

Four common themes were identified as important for middle leaders' professional learning needs:

1. Leadership of teaching and learning
2. Managing conflict
3. Staff performance
4. Administration.

Being credible as a leader in teaching and learning requires a high level of professional competence and knowledge (Robinson, 2006). The most frequently preferred professional learning topic from the sample analysed was the leadership of teaching and learning. The focus of the professional learning was often associated with the middle leaders' roles and responsibilities in the school. This included technology. For example: "Technology is changing constantly, providing new and better ways of doing business and it is difficult to keep up, and training would be delightful" *(Head Teacher)*.

Engaging in professional learning in complex areas such as managing conflict and staff performance were also identified as a significant professional learning need. Some middle leaders highlighted the complex responsibility of managing staff performance and their inexperience in this area:

> The key areas [where] I think Head Teachers need support in terms of professional learning would be in having difficult conversations and staff management. Teaching quality is a given but dealing with difficult staff is hard and complex and under resourced (***Head Teacher HSIE***).

Others explained a need to engage in professional learning that supports them to manage conflict with staff and students, for example, "Managing staff – having difficult conversations and addressing issues and managing behaviour – getting to the bottom of student stories with who is lying etc." (*Assistant Principal*).

Similarly, others discussed managing difficult parents and the community, stating "Dealing with difficult conversations with parents, building and maintaining community and staff cohesion" (***Assistant Principal***).

Professional learning in administrative areas was also cited as a professional learning need. This was predominantly focused on financial management. For example,

> More professional learning around finance would be great. At the moment we spend a lot of time writing purchase requests and are expected to have a handle on purchasing and budgeting like SAMs in schools (***Assistant Principal***).

Other areas included legal matters, record keeping and timetabling.

Research Question 6: What are the leadership trajectories and aspirations of formal middle leaders?

The last section of the survey focused on career aspirations. Participants shared how they became middle leaders in their schools, their future leadership aspirations, and what would inspire them to take on a more senior leadership role in the future. Participants also gave insights into the conditions that would support them to take on a more senior role and aspects of their work that constrained them. A sample of n=316 out of n=1759 responses were analysed in accordance with Table 4 to examine how these respondents became middle leaders in their schools.

The following key themes were derived from the data:

1. Applying for and obtaining a middle leadership role
2. Relieving middle leadership roles
3. Supporting aspiring middle leaders
4. Greater proficiency in role
5. Future aspirations: in middle leading or senior leadership roles
6. Influencers and constraints on taking on senior roles.

Applying for and obtaining a middle leadership role

Participants were asked to 'explain how [they] became a middle leader in [their] school.' The majority (64% of those surveyed in the sample) responded literally to the question, that they became middle leaders through merit selection opportunities and formal interview processes, as all formal middle leaders have been. Other participants responded to the question by sharing the system and school conditions that enabled their formal appointment. A quarter of middle leaders in the sample were given relieving leadership opportunities prior to their formal appointment. A small proportion (3%) shared that they were identified by senior leaders and supported in their formal applications.

Relieving middle leadership roles

Prior to their appointments, a quarter of middle leaders in the sample were in relieving leadership positions. Relieving roles provided middle leaders with on-the-job leadership training. This informal opportunity to 'try' middle leadership forms part of the leadership culture of the DoE. This connects back to the site-based professional learning and on-the-job training discussed in Research Question 5. For example:

> I took on the role of Year Adviser, then filled in for the HT Wellbeing. I took on the role of Student Engagement and then part-time HT Wellbeing for two years. Then went for the position at interview (***Head Teacher Student Wellbeing***).

Supporting aspiring middle leaders

Aspiring middle leaders who had the opportunity to take relieving positions were usually identified and supported. As Irvine and Bundrett (2016) suggest, they are promoted to middle leadership positions as a result of their teaching and learning capabilities. For a small proportion of middle leaders in relieving roles, being promoted to a permanent middle leadership position also led to other professional learning opportunities, such as the Aspiring Leaders course:

> I was identified as an aspiring leader by a previous Principal and given opportunities to relieve in various Assistant Principal roles. Completed Aspiring Leaders course with DET. Applied for my current role at another school and commenced as an Assistant Principal in my sixth year of teaching (***Assistant Principal***).

Data revealed 10% of middle leaders were "identified" by Senior Executive and supported, or "offered opportunities" for middle leading experience. However, some respondents also indicated a lack of support from their senior leaders. Only 1% of participants in middle leadership positions reported "personal aspiration" (*Head Teacher, Languages*) as their motivation for becoming a middle leader.

Greater proficiency in role

The survey also investigated why middle leaders wanted to become middle leaders. Data revealed those who were surveyed wanted to achieve greater proficiency in their roles so that they could support the outcomes of students in their schools. Many participants talked about their ability to identify 'needs' in their schools for improvements in curriculum or welfare. In consideration to career aspirations from the sample analysis, two thirds of respondents sought to continue in their current roles and further develop what they called "curriculum leadership", including the mentoring of other staff. These middle leaders were seeking to create better educational opportunities for students by providing professional learning opportunities for their teams, based in teaching and learning proficiency, which is an area of expertise for middle leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013).

Future aspirations

Respondents were asked what their future aspirations were as school leaders. A sample of n=315 out of n=1745 responses were analysed in accordance with Table 4, omitting non-responses. Forty-four per cent of respondents were Head Teachers and 46% were Assistant Principals, with the remainder in other positions.

Some respondents interpreted and discussed aspirations and future promotion on a leadership trajectory, or continuum, such as the one designed by the NSW DoE SLI. Others were highly satisfied in their current middle leadership roles and sought to improve their leadership practice for the benefit of student outcomes and to support "younger" teachers. Some were "uncertain" about their future and others were "close to retirement age", which aligns with the demographic data from the survey. This tendency for many middle leaders to be nearing the end of their careers means that experienced teachers fill these roles but this may be limiting the selection of younger, able potential middle leaders.

The most frequent responses from the data for Head Teachers and Assistant Principals suggested many middle leaders were content in their roles. For example, "Remain at my current level" (*Head Teacher TAS*), "Continue in my current role" (*Assistant Principal*), "I am happy in my current role" (*Assistant Principal*) and "I love my current role" (*Head Teacher, Science*).

Middle leaders elaborated on the reasons for being content to remain at their current level with a range of positive responses showing how much they enjoyed their roles, as outlined below:

> To have a positive impact on student learning outcomes for all students and build teacher capacity (***Assistant Principal***).

> To be good at the level of Assistant Principal. I don't want to remove myself from the classroom – this is what I came into teaching for, not to fill out papers (***Assistant Principal***).

One-third of middle leaders aspired to be promoted in the future and were clear about their goals. For example:

> To be a Deputy Principal in the next 12 months to two years and then actively pursue a role as a Principal within 5 years after that (***Head Teacher TAS***).

Other middle leaders within the aspiring group were actively seeking senior roles and were having difficulty with the application process or expressed concerns:

> Have been trying to develop a strong application for Deputy Principal jobs, but find it extremely difficult to commit the time required, particularly as the questions change each time, and are often very specific to a narrow function within the school, which I may not have specific examples to easily use (***Head Teacher Creative and Practical Arts***).

Some middle leaders expressed an interest in other roles across external networks:

> None – within the school but within the state I aspire to continue to be part of the executive of the Science Teachers' Association to help develop other teachers and provide professional learning and networking opportunities (***Head of Science and Head of Careers***).

Two per cent of middle leaders expressed no desire for promotion and were also not enjoying all aspects of their middle leadership role. One stated that "the workload is killing me now" *(Head Teacher)*. These responses connect with earlier responses where middle leaders discussed the burdens of increased administrative loads.

Influencers and constraints

A concluding question in the survey asked what would inspire middle leaders to take a senior leadership role within the NSW DoE. This was a logical conclusion in considering leadership progressions for the DoE. However, placing a question asking middle leaders about more senior roles at the end of the survey may have left participants to infer that middle leadership is a rung on the ladder of a career trajectory to senior leadership roles to which they should be aspiring.

Forty-seven per cent of respondents indicated they were interested in taking on senior roles in the future. Additionally, participants provided valuable feedback on the types of professional learning and support pathways they desired for their future careers. This aligns with Cranston's (2009) finding that up to 90% of Australian middle leaders are highly satisfied in their roles, and not all are aspiring to a principal role, and that those who are require targeting and nurturing.

Many expressed a desire for ongoing support in the areas of: professional learning, mentoring, job shadowing and interview processes. Many also wanted time off class teaching to ensure balance and wellbeing.

Others expressed a lack of interest in senior leadership roles due to the significant responsibility of these roles and the stress they believed was associated with these positions. For example, "Principal position appears to have too many stresses" *(Head Teacher Science and Careers)*.

Some respondents said future promotion was dependent on finding opportunities for relieving and finding roles within their region. Family time and work--life balance were also high priorities for these leaders (17%).

> Nothing. Principals have one of the hardest jobs!! I value my marriage and wouldn't want to put that kind of pressure on my relationship. I also have immediate family members unwell, so I wouldn't want to take on a role that would take me even further away from them (***Assistant Principal***).

Seven per cent of middle leaders said that conditions would need to "change" for them to take on a senior role, whilst another 10% stated that "no", "none", or "nothing" would change their mind about becoming a senior leader, or that they were "not sure" what would.

> Nothing – My role is so varied and rewarding – I am satisfied in my leadership role and at this point in my career I am not aspiring to more senior roles" (***Assistant Principal, Support***).

Suggestions for system-wide changes included:

> That the DoE takes seriously the mental health and wellbeing of all staff and students and that all policies and procedures in this area are strictly adhered to (***Assistant Principal***).

> More centralised systems so we had a clear role and list of responsibilities and professional tools to be able to accomplish them (***Head Teacher. History***).

> The ability to use a fair system to performance manage and dismiss staff who are not performing their duties (***Head Teacher VET***).

Some respondents expressed positive feelings about their current middle leadership positions and cited them as reasons for not taking on more senior roles. They had a strong sense of identity in their roles that came from a sense of appreciation for their work. For example, "Being valued for the role I currently undertake" *(Head Teacher, TAS)*.

Part E: Implications for policy and practice: recommendations for consideration

Part of creating a world-class educational system is to consider the system in which leaders operate, and then to identify what is needed to support them to lead effectively within the system. For middle leaders in NSW public schools, the Department provides the overarching system support, and for each middle leader the sub-system is the school in which they work. This is a complex situation, as middle leaders are navigating systems at multiple levels. They are faced with different demands from the Department and their own schools, including the schools' senior leadership. The findings of this study have important implications for the development of middle leaders in NSW public schools both at a system level as well as more locally in individual school sites and communities. The recommendations are based on an understanding that leadership development is contextual and situational. As the Department continues to invest in the development of middle leaders focussed on increasing skills, understanding and practice at system-wide level, at the same time, for middle leaders to enact their roles effectively, they require both system-wide and localised support from leaders in their school.

Three key opportunity areas were identified from the data analysis for consideration of the NSW School Leadership Institute (SLI):

- Advancing a system-wide understanding of formal middle leadership;
- Identifying and supporting aspiring middle leaders;
- Developing system and localised professional learning for current middle leaders that is relevant, differentiated and responsiveness to diversity of needs.

The sections that follow consider each of the opportunity areas illustrated in Figure 1 and provide a detailed discussion on ten recommended strategies for the SLI to consider. Additional to these opportunity areas, it is important to acknowledge that some of the findings from this study highlight important constraints for middle leaders associated with the conditions in which they enact their roles. Issues associated with time, administration and workload were both significant and common themes that emerged from data analysis. These issues are important areas for the Department to understand, consider and respond to. However, providing recommendations about these areas are beyond both the scope of this study as well as the remit of the SLI who commissioned this report. As such, the following implications and recommendations are designed to support the primary purpose of this study: to develop a deeper understanding of middle leadership in order to proactively support the professional learning of this important school leadership position, across NSW public schools.

Figure 1: Recommendations

Advancing an understanding of formal middle leadership

Middle leadership has been, and continues to be, an ambiguous and contested term (Farchi & Tubin, 2019; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). Similar to international research (Heng & Marsh 2009; Larusdottir et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018), our survey results indicate that in the NSW DoE, understandings of the term middle leadership vary and consequently there are different views about which roles are middle leadership roles. This is in part due to the diversity of contexts, titles and responsibilities across school sites in the NSW DoE Given the diversity in NSW school contexts, it is recommended that the SLI consider advancing a system-wide understanding of middle leadership as the term is not well documented in Department policy and practice. As research has demonstrated, for middle leaders to significantly and positively impact student learning it is critical that their work is defined with clarity (Grootenboer, 2018; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). Three key recommendations guide this consideration. The recommendations are derived from the empirical data from this study and are also informed by wider middle leadership and school leadership development research.

Recommendation 1: Develop an operational definition of formal middle leadership in NSW public schools

Developing an operational definition of formal middle leadership in NSW public schools may support middle leaders' work within the NSW DoE and increase their system-wide recognition. Role definition has the potential to enhance the understanding and support that teacher colleagues and school leaders give middle leaders, and may support middle leaders to focus on tasks in specific areas that lead to improved student learning outcomes (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Hirsh & Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2019). In supporting the NSW DoE to define middle leadership in NSW public schools, we suggest the SLI take into account the following questions:

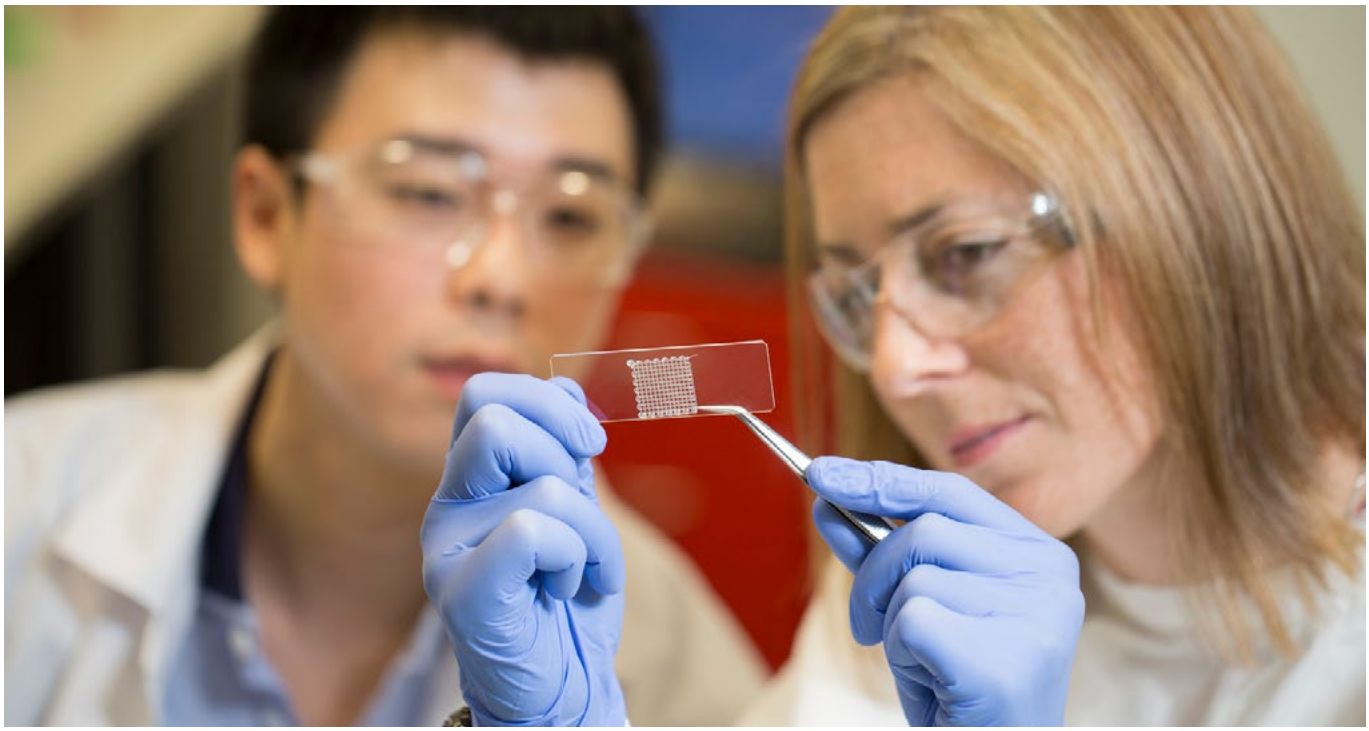
Formality of position: Are middle leaders always in formal positions within schools?

Positionality: Are middle leaders positioned primarily between principals and teachers? Do they work alone or in teams?

Responsibility: Are middle leaders always classroom teachers who also have a formal leadership responsibility?

Focus: Are middle leaders primarily working to contribute to teaching and learning in schools, or do they include other areas such as career guidance, welfare and counselling?

Defining who middle leaders are and what they do in NSW public schools has the capacity to support greater consistency, commitment and understanding of middle leaders' work. It also may help strengthen the applicability and acknowledgment of this important leadership position in Department policy and documents so that middle leaders and principals have greater understanding and clarity about the role within Departmental reform and guidelines.



Recommendation 2: Design a framework and accompanying guidelines for principals to develop localised role descriptions for formal middle leaders in their schools

The space in which middle leaders work in NSW DoE schools is both significant and unique in comparison to other leadership roles. However, we believe that a clearer articulation of middle leaders' roles and responsibilities will help to define their work. A large body of research on middle leadership stresses the difficulties created by ill-defined role descriptions for middle leaders and how this influences their interactions with peers due to a lack of clarity about their status (De Nobile, 2018a). The kind of impact that middle leaders have on schools depends somewhat on role definitions and expectations (Gurr, 2019). Official guidelines that outline what is expected of middle leaders may legitimise their roles (Farchi & Tubin, 2019) and may reduce administrative tasks (Dinham, 2007; Leithwood, 2016). Our survey findings suggest that middle leaders have many responsibilities and tasks in NSW DoE schools, including supervising staff, student-centred tasks, and curriculum-centred tasks identified as the three most common roles, indicating a strong focus on teaching and learning. However, data illustrates middle leaders are also struggling to reconcile and manage the varied and manifold responsibilities placed on them from system level and the school level priorities. As concerning were the reports of negative impacts on their health and their time with families. Many middle leaders reported working lengthy after hours and weekend hours to simply complete their roles. While this was consistent across both Head Teachers and Assistant Principals, it appeared to be more prevalent among Assistant Principals who often have leadership responsibilities and a full-time teaching load without the additional time release Head Teachers have as part of the Teacher Act (*Crown Employees (Teachers in Schools and Related Employees*) Salaries and Conditions Award 2020 (NSW) s 7.1). What is apparent is that middle leaders have many expectations placed upon them, and that their work tasks impact upon their personal lives.

> Being an Assistant Principal as well as a classroom teacher has over the years become quite overwhelming with the additional responsibilities and expectations related to PDP's and the ever expanding leadership role (***Assistant Principa***l).

We propose that the SLI design a framework with guiding principles that support principals to develop localised role descriptions which specify the expectations for middle leaders in NSW public schools. The formulation of guiding principles or a framework, as opposed to set descriptors from the system, will acknowledge the diversity of NSW public school contexts whilst providing clarity about middle leader roles and responsibilities that can then be tailored to school contexts. This approach would provide conditions that support middle leaders to work effectively by aligning the expectations of the Department and the expectations of individual schools. The framework and principles could include:

- Broad guidance from the Department regarding the expectations of middle leaders that are also aligned to, for example current policy and procedures such as the selection criteria for middle leader positions;
- Consideration of different expectations for different middle leaders according to the context in which they work (e.g. position, school type, school size);
- Consideration of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, especially within the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages, where teachers begin to formally lead others. Additionally, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals might be considered, particularly in relation to managing performance (in the professional practice of 'Leading the management of the school') and developing self (in the professional practice of 'Developing self and others') both of which are not well highlighted in HA and Lead Standards (Lipscombe et al., 2020c) but identified as common responsibilities for middle leaders in this survey;
- Professional learning support for principals aimed at developing a greater understanding of the role and importance of middle leaders and how to develop localised role descriptions;
- Based on the above, an expectation that principals will develop clear school-based role descriptions for middle leaders.

The call for clear guidelines and a framework at the departmental level regarding what is expected of middle leaders, and the expectation that principals will use these guidelines and framework to formulate more localised role descriptions, does not mean that we are promoting a reductionist view of middle leadership. We do not advocate an approach that is simplistic or led purely from the top (Bates, 2013). Rather, we recommend a process that supports middle leaders by making the expectations placed on them realistic. This will enable them to lead teaching and learning more effectively in their local school sites, with the support of their principals, the senior leaders in their schools, and other middle leaders.

Recommendation 3: Increased inclusion and support for middle leaders in reform and policy contribution, influence and enactment

The work and challenges middle leaders face in mediating system policy and initiatives in schools has been reported in other middle leadership research (e.g., Bryant, 2019). While the aim of system policy and directives is typically to create uniformity in a specific setting or activity (Olssen et al., 2004), challenges associated with policy implementation at different levels of the system, and variations in approaches are common (Garrett & Bowles, 1997). Arguably, this is because policy and system directives are largely static and not sufficiently responsive to the local contexts in which they must be enacted. According to Ozga (1999) a more nuanced and reciprocal approach to policy realisation is needed in education. Enacting a policy means that practitioners, in this case middle leaders, should influence policy production and actively interpret, negotiate and re-negotiate the complex interchanges which determine what is produced in policy and how it is implemented in practice (Ball et al., 2012). In this way, a greater understanding of how middle leaders can contribute, interpret and enact Department policies and reforms can be achieved.

This study identified that middle leaders play an important role in connecting system and school policies and directives to teaching and learning in classrooms. This was evidenced, for example, in academic program implementation and contributions to whole school strategy work. Middle leaders lead from the core areas of the school, the classroom (Grootenboer, 2018), and are often appointed to leadership roles as a result of their expertise in teaching and learning (Busher et al., 2007). As such, their ability to know what needs to change, and to lead innovation and reform from the bottom up is significant. However, constraints surrounding areas such as unclear expectations, limited resources and influence, and a lack of support were evident in many responses. We suggest that the SLI could provide greater support for middle leaders with the opportunities, knowledge and practices to contribute, influence, and enact with fidelity system policies and directives. This includes, as Hargreaves's (2019) research suggests, a move towards long-term building of collaboration as a context for designing and implementing present and future policies in schools.

Specifically, we suggest considering:

Design: When system policies and directives are designed that are intended to impact teaching and learning in classrooms, middle leaders and school leaders should be included in the co-design of the policy and middle leader responsibilities should be clearly identified, communicated and resourced.

Interpretation: Middle leaders should be provided with professional learning opportunities that enable them to interpret policies and initiatives, and enable them to seek clarification and explore system direction more deeply.

Implementation: Middle leaders should be supported to implement policy with clear evidence informed strategies and resources. This will provide them with support on ways to implement policy and directives at the local level while also providing boundaries around what is expected of middle leaders.

Consultation and Feedback: As middle leaders are at the coal face of policy implementation in classrooms, they should be provided with opportunities to contribute to policy design, implementation and evaluation.

Identification of aspiring middle leaders

Given that the survey data revealed the inexperience of many middle leaders in leadership, and the suggestion from other research in middle leadership that many are employed based on the quality of their teaching (Busher et al., 2007; De Nobile, 2018a), early identification of aspiring middle leaders and opportunities for them to engage in leadership professional learning experiences is recommended. Commitment to professional learning to prepare for future leadership roles can positively shape leadership identity (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003), an area in our survey that many middle leaders disclosed they had difficulties with as they attempted to influence colleagues and "change hats" between leader and colleague.

Recommendation 4: Identify potential middle leaders and help prepare them for future middle leadership roles

Identifying potential middle leaders and supporting them to develop their leadership through professional learning experiences and leadership opportunities could enhance system-wide support for middle leaders in the NSW DoE (Hargreaves, 2019; Lipscombe et al., 2020c). Considering 'potential' strategically from a broad perspective, incorporating different contexts and creating a diverse and substantial pool of potential middle leaders will help the NSW DoE to develop leadership capacity and sustainability.

It is recommended that the SLI consider middle leadership identification as a component of informal teacher leadership development work, where teachers who are effective in carrying out informal leadership tasks are encouraged to engage in professional learning that prepares them for possible future positions as middle leaders. Additionally, professional learning for principals could be introduced to support local school environments to enable aspiring middle leaders to access support and gain experience in teacher leadership, mentoring, and team and school leadership opportunities.

Developing system and localised professional learning for current middle leaders that is relevant, differentiated and responsiveness to diversity of needs.

Researchers such as Spillane and Hopkins (2013) explain that school development initiatives often fail as there is too much dependence on schools and individuals to deliver them. A systems approach to the development of middle leaders should move beyond an exclusive focus on one level of a system, and instead focus on multiple components and how they function together. Typically, there are three main reasons for adopting a system approach to middle leadership support and development. Firstly, an investment in system-wide leadership support and development ensures leaders and their organisations are more effective. Secondly, systemic learning develops shared language embedded in system policies and initiatives so that research and guiding principles can be shared to support work in schools. Lastly, system-wide support and development recognises that schools and individual leaders can make a greater difference if they work together and contribute to the system to share, challenge, and transfer knowledge and capacity within and between schools so that all schools improve and *all* children achieve their potential (Greany, 2017, p. 57). With 1016 of the 2608 middle leaders reporting only 0-5 years of leadership experience, and nearly a third of the 302 open-ended responses analysed highlighting no experience in leadership professional learning, there is an imperative for the NSW DoE to support middle leadership development. What follows includes recommendations derived from the empirical data from this study and associated research in middle leadership and school leadership development.

Recommendations 5: Implement purposeful professional learning strategies to support system, school and individual experiences, contexts and needs

System led professional learning is important but obstacles associated with a lack of relevance to meets the needs of the diversity of educators as learners are common (Tooley & Connally, 2016). System lead leadership development has been criticised as inadequate if it is too focussed at a system level without careful consideration to individual leadership development (Lovett, Dempster, & Fluckiger, 2015). While there is a paucity of research in middle leadership development, studies in effective professional development, leadership development and middle leadership highlight important considerations for purposeful professional learning. These include internal (e.g., localised) *and* external (e.g., system) opportunities (Ng & Chan, 2014) to support relevant learning, job embed professional learning aligned with both school and system priorities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), strategically focussed professional learning so middle leaders can consider both their immediate context as well as their leadership capacity within the broader system (Bassett & Robson, 2017), and negotiated learning opportunities that achieves a balance between system, school and individual needs (Cardno & Bassett, 2015). This study identified a number of divergent middle leader needs and experiences including diverse school context (e.g., rural, remote, metropolitan, primary, secondary, central, SSP), various teacher accreditation levels (from Graduate to Lead), teacher experience (1-40 years), leadership experience (1-16+ years) and preferred professional learning approaches (e.g. mentoring, networking, formal programs).

As part of middle leadership development, and based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the SLI consider targeted professional learning to cater for different groups and needs of middle leaders. This may require at times a decentralisation of professional learning offered to middle leaders, with the SLI ensuring quality assurance to ensure learning is impactful and evidence informed. Regarding differentiated professional learning to cater for middle leader diversity, the SLI may consider the following ideas derived from the study data and additional leadership development research:

- Attention to understanding the diversity of middle leader needs (including school type, experiences and motivations) in the design of system based professional learning. This may include consulting and examining the prior and individual learning needs of middle leaders through, for example, surveys, focus groups, and demographic analysis;
- Negotiated professional learning pathways where middle leaders can, in consultation with their principals, choose varying options and learning opportunities to suit school and individual needs;
- Professional learning that is firmly embedded in context and emphasises authentic middle leadership experiences. This could include experiential learning activities, school-based inquiries and action research, and local networking;
- Alignment of professional learning activities to the requirement of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher accreditation to support development of middle leaders who are motivated to engage with higher levels of accreditation but do not have the resources (e.g. time and appropriate information or other support). For example, this could involve aligning professional learning activities to APST descriptors and supporting annotations of learning activities as part of the state-wide middle leadership programs. With only 3% of middle leaders from this studying accredited at Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher, aligning professional learning to accreditation has the potential to support middle leaders to engage in higher levels of accreditation as part of an integrated professional learning approach.

Recommendation 6: Development and support for the use of evidence informed and student centred teacher collaborative processes as a vehicle to support teacher development and improvement

We know quality teaching makes the greatest different to student learning and that school improvement won't be successful unless teacher development becomes a collective and collaborative enterprise (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Middle leaders are acknowledged as important to the development, implementation and success of teaching and learning development (Grootenboer, 2018). It is, however, important that they assess the impact of a school teaching and learning intervention they have led, through for example, pre- and post-assessment student learning data (Dinham 2007; Grootenboer et al., 2015), to enable decision-making grounded in data, and to facilitate conversations that are based on evidence rather than assumptions (Dixon & Palmer, 2020). This study identified the significant commitment and dedication of middle leaders to work with their colleagues to improve teaching and learning. Specifically, data from the survey indicates that most middle leaders identify a high to very high impact on student learning and are more influential when they work in teams. However, wide-spread use of student data to understand teacher and leader impact as well as the use of co-teaching and peer feedback as a collaborative professional learning strategy was less evident. Effective leadership professional learning has been described as grounded in practice where leaders can work together to analyse practice and use observations connected to professional readings and discussion in professional learning workshops (Darling- Hammond et al., 2007). As such, we suggest an investment is supporting middle leaders to work together with teacher colleagues in collaborative processes to analyse student learning data in order to best understand how to meet student needs, and to engage in continuous and well-resourced co-teaching, peer observation and feedback to evaluate the impact on teaching and leadership.

Recommendation 7: Development and support for personalised and localised induction and mentoring for new formal middle leaders

The increasing responsibilities imposed on school leaders, including middle leaders, and the greater complexity of their roles, highlights the significance for new middle leaders to engage in effective preparation for their role (Bush, 2018). Given that this study identified middle leaders often feel they lack training, credibility and support, an effective induction and mentoring program seems essential. Heck (2003) refers to the dual nature of system and localised induction as professional and organisational socialisation. Professional socialisation, led by the system, includes formal preparation for a role within the system and includes, for example, induction that considers system policies, resources and expectations as well as explores professional identity as a new leader. Organisational socialisation, led by the local school site, involves processes within the context where leadership is enacted. In this way, newly appointed middle leaders are orientated in system expectations and resources for their roles. They also have the opportunity to engage with other newly appointed middle leaders, receive site-based support from their senior school leaders, and importantly, have the opportunity to change their identity, from teacher to middle leader.

Findings of this study suggest that many middle leaders have partaken in system induction programs over the years, which are delivered each year for newly appointed Head Teachers and Assistant Principals. Some, although not many, have also been involved in informal mentoring by senior leaders. Extending a system-wide induction program to include personalised support for local induction and mentoring at the school site is recommended. It is therefore suggested that the SLI design a set of guidelines and resources for principals to utilise to induct and mentor new middle leaders in their school sites. This process should apply to middle leaders who are new to a school, so they can learn and understand the culture and processes required for leading within the school site.

Following induction, a structured mentoring program for new middle leaders who are both new to the school site as well as those who are already teachers within the school who have been newly appointed to a middle leadership position, provides new middle leaders with an opportunity to establish themselves from teacher to formal middle leader. What is known is that mentoring is highly rated by middle leaders (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014) as a method of development for its personal, contextual and flexible approach. Importantly for the SLI it provides support and resources to schools and school leaders to facilitate successful mentor-middle leader mentee programs.

Three important points should be considered as part of this process. Firstly, localised induction and mentoring should be personalised to recognise the homogeneity and applicability of the role rather than a one size fits all process. The focus for mentoring can be negotiated based on needs identified from the unpacking of roles descriptions discussed in the recommendation associated with localised role descriptions. Secondly, induction and mentoring should move beyond administration to instead consider pedagogical leadership and the priorities, strategies, approaches and resources of the school focussed on teaching and learning (Crowther & Boyne, 2016). Lastly, the principal is a critical agent as part of the localised induction process for formal middle leaders not just as the senior leader of the organisation but to authentically care for middle leadership development, thus it is recommended that school principals are supported with leading and implementing school middle leadership induction and mentoring programs.

> "I feel that there is a lack of mentorship and professional development for new head teachers. The expectation of a new head teacher to have the same skills and understanding of the role as a very experienced head teacher is completely unrealistic and highly stressful. I believe new head teachers (appointed for the first time) should undergo extensive professional development to ensure they have at least a sound knowledge and understanding of all of the roles and responsibilities of their new role in the school" ***(Head Teacher)***.

Recommendation 8: Provide opportunities for middle leader networking

Networking in education has been described as the process of personal communication between staff where information and support are shared with certain goals in mind (Blandford, 2006). Collegial learning networks for leaders that provide opportunities for communities of practice and support for collective problem solving is an important aspect of leadership development (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). Our data suggests two direct benefits of networking for middle leaders. These relate to school change and professional development.

Middle leaders who are provided opportunities to collaborate in local networks are able to support system-wide initiatives and foster network-led change. Networking provides a space for middle leaders to share and collaborate on local solutions, stimulates co-construction between schools and makes professional learning localised, ongoing and sustainable (Fullan, 2019; Supovitz, 2014). Survey results indicated that opportunities for middle leaders to meet and connect with other middle leaders would benefit knowledge and skill sharing in relation to a variety of tasks including, data literacy, implementing a new curriculum, planning professional development for teachers, and liaising with feeder schools.

It also provides a space for people to work together through networks of learning, mutual support, shared professional learning and trusting relationships (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Survey results from this study indicated that networking is a preferred and needed professional learning approach for middle leaders, and that when implemented, networking was commonly organised using local resources and management. Networking with other middle leaders was identified as beneficial because it reduced isolation in small schools, enabled the sharing of resources across schools and enabled middle leaders to collaborate to solve local problems.

It is therefore recommended that the SLI consider ways they can resource and support middle leaders by providing them with opportunities to come together in networks with other middle leaders to engage in ongoing professional learning. This may be done as part of a system-wide professional learning program, or as a follow-on to middle leadership induction or resource development (e.g. time, strategies, policies) to support local directorates to self-manage and develop their own middle leadership networks. The implication of this recommendation is that the SLI create meaningful strategic networks for middle leaders through their programs.

Recommendation 9: Professional learning for leadership partnerships

School leadership is distributed. This is not simply a matter of dispersing tasks from principals to formal middle leaders across the school. Rather, it is a partnership and orchestration of the resources within the school community with the common purpose of positively impacting all student learning (Grootenboer, 2018; Harris, 2014). One of the challenges of distributed leadership is reforms and strategies delivered from the system level down to schools often create new leadership responsibilities (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008) that must then be added to the existing leadership structures, resources and practices, raising questions and tensions surrounding distributed leadership interactions. How leadership is distributed and supported is of significance and can result in enhanced or diminished outcomes (Spillane, 2006).

The implication for the NSW DoE is that the SLI work on educating leaders system-wide to genuinely distribute the leading of learning for student outcomes amongst leaders best suited to these positions in schools. Participants in this survey raised principals as both a support and constraint to middle leadership. Middle leaders in this study reported that senior leaders impacted their ability to directly influence student learning, their capacity to influence staff, and development of their leadership capabilities. The significance of support from senior leadership is consistent with findings in previous research (Day & Grice, 2019; Lipscombe, et al., 2019c).

We recommend that the SLI engage in work across two core areas, firstly professional learning to support school leaders to examine how leadership responsibilities and roles are distributed across educators and leaders in the school. Secondly we suggest the SLI invest in professional learning that builds leadership partnerships between principals, middle leaders and other leaders who may not be in formal leadership positions. Strategies to support this work may include:

- Leader development programs and activities that prioritise the collective leadership process and relational abilities of leaders by offering joint programs that bring senior leaders, middle leaders and emerging middle leaders together for mutual learning;
- Professional learning activities that are designed for leaders to examine and strengthen internal leadership, collaboration and teacher teams;
- Professional learning programs and resources that support leaders to both understand and have the capacity to respond effectively to system reforms and initiatives through distributed leadership;
- Professional learning that provides enabling strategies, resources and arrangements that can support middle leaders and teacher leaders to feel supported, credible and influential to develop school improvement.

> I love my school, I love teaching, inside my classroom is the best part of my day. I don't like the way much of our work as teachers is now, more and more administration tick a box bureaucracy. Local Schools Local Decisions has pushed more work down towards principals... This in turn has pushed more work down onto middle management and teaching staff who should be concentrating on their teaching. If I tried to read every online policy update and email, prepare fully planned differentiated lessons with pre and post testing data cross checked against multiple syllabus points catering to the individual needs of 30 students as expected and do the rest of my daily crisis management it just wouldn't be possible ***(Head Teacher).***

Recommendation 10: Inclusion of social-emotional leadership professional learning support for formal middle leaders

Research in middle leaders' work shows that it is highly relational, as they navigate and negotiate relations up, down and across school organisational structures (Bennett et al., 2007) while balancing expectations of being collegial, professional and authoritative (Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). There is a substantial amount of research pointing to the difficulties middle leaders have dealing with conflict and the supervision of colleagues (Bennett et al., 2003; De Nobile, 2018a) and in engaging performance conversations of and with their colleagues (Blandford, 2006). Aligned with this is middle leaders' reluctance to engage in monitoring activities of colleagues such as classroom observations (Ashmore & Clay, 2016). A possible reason for middle leaders being conflicted in undertaking these roles is the fact that they are often recruited 'up from the ranks' and are negotiating a change in identity from close colleague to 'leader', while understanding their authority within the school is largely relationally based. Hence relationships, and relational expectations, are central to the complexity of middle leadership.

This study supports the relational component of NSW DoE middle leaders work with data showing that supervising staff, having responsibilities for staff and student wellbeing, mentoring and collaborating with colleagues, and leading school teaching and learning initiatives were common middle leader activities. Additionally, the data suggest that middle leaders perceive their impact on student learning is a result of their relationships with their colleagues, students and parents. Moreover, middle leader influence is often team-based, with the development of collegial and cooperative relationships foundational to their work.

Acknowledging the centrality of relationships to middle leaders' work where middle leader authority is formed within the nature of their relationships, we would argue that it is critical for middle leaders to understand and develop core emotional and social intelligences (ESI), including the attributes of self-awareness, self-management, relationship management and empathy viewed as pillars to positive relationships (Goleman, 1995; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). We suggest that the SLI consider professional learning that supports middle leaders to develop their understanding and knowledge of ESI and provide opportunities for the development and practice of core ESI attributes understood as foundational for effective leadership. Possible professional learning may include:

- Experiences that support middle leaders to engage in critical thinking skills including self-reflection and critical consciousness (Christman, 2010; Diem & Carpenter, 2012) which has shown to help facilitate people's emotions and subsequent actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This may include activities such as journal writing and opportunities for honest conversations with trusted colleagues (Patti, Stern, Martin, & Brackett, 2005).
- The provision of targeted workshops coupled with time for middle leaders to reflect with peer networks and school leaders on workshop content focused on middle leader areas of concern including, undertaking difficult conversation, strategies for effective conflict resolution and implementing change management strategies.
- Expanding the use of 360-degree emotional intelligence assessment tools currently used as part of the Aspiring Principal Leadership Program (APLP) alumni, to include NSW DoE middle leaders. This tool would support middle leaders' understanding of their emotional and social competencies. This could be followed up by middle leaders developing a personal growth plan which focuses on the further development of core ESI attributes. The development of middle leader's identified attributes could be supported by a mentor and/ or critical-friend and through formal and informal peer feedback.

> "I impact through my relationships with the students, their parents/carers and therapists and the positive partnership that I deliberately build with my colleagues (***Head Teacher***)

Part F: Conclusion

Research has shown that middle leaders have possibly the greatest potential of all school leaders to impact positively classroom practices and improve student learning (Gurr, 2019, Leithwood, 2016. Crowther & Boyne, 2016). It has been argued that, "No other position has more potential to increase school effectiveness than the department-head position because it is a direct extension of the school's administration and department heads enjoy the unequalled opportunity of direct, daily contact with teachers and students" (Weller, 2001, p. 74). Within the NSW School Leadership Institute Development Continuum, the SLI has determined that the roles of middle leaders are distinct from the roles of other NSW school leaders. This demonstrates the uniqueness and importance of middle leadership within the NSW DoE School system. As such, NSW DoE middle leaders are central to leading school and system-wide improvement aligned with the NSW DoE Strategic plan (2018-2022).

The six research questions that guided this project provide the NSW DoE with an evidence base on formal middle leaders relating to their roles, responsibilities, practices, impacts, professional learning and career trajectories. The data provides clarity around who NSW DoE middle leaders are. They are predominantly female, aged between 41 and 60, and they are mostly in role positions titled Assistant Principal and Head Teacher. Their roles and responsibilities are focused on seven core themes: Developing staff, Student-centred, Administration, Organising people, Curriculum-centred, Supervising staff, and Leading learning and change. Three-quarters of NSW

DoE middle leaders perceive they have a high to very high impact on student learning, with leading, collaborating and influencing colleagues with school leadership support perceived as foundational to their success. It is evident that school middle leaders' roles are evolving. They are moving from being focused on management and administration and becoming more strategic through supervising and developing teacher colleagues, leading student and teacher learning and supporting their wellbeing. Middle leaders are committed to making a difference in their schools, but they are at times impacted in schools by heavy workload, particularly in administrative tasks. The data suggests there is a paucity of middle leader professional learning.

Professional learning with the objective of system leadership development is worthwhile. The idea that a system, in this case the NSW DoE, which defines overall roles, responsibilities and expectations, can impact individual sub-systems (schools) within the system, is supported by research (Gurr & Drysdale, 2018). However, system professional learning alone is unable to accommodate all the diversity across the system, including different levels of teaching and leadership experience, the different individual aspirations of middle leaders, and their vastly different school contexts. Moreover, system professional learning may not support the autonomy encouraged by the Australian school system which includes policies that support local decision-making to meet the local needs of communities (NSW Department of Education, 2012).

Therefore, a limitation of system professional learning approaches is their inability to take into account individualised and localised contexts. This can result in middle leaders not being able to apply the new knowledge and skills learned in professional learning in their practice. Data from this study reveals that currently, middle leaders vary considerably in important areas such as teaching experience, leadership experience, professional learning needs and aspirations. For example, some middle leaders are new to the position, with less than one year of leadership experience, while others have 20+ years of leadership experience. Some have engaged in formal leadership development, many have not. As a result, the NSW School Leadership Institute should provide differentiated approaches to learning to ensure that middle leaders receive timely support that is relevant to their needs.

In order to provide guidance the SLI in their development of school leadership, we have suggested ten recommendations to support the development of school middle leaders. These include, system-wide clarity about what is expected of middle leaders, and clear roles and capability frameworks for middle leaders and their teams. We suggest the identification, local induction, mentoring, and networking for middle leaders is needed, coupled with professional learning support and partnerships from principals and senior leaders in schools. All these initiatives need to be adapted to the diverse contexts in which NSW DoE middle leaders work. Critically, we recommend that the SLI consult with middle leaders in the development of the above initiatives to ensure middle leader voice and agency. These recommendations originate directly from the survey data and we acknowledge that since this data was collected, analysed and reported on, the SLI has and continues to develop middle leadership in areas such as the redesign of the middle leadership induction program and the commitment to the design of a system wide formal middle leadership professional development program .

Successful middle leading requires flexibility, adaptability, knowledge, skills and specific personal qualities. The SLI is well positioned to support the growth and development of middle leaders in public schools, and to address the evident challenges that middle leaders are currently experiencing. The data from this project suggests that realising NSW DoE middle leaders' potential will require development in policy (such as role descriptions) at the system level, and support for middle leaders at the system and school levels. It will also require a change in what middle leaders' work should focus on. The focus on managerial and administrative tasks should give way to a focus on more strategic tasks. In addition, middle leaders, and those they lead and collaborate with, should be able to access targeted professional learning. We believe the findings reported here can inform future NSW DoE middle leader policy and strategy to support and enhance the work and performance of formal middle leaders in NSW public schools.

Limitations of the study

This large-scale study provides important empirical evidence on middle leadership in NSW public schools. However, as with all studies, there are limitations. The population size was above expectations and the response rate to our requests for participants was high. This provided important data from different demographics representative of the diversity of middle leaders in NSW Department of Education schools. While this data was valuable, limited time and financial resources meant we were not able to analyse fully the large number of responses to open-ended questions to what we would consider deeper levels of analysis in our published research. Instead randomised samples were used to determine sample sizes while at the same time ensuring a saturation point was reached when thematically analysing this data. Additionally, as with all surveys, the instrument only collected response data to preconceived question categories at a single point of time. This meant that the responses may provide a somewhat simplistic review of reality, and important site-based considerations, including historical, economic, cultural and geographical information, could not be analysed. As such, a detailed analysis that takes into consideration the contexts in which middle leaders work could not be provided.

Authors

A middle leadership cross-institutional research team with members from the University of Wollongong, Macquarie University, and The University of Sydney was formed to research the middle leadership landscape nationally and internationally. Primarily, the team aims to work in partnership with various educational sectors, such as NSW Public Education, to understand the roles, practices, relationships, needs and impacts of middle leaders in schools.

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Appendix A

Table 25: Factor solution for the MLRQ-SE

Factor name	Number of items	Eigen-value	Reliability (alpha)
F1: Developing staff	8	30.74	.86
F2: Student-centred	9	7.90	.86
F3: Administration	3	5.56	.66
F4: Organising people	3	5.03	.69
F5: Curriculum-centred	2	3.73	.77
F6: Supervising staff	3	3.63	.80
F7: Leading learning and change	8	3.11	.86

Table 26: Factor loadings for *Developing staff*

Item	Wording	Loading
32	Providing feedback to staff members about work done	.694
33	Helping staff members with aspects of their work	.650
26	Engaging in classroom observations of teachers	.545
14	Mentoring staff members	.479
21	Discussing aspects of work performance with staff	.452
27	Facilitating professional development for staff	.433
13	Demonstrating procedures and/or techniques for other staff	.373
36	Involvement in staff induction	.270

Table 27: Factor loadings for *Student-centred*

Item	Wording	Loading
17	Meeting with students about personal issues	.726
29	Assisting students with academic issues	.631
05	Meeting with students about academic issues	.612
18	Creation and/or maintenance of records relating to student behaviour, achievement or other student data	.593
31	Liaison between student's home and school	.588
01	Helping students	.562
08	Being responsible for records of student behaviour, academic progress or other student data	.512
23	Dealing with student behaviour	.506
07	Creation and/or maintenance of information/data relating to student progress	.351

Table 28: Factor loadings for *Administration*

Item	Wording	Loading
25	Arranging orders and purchases	.754
15	Keeping inventory of resources and/or equipment	.735
24	Creation/modification of forms, proformas and other admin tools	.285

Table 29: Factor loadings for *Organising people*

Item	Wording	Loading
09	Organising timetables for relief teachers or guest staff	.740
02	Organising rosters	.722
30	Organising agendas and itineraries for special days or events	.350

Table 30: Factor loadings for *Curriculum-centred*

Item	Wording	Loading
19	Implementing curriculum	.704
35	Planning curriculum with other teachers	.660

Table 31: Factor loadings for *Supervising staff*

Item	Wording	Loading
11	Supervising staff members	.796
10	Monitoring the performance of staff	.637
03	Supervising staff in a year/grade or stage	.579

Table 32: Factor loadings for *Leading learning and change*

Item	Wording	Loading
28	Heading whole-school policy change	.784
12	Creating or changing whole-school policy	.781
16	Leading innovation and change	.578
34	Heading teams or committees	.557
22	Establishing a vision for area of responsibility	.473
20	Organising a team or committee	.436
04	Leading staff professional learning	.365
06	Establishing goals for area of responsibility	.269

Fire exit

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