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An Examination of Middle Leadership in Western Australian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study examined the complexities inherent within secondary school middle leadership positions. These formal positions typically have line management accountability through the deputy principal to the principal for the supervision of teaching and/or ancillary staff. The study investigated the formal position requirements, as well as the professional perceptions and expectations of Western Australian, secondary school middle leaders. The results presented in this paper were collected during the qualitative phase of a mixed methods research project. The qualitative phase involved two stages of data collection and analyses. Firstly, a document analysis was conducted on the formal position descriptions of middle leadership positions in a purposive sample of ten Western Australian secondary schools. Documents outlining the organisational structures of schools, as well as formal position descriptions detailing the professional responsibilities of middle leaders were collected and analysed using content analysis techniques. Additionally, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of discipline-based, pastoral-based and program-based middle leaders across three Western Australian secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a senior leader of each sampled school.

The findings of the document analysis conducted on middle leadership position descriptions are presented using Sergiovanni's (1984) forces of leadership model. The application of this model allowed for the exploration of the technical, human and educational leadership roles typically required of middle leaders working in secondary schools. The results of interviews with middle and senior leaders are also presented here, with a focus on six key aspects of the middle leadership position including: the dual and dynamic nature of middle leadership; the organisational functions of middle leaders; the problems and limitations associated with middle leadership positions; the qualities and skills of effective middle leaders and their training needs; the support and review requirements of the position, as well as the personal goals and experiences of middle leaders.

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Background

Defining middle leaders.

The term middle leader can be thought of as an overarching title encompassing a number of related educational positions: discipline-based leaders, such as heads of department; pastoral-based leaders, such as student service coordinators or year level coordinators; and specialised program-based leaders. The definition of what constitutes an educational middle leader is largely related to the hierarchical organisational structure of schools. Busher and Harris (1999, p.306) explain that, "...in hierarchical terms the head of department is a middle manager. He or she is not part of the senior management team, responsible for the overall strategic development of a school, but someone responsible for the operational work of others, namely classroom teachers". Within secondary school organisational structures, teachers and ancillary staff are typically organised within subject, pastoral or specialised program groupings. These departments or teams require a coordinator to organise and supervise the work being carried out. Middle leaders fulfil this function and in doing so will be accountable to a school's senior leaders for the work of the staff in their specific area of responsibility (Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher and Turner, 2007). Middle leaders can be thought of as providing the bridge between the teaching staff and the executive staff within their school (White, 2000). The bridging or linking function is one of the central attributes in defining a middle leader. In describing the middle leadership position of Curriculum Area Middle Managers, White (2000, p. 85) explained, "Their role, like that of all middle managers in schools, is seen as being part-classroom teacher and part-administrator, a situation that sees them considered as the link between teachers and senior administration...". Despite these commonalities, there is no complete and commonly understood definition of the role and position of middle leaders (Weller, 2001).

The role of middle leaders.

The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders in secondary schools are diverse. Their job descriptions are often complex and can vary widely according to school and department (Weller, 2001). In recent years, researchers have attempted to document and categorise the specific duties of this group of professionals and have identified common tasks undertaken by middle leaders (See White, 2002; Glover and Miller; 1999). The particular analytical construct underpinning this study, was drawn from Sergiovanni's (1984) research into educational leadership and school excellence. Sergiovanni outlined five *leadership forces* which, "...can be thought of as the means available to administrators, supervisors, and teachers to bring about or preserve changes needed to improve schooling" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 6). The five leadership forces identified by Sergiovanni (1984) include: the technical force; the human force; the educational force; the symbolic force and the cultural force. These five leadership forces combine to form the *leadership forces hierarchy*, in which the first three forces (technical, human and educational) are said to be central to a school's overall competence, and where the latter two forces (cultural and symbolic) promote school excellence (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Caldwell and Spinks (1988), in applying the five leadership forces to their concept of the *self-managing school*, state that middle leaders, that is those "...who exercise leadership in programme teams", will be given the opportunity to exercise the

leadership approaches and techniques underpinning the technical, human and educational leadership forces (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 176). Yet, in relation to the symbolic and cultural leadership forces, Caldwell and Spinks explain that, "... the head teacher plays a special leadership role", in focusing and working with the school's staff and community members (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 177). Thus, the technical, human and educational leadership roles can be seen to more precisely represent of the scope of middle leadership positions. To explain this further, according to Sergiovanni, a leader's technical role is concerned with the completion of management duties need for the daily operation of a school and serves primarily to influence, "... routine school competence..." (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 12). The human leader focuses on providing the support, motivation and encouragement required for others to grow, learn and ultimately realise their own professional potential. Sergiovanni's educational force of leadership sees the leader acting as an educational expert, with specialist knowledge and skills.

The influence of middle leadership.

An awareness of the importance of middle leaders within a school's organisational structure is on the rise (White, 2000) and the influence of middle leadership positions, especially in relation to whole-school development, needs to be considered. Bennett (1999) raised the question of whether middle leaders should play a role in influencing whole-school policies and decisions, or whether they should solely function to implement the decisions and policies of the school's senior leaders. Much of the literature on the role of middle leaders highlights the importance of this unique position. In fact Weller (2001) asserted that department heads, as middle leaders, have the potential to be the most influential people in a school's organisational structure. Many argue that educators holding middle leadership positions have the power to influence not only their own area of responsibility, but also the wider school community. Middle leaders can play a vital role in whole-school planning and decision-making (Brown, Boyle & Boyle, 1999). It is also thought, that because middle leaders have the power to dramatically influence the performance within their department or team, they can in turn have a significant impact on whole-school performance (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Busher & Harris, 1999). Busher and Harris (1999, p. 315) captured the significance of the role of heads of department in stating, "Within this middle management role, more than any other, is the real potential of organisational change and improvement". The challenge for schools then, is to fully utilise middle leadership positions.

The authority of middle leaders.

Middle leaders are experiencing an intensification of their responsibilities, with workload demands consuming time at school and after school (Fitzgerald, 2009). However, this increase in responsibility has not necessarily equated to greater authority or heightened influence at the whole-school level, with middle leaders attempting to "... fulfil their extensive responsibilities with ... limited formal authority" (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007, p. 460). Although middle leadership is commonly viewed by researchers as being crucial to school operation and improvement, there is evidence to indicate that schools, in general, do not fully utilise the leadership potential of their middle leaders (Weller, 2001). The recent attention paid to educational middle leadership positions world wide, has stemmed from a perceived failure to develop or expand the position within schools (Brown, Boyle & Boyle, 1999). One explanation for this is that schools may under-value the

potential influence of the middle leadership position (White, 2002). Weller (2001) explained that in a survey of secondary school department heads many believed that they should play a larger role in whole-school decision-making, concluding that a lack of authority and voice limited the effectiveness of these positions. It may however, take more than an increased awareness of the importance of middle leaders to improve their authority within schools. Middle leaders are often too absorbed in their specific administrative responsibilities, to have sufficient time to engage in broader strategic planning (Brown & Rutherford, 1998). Thus, there also needs to be a shift in the prioritising of their many responsibilities, with an emphasis placed on their whole-school leadership potential (Weller, 2001).

The tensions of middle leadership

There are a number of tensions inherent in middle leadership positions, including role conflict and ambiguity. Role conflict exists because of the dual function of a middle leader's role as both teacher and administrator. Middle leaders are typically in a complex position, in that they are neither fully a teacher nor an administrator (Brown, Rutherford & Boyle, 2000) Because of this, middle leaders often endure a sense of divided loyalty between the senior leaders and the teachers in their department (Weller, 2001). According to Weller (2001, p. 73), "... [department heads] perform a range of responsibilities that call for the allegiance of both administrator and peer alike". Middle leaders also experience "a form of dual accountability", where they are accountable to their school's senior leaders, as well as to their own department or team of staff (Fitzgerald, 2009, p. 63). Brown, Boyle and Boyle (1999) noted that this divide between middle leaders and others, will cause some middle leaders to feel a sense of isolation. Aside from role conflict, middle leaders also face the issue of role ambiguity. According to Mayers and Zepeda (2002) role ambiguity occurs when a person is uncertain about the expectations of their position. Role ambiguity can lead to decreased effectiveness, job satisfaction and increased stress (Mayer & Zepeda, 2002). In part, this problem of definition appears to stem from a lack of clarity in delineating the responsibilities of middle and senior leaders, "the distinction between middle and senior management remains blurred and leadership functions are still not adequately delineated or defined" (Busher & Harris, 1999, pp. 305-306). White (2000) explained that role ambiguity and role conflict exist largely because of the lack of training and time given to middle leaders, which can result in increased stress for middle leaders. These issues need to be recognised and addressed by schools, in order for middle leaders function more effectively.

Research Objectives

The research investigated three areas relating to educational middle leadership positions including: the formal organisational role of middle leaders; their school responsibilities and the training and professional development of middle leaders.

What is the role of middle leadership in the secondary school organisation?

- How do middle leadership positions fit within the school's formal organisational structure?
- What are the accountability requirements and processes associated with middle leadership positions?

- To what extent do middle leaders contribute to school organisational development?

What are the school level program responsibilities of middle leaders?

- What areas are middle leaders responsible for within the school (e.g. curriculum, teaching and learning, student pastoral care) and what duties are involved?
- How do middle leaders meet the demands of these responsibilities?
- Is there a need to change the responsibilities of middle leaders?

What are the training and professional development needs of middle leaders?

- What professional preparation and ongoing training do middle leaders require?
- What are the career expectations and professional aspirations of middle leaders?
- How can the professional growth of middle leaders be improved?

Investigative Themes

The framework consists of nine investigative themes based on a preliminary examination of the literature relating to educational leadership and middle leadership:

1. Defining the educational middle leadership position
2. The accountability requirements of middle leaders
3. The professional responsibilities of middle leaders
4. The professional goals or expectations of middle leaders
5. The training and development needs of middle leaders
6. The changing nature of middle leadership
7. The organisational function of middle leaders
8. The problems and limitations related to middle leadership positions
9. The qualities, skills and experiences of effective middle leaders

Research Methods

The results presented here were collected as a part the qualitative phase of a broader mixed methods research approach. The first phase of data collection involved the gathering of documentation relating to secondary school middle leadership positions. The documents, collected from a sample of ten Western Australian secondary schools, included school-designed position descriptions detailing the roles and key responsibilities of various middle leadership positions. Where available, documents outlining the organisational structure of participating schools, in either diagrammatic or descriptive forms, were also collected. The documents collected were subsequently analysed by applying the content analysis techniques of ascribing the data to formulated categories, coding data, then interpreting the data for meaning (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Sergiovanni's (1984) forces of leadership model was applied as a coding scheme as it offered clear, mutually exclusive categories representing all aspects of the middle leadership position (White & Marsh, 2006).

Three senior leaders and nine middle leaders from three Western Australian, secondary schools were interviewed using a semi-structured interviewing method. Purposive sampling was applied in order to select a representative sample of interview participants for the study. The middle leaders sampled for the interviews, were selected to represent three categories of middle leadership positions, including discipline-based, pastoral-based and program-based middle leadership. A semi-structured interviewing method was applied to allow for the comparison and categorisation of interview responses during the data analysis process (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Interview schedules for senior leaders and middle leaders were designed based upon the research questions and a preliminary conceptual framework which emerged from an analysis of the pertinent literature. Each of the interviews was recorded with the permission of the participants, in order to ensure comprehensiveness and accuracy, as well as to allow for later clarification. A process of content analysis was then undertaken, during which the interview data were coded and analysed using the preliminary conceptual framework which was then adapted to include emergent themes.

Results of the Document Analysis

Sergiovanni's model of *leadership forces* (1984) functions as a relevant framework for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of secondary school, middle leadership positions. Using this model, the specific responsibilities of middle leaders, including discipline-based, pastoral-based and program-based middle leaders were analysed. The middle leadership position incorporates three dominant leadership roles, with middle leaders acting as technical, human and educational leaders. The following summarises how middle leaders fulfil these three leadership roles within different communities or sub-groups that exist in a school's organisational structure (Busher et al., 2007). These include a middle leader's responsibility to their school's senior leaders, the staff working within their team or department, the other teaching and ancillary staff outside of their area of responsibility, parents, students and the wider community.

Technical leadership.

As a technical leader, a middle-level leader is required to apply relevant theories of management (Sergiovanni, 1984), in order to promote the efficient running of their school and, more specifically, their own area of responsibility. As a part of their specific technical leadership duties, middle leaders are accountable to their school's senior leaders for the provision of required documentation and information pertaining to their area of responsibility. They are required to adopt a broader whole-school focus by attending school leadership meetings, participating in whole-school planning and development processes, and contributing to the coordination of whole-school events. As technical leaders, a school's middle leaders are responsible for the daily operational work of their educational teams. A middle leader must, therefore, work closely with their staff, maintaining effective communication. Middle leaders are required to coordinate and manage the work of their staff, as well as the various pastoral or learning activities that may occur within the area. Furthermore, a middle leader must establish and manage administrative and operational systems and policies within their specific area. Within the broader educational community a school's middle leaders may be responsible for coordinating the reporting of student achievement to external education bodies. Middle leaders must also be working actively in order to build industry links and to locate useful community resources.

Human leadership.

Sergiovanni's human force of leadership takes into account the educational leader's influence on a school's *human organisation* (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 6). As human leader, those in a middle leadership position aim to build a collaborative working relationship with the school's senior leaders and are expected to inspire, encourage and support the staff in the educational team. Middle leaders must work towards fostering a culture of collaboration and collegiality both within their own departments and amongst members of the whole-school staff. Along with promoting teamwork, the middle leader must focus on establishing positive communication with the students and parents who participate in their educational program. They are required to ensure that the pastoral, behavioural and welfare needs of students are being met. Student leadership potential and community spirit must also be fostered. A final duty of the middle leader as human leader is to promote the school's ethos and vision across the wider community.

Educational leadership.

In their role as educational leader, a middle leader brings to their area and whole-school community, expert specialist knowledge and skills specifically relating to the field of education. As an educational leader, a middle leader will work closely with the senior leaders to discuss and address key educational issues relating to their educational program. Middle leaders must also monitor the professional performance of their staff members, providing relevant professional development opportunities. A middle leader is additionally, expected to model exemplary classroom practice, seek opportunities to enhance student learning, and in some instances coordinate the assessment and reporting of student achievement and participation. Middle leaders who are responsible for coordinating whole-school educational programs will often work with staff members outside of their area, to ensure that such programs are being run effectively and consistently throughout the school community. They are also expected to deal with the educational concerns or queries of students and parents; identify students requiring additional educational support and establish initiatives to meet the educational needs of such students. A middle leader may also act as a professional leader and representative of their educational team. As such, they are required to be actively involved in the wider professional community.

Interview Results

The following is a summary of the results from the semi-structured interviews conducted with nine middle leaders and three senior leaders across three Western Australian secondary schools.

The nature of the role.

One of the definitive features of middle leadership is the dual nature of the position. That is, middle leaders are typically responsible for both teaching and administering. Middle Leader Three for example explained that, "We [discipline-based middle leaders] run the department, so we teach and administer and that's a key factor". Middle leaders typically have a significant teaching allocation along with their leadership role and as such are expected to liaise between their school's teachers and leaders. This double function places middle leaders in a critical position within a school's organisational structure. Their role as both a teacher and a leader creates the potential for middle leaders to experience a sense of isolation, "I do feel in some

respects that I'm a little bit on my own. Everyone's always really busy", Middle Leader Four explained. Yet, at the same time they remain central, influential figures within a school's organisational structure, an area that will be explored later. Middle leadership was also seen to be a very dynamic position. Those interviewed indicated that alterations had often been made to both their individual roles and more broadly across middle leadership positions within their school. In particular, the position was seen to becoming more complex with increased responsibility, accountability, workload and performance expectations. "It's a more complex world and, as a result, it's a more complex job. Things aren't as simple as they used to be", Middle Leader Seven explained. Ongoing redefinition and refinement of middle leadership position descriptions had also taken place in some schools to meet shifting demands and needs. The dynamic nature of middle leadership was seen to have contributed to the heavy demands of the position, with a view that the responsibilities and expectations of the position are increasing and intensifying.

Problems and limitations.

As reflected in the literature on middle leadership, a lack of clarity in the definition and scope of middle leadership positions was seen to be a concern of middle leaders. In particular, some of the middle leaders interviewed stated that a blurring of responsibilities existed between different middle leadership roles, Middle Leader Seven explained that, "We've got 16-17 people working up at this (middle leadership) level, and working out who's responsible for what can get a little confusing at times". A lack of clear delineation of the responsibilities and duties required of senior leaders and those required of middle leaders was also noted. It was felt that the increased work demands being placed on senior leaders and teaching staff, had resulted in a *sandwiching* of the middle leadership position. Middle Leader Three explained that, "[The] jobs that were primarily the role of deputies in past years are now the prerogative of middle management. Also we have work load issues from the teachers coming up...so [there is a] squeeze in the middle". It was also felt that formalised, written position descriptions, while quite clear in outlining core duties and requirements of the role, did not always adequately fully capture the complexity and unwritten expectations of middle leadership. Middle Leader Seven stated, "The breadth of it [the role] is extraordinary. I mean you could write a book on the things the things that are touched on in this particular job".

The issue of role conflict, as discussed in the background, also arose in the interviews. Several middle leaders commented that conflicts can arise with other school members because of their work as middle leaders. Busher et al. (2007) explained that middle leaders work with multiple groups and levels within a school's organisational structure and as such, "middle leaders are sometimes viewed with suspicion by other members of their departments who question whether they are really working for the interests of the department or for those of the middle leadership team" (Busher et al., 2007, p.409). This was indicated in the interviews with some middle leaders explaining that tensions can arise with teaching staff, "Sometimes to do what I have to do, the staff wouldn't be that happy with the outcome, because it's the kids' welfare that I have to look after", Middle Leader Seven explained. Some middle leaders had also experienced a sense of confusion or a conflict of loyalty when the expectations or ideas of senior leaders, had varied from those of the other staff members. Middle Leader Eight for instance explained, "I didn't expect to be pulled from left, right and centre, from every direction..."

Everyone, a lot of the time, has got different ideas about how things should be done and there's me in the middle. Well, who do I go with? Who's making the right choice?"

Some middle leaders interviewed also expressed a sense of frustration at having limited authority within their middle leadership position. They observed that middle leaders lacked opportunities to be involved in whole-school planning or decision-making. Middle Leader One explained that, "In the ideal school I think the [discipline-based middle leader] should have a lot of dialogue in so far as the direction the school goes and how things actually develop. But, in reality, it comes down to one decision and way, as we act sort of as consultants towards getting the best possible outcome with the Deputy Principal." Some middle leaders also felt that the importance of their role was being undervalued or overlooked by the school community. Middle Leader Six, a pastoral-based leader, felt that their role was not as valued as those of discipline or program-based middle leaders saying, "I suppose sometimes we [pastoral-based middle leaders] feel as those we're not as valued as the subject [middle leaders], yet I think that our job is just as important". Middle Leader Nine, a program-based middle leader felt that on the whole, "There is a need to definitely recognise the role of [middle leaders] more significantly".

Organisational function.

Despite a view that they at times lacked involvement in school development processes, middle leaders saw their role as being a linchpin within their school community. Specifically, middle leaders can fulfil several organisational functions by contributing to the operation, communication, decision-making and planning of their schools. At an operational level, middle leaders work to achieve the objectives or goals of their school, through their day-to-day duties and interactions and were seen as being vital for the daily operation of the school. Middle leaders are, for example, needed to allow for the consistent coordination and operation of their area of responsibility. They also have the important responsibility of putting school wide policies and plans into action, with Middle Leader Five explaining that, "We're the ones that implement the structures that come down from the Senior Executives". Importantly, Senior Leaders Two and Three confirmed this function observing that middle leaders play an important role in a school, as they can control the extent to which school policies and plans are implemented at a classroom level. Middle leaders were also seen to play an important communication and support function within their school, providing a link between teaching staff and senior leaders. Middle leaders have direct, daily contact with teaching staff and students and can therefore act to understand and 'voice' concerns of school members to the senior leaders. Middle leaders can also function in a decision-making and planning capacity, with varying degrees of involvement as has been discussed. At a whole-school level, middle leaders may contribute to school decision-making or act as a catalyst in the planning process.

Skills and training.

When asked what skills and qualities are required for effective middle leadership, a wide range of attributes were suggested. Several middle leaders stressed the need for competencies such as intelligence, innovation and flexibility. Effective middle leaders were expected to possess a strong sense of self-efficacy, motivation and commitment to the role. Exceptional interpersonal skills were seen as being

necessary for effective middle leadership, as were strong teaching, organisational and administrative skills. Several middle leaders explained that they experienced a difficult transition from classroom teacher to middle leader and, as such, saw a need for middle leaders to undergo specific training before taking on the position. Many of the middle leaders interviewed explained that much of their training had occurred on the job, rather than through formal, professional learning programs. Middle Leader Six explained that, “A lot of what you do in this job, you learn on the go and fortunately people are very good here and you just have to ask, ‘what do I do now?’ And that’s what happened when I first started the job ...”. Several middle leaders emphasised that their prior professional experience had also been vital preparation for a middle leadership position. Middle leaders saw a need for ongoing professional development and training in areas such as the use and application of new technologies, to support middle leaders as their role changes and they face new challenges. The need for a “staged, well documented leadership program” for middle leaders was recognised by Senior Leader Three, as was as the need for targeted professional learning opportunities.

Support and review.

During the interviews, middle leaders were asked what could be done to better support them. Aside from improved professional learning opportunities, the need for greater communication, collaboration and consultation amongst school leaders, was commonly requested. In particular, some felt that more time should be allocated, to allow for more regular meetings with other middle leaders within their school. Middle Leader One suggested, “I would create more forums for discussion, for future planning at a middle management level. And I would liberate specific time, during school time for that to happen”. More regular meetings with senior leaders, the provision of mentoring opportunities between middle leaders and more opportunities to work collaboratively with other school leaders were also suggested as support mechanisms. Middle leaders frequently explained that they lacked the necessary time to complete all of their necessary duties effectively. Many of the middle leaders interviewed felt that the amount of time they had been allocated outside of their teaching load was inadequate to effectively fulfil the position requirements. Aside from additional time, more staffing at the middle leadership level and increased access to administrative assistance could help to reduce the work demands of middle leaders. In terms of the performance review, the accountability requirements of middle leadership positions vary according to school and some middle leaders were unclear of the nature and frequency of performance review processes within their schools.

Personal goals and experiences of middle leaders.

The middle leaders interviewed expressed several goals they wished to achieve through their position. These goals included: to stay in the position long enough to carry out the educational programs they have initiated; to develop more structure within their middle leadership position; to review, consolidate or expand the education program they are responsible for; to improved staff, student and parent involvement in their educational program; to build stronger relationships with staff, students and parents; to develop wider links to the community; to motivate students; to assist students at educational risk and to develop a more cohesive culture within their team or program.

The middle leaders were also asked to consider their longer-term promotional expectations and goals. With this in mind, some middle leaders interviewed saw the position as being a 'stepping stone' to senior leadership positions and aimed to operate at a higher level of school leadership. More commonly, middle leaders expressed a reluctance to take on a more senior leadership position in the foreseeable future, because of an unwillingness to give up subject teaching or because they felt it would lead to a significant and undesirable increase in responsibility and workload. Despite the conflicts, tensions and limitations of the position outlined above, many middle leaders, expressed satisfaction with their middle leadership role and were not currently seeking further promotion. "I'm happy where I am. I think I've reached a good level" Middle Leader Seven claimed. "It's a great role. Being in middle management, I am thrilled" (Middle Leader Eight).

Discussion

Middle leadership is widely seen by both middle and senior leaders, as being vital to the effective, daily operation of secondary schools. Educational middle leaders, whether discipline-based, pastoral-based or program-based, play a unique leadership role. One of the functions of middle leadership is the bridging role middle leaders play in linking a school's senior leadership with other members of the school community, particularly the teachers and students (Weller, 2001; White, 2000). The unique functions of middle leaders can also lead to unique challenges, such as the need to manage and balance their dual teaching and administrative roles. Their work requires middle leaders to function within "...the multiple communities that make up a school community" (Busher et al., 2007, p. 407), causing some middle leaders to experience conflict and tensions, including a sense of divided loyalty where the ideas and opinions of senior leaders to whom they are responsible, do not match those of the teaching and ancillary staff, for whom they are responsible.

Middle leadership is a dynamic position that has faced constant and considerable changes in recent years (Fitzgerald, 2009). As a part of these changes, some middle leaders have experienced significant redefinition of their position as the needs and structures of schools shift and blur. Factors such as teaching shortages and broad curriculum changes, were seen as key factors impacting the work of middle leaders. The interview data suggests that the position has become increasingly complex, with higher expectations, demands and accountability. In particular, some middle leaders have experienced a 'sandwiching' of role, where the increased workloads of senior leaders and teaching staff have placed pressure on middle leaders from both sides of the school organisational structural. Increases in the workload and responsibilities of middle leaders, have not necessarily translated to increased authority or influence in whole-school planning or decision-making. Middle leaders commonly felt frustrated at the lack of opportunities to be involved in whole-school development processes and some believed their role was undervalued or not fully recognised within the school or wider educational community.

Certain pressures and difficulties are limiting the extent to which middle leaders are able to successfully and effectively fulfil their position requirements. Middle leaders need a balance of individual qualities and skills, as well external support structures and strategies to most effectively meet the demands of their position. Most notably, the allocation of additional time outside of their classroom commitments is needed to support middle leaders in their role. Clearly defined and delineated position

descriptions, effective operational systems and policies, adequate staffing and resources and opportunities to access position-specific training programs are additionally required to support middle leaders in their role. More formalised, ongoing review processes for middle leaders may also be required, to allow for the provision of regular feedback and targeted training and/or support.

Whether or not middle leaders seek further promotion, they frequently expressed satisfaction or enjoyment of their role. The opportunity to build relationships with staff and students and the opportunity to face positive challenges were some of the reasons cited as to why educators enjoy middle leadership. Middle leaders also take on the position, because they feel it will give them the opportunity to make changes and implement new initiatives. This is true in that middle leaders are in a position to strongly influence the attitudes of staff within their specific area of responsibility and also have the responsibility of implementing school policies and systems on a daily basis, at the classroom level. As such, there is a need for schools to further recognise the potential middle leaders have to profoundly and positively influence a school's culture and direction.

Conclusion

While there has been a considerable amount of research into the area of educational leadership, much of the research has focused on leadership issues relating to senior administrators, such as principals and deputy principals. Comparatively little research has addressed the needs and issues relating to middle leadership positions within secondary schools. Although all efforts were made to form a representative sample, the interview data from which these observations are drawn were gathered from a limited sample of middle leaders. Any generalisations formed from such results are done so with an awareness of validity concerns. The results from the qualitative study outlined here will form the basis of a more extensive quantitative study which will aim to further explore the issues raised from the document analysis and interview data. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been designed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings presented above. Notwithstanding the limitations of the study noted above, the findings of this study are important to secondary schools in reviewing organisational structures and the responsibilities of middle leaders.

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