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Towards a theoretical model of middle leadership in schools

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While there has been considerable research activity in the area of middle management / middle leadership since the late 1990s, the concept remains under-theorised and ambiguities persist in relation to who middle managers or middle leaders are and what they do. The recent shift in terminology in the literature from 'middle management' to 'middle leadership' alludes to evolution in the roles these leaders play in schools. However, without a theoretical model to use as a point of reference it is difficult to describe the nature of such evolution and even more difficult to identify implications for teacher productivity, student outcomes and school effectiveness. This article proposes a model of middle leadership in schools based on an extensive review of the literature. The Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) model describes factors that influence middle leadership, possible influences of middle leadership on schools, a typology of roles middle leaders perform and how they might perform them. The article concludes with implications for research and theory building in a still-emergent area within the broader field of educational leadership.

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Introduction

Middle leadership has become increasingly important to the work of schools. The constant policy change and increased accountability and responsibility required of principals has resulted in work intensification that has, in part, been addressed by distributing some of the leadership load from senior leadership to middle leaders (Dinham 2016; Irvine and Brundrett 2016; McCulla and Degenhardt 2015). Correspondingly, there has been increased research interest in the role of middle leadership in schools (for example, Bennett et al. 2007; Harris and Jones 2017; Larusdottir and O'Connor 2017).

Despite increasing research into middle leadership, we are no closer to a coherent theory base like the body that exists for senior leaders such as school principals (McCulla and Degenhardt 2015), and complaints persist
about it being under-researched and under-theorised compared to senior leadership (Cranston 2006; Dinham 2016). Ambiguity still exists in relation to what middle leaders are expected to do (Fluckiger et al. 2015; Koh et al. 2011; Odhiambo 2014). Conceptions of the roles of middle leaders are either quite broad (Fleming 2014), specific to a given role such as the head of department (Dinham 2007), or not organised into conceptually coherent domains of practice (Bennett et al. 2003; Busher 2005). Some empirically supported models of school leadership exist, but these in the main apply to school principals or have been developed primarily with senior leaders in mind (for example, Dysdale and Gurr 2011; Robinson 2007). Middle leaders, however, do different things from senior leaders, they are not principals or deputy principals, and the reach of their authority is limited. A theoretical model of middle level leadership should reflect those differences.

This article describes a model of middle leadership in schools arising from an extensive review of the relevant literature. The model is not intended to represent middle leadership as a ‘one size fits all’ set of variables and components applicable to all contexts. Rather, it is intended as a starting point for thinking about middle leadership, a springboard for research in primary, secondary and other school contexts, and a small contribution to the theory-building that middle leadership so sorely needs at this point in time. While middle leadership in broad terms includes non-teaching staff in schools, or the sake of clarity the focus of this article will be on teaching middle leaders.

Who are middle leaders?

There has been a shift in terminology from ‘middle managers’ to ‘middle leaders’ since the early 2000s. This shift reflects an apparent evolution of the roles individuals in these positions are asked to perform, from mainly mundane administrative tasks to increasingly dynamic strategic and staff development oriented activities (Bennett et al. 2007; De Nobile and Ridden 2014; Fleming 2014). This is not to say that management has become less important. Indeed, Fleming (2014) and Dinham (2016) remind us that middle leaders still need to be good managers. However, middle leaders are increasingly being asked to do far-reaching things that can have significant impacts on schools and students.

So who are middle leaders?
The answer to this question is not straightforward. In the corporate literature common definitions place middle managers and leaders between the senior leadership (such as the chief executive or directors) and the lower, first line, managers who oversee employees who largely have no particular responsibilities (Robbins and Barnwell 2006; Samson and Daft 2012). In the educational literature, however, there is an almost unanimous perception that middle leaders operate between the senior leadership group (for example, principals and
deputy principals) and the teaching (and where relevant, non-teaching) staff (Bush, Hammersley-Noller, Turner 2007; Dinham 2016; Fleming 2014; Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Wise and Bennett 2003). Alternate conceptions do place middle leaders hierarchically above lower level leaders in schools (Anderson and Nixon 2010), which aligns more to the corporate model.

Clearly, middle leaders occupy formal positions of responsibility in schools. A list of common formal positions is presented in Table 1. However, it is also important to note that middle leadership as an activity can occur outside of formal positions of responsibility, and that it may occur informally. Danielson (2007) describes ‘teacher leaders’ who might not occupy formal promotion positions, but influence the work of other teachers, especially those new to the profession. For example, a teacher with years of experience who assists an early career colleague might be performing a middle leadership role informally. Therefore, when attempting to define middle leadership, it is important not to constrain the concept only to formal positions of responsibility.

The other aspect that prevents straightforward answers to the above question is the consideration that middle leadership can be a rather fluid concept. Principals might be perceived as senior leaders, given the impact they have on school organisation, the hiring and firing authority they possess and so forth. However, they might be considered middle leaders in the context of the larger organisation if they are part of system of schools. The emergence of multi-academy trusts in the U.K. might provide new examples of dual middle and senior roles for head teachers and principals (Department for Education 2016). When these possibilities are added, the idea of middle leadership becomes necessarily bound by context and perspective. As this article concerns leadership in schools, the context places principals in senior leadership.

The question of who middle leaders are has also been contested with regard to the formal positions that might comprise the echelon. In his study of leaders in Australia and New Zealand Cranston (2006) included deputy principals as middle leaders. Others, however, have conceptualised deputies as part of the senior leadership group (Brooks and Cavanagh 2009; Gurr and Drysdale 2013). Both sets of scholars may be right depending on the roles deputies are performing (or

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<th>Primary schools</th>
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allowed to perform). De Nobile and Ridden have observed, ‘deputies who are given mostly mundane administrative duties in one school, and coordinators who have significant strategic roles similar to senior leaders... in another school’ (2014, 23). This reinforces the earlier point about not constraining middle leadership to formal positions conceptually.

Two types of definitions relating to middle leadership can be identified from the literature. First, there are references to people as ‘middle leaders’ who are defined generally as the layer of leadership between senior leadership teams and classroom teachers and other staff (Bush 2016; Choi 2013; Dinham 2016; Fleming 2014; Fleming and Amesbury 2001; Gurr and Drysdale 2013). Second, there are references to ‘middle leadership’ relating to the functions they serve as teachers who have responsibility for other staff and/or an aspect of the work of the school, such as curriculum areas and policy (Brooks and Cavanagh 2009; Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, and Turner 2007; Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Wise and Bennett 2003). The more recent literature views middle leadership as the actions that lead to the creation of teams and improving the quality of work (Ashmore and Clay 2016; Choi 2013). Middle leaders are commonly described as individuals who still engage in classroom teaching (Dinham 2007; Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Ronnerman 2016).

Taking these conceptualisations into account middle leadership in schools is defined here as teachers (and some non-teachers) who have, or assume, responsibility for the maintenance, development or improvement of some aspect of school organisation including student welfare, curriculum area(s), policy, teacher development and various other activities, often through teams or committees. Formal middle leadership positions operate on behalf of senior leadership (Bennett et al. 2007; Larusdottir and O’Connor 2017), often interpreting the agenda of the senior management team or principal, for the teachers they lead. Incorporating alternative models of middle leadership (Anderson and Nixon 2010; Ridden and De Nobile 2012; Samson and Daft 2012) they may supervise, or be assisted by, lower level leaders such as assistant coordinators. Middle leaders may also be expected to develop and lead staff towards a vision for their area of responsibility (Ashmore and Clay 2016; Busher 2005; Dinham 2007).

The concept of teacher leadership overlaps with, but is not the same as, middle leadership. It is possible for teacher leaders to also be middle leaders (Bennett et al. 2003; Bush and Glover 2014) if they are engaged in responsibilities congruent with middle leader roles. Middle leadership may also be viewed as a form of distributed leadership (Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain 2011; Larusdottir and O’Connor 2017), but it is important to assert that they are not the same thing. Distributed leadership is a broader concept and may include the activities of teacher leaders who are not doing ‘middle leadership things’, or the efforts of other individuals involved in the running of the school (Harris 2014; Moos 2012).
The earlier reference to a difference between leadership and management echoes a long theoretical discussion that many scholars have contributed to over the years (Dinham 2016; Drysdale, Gurr, and Goode 2016). Leadership has been conceptualised as a component of management (for example, Tranter 2000), but on the other hand management has been described as a component of leadership (Duignan 2012). It is more sensible, perhaps, to view the two as distinct but complementary to one another (Drysdale, Gurr, and Goode 2016).

Management implies tasks that help keep the organisation running (Bennett et al. 2003; Southworth 2008). To that end manager tasks might include establishing routines and procedures (Bennett et al. 2003), budgeting and resourcing (Fitzgerald and Gunter 2006), record keeping and organising time and rosters (Kemp and Nathan 1989; Struyve, Meredith, and Gielen 2014). There is general agreement in the literature that leadership implies actions that influence others via vision sharing, direction setting and motivating (Dinham 2016; Duignan 2012; Southworth 2008). Leader activities tend to result in improvement, change, innovation or all three (Cranston 2013; Dinham 2016; Gurr 2015; Pont, Nusche, and Moorman 2008; Urick and Bowers 2014). While leading and managing are different things, they represent sets of abilities and skills, often dependent on each other, that comprise successful leadership (Dinham 2016; Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Urick and Bowers 2014). Some have explained the shift in terminology from middle managers to middle leaders as a result of the considerable changes that have washed through educational systems worldwide, including Australia, that have required more leadership at the school level and a tendency toward devolution of authority to schools (Macpherson 2009; McCulla and Degenhardt 2015; Southworth 2008). It follows that any model of middle leadership should account for a variety of manager and leader oriented activities (Drysdale, Gurr, and Goode 2016; Urick and Bowers 2014).

The middle leadership in schools (MLiS) model

While recognising the danger of theoretical models as interpretations of leadership, they can be useful as starting points for understanding and for guiding empirical research (Eacott 2015; Gurr 2015; Heck and Hallinger 2005). The Middle Leadership in Schools (MLiS) model, shown in Figure 1 below, was developed from an extensive review of literature comprising over 250 refereed journal articles, research reports, conference papers and books dating back to the 1990s (and some prior). The review was conducted using an adaption of the procedure employed by Bennett et al. (2003) for their work on behalf of the English Government sponsored National College of School Leadership projects involving the use of multiple databases (for example, ERIC and A+), limiting non-book publications to research based or institutional reports, and using a variety of terms relating to middle leadership (for example, middle manager, year coordinator,
head of department and so on). Because the work by Bennett and associates covered the period from the 1980s to 2002, the focus for this model was on literature published from 2003. However, some work prior to this time has been referred to here for their contribution to knowledge. It is important to note that not all of the sources reviewed are cited here. When many sources had identical findings, especially in relation to roles and inputs, only the most recent ones were cited. Further, some books and conference papers provided background knowledge that, while useful in helping conceptualise the model in the early stages, were not used for the final model.

Findings from the literature review were initially categorised according to themes that described broad roles of middle managers and leaders, but as those categories were developed it became apparent that research was also describing factors that influenced the work of these people, as well as how they performed their roles. The themes that emerged from these descriptions were clustered to become categories, such as ‘support from the principal’ and ‘communication’ that subsequently contributed to the elements theorised in the model. It was then determined that a model showing leadership roles and inputs into those roles should also include potential influences on schools through teacher work and student achievement. Examination of the literature suggested three main influences pertaining to teaching quality, and teacher attitudes as well as their potential to influence student performance. This last set of categories suggests how middle leadership may be important to school effectiveness. The resulting model was designed to show environmental and personal inputs into middle leadership, the key roles middle leaders play, and the potential outputs in relation to teachers and students.

At the centre of the MLiS model is a set of key roles gleaned from the literature. The model distinguishes the ‘what’ of the roles from the ‘how’ of the roles to provide conceptual clarity between the distinct roles middle leaders perform and
the ways they perform them as this has been a confounding aspect of the research to date. For example, Busher (2005) combined tasks and character qualities in listing middle leader roles. The model also recognises inputs, as processes, circumstances and people that can influence the work of middle leaders for good or ill. Finally the model shows potential outputs of middle leadership that can contribute to school effectiveness. The following sections comprise a more detailed description of MLiS, starting with inputs, moving through the roles and finishing with outputs. Areas marked ‘other??’ are an allowance for the findings of the connected research.

Inputs into middle leadership

In the MLiS model inputs are the personal, organisational and other factors that may influence the work of middle leaders. Put another way, these are what makes middle leaders succeed and what may limit success. The literature suggests five main inputs: principal support, school/system culture, professional development, enthusiasm/drive and knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Principal support

This was the most frequent input to emerge from the literature. There is strong evidence that support from the principal is an enabler of successful middle leadership (Crowther and Boyne 2016; Day, Gu, and Sammons 2016; Gurr and Drysdale 2012). Specifically, empowerment and autonomy underpinned by trust were key factors of principal support leading to effective middle leadership (Ghamrawi 2010). What is not so obvious in the literature is the specific ways principals can offer support. However, the nurturing of leadership aspiration might be one of them. In their study of Australian independent schools McCulla and Degenhardt (2015) found principal support to be a major driver of aspirant leaders’ enrolment in a leadership professional development programme. Likewise, Crowther and Boyne (2016) described how encouragement from a principal promoted the confidence of emergent teacher leaders to run a pedagogical innovation in their school.

School culture

Principals, of course, have a substantial impact on school culture (Hoy and Miskel 2012). While there is not a great deal of empirical research linking school culture and middle leadership, studies that have been done suggest the culture should: promote participation in decision making and risk-taking (Muijs and Harris 2006), be characterised by trust and collaboration, and encourage collegiality (Danielson 2007; Silins and Mulford 2004). Some studies have made clear that certain aspects of the socio-cultural milieu in organisations, such as ‘tall poppy syndrome’ and deference to ‘heroic’ leaders may breed resentment and resistance.
to the efforts of middle leaders (Danielson 2007; Fairman and Mackenzie 2015; Heng and Marsh 2009; McCulla et al. 2015).

**Professional development**

Professional development in leadership can take several forms, ranging from formal courses and training (Jones 2006) through to more localised activities such as shadowing and mentoring (Odhiambo 2014; Rhodes and Brundrett 2008). Research suggests that middle leadership is more difficult without professional development, especially for those being promoted and/or changing institutions and that it needs to be systemic, relevant to needs, and followed up (Fleming 2014; Harris, Busher, and Wise 2003; Sanders 2006).

A number of scholars have recommended that professional development be conducted alongside succession planning so that potential leaders are not discouraged or lost, and that new appointees are up to their new role (Macpherson 2009; Rhodes and Brundrett 2009; Supovitz 2014). There is some research suggesting long term, experience-based and situated practice approaches can work well (for example, McCulla and Degenhardt 2015). However, studies in the area are disparate and there is a need for more investigation into the types of professional development that can be considered ‘best practice’ for given contexts (Fluckiger et al. 2015).

**Knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy & assessment**

Knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (CP&A) that is comprehensive and up to date has been identified as a key quality of effective middle leaders (Abdul Razzak 2015; Dinham 2016; Heng and Marsh 2009; Lai and Pratt 2004). It makes sense that good knowledge of subject area and pedagogical expertise are valued in middle leaders because of their staff development and supervisory roles (Crowther 2011; Fleming 2014; Tranter 2000). What is not reported on extensively is how successful middle leaders go about using this knowledge and what impacts given strategies have on student outcomes.

**Enthusiasm/drive**

A passion for education, a drive to make things better and a commitment to transforming learning are examples of this personal variable (Dinham 2007; 2016; O’Neill et al. 2010; Reid, Brain, and Boyes 2004). Bezzina (2012) would add that moral purpose is important background to enthusiasm and drive as middle leaders are engaged in activities that should, at least in theory, lead to best possible student outcomes. Cranston (2013) explains this as leaders’ knowledge of why they are doing what they do. It implies a grasp of values and a commitment to impacting learning (Cranston 2013; Day et al. 2009). Enthusiasm and drive may be sapped by low confidence (Southworth 2008). It would be valuable for this model to know the extent to which school culture, professional development and ‘Knowledge of CP&A’ might mitigate that constraint.
Middle leadership roles

The six role categories are ordered in terms of their standing as leadership activities. It is proposed, and the model is meant to suggest, that student focussed, administrative and organisational roles are less to do with leadership and more to do with managerial work, in line with contemporary thinking (Heck and Hallinger 2005; Urick and Bowers 2014) because they are more concerned with processes, organisation and keeping things in order. They are therefore classed as mainly ‘managing’ roles. In contrast, the supervision and staff development roles, while still involving organising and processes, also potentially serve to motivate others to improve or change practice. The strategic role, to do with developing and sharing vision, is mostly to do with leadership because it is focussed on influencing, often changing, the way others think and behave (Gorton, Alston, and Snowden 2007). These have been categorised in the model as ‘leading’ roles.

Student focussed role (SF)

The student focussed role involves working with students in dealing with issues such as problem behaviour, welfare needs, academic choices, and liaison between school and home. Wise and Bennett (2003) reported that most middle leaders spend significant portions of time working with individual students on issues ranging from behaviour problems to personal problems. Year coordinators (also known as year advisors and pastoral leaders) in particular tend to spend a lot of their time on student welfare issues, liaising between teachers and department heads in relation to student issues, as well as monitoring academic achievement across a cohort (Ashmore and Clay 2016; Crane and De Nobile 2014). Cosenza (2015) and Dinham (2007) have described teacher leaders and department heads who act as mentors to students. Coffey, Berlach, and O’Neill (2011) reported on year coordinators who assisted students with the transition from primary to secondary schooling. There is little mention of this role in the literature.

Administrative role (AD)

The administrative role involves developing procedures and implementing them so that tasks can be carried out effectively. This includes the development of systems, such as files, forms and databases for the keeping of records relating to a variety of things ranging from purchases and inventory through to student achievement and behaviour (Bennett et al. 2003; Busher 2005; Fluckiger et al. 2015; Tranter 2000; Wise 2001). The purpose of the administrative role is to promote efficient use of time and resources. The middle leader develops these systems, or does so as part of a team. The administrative role also entails dealing with equipment/resources and a budget (Devolder et al. 2010). The administrative role often supports other roles. For example, a year coordinator
might develop a pro-forma for meetings (Fleming 2014) in relation to the student focussed role, or may examine student records to develop new whole school programmes (Danielson 2007) consistent with the strategic role.

Organisational role (OR)
The administrative and organisational roles are often treated together in research as ‘managerial work’ (Hoy and Miskel 2012; Samson and Daft 2012). However, they do serve different purposes. The administrative role is mainly about dealing with ‘things’, but the organisational role primarily concerns people. Both roles are managerial in nature, but some scholars have distinguished them (Bell and Ritchie 1999; Wise 2001) and so does the MLiS model. As part of this role, middle level leaders organise duty rosters and teaching timetables (Brooks and Cavanagh 2009; Glover and Miller 1999; Mercer and Ri 2006). The role also involves planning, executing and implementing a range of programmes, events and activities. These are increasingly collaborative tasks with others in a team, department or committee (Dinham 2007; Fleming 2014; Ribbins 2007).

Supervisory role (SU)
The supervisory role involves evaluating the performance of other staff, which in turn involves monitoring, communication and in some cases remediation (which can link to the staff development role). The role is focussed on monitoring and reporting the competency of individuals as well as the quality of their work (Brooks and Cavanagh 2009; Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, and Turner 2007; Fleming 2014; Tranter 2000). The role may include classroom observations, giving feedback on observations or on teaching programmes, discussing performance and supervising a group of teachers in relation to a cognate area (Danielson 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain 2011; Koh et al. 2011; Wise 2001). This role, once solely the domain of senior leaders, is becoming increasingly more common for middle leadership (AITSL 2012; Ashmore and Clay 2016; General Teaching Council Scotland 2012) even though some studies report resistance to ‘supervision’ by some middle leaders, or at least a reluctance to ‘supervise’ in the traditional sense in favour of more collegial approaches (Bennett et al. 2003; Ghamrawi 2010; Mercer and Ri 2006).

Staff development role (SD)
The staff development role involves building the capacity of staff members. It may or may not stem from the supervisory role. Middle leader behaviour in this role ranges from encouragement and moral support through to direct assistance, mentoring and coaching (Danielson 2007; Dinham 2007; Fleming 2014; General Teaching Council Scotland 2012; Liljenberg 2016). Because middle leaders are often regarded as good practitioners and often may have achieved their status through recognition of such competence, they model best practice
and lead by example (Brooks and Cavanagh 2009; Danielson 2007; Dinham 2016; Heng and Marsh 2009; Koh et al. 2011; Youngs 2014). They have the potential to do this well because of their close proximity, both hierarchically and physically, to staff (Dinham 2016; Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Ronnerman 2016). The staff development role can also entail the conduct of professional development (Abdul Razzak 2015; Lai and Pratt 2004). It follows that they would be suited to lead induction for new staff. While Tranter (2000) and Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, and Turner (2007) talk of their potential in this area, scant evidence was found of this in other literature.

Strategic role (ST)
The strategic role involves vision forming, goal setting and influencing. While not required in the past, middle leaders are increasingly asked to develop vision or a set of goals for their area of responsibility (Anderson and Nixon 2010; Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). Consequently, they are also required to persuade other staff to ‘buy in’ and work towards that vision or set of goals (Busher 2005; Danielson 2007; Fleming 2014; Ridden and De Nobile 2012; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). Collaborative styles of leadership that cultivate positive trusting relationships are beneficial (Bennett et al. 2003; Duignan 2012; Tam 2010). The strategic role implies motivating and persuading others to follow a particular policy line or get involved in implementing change (Hammersley-Fletcher and Brundrett 2005) and using a power relationship to get compliance from individuals who might be resisting change (Busher 2005). The strategic role is likely to be much easier to carry out if middle leaders are good staff developers, supervisors, administrators and organisers because they are creating the optimal conditions for influence and change (Ridden and De Nobile 2012).

How do middle leaders perform these roles?
The literature suggests five main ways in which middle leaders may carry out the above roles: managing relationships, leading teams, communicating effectively, managing time and managing self. MLiS proposes that the ‘hows’ occur across roles. For example, managing relationships would be important when supervising teachers, helping students or implementing change. The ‘how’ is often dependent on context. It is an accepted axiom that leadership is situated within contexts and is influenced by them (Eacott 2015). Contextual factors such as recent history, prevailing school or jurisdictional cultures, and external influencers such as government policy will influence the way middle leaders may ‘do’ their leadership (Denis, Langley, and Rouleau 2010). It follows that middle leaders should consider context when carrying out their roles (Grint 2003; McCulla and Degenhardt 2015).
Managing relationships
Middle leaders are often liaising between senior leadership and staff members in attempts to implement policies or drive changes coming from ‘above’ (Ng and Chan 2014; Osterman 2008). They are often working in collaboration with others (Cosenza 2015; Muijs and Harris 2006). Establishing positive working relationships is a key to success and there is an abundance of literature reporting links between supportive, collegial relationships and successful policy change, innovation, or teacher cooperation, and so on (Crowther 2011; Fitzgerald and Gunter 2006; Liljenberg 2016; Van Emmerik and Euwema 2007).

A problematic dimension of managing relationships is internal school politics, which may manifest in several ways. Middle leaders often achieve their formal positions as a result of being identified as accomplished general educators or strong practitioners in their subject area (McCulla et al. 2015). The transition from ordinary staff member to leader of staff may require effort by individuals to minimise resentment from other staff members and the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ issue mentioned earlier (Bush and Glover 2014; McCulla et al. 2015). New types of middle leadership might also be perceived as a threat. The study of English schools by Edwards, Lunt and Stamou (2012) reported concerns by heads of year that the newly appointed ‘welfare managers’ were jeopardising the integrity and value of their roles.

In addition, the newly appointed middle leader might need to alter the way they relate to others. Language that was acceptable to be used among peers might need to become more formal (Gorton, Alston, and Snowden 2007). Further, challenging the behaviour of some staff or looking after the interests of the team may lead to tensions and require communication that is sensitive to feelings of staff members on the one hand or facilitative of gaining support from senior leadership on the other (Denis, Langley, and Rouleau 2010; Duignan 2012; Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves, and Ronnerman 2015; Irvine and Brundrett 2016).

An important factor in the establishment and management of positive relationships is trust (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Ronnerman 2016; Ghamrawi 2010; Muijs and Harris 2006). This may be achieved by honesty, respectfulness and support for colleagues (Duignan 2012). Ng and Chan (2014) have suggested, however, that professional development in relationship building may also be important to a successful transition into middle leadership.

Leading teams
Leading teams is an inevitable ‘how’ of middle leadership. Fleming (2014) suggested a distinction between true teams and groups who happen to be together because they teach the same subject or cohort. Osterman (2008) explains that teams vary in size, membership and timespan according to the jobs required to be done. In light of emerging organisational structures (Department for Education 2016) and the opportunities provided by distributed leadership for teachers to lead projects unaligned to formal portfolios or discrete
subject areas (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves, and Ronnerman 2015; Harris 2014), middle leaders may be called upon to perform tasks that cut across subject areas, involve multiple groups of staff, and range in level of formality (Ashmore and Clay 2016; Fleming 2014; Muijs and Harris 2007).

Middle leaders need to be able to establish many types of groups, but keys factors in the successful work of teams is cohesion and shared goals (Fleming 2014; Van Emmerik and Euwema 2007). To be a successful team leader implies team building capabilities that promote these and it is proposed that teamwork and managing relationships would be closely linked in a study of how middle leaders perform their roles. It may not come naturally to many. Some studies have reported on the need for professional development in team building (Sanders 2006; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). It follows that any study of how middle leaders create and drive successful teams would be instructive towards such professional development.

**Communicating effectively**
Also linked to the above two ‘hows’ is effective communication. Establishing trust, collegiality and cohesion are impossible without it (Hoy and Miskel 2012). De Nobile (2016) has described a number of communication variables that are linked to positive relationships and better productivity. Supportive communication and openness are valuable for relationship building (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Ronnerman 2016; Hoy and Miskel 2012). Providing adequate information that is timely and easy to access will keep people up to date, reduce ambiguity and provide the information staff members require to do their jobs (Bell and Ritchie 1999; Herrington 2004; Southworth 2002). There is at the moment little research into the communication practices of middle leaders.

**Managing time**
Balancing the time required for the middle leadership roles with teaching and other aspects of work has been a major issue in the literature, leading to the experience of pressure, frustration, stress and worse (Abdul Razzak 2015; Harvey 1997; Irvine and Brundrett 2016; Muijs and Harris 2006; Sinkinson 2005; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). There are many instances reported in the literature listed above of roles not being performed properly or not at all.

In a study of Australian heads of department Deece reported that time to perform their roles was a critical concern for these middle leaders, with some suggesting that their teaching load is not much less than for ordinary teachers, leaving little time to develop teacher capabilities once they have completed ‘routine, but minor administrative tasks’ (2003, 50). Herrington’s (2004) study of English heads of year revealed that these pastoral middle leaders were under significant pressure to deal with their additional responsibilities in tandem with classroom teaching, sometimes not doing as good a job with their student focussed and administrative roles due to the priority they
place in their teaching. More recently Irvine and Brundrett (2016) described how the middle leaders they interviewed felt unable to perform their roles as well they would like due to limited opportunity.

Though not numerous, there is some literature describing how middle leaders might overcome the problem of time management. Writing from the corporate perspective, Haneberg (2005) suggests middle leaders use small amounts of free time between activities or meetings to complete small tasks that can be done in that time. There was no evidence of this strategy, nor any others dealing with time management, to be found in the school-based literature. Overwhelmingly, the references to time management present time as a constraint as outlined above, but some suggestions for improvement were found. Those interviewed by Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) suggested professional development about time management and prioritisation would be helpful. One of the participants in Abdul’s (2015) study suggested that a personal assistant of some sort might help senior teachers to manage their commitments, while more than one participant indicated that the teaching component of their job needed to be reduced to allow for their leadership roles.

Managing self
Managing self refers to how middle managers deal with the pressures, emotions and demands made of them by the roles. This was inferred from descriptions of how middle leaders explained their success from a personal perspective (not many!) and from what they offered as helpful ways to manage their professional growth in the role. The major theme emerging from the literature was engaging in professional development by keeping up to date on subject areas (Gurr and Drysdale 2013; Heng and Marsh 2009) or leadership skill training (Bush 2016; Lai and Pratt 2004; Muijs and Harris 2006). Another aspect of managing self was coping with role pressure and stress (Fleming 2014).

There is, however, not a great deal of research into this area and links to some obvious concepts such as emotional intelligence (Wong, Wong, and Peng 2010) and emotional labour (Grandey and Gabriel 2015) might generate some insights into best practice. Held and McKimm (2012) suggest emotional intelligence can make leaders more aware of feelings and related actions, while knowledge of emotional labour may help them to be more emotionally supportive of staff.

Outputs from middle leadership
The last part of the MLiS model concerns the possible results of middle leader activity. The literature suggests, and the model proposes that middle leaders may influence school effectiveness at least in three ways: teaching quality, teacher attitudes and student outcomes. The research evidence, while not voluminous to date, is outlined briefly in the next sections.
Teaching quality
While the link between middle leadership and teacher quality is an area in need of more research (Dinham 2016) there is some evidence of the potential for middle leaders to impact positively on the quality of teaching (Fleming 2014; Harris, Busher, and Wise 2003; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). Dinham (2007) reported on secondary school heads of department who were able to influence teacher practice by modelling a focus on student achievement and encouraging innovation and best practices (practices congruent with the Staff Development role).

Teacher attitudes
This is an area that requires more research attention. However, there is some evidence in the literature suggesting middle leaders can influence teacher attitudes such as job satisfaction, job commitment and stress (Day et al. 2009; Dinham 2007; Wong, Wong, and Peng 2010). These attitudes may in turn influence behaviours related to productivity and turnover intention, all of which are associated with wellbeing (Collie et al. 2015).

Student outcomes
It follows logically that teacher attitudes and quality of teaching (which are likely to interact with one another) are likely to influence student outcomes. A number of studies have linked student outcomes to leadership via quality of teaching (Day et al. 2009; Dinham 2007), but direct evidence is surprisingly hard to find. The Australian study reported by Dinham (2007) was a rare exception. That study concentrated on department (subject) heads and reported qualitative evidence linking focus on student achievement and wellbeing (congruent with Student Focus in the MLiS model), and effective team leadership to student outcomes. Outside of the above studies, however, it would be helpful to know what student outcomes could be interpreted as evidence of school effectiveness. Youngs (2011) provides some insight into how this might be achieved qualitatively, which could then guide quantitative or mixed method research.

Conclusion
Over twenty years ago Bennett, whose work has had wide influence in the field, asserted that ‘A theory of educational management should be able to help us to analyse what managers in educational establishments do and how they do it.’ (1995, 55). While attempts have been made to achieve this goal since that time, a comprehensive model remains largely out of reach. A large body of literature was drawn upon to produce a model that attempted to explain middle leadership in schools in terms of inputs, roles and outputs. The MLiS is not, however, meant to be the definitive representation of how middle leadership operates in all schools. Rather, it is offered as a model that could be operationalised to guide
further research into the way middle leaders operate, the influences that support or constrain them, and the influences they have on school effectiveness as evidenced through teaching quality and student outcomes. Such research would empirically test the model, and lead ultimately to a more cohesive theory, or set of theories, of middle leadership.

The MLiS presents a number of possibilities for research agendas, including those of the author. A key unknown entity in middle leadership theory, such as it is, is the form and range of middle leader roles. The MLiS proposes six, based on previous literature. However, these are problematic because they have not been empirically tested as theoretical constructs representing middle leadership activity, and their status as roles involving mainly managing or leading requires confirmation (or disconfirmation) through empirical research. These issues notwithstanding, it is desirable to be able to describe and explain the nature of the roles, uncover examples of best practice and how the roles are executed. The last point would need to account for the situated nature of leadership practices.

Theory of middle leadership would also be served well by investigations into the inputs that can lead to successful middle leader work (visible through outputs), as well as those that might constrain the work of middle leaders. Positioning of certain input categories (such as the ones identified in the MLiS model) as predictors of effectiveness in middle leadership role execution might be a way to start, followed by the uncovering of narratives that explain how factors such as professional development and senior leadership relate to roles in detail. Similar investigative work could identify which roles impact most significantly on outputs such as teaching quality and student outcomes.

The suggestions above assume an ‘input-roles-output’ flow of interactions. In terms of theory building, the reality of the interactions between components of the model needs to be revealed. The form of the MLiS model is not to suggest an orderly and linear relationship here. It would be interesting, for example, to investigate how ‘Principal Support’ or ‘Knowledge of CP&A’ effect student outcomes directly, as well as indirectly through the roles, as well as to see what recursive effects teacher attitudes (for example) have on inputs such as ‘Enthusiasm/Drive’.

Finally, and relating back to a point made earlier, it may not be possible to produce a ‘one size fits all’ model or theory of middle leadership, given the importance of context. What should be possible, however, is a theoretical framework that explains how aspects of middle leadership may be influenced, and how middle leadership may influence schools in terms that consideration of context may then help us to better understand.

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