香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong
教育及人類發展學院

Research Brief

EPL IMPACT

Presented by

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Middle leaders make a difference
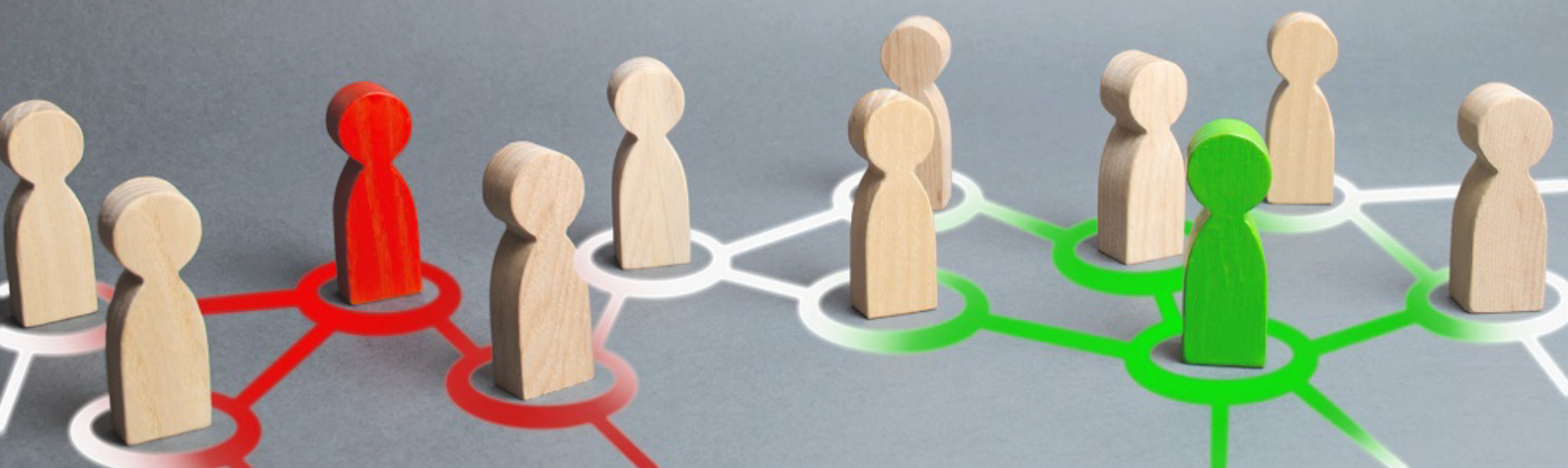
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Introduction

Middle leaders play vital roles to support educational reform. They hold formal responsibilities but work directly with teachers and students. Middle leadership positions include panel chairs and heads of department, curriculum leaders, and information technology and special educational needs coordinators. This research examined how schools embracing reform and innovation used middle leaders and the conditions that supported or inhibited their work.

Four Aided and four Direct Subsidy secondary schools with successful track records in implementing innovation participated in this project. An important finding was that effective middle leaders in the sampled schools engaged in leadership practices that extended beyond their immediate subjects or specialisms to work across the organization, build individual and team capacity, and engage with policy or government.

Key Issues and Significant Findings

1 Middle leaders engaged in management practices that supported stability, predictability and quality control and in leadership practices that facilitated improvement. Key middle management and middle leadership practices occurred at the instructional, organizational and system domains. The below table identifies examples of typical middle management and middle leadership practices at each domain.

2 Middle leaders who engaged in organizational and system leadership:

- identified areas for improvement in support of school mission;
- developed teachers' individual and collective capacity by mentoring, modeling and collaborating;
- took responsibility for staffing and resource allocation;
- designed team structures and purposes and defined team members' roles;
- developed strong interpersonal and interprofessional relationships;
- engaged people and networks beyond their school to draw capacity into schools.

3 Middle leaders engaged in organizational and system leadership when supported by:

- aspirational school missions that focused teamwork;
- clearly articulated job descriptions that framed and structured middle leaders' roles;
- formal mentoring and regular support from senior leaders;
- rich opportunities for professional learning;
- opportunities to lead innovation.

4 Challenges to middle leaders' effectiveness at the organizational or system domains related to:

- unclear or unmotivating school missions;
- lack of experience, support and opportunity to lead;
- limited school resources and policies;
- balancing teaching and leading responsibilities;
- prioritising leadership and management responsibilities.

Domains of practice	Management	Leadership
Instructional (learning and teaching)	- Allocating curriculum time - Communicating procedures - Scheduling teaching - Documenting	- Co-constructing curriculum - Scaling-up new practices - Mentoring and coaching teachers - Identifying improvement areas - Providing feedback
Organisational (cross-school activities, individual and collective capacity building)	- Providing professional development opportunities - Accountability - Appraisal documentation	- Networking - Strategic resourcing - Teacher recruitment - Team-building - Schoolwide planning - Selling the school mission - Setting and operationalising departmental vision - Motivating innovation and improvement - Collaborative strategic planning - Negotiating resource allocation - Building individual and team capacities - Leading cross-curricular instruction
System (government, policy, socio-economic context)	- Reporting to the government - Compliance and accountability	- Interpreting policies to leaders and teachers - Recommending responses to policy change - Advocating for policy change

Research Impact and Recommendations

This research has informed professional learning programmes offered by the department of Education Policy and Leadership. It has the potential to influence middle leadership development in the following ways:

- Schools, their sponsoring bodies, and the Education Bureau should develop middle leaders' potential for building teachers' capacity, fueling innovation, and enacting policy.

- Principals and principal development programmes should emphasise senior leaders' role in creating school conditions, structures and strategies that facilitate middle leaders' in-school development.

- Middle leadership training and in-school development opportunities should address team leadership, innovation, policy enactment, and capacity development at the panel, department or team level. This will enhance the implementation of the EDB's professional standards and "career ladder".

For more Information:

1 Bryant, D. (2018). Conditions that support middle leaders' work in organisational and system leadership: Hong Kong case studies. *School Leadership & Management, 39*(5), 415-433.

2 Bryant, D. A., Wong, Y. L., & Adames, A. (2020). How middle leaders support in-service teachers on-site professional learning. *International Journal of Educational Research. doi: 10.1016/j.ijer,* 1-17.

3 **For any inquries**, **please contact Dr Darren BRYANT by dabryant@eduhk.hk**.

▶ **Video Interview**