

# Lecture Title: Roles and Duties of Middle Leaders in Educational Institutions



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**Middle Leaders and the Leadership  
of Educational Institutions**  
MQF Level 5, 4 ECTS

- Introductions – roles
- Expectations



## Learning outcomes

### Competences:

Develop new skills, gain experience, and acquire confidence,

### Knowledge

The different roles and Duties of Middle Leaders in Educational Institutions

### Skills

apply a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of middle leaders and how they influence learning and development, teamwork, and engagement and motivation within the education environment





Interactive activity

Generate a word cloud on slido

**slido.com** with **#3828983**



# Definition of a middle leader

What is the role of a middle leader?

What is the role of leadership in educational institutions?

What is middle leadership in education?

Who are the middle leaders?

How do they assume this role?



## Daniel Robertson on Middle Leadership in Schools – (March 14, 2022)

“The middle leadership role is varied and focuses on the leading of both teaching and learning within the classroom development and implementation of strategies across a team of educational professionals”



# The duties and roles of middle leaders

Defining the role of middle leadership is not an easy task particularly as the middle leadership role is continuously evolving and changing like many other roles in the educational setting.

- According to Robertson D (2022) the role has evolved into one that describes practitioners with school wide responsibilities, that often run alongside with the class responsibilities of a teacher.
- Moreover, Ron Tan (Sep 2020) - in his research “Understanding the roles practice and professional development of Middle leaders in Schools”-maintains that there has been a shift in educational terminology from “middle managers” to middle leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (De Nobile 2018)



Tan R (2020) argues that the role of a manager in school which signifies the day to day administrative work in a particular department, has changed to the need for the personnel to become a dynamic leader which in turn has widened the job's scope.



# Education Reform



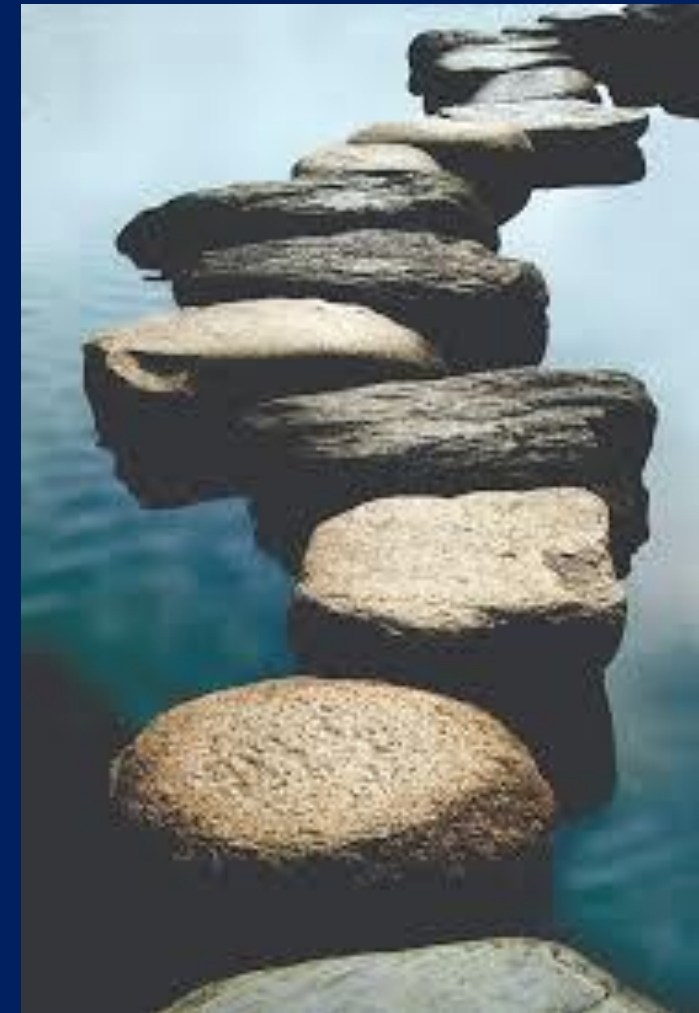
According to Mercer and Ri (2006) the changes in roles of middle leaders have come about as a result of the many reforms adopted.



Middlewood and Lumby (2007) maintain that defining the duties of middle leaders should not be taken lightly as all teachers can be managers of students in their own class.

### **International vs the Maltese context**

Over the past decade , middle leadership in secondary schools as a stepping stone to headship was less researched in a number of countries like England, New Zealand, Australia and USA when compared to that carried out on teachers and senior leadership (Collier et al., 2002; Cranston, 2006; Dinham, 2007; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009).



- This is also the case argues Vella K (2015) doctoral thesis, *Middle Leadership Progression in Maltese Catholic Schools: A Case Study in Enclosed Succession*, that with regards to the Maltese context, the academic literature on middle leadership in schools is somewhat sparse.



- In the local context while the middle leader's role in state schools in Malta is prescribed by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, internally in Church schools middle leaders are directly appointed by the head of school from teachers employed at the same institution.
- Internationally it was found that such a situation seems to have both advantages and disadvantages for all those concerned. Research in the USA claimed that middle leaders might feel at ease in their surroundings, as they are accustomed to the procedures and ethos of the school and "can deal efficiently and possibly effectively with issues due to the familiarity with the school system and ethos" (Loder and Spillane, 2005:23).



- On the other hand they may feel uncomfortable with their new role as previously they were teachers without a managerial position (ibid, 2005).
- Middle leaders in Maltese Church schools might also feel stressed due to increase in duties and also due to lack of official recognition and time to do the job properly. (Vella K 2015)
- When talking about middle leaders in Maltese Church secondary schools we are referring to year heads, subject co-ordinators, guidance teachers and inclusive education coordinator (INCO).
- They are not only not officially recognized by the Maltese education authorities (which does recognize similar grades in state schools) nor by the Directorate for Catholic Education within the Curia (the Archdiocese or the administration office of the Maltese Roman Catholic Church). As middle leaders are not officially recognized as such they do not have any financial remuneration for the extra duties they perform.



- Reforms of Maltese education (The National Curriculum Framework, 2013) and the decline in Roman Catholic religious vocations (Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007), leave Maltese Church schools having to recruit head teachers from lay people (Roman Catholic but not part of a religious order) whilst simultaneously dealing with structural and curriculum developments and an increase in student numbers and schools. This situation made these schools become increasingly or sometimes totally dependent on lay Catholic teachers and heads (Galea, 2004).
- It seems evident that the Maltese Church schools succeeded in finding teachers who were willing to hold such posts (Borg, 1997). The literature suggested that often middle leadership positions were accepted because there was a high level of trust between those working in the institution and a sense of pride and belonging to the school by those approached to serve (Bezzina, 2012).







## Research on roles and duties of middle leaders

- Over the past two decades, international research has focused mostly on the roles, duties and challenges of middle leaders, primarily focusing on subject co-ordinators and heads of department at secondary level.
- In England (Earley, 1990; Bolam and Turner, 1998; Busher and Harris, 1999; Brown, Rutherford and Boyle, 2000; Wise, 2001; Briggs, 2003; Bush, 2003; Bedford, 2006; Cranston, 2006 and NCSL, 2006a), in Africa (Bush and Glover, 2013), Hong Kong (Choi, 2013), China (Mercer and Ri, 2006) and New Zealand (Fitzgerald, 2004 and Gregory Marshall, 2012).

# Middle leaders are vital to raising standards

Researchers in England, Canada, Australia and China who focus their writing on middle leadership seem to agree that the role of a middle leader is a vital, key role that enables educational institutions to raise their standards (Fink, 2010; Middlewood, 1997; Barallon, 2008; Brown, Rutherford and Boyle, 2000; Mercer and Ri, 2006; Rhodes, Brundrett and Nevill, 2008; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014).

The research suggests that a school head should always consider and reflect on the aptitudes of his/her staff to identify those members of staff who would be suitable to fill a middle management role (Fink 2010). Middlewood, 1997:23) argues that “it is a truism to say that appointing such people is the most important task” that a school principal will ever face throughout his/her career as middle leaders are particularly influential in any educational organization.



# The need to support middle leaders

- Research shows that how much middle leaders contribute to their organizations depends on how involved they are in the decision making process and the level of authority they are assigned.
- Rhodes and Brundrett, (2005) argue that the contribution of middle leaders is vital for improvement and so they need to be supported by their senior leaders. Besides, Brooks and Cavanagh (2009) maintain that middle leaders link everything together and are vital for schools to run smoothly.





Middle Leaders and the Leadership of  
Educational Institutions



## Middle leaders assume more responsibilities

- Over the last decade more responsibilities have been assigned to middle leaders as senior leaders have tried to delegate their workload in the face of Educational Reform and change. (Glover and Gleeson, 1997; Earley and Fletcher-Campbell, 1989a; Brown and Rutherford, 1996), duties which in the past were directly administered by the senior leaders (Brown et al., 2000).

# Successful Middle leadership

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- How does successful middle leadership look to you?





# Successful middle leaders

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- The success of middle leaders depend on 3 key expectations:
- What you are responsible for
- Who you are accountable to
- How do you account for your success/what authority is invested in you

# What may the roles and duties of a middle leader look like?

- As a middle leader you may be required to work with SLT to raise standards
- Observe lessons or parts of lessons
- To work alongside colleagues
- To assist in planning, teaching assessing, reporting of the subject area
- Leading a discussion on a subject
- Organise inset days



# Different perspectives in describing middle leadership

There seems to be three perspectives when describing middle leadership emerging from the current literature argues Tan 2020

The first dimension is a *positional role* in the hierarchy where a middle leader manages a team of both teaching and administrative staff and is in turn managed by the school's senior management (Bush, 2016; Choi, 2013; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013).

For example, a teacher is given a *formal position* where he/she is expected to lead a team or group of teachers according to their subject area or areas of student development like pastoral care or co-curricular activities.



The second perspective is where the middle leader is defined by their *function* for example by developing a team of pastoral care teachers (Brooks and Cavanagh, 2009; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013).

Another example of an *informal* middle leadership function would be that of a “teacher leader” (Danielson, 2007) who would be given the task of running a professional development workshop for colleagues.





# Formal and informal teacher leaders



Formal teacher leaders are those identified as guidance teachers, health and safety officers, Head of Departments(HOD) or year tutor. In our local context these roles have a lighter teaching- load and these positions are by application and not by seniority. Training is then organized during school hours.



Then there are the informal teacher leader roles which are usually time stipulated and linked to projects or programmes, extra-curricular activities as well as serving on a committee like Eco Schools.



- These informal positions are usually voluntary and no compensation is offered other than the intrinsic one. These positions are usually project based and open up the “possibility of all teachers becoming leaders at various times” as aptly described by Muijs and Harris (2007:113).
- They argue that this possibility changes the power relationships between leaders and followers and leads teachers to increased participation in school improvement.



- In schools there is usually a mixture of the two types, depending on the culture of the school in the case of the informal roles.
- In the case of the formal teacher leader roles depends in the school size and the allocation of resources.



The third perspective has been defined in recent years by *actions*, by which they improve the quality outcomes for the students and staff.

Essentially in this role of function and action is that the middle leader is still a classroom teacher who has an impact on the students as well as having a transformational active role in teaching and learning.

- The three aspects of positional role, function and action are interdependent and whilst the positional role is rather clearly defined, the actions and functions are more complex and cannot be generalised (Harris and Jones 2017) as they are “empirically based accounts of the nature, practice, and influence of middle leaders in schools”.



# What makes an effective middle leader?

- To define a middle leader in today' educational context as a teaching role with added management responsibilities is perhaps outdated. According to (Irvine and Brundrett, 2017) middle leaders have specific skills and traits that need to be developed to improve the students' learning.
- In current literature middle leaders are viewed as the critical agents in leading learning and developing curriculum as well as building on intrapersonal relationships with their peers.

ANN LIEBERMAN  
LYNNE MILLER

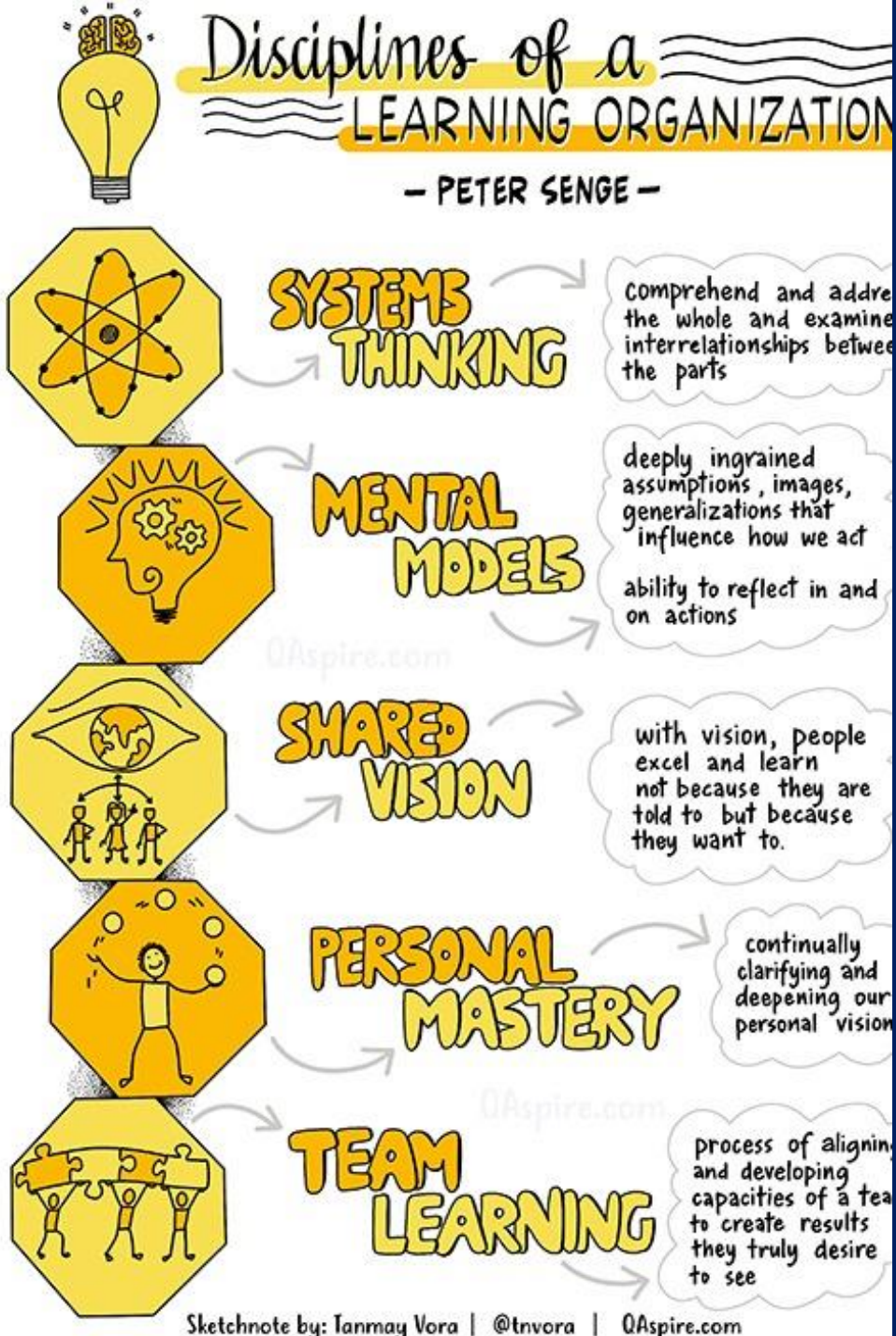
*Teacher*  
LEADERSHIP





# Building professional learning communities

- Wenger (1998) suggests that building a community of practitioners in schools is important not only to develop leaders of learning but also to foster a sense of meaning and identity in their work as well as enabling the effective implementation of school wide or national policies and curricula.
- According to Senge P (1999) – when discussing learning organizations as “...diverse webs of and teams who continually help one another, rely on one another, and learn with and from one another, not individuals”



- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpiqnCAQ6S8&ab\\_channel=KrisWile](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpiqnCAQ6S8&ab_channel=KrisWile)



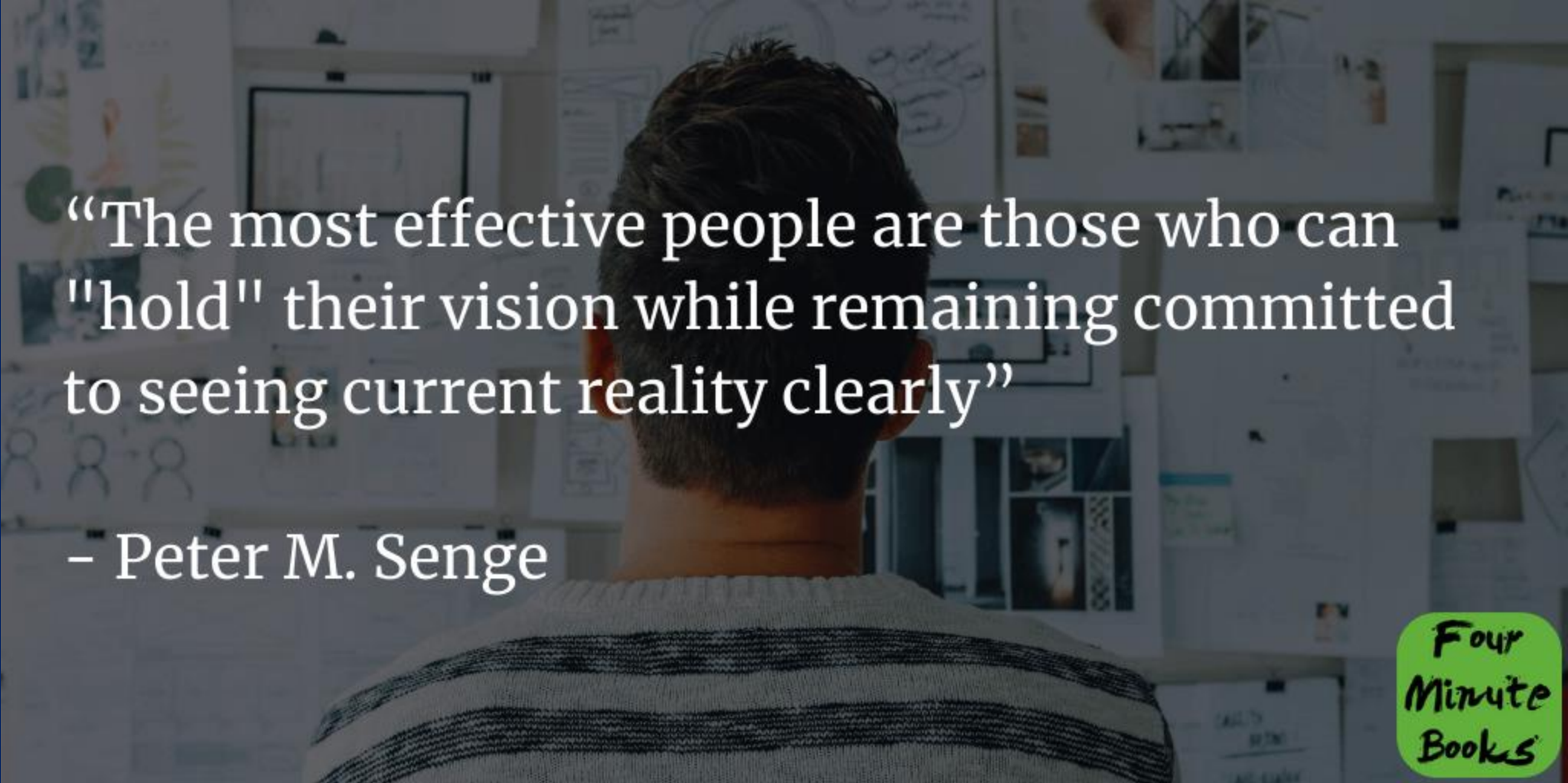


# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions





- Hughes and Kristonis (2006) maintain that educational leaders who want to create an environment of professional learners will systemically transform the organizational culture of their schools so that learning communities become “a way of life” - a *school that learns* Senge 2000
- Senge (1990 :3) in the Fifth Discipline maintains that an effective organization is a learning organization:
- “ where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together”



“The most effective people are those who can  
"hold" their vision while remaining committed  
to seeing current reality clearly”

– Peter M. Senge

Four  
Minute  
Books



- Since communities are built on a shared vision and beliefs- it makes sense for middle leaders to lead to personal growth and increase their range of practices.
- Harris et. al (1995) and Harris (1998) argue that effective departments depends on the middle leader's relationship with his/her members.
- Hargreaves (2019) maintains that collegiality or what is known as “collaborative professionalism” are key/pivotal to bring about educational change.



# Teacher leaders as change agents

- Although a lot of research has shown that senior school leadership brings about cultural change in an organization, these cultural changes would not be possible if the middle leaders were not to take the lead and influence relationships within their department.
- Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009:156) regard teachers as agents of change. They argue that the “involvement of teachers in setting standards, not just trying to reach them, is important if teachers are to move out of the role as technicians and into professional teacher roles”. (ibid.:157)



# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo\\_mHNTMlSk&ab\\_channel=EducatorsforExcellence](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo_mHNTMlSk&ab_channel=EducatorsforExcellence)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jm-X0kkU4s&ab\\_channel=WisconsinDPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jm-X0kkU4s&ab_channel=WisconsinDPI)



# Leading from the middle

Fullan's (2015) idea of "Leading from the middle" suggests that middle leadership is key in running effective schools.

Recent studies on educational leadership accept/adopt models "distributed leadership" (Spillane, 2006) 'dispersed leadership'

Lingard et. al (2003) and democratic leadership Woods (2004) suggesting that authority is much more dispersed, decentralised in schools.

Although this is a positive development for the empowerment of middle leaders to lead learning, the role of the leaders and the learner have become blurred, making the middle leader's position much more complex.



# Middle Leaders and the Leadership of Educational Institutions

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k70zIXrlcHk&ab\\_channel=France%C3%89ducationinternationale](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k70zIXrlcHk&ab_channel=France%C3%89ducationinternationale)





# The Maltese Context



Vella K (2015) argues that over the past decade middle leadership in secondary schools as a springboard to positions in Senior leadership/headship was much less researched in contrast to research on teachers and senior leadership. Collier et. Al 2002 Cranston 2006, Dinham,2007, Robinson, Hophea and Loyd, 2009 in Vella 2015).

Likewise, in the Maltese context, there is no academic literature on middle leadership. In the local context the duties and roles of middle leaders are first mentioned by the Directorate for Quality And Standards Education in 2010, despite the fact that such middle leadership positions have been offered to teachers over the past two decades.



- <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Teachers%20Resources/Staff%20Handbook.pdf>
- Heads of Department are expected to work together with the College and School educational leadership to ensure high standards of teaching and learning practice and processes while being guided by Education Officers.



- Performing the duties of Teacher (see Job Description of a Teacher) and Head a Department for a particular subject or group of subjects;
- Actively assisting the Head of School in ensuring the good professional practice, standards, and quality of teaching and learning of subject/s through proper dialogue with the class teachers
- Advising and contributing to curriculum development at school and system level under the direction and guidance of the respective Education Officer;



- Advising and contributing to curriculum development at school and system level
- Co-ordinating the teaching and learning of the subject/s for which one is responsible;
- Setting examination papers, co-ordinating marking schemes and moderating examinations and assessment processes at one's school as well as in other schools;
- Ensuring timely and adequate provision of textbooks, materials, and equipment required for the effective teaching of the subject across schools in the College;



- Ensuring that the maintenance and upkeep of equipment related to teaching tools
- Preparing specifications and budgets for the requirements of the subject-specific teaching tools and equipment,
- Mentoring other teachers in the subject/level of their speciality;
- Holding and leading regular departmental meetings and ensuring the keeping of minutes;
- Encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with the SDP targets and as agreed with the Senior Management Team.



- The duties and responsibilities of a Head of Department (Primary) shall include the following:
- Performing the duties of Head of Department and performing limited Teacher duties
- Actively assisting the Head of School in ensuring the good professional practice, standards, and quality of teaching and learning of the subject/s through proper dialogue with the class teachers
- Advising and contributing to curriculum development at school and system level under the direction and guidance of the respective Education Officers;





- Co-ordinating the learning and teaching of the Primary Curriculum;
- Co-ordinating the setting of examination papers and marking schemes and moderating examinations and assessment processes at one's school/s;
- Ensuring the timely and adequate provision of textbooks and materials
- Assisting the Head of School in the preparation of specifications and budget for curricular requirements; required for effective teaching and learning;
- Encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with the SDP



- Guidance Teacher
- Performs the duties of a Teacher
- Assists and guides students in their personal, educational and emotional development;
- Caters for particular needs of students referred to him/her by other teachers or school administrators, and prepares any reports and makes the necessary contacts within the Education Division for external referrals if, and when required;
- Advises parents on the personal development and behaviour, subject options and career choices of their children;



- Organises, meetings (including talks, discussions, seminars, etc.), for parents as agreed with the Head of School;
- Prepares students and provides the necessary information for subject options and career choices;
- Organises visits by students to educational institutions and career related establishments;
- Co-operates in the organisation of Guidance and Counselling activities and services at school and system level;
- Works under the direction of Counsellors and Guidance and Counselling Education Officer/s;



- Facilitates the transition of students from primary to secondary school, and from secondary to another school, or to school leaving;
- Organises guidance and counselling spaces and facilities at school.



- The roles and responsibilities of an Inclusive Education Coordinator (INCO) shall include the following:
- Participating in the development of a College-wide Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy and provision in collaboration with the College Principal, the Senior Management Team (SMT) of the school, school staff, students and parents;
- Ensuring the effective implementation and monitoring of this policy and related actions so as to ensure equitable access to a relevant curriculum for students with Individual Educational Needs (IENs);



- Overseeing the formulation, implementation and review of IEPs for students with IENs;
- Ensuring the co-ordination of the provision of special examination arrangements for students with IENs;
- Adopting and working towards the implementation of the school development plan of the particular school they are giving service in;
- Accessing and regularly monitoring the records of students with IENs;
- Advising the Senior Management Team (SMT) on the procurement and management of SEN resources in schools and monitoring their utilisation





- Ensuring that Individual Transition Programmes (ITP) are implemented before transition from one school to another or from one sector to another and participating in the development of such programmes, including school-to-work ITPs where applicable;
- Co-ordinating all staff assigned to students with IENs;
- Liaising with feeder and receiver schools;
- Facilitating links between Colleges and Resource Centres through networking activities;
- Mentoring (see Appendix 1) other teachers/learning support assistants in the subject/level of their speciality;



- Ensuring that students with IENs are encouraged to develop advocacy skills and where possible to begin to take responsibility of their own learning;
- Liaising with and providing technical advice to colleagues in schools and other professionals, including the College and school multi-disciplinary team, who are in contact with students with IENs;
- Under the direction of the relative College Principal and Head of School, liaising with external agencies involved in supporting students with IENs;
- Co-ordinating professional development opportunities for colleagues and participating in CPDs;



- Liaising with, guiding and collaborating with parents/guardians of students with IENs;
- Encouraging participation in EU projects and other projects in accordance with the SDP targets and as agreed with the Senior Management Team.
- An Inclusion Coordinator (INCO) may also be assigned the above duties and responsibilities in more than one College/Resource Centre.



What is the common theme running through most of the responsibilities or descriptors of what each role constitutes in the job descriptions explored above?





- The title *middle leader* is often used to describe a leadership position in a school attributed to a person who has additional responsibilities outside the classroom.
- Middle leaders have different areas of responsibilities.
- These may include pastoral, curriculum leadership or leading a team for a specific school improvement policy.
- In this context middle leadership is being interpreted as those role with out of class remit and with a leadership remit.
- This theme running through most definitions is referring to the teachers as the *layer in the middle* between the Senior leadership i.e, the Head of School and Assistant Head of School (international literature – principal and deputy principal, and the classroom teachers.



- Therefore, the role of a middle leader is much more complex and requires development and improvement to be truly effective .
- According to Daniel Robertson (2022)
- “This flexible role within the hierarchy of school life requires the individual to be adaptable, and to have the skills necessary to translate Senior Leadership visions into achievable processes. What's more, Middle Leadership in Schools, when used effectively and efficiently, provides unique insights into how things play out in the day-to-day actioning of those visions. In this sense, then, we can think of the middle leadership role as being the engine room of any school.”





How confident do you feel about the content for today?

1      2      3      4      5

Not confident                                    Confident

What challenges did you find in today's lesson?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_



- **Core Reading List**

- 1. Bush, T. (2011) Succession planning in England: new leaders and new forms of leadership. *School Leadership and Management*,
  - Vol.31, No.3, pp.181-198.
- 2. Fink, D. (2010) *The Succession Challenge*. London: Sage Publications.
- 3. Grootenboer, P., Edwards-Groves, C., & Rönnerman, K. (2020) *Middle Leadership in Schools A Practical Guide for Leading Learning*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis.
- 4. Directorate for Educational Services (2010) *Standard Operating Procedure*, Floriana: Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family

- **Supplementary Reading List**

- 1. Bennett, N., Woods, P., Wise, C. and Newton W. (2007) Understandings of middle leadership in secondary schools: A review of empirical research.
  - *School Leadership and Management*, Vol.27, No.5, pp.453-470.
- 2. Brooks, Z. and Cavanagh, R. (2009) *An Examination of Middle Leadership in Western Australian Secondary Schools*.
- 3. Earley, P. (1990) *Piggy in the middle: middle management in education*.
- 4. Malta Review of Educational Research - <http://www.mreronline.org>
- 5. The Educator- <https://mut.org.mt/publications/the-educator>

