Middle management structures and professional development opportunities for middle leaders in future focused New Zealand secondary schools.

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"Great schools grow when educators understand that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships. Strong leadership in schools results from the participation of many people, each leading in his or her own way.
Whether we call it distributed leadership, collaborative leadership, or shared leadership, the ideal arrangement encourages every adult in the school to be a leader.
Administrators, formal teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders all contribute to the leadership mix. They hold the power to improve student learning in the hands they extend to one another."
(Donaldson, Gordon A.; 2007)

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

I reviewed leadership structures in five schools who have been established in the last ten years. I saw in these schools a focus on extending the curriculum to ensure a contextual and engaging experience for students to explore ideas through passion projects and other activities while being guided by a strong mentoring base. The middle leadership structure encompassed curriculum leaders, teacher leaders and pastoral leaders working together to provide a wide range of learning experiences for students.

The middle leadership structure was far less hierarchical than in a traditional school, and the learner had key inputs into their own learning programmes. There was a strong sense of collaboration in the schools who were all considerably smaller in roll size that the school I lead, and I did wonder if the smaller school size made this approach easier to develop. Various structures exist in these schools to bring ideas for learning to the table, for everyone to contribute to the learning programmes and for the learner to be at the heart of the planning. This collaboration created many situations for professional development opportunities to naturally occur.

In consultation with Heads of Learning Areas from my own school and using the idea of mentoring I saw at Haeata Community Campus, I extended my research into coaching and mentoring as ways to provide the professional learning that would support and grow middle leaders. Two schools in Canterbury have initiated programmes for teaching "coaching" to their middle leaders and both report positive outcomes from the programmes. There are a variety of ways to provide relevant professional learning through hierarchical mentoring (where the mentee selects a mentor of their own choice) or coaching, or peer coaching for our middle leaders.

I also considered the role of the Kāhui Ako in each of the schools. For most schools, the develop of the Kāhui Ako was still in the early stages and some middle leaders also held Across School Teacher (AST) roles or Within School Teacher (WST) roles. For schools who had yet to have these roles appointed there was some apprehension as to what would happen if their middle leaders moved into these positions. In my readings, I explored the *Teacher Leadership* concept and felt this fitted well with much of what is happening with the AST and WST roles in the Kāhui Ako as it was the learning and leadership without the administrative demands of a more traditional middle leader role. I believe we can do more to grow our middle leaders, who are at the heart of curriculum in our schools, through coaching and/or mentoring.

Purpose

For students to achieve their very best we need middle leaders who have the necessary skills and attributes to support their teachers in working with students to provide future-focused opportunities. If we keep doing what we did last century we will not change the mechanism for how education can be delivered into the future. We need to be providing quality professional development to middle leaders and clearly understanding what their goals and aspirations are for their futures – whether it is to be a great middle leader or to aspire to senior leadership and beyond.

With a shortage of quality, qualified, enthusiastic and suitable teachers increasingly causing problems in attaining good quality staff in the school we are leaning on our middle leaders to plug the gaps and work with some teachers who are struggling with the demands of our secondary students. This adds to the complexity of the position for middle managers and they are stepping up to have "open conversations", "difficult conversations" and manage staff in difficult situations. We have also seen an increase in mental health problems among staff and this in turn puts pressure on our middle leaders. With the current teacher shortage, we are increasingly looking to employ staff from overseas and while they may have the qualifications for the position, it is our middle leaders who are working closely with them to upskill on NCEA and the NZ curriculum and how NZ schools function.

The current hierarchical model and level of professional development for middle leaders in our schools is not sustainable with the advent of Communities of Schools and the pressures middle leaders find themselves in. The tension between being a great classroom teacher, a manager of people and systems along with aligning school and department goals is a huge task for our middle leaders. With the shortage of teachers and the pressures of time for all teachers, the role of a middle leader is often not seen as a desirable role. One could become an Across School Teacher and enjoy the wonders of working with curriculum or "big picture" ideas, get more pay and time allowance, and not have to worry about the personnel and systems issues that confront middle leaders.

We owe it to our students to provide the best middle leaders we possibly can to enhance their learning opportunities and I want to explore how this can be achieved for both our students and our middle leaders.

Background and rationale

Middle leaders play a significant role in our secondary schools in New Zealand. The hierarchical model of Heads of Faculty/ Head of Department has been in place for a long time and I question whether we are giving middle leaders the professional development necessary to thrive in our future focused schools. As a leader, I want to be known for the leadership I have created and supported in others I work with.

The Canterbury West Coast Secondary Principals' Association (CWCSPA) Executive established an Aspiring Principals' Programme in 2017 but in discussions this year at executive level, consideration was given to the need for more professional development for middle leaders as being more critical for the future. There is a body of evidence that would suggest that we offer (or have done in recent years) professional development for aspiring principals and first-time principals but the same can't be said for those in middle leadership positions. Flückiger, Lovett, Dempster and Brown (2015) state:

> "In the light of these interests, while we argue that middle leaders are well placed to move into the promotional leadership pool with appropriate preparation, we are less sure about the commitment that education systems have to provide role relevant professional learning for professionals who see middle leadership as their career path."

Cardno and Bassett (2015) conducted a study of 5 large secondary schools in Auckland in 2015 to investigate how leadership was being developed with the middle-leaders in these schools. The middle leaders were seen to be managing systems, people and themselves as part of their leadership role. There were conflicting opinions between the senior leadership and the middle leadership on what progress was being made. I would like to unpack these perceived differences as I visit schools and look to establish what the professional development needs of the middle leaders are in our schools.

Methodology

Are we doing enough to provide professional development for middle leaders and do we establish whether they aspire to senior leadership positions or are content to lead from the middle as this is possibly an important distinction to make in determining the type of professional development to best support each individual middle leader?

I reviewed some literature on leading from the middle, middle leadership, current middle leadership structures and outlined possible professional development opportunities that could be offered to enhance middle leaders in our future-focused schools in New Zealand. I had intended to look at the links between the professional development being offered to middle leaders and the Across School Teacher roles in the Kāhui Ako in the schools I visit (where applicable) as I have been very impressed with the professional development provided for me as a Kāhui Ako leader and was keen to see how the professional learning for Across School Teacher roles may be used for our middle leaders. Time constraints restricted the extent to which I delved into the Kāhui Ako links to explore comparative professional development opportunities and content.

I visited three schools in Auckland (Hobsonville Point Secondary School, Albany Senior High School and Ormiston Senior High School) and two schools in Canterbury (Rolleston College and Haeata Community Campus) that have been established within the last ten years. I visited the three Auckland schools 3 years ago with the Canterbury West Coast Secondary Principals Association (CWCSPA) Principals' Tour to Auckland schools and have liaised with Maurie Abraham, principal at Hobsonville Point, on a number of occasions since our visit. In 2015, our school was undergoing a review of how curriculum was delivered, and I arranged for 24 staff from our school to visit the same Auckland schools the principals visited. I was impressed with what they were offering and wanted teachers from our school to see the schools in action. Maurie Abraham also visited our school and spoke with our middle leaders in 2015 when we were exploring the new timetable structures. Having experienced their philosophies and visions I was keen to revisit and discuss their middle leadership structures and how they are providing the systems necessary for growth in middle leadership in future-focused schools. I have included notes from the visits in the appendix.
What I hadn't taken into account was the size of the schools as they were all much smaller than my school and as a result management/leadership structures varied.

I looked at their middle management structure and how they gauge the aspirations and dreams of their middle leaders. Do they have coaching and mentoring in place for middle leaders and how do the middle leaders align the school goals with the learning area goals as part of their leadership? Are they part of a Kāhui Ako and if so, how does this align with the middle leadership roles within the school?

I met with two middle leaders (Heads of Learning Areas) within my school to discuss their desired professional development to enhance their roles. This gave me a base to consider changes to support them further alongside the findings from the other schools I visited. I was able to discuss what I had seen in the new schools and also what I had been reading as we explored their desired professional learning paths.

Findings

In each of the schools I visited the middle leadership Leader of Learning was often positioned to manage or oversee that the curriculum was being delivered to the level required. Many of the learning programmes were developed from the bottom up – students or staff indicating what their area of expertise/interest was and a programme being developed in response to this. In each case the number of staff contributing to the discussion and planning was considerably smaller than my own school is. It will be interesting to see, as these schools grow, whether this model is sustainable. They are definitely delivering contextual curriculum in response to student voice. As one principal said – the teachers could offer 3000 courses for the next semester, but they will only run if the interest is there from the students.

The schools have a variety of terms for their middle leader positions including but not exclusively: Specialist Subject Leaders, Quality Teacher Leader; Learning Community Leaders, Learning Design Leaders, Learning Area Leaders; Curriculum Leaders, Team Leaders; Leaders of Learning, Whānau Leaders. One key aspect of the difference between these structures and a more traditional model was an emphasis on tutoring/mentoring/coaching of students through their learning. Mentoring time played a significant part in the students' timetables in each school.

As my school visits finished, an emerging idea was one of mentoring or coaching of staff sparked from what I saw at Haeata Community Campus. The middle leaders could choose a mentor from the senior leadership team. As they choose the mentor, some SLT may have more mentees than others. Each has a development plan covering their own leadership and collaborative leadership. They meet twice a term. They might get coaching on aspects they are interested in e.g. want to know more about restorative practices. When the DisruptED group came down to Christchurch the DPs owned the work. e.g. NASDAP conference - some middle leaders sharing this at the APDP conference. In turn, middle leaders are mentoring those with 1MU.

I interviewed two Heads of Learning Area (HOLA) from my school and our discussion soon moved to providing more opportunity for mentoring or coaching of our middle leaders. They considered they were the "gatekeepers" of the curriculum and are responsible for providing:
- Strong links to curriculum model
- Specialist teachers in curriculum
- Pedagogical leadership; administrative role; people-management role

Further they suggested they would like to see HOLAs complete a Leadership Inquiry and a teacher inquiry. Two suggestions were put forward: 2 meetings per term on a leadership inquiry with a mentor and introducing a more formal buddy HOLA system within the school.
I was encouraged by the fluidity of the conversation, they recognised that:

- As the nature of schools change, we need to be very reflective
- The current HOLA role with single sell experts may need to change if/when we integrate subjects.
- The HOLA has a larger pastoral role now
- Mentoring individual students is a key aspect of their work e.g. working with a gifted Mathematics/Science student.
- Talks with English/ Science teachers taking enrichment classes at the junior level
- Communication with HOLAs has changed.
- They would like to see some fixed term MUs for special projects

Jan Robertson, author of Coaching Leadership (2005), led some professional learning on Coaching Leadership with the CWCSPA in 2018. I revisited her presentations and re-read her book as I could see a strong future in coaching for our middle leaders. I discovered that two local high schools had engaged an ex-principal, Denis Pyatt, to do some work on coaching with their middle leaders. This work was very positively received by the middle leaders. In one school the programme has been extensive and is still ongoing. The middle leaders voluntarily opt into the programme which has covered:

- Two sessions outlining what coaching is.
- A learning relationship - open to new learning; engage together as professionals
- Active listening – the programme makes them listen to other people
- Dialogue is the key
- Reflective questions
- Coaching partners then worked in groups for a proper coaching session - then reversed roles.
- Developing in-depth learning relationships
- Someone who they can talk and reflect on their leadership with
- Setting goals

At each session, some leadership theory is also covered. e.g. what gives a leader credibility; what people really think about people; MOE documents; EC framework for Leadership Capability (Cathy Wiley's work)

I participated in the CWCSPA Principal Tour to Brisbane in May 2019. We spent one afternoon at the Queensland Education Leadership Institute (QELi) where Catherine Jackson spoke to us on coaching. Some key points from her presentation resonated for me in relation to possibilities for middle leadership professional development.

- Shift the cognitive load to the person you are coaching.
- The person with the problem is not to answer the questions.
- Make your questions as open as possible.
- It is important for the person to get a better understanding of the problem - not you as the coach.
- What is the real leadership challenge for you?
- What is the part of this work that only you can do?
- What might give you early success?
- What are people going to hate about your idea?

6 questions: some great "clean" questions. Tone is important
1. Kick start: What's on your mind?
2. AWE question - and what else?
3. Focus question: What is the real challenge here for you?
4. The foundation question: what do you want?
5. The lazy question: What can I do to help?
6. The magic question: If you woke up tomorrow morning and everything was better, what would have happened?
Silence !! Allow this to do some of the heavy lifting for you.

I highly recommend a visit to the QELI website to explore their leadership resources in more detail.
https://qeli.qld.edu.au

Teacher Leadership

The concept of teacher leadership also emerged from my readings and is worthy of further exploration. Many of us will have been in roles in our careers where we were leading/ mentoring/coaching others informally and without the titles of HOD, HOF, HOLA etc. Charlotte Danielson (2006) shares some examples of teacher leadership, highlighting that leadership need not be hierarchical or communication one-way. She describes teacher leadership as informal and not usually an assigned role in a school where the teacher continues to teach but also has influence beyond their own classroom. I likened this to the Within School Teacher Kāhui Ako roles we have within our own school. The teachers have time and resources to explore ideas of passion and share them with the teaching staff. I see WST roles being very positive in our schools for this purpose. At the end of 2018, we had teachers exploring a range of ideas e.g. Digital curriculum, project-based learning, culturally responsive curriculum in Science.

Organisational Health

I could not finish this report without a mention of the book **The Advantage** by Patrick Lencioni. In this book, he talks about building a cohesive leadership team and as I read his book, I saw many examples of how we could work with our middle leadership teams to enhance the "health" of the organisation. Lencioni (2012) outlines two requirements for success.

Smart	Healthy
Strategy	Minimal policies
Marketing	Minimal confusion
Finance	High morale
Technology	High productivity
	Low turnover

Lencioni, P. (2012)

Further, he provides a variety of team-building activities and highlights the importance of building a cohesive leadership team through five behavioural principles: Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability and Results.

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Appendix

Albany Senior High School

Middle leadership structure and roles
- Specialist subject leaders (SSLs) each have 2 or 3 MUs   - One SSL has a position as an Across School Teacher (AST) role in the Kāhui Ako (this required the reduction of 1MU to fit the criteria).   - Assistant specialist subject teachers 1 MU   - Quality Teacher leaders (QTL) - one may also have AST role. They are working with tutors/mentors.   - One SSL is also a QTL and holds a Within School Teacher (WST) role in the Kāhui Ako. The role includes: Oversee tutorial teachers; Impact project mentors; Student agency
Professional Development/meetings
The Senior leadership team meet with each group on a regular basis: SLT meet with QTLs; SLT meet with SSLs; SLT meet with QTLs and SSLs together once a term.
Kāhui Ako
Impact projects - supporting feeder schools. At the end of term 3 there is an evening for impact project presentations and an exhibition night with the KA schools.

Hobsonville Point Secondary School

Middle leadership structure and roles
- Learning community leaders (LCL): The four LCL (2 MU each), have oversight for a House, and are responsible for overseeing the Learning Coaches (LCs). There are 9 Hubs per House with approximately 16-18 students per hub.   - Learning Design Leaders (LDL): Currently there are six LDL but this is reducing to four. The LDL's design modules for SPIN have 2MU + 1MMA are focusing on "what does learning look like in our school"   - Learning Area Leaders (LAL): Currently there are two LAL but this is likely to grow to 7-9. They have 1MU each.
Professional Development/meetings
There are a series of meeting structures which support communication and professional elearning: - Week 1: LCL, SGT, LDL, PxP, PLT meet together (PxP - Projects and Pathways team; SGT - Student Guidance Team)   - Week 2: LCL; LDL; PxP; PLT meet separately   - Week 3: LDL and LAL meet together.   Professional learning is provided by middle leaders. The principal provides insights into education/learning regularly as part of a scheduled morning meeting slot. This is referred to as TWM (Tuesday with Maurie) **GPILSEO model** – a strong focus on the Pedagogy, Institutions and Leadership aspects of this model.
Kāhui Ako
There is a **Professional Learning Team** (PLT) which consists of the 4 WST + 2 AST + SCT which meets regularly.

Ormiston Senior College

Middle leadership structures and roles
• 7 curriculum leaders 2MU + 2MMA each + 2 hours release a week.   • 6 team leaders 1MU on a 2-year fixed term contract. The Team leaders have 7 groups (90-100 students) of Learning Advisory groups of teachers/students they oversee. 6 commons are now operating. Learning Advisors (LA - all teachers) go to Team leaders for advice
Professional development/meetings
• Team leaders - build the capacity of the LAs   • The Guy Claxton model is highly valued in the school.
Kāhui Ako
The school is not part of a Kāhui Ako but strongly advocates for the cluster of schools they are working with. In this structure, self-funded TODs have been very successful. The Principals meet regularly as do the deputy principals.

Haeata Community Campus

Haeata is a Year 1-13 school but for the purposes of my visit, I focused on the Year 7-13 part of the school.

Middle leadership structures and roles
• 5 middle leaders with 3 MU each.   • 3-4 staff with 1MU with some curriculum responsibility.   • 2 people look at learning design across Year 7-13.   • Timetable changes each 5 weeks and is done manually.   • Teachers pitch a block and know what their own requirements are (e.g. 20 hours teaching per week etc)   • Block lasts for 5 weeks but may be offered in a variety of ways e.g. one day a week or other options.
Professional development/meetings   • Learning is all done together   **Mentoring aspect to leadership**   • Each middle leader has a mentor on SLT   • They choose the mentor so some SLT may have more than others.   • Each has a development plan covering their own leadership and collaborative leadership.   • They meet twice a term.   • They might get coaching on aspects they are interested in e.g. want to know more about restorative practices.   • DisruptED group came down - DPs owned the work. e.g. NASDAP conference - some middle leaders doing this at the APDP conference.   • Middle leaders mentoring those with 1MU
Kāhui Ako
The school is not part of a Kāhui Ako but is looking at options.

Rolleston College

Middle leadership structures and roles • 8 Leaders of Learning each with 2MU or 3MU • The concept of an experienced leader of learning has changed from the traditional hierarchical model. This could be considered leading from behind • They check the learning programmes e.g. checks proposed course to ensure level of curriculum covered. • Leaders of Learning have come to the fore with Level 1 NCEA in 2019. • There are 4 Whānau leaders with 3MU each • Currently they don't have Ass Leaders of Learning but have units available for other projects.
Professional development/meetings • Subject experts planning in response to learners' needs which is empowering and responsive. • Leaders of learning meet regularly with two of the DPs • Principal also meets with Leaders of Learning twice a year.
Kāhui Ako The school is part of a Kāhui Ako which will soon be appointing 6 AST positions.