

The Roles of Middle Leaders in Schools: A Qualitative Educational Case Study

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Abstract

In the 21st century, there is a wide recognition that successful schools rely on outstanding teachers and leaders who work collaboratively. Effective leaders are knowledgeable, skilled, proactive and committed individuals holding both senior and middle leadership positions. This paper has emerged from a qualitative educational case study, aimed at increasing understanding on the professional performance of school middle leaders, who can best impact the learning outcomes of students for having a direct influence on teachers and classroom teaching. The research questions included one focused on identifying the roles played by them, applied to the context of a Brazilian private mainstream school. The purpose of this paper is to outline how the topic was approached in the academic study. Through an electronic questionnaire and individual face-to-face interviews, supported by a robust body of research, it was possible to find evidence that middle leaders play four roles: *leading and managing curriculum*; *leading and managing the teaching and learning processes*; *building, leading and developing teams*; and *leading change and improvement initiatives*. Also, a set of tasks lying within the sphere of each role was uncovered, so an attempt to categorising these was made. It has been concluded that middle leaders should have clarity about the roles and tasks assigned to them, and gain expertise on how they should perform them effectively within their contexts, which is only possible when they acquire and develop a specific set of knowledge and skills in their field and are provided with adequate support by their senior leadership.

Keywords: educational middle leadership and management, roles of middle leaders in schools, categorising the roles and tasks of middle leaders.