Leading Within the Middle:

Perspectives on Middle Leadership

in Secondary School Improvement

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an investigative and analytical view of the social and political processes occurring within the implementation of a system initiated and resourced, secondary school improvement initiative (SSII) in a Catholic urban school system in a capital city on the East coast of Australia. The SSII follows a tiered model of implementation within a local school system [in this case, the MacKillop Catholic School System, (MCSS)] and its schools through a group of school-based middle-level leaders, the School Improvement Middle Leaders (SIMLs). This thesis is a six-site case study. The lens of symbolic interactionism is adopted as the theoretical perspective and multiple-site case study adopted as the methodology. It explores the experiences of SIMLs working within the SSII reform initiative across the MCSS to investigate influences of the SSII on the interactions occurring within each school and the school system structures.

Successful reform is about creating the conditions, which enable teachers to change and improve their practice. Models of school reform can adopt two views. The inside view of school reform focuses on the capacity of a school to transform itself. Teacher learning is crucial, and school conditions need to foster that learning. This type of model can be described as "bottom up". An outside view of school reform is one involving the implementation of externally-developed initiatives. A model in which innovations and practices developed by policy-makers and then transferred to multiple settings ("scaling up") can be described as "top-down". The SSII is an example of a blended "top down" and "bottom up" initiative in secondary schools.

This multiple site case study uses individual, semi-structured interviews and an online survey instrument, to gather the participants' perspectives on the

numerous, different experiences that occur in six secondary schools as a result of the implementation of this school improvement initiative. The central findings of the study are reflected in a proposed model, which describes the conditions that enable a school improvement middle leader within a school to support teachers and facilitate an improvement in their practice.

This study serves to highlight the complexities that occur within the school reform agendas in systems and secondary schools, and the pressures placed on middle leaders charged with the responsibility of leading an initiative within their unique school context. The complex nature of secondary schools and how they operate within a school system means any new initiatives are challenged, situated and adopted within the existing established hierarchies of these organisations. Exploring these complexities assists in understanding the nature of school change, social interactions, and the concept of middle leadership within the unique and common features of urban secondary schools.

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Vittoria Lavorato
4th August 2017

DECLARATION

I, Vittoria Lavorato, declare that the Doctor of Education thesis entitled *Leading Within the Middle: Perspectives on Middle Leadership in Secondary School Improvement* does not contain any material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the Australian Catholic University, and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the Ethics/Safety Committees on 27 August 2013 and given approval number 2013 161N.

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GLOSSARY

Many terms will be used throughout this thesis, some of which are particular to the Australian school system and the MCSS system. The following definitions are designed to help the reader fully comprehend the background in which this research was undertaken.

Accountability. This is "the concept of holding educators responsible for students' learning. The learning is measured in quantifiable terms and is linked to school or school system funding" (Lee, 2012, p. 15).

Change. Within the context of this study, is "taken to be change in teachers' practice and behaviour that provides evidence of change in attitude, disposition and thinking" (Miller, 2002, p. 13).

Change agent. "A person who knows how to enter an organization, often from outside, and change things" (Bridges, 2003, p. 92). This definition stresses the importance of a leader, even a middle leader, understanding what is needed to affect a change in terms of scheduling, exigency and courses of action. The leader also needs to be capable of leading the courses of action required.

MacKillop School System (MCSS). An urban Catholic school system in New South Wales (NSW), an eastern state of Australia.

Middle Leader. Teacher-leaders who are "responsible for teams, year levels or curriculum areas" (Schleicher, 2012, p. 21).

NAPLAN. NAPLAN stands for the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy. NAPLAN is a series of common literacy and numeracy tests conducted annually across Australia for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (National Assessment Program, 2017).

School improvement middle leader (SIML). Someone who is in a full-time, job-embedded secondary school middle-leadership role established by the MCSS, and responsible for delivering on-the-job support to teachers. The SIML was assigned the task of overseeing every aspect of the SSII, an initiative, which at its core, was seeking to improve teacher quality and practice (for role description, see Appendix A).

Professional Learning Community (PLC). "A group of professional educators who learn together to direct efforts toward improved student learning" (Hord, 1997, p. 17).

Persistently under-achieving. This describes any school where a significant proportion of students are failing to meet the National minimum literacy and numeracy benchmarks, and are consistently not meeting these benchmarks in several, consecutive, subsequent years.

School improvement "describes a set of processes, managed from within the school, targeted both at pupil achievement and the school's ability to manage change – a simultaneous focus on process and outcomes" (Potter, Reynolds and Chapman, 2002, p. 244). Consequently, an improving school is "one that over time, increases its effectiveness" (Gray et al., 1999, p. 5). That is, the above-expected gains achieved by pupils, continues to rise for successive cohorts.

Teacher Leadership. This is defined as teachers exercising leadership in formal, official positions, who implement the initiatives of the school's and/or system's administration, and who try to influence their followers (MacBeath, 2003).

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed; the culture reflects the realities of people working together every day. (Hesselbein, 1999, p. 6).

The continued focus on Australian schools to reform, improve or reinvent themselves to enhance the academic performance of students is daily fodder for the popular and academic press. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008) and the Australian government's recent stated intent to fund schools to ensure that Australia is in the top five countries globally for reading, writing and mathematics by 2025 (Australian Government, 2012), is evidence of an increased focus on improving student achievement.

Efforts to improve student achievement have created several reform programs that can target either the school or the educational system as the unit of change. Many researchers argue the essential condition for improving student outcomes is inseparably connected to improving the quality of instruction in schools, and building a culture of success in schools as organisations. "If academic standards are rigorous, curriculum and assessments are aligned to those standards, and teachers possess the skills to teach at the level the standards demand, student performance will improve" (Wenglinsky, 2002, p. 2). Other researchers contend the challenges of teaching really lie beyond the school's walls. The socio-economic status of students and their families can pose a difficult challenge to overcome for

the schooling system and, in fact, actual school features have seemingly little influence on student outcomes (Lee, Bryk and Smith, 1993). Studies have concluded instructional procedures and classroom praxis have noticeable effects on student attainment, and these effects are at the very least, just as noticeable as those due to student personal circumstances (Chapin, 2009; Dinham, Ingvarson and Kleinhenz, 2011; Sanders, Wright and Horn, 1997; Wenglinsky, 2002). These findings would undeniably suggest schools do make a difference to student achievements, due to the tremendous influence teachers' classroom practices have on student learning (Hattie, 2009).

In Australia, many attempts have been made to improve student outcomes particularly in low socio-economic areas. Given the increasing national, state and system level emphasis on accountability, and the commitment to increase student outcomes to meet high benchmarks, teacher effectiveness is under intense scrutiny across the nation. Research indicates it is the teacher that makes a difference in student achievement; the teacher's level of knowledge and attitudes about students' abilities directly correlates with the level at which students learn (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Sanders et al., 1997). Teachers are called upon to continuously review and improve their pedagogical approach and content knowledge to meet the diverse needs of students. However, the teachers need support if they are to constantly change their pedagogical approaches and attempt new ways of curriculum delivery. Many schools and school systems have begun to develop reform models where in-school professional learning experiences are provided to teachers on an ongoing basis (Cornett and Knight, 2009; Knight, 2004; Office for Standards in Education, 2003). However, these reform models have had varying degrees of success, particularly in secondary schools. A common outcome

is an initial, positive impact in the schools with a plateauing of improvement in student outcomes, and a lack of sustainability beyond the funding period.

The failure of past reform programs to improve student achievement outcomes creates questions as to whether or not structures exist within schools that might divert or hinder the success of the initiatives aimed at improving them, and/or whether the processes of change at the school level are deficient in some way (Berends, Bodilly and Kirby, 2002; Borman, Hewes, Overman and Brown, 2003; Fullan, 2011; Hess, 2011; Payne, 2008; Robertson and Timperley, 2011). The researcher was thus interested in studying a secondary school system reform initiative that involved a change in existing school leadership structures.

Founded on a review of previous school improvement initiatives aimed at improving teacher quality to improve student outcomes and selected theories of change, this study **explores the role and influence of school improvement middle leaders in a system funded by, and initiated in, six large, urban Catholic secondary schools**. As part of that process, this study examines the implementation of the school improvement reforms and their impact on each school community. This first chapter provides an outline of the researcher's background in the field of educational research, the educational setting that scaffolds the study, the research problem, the purpose for the research, and the research questions posed. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the anticipated significance and contribution of this study to the body of research in this area of education, and the definitions of key terms specific to this research area.

1.1 The researcher

The researcher brings to this study more than sixteen years of experience as a secondary school and system leader, and the accompanying practical application of school change, with first-hand experience in secondary school reform. Having significant awareness of the complicated features of secondary school reform, and an extensive knowledge of the interpersonal relationships needed for change in a secondary school setting, only strengthened the resolve of the researcher to complete the study.

Currently, the researcher is employed as a secondary school principal in the MacKillop Catholic School System (MCSS). With respect to the six schools participating in the study, the researcher, whilst known to some, is an 'outsider': a person observing their practice, and interpreting their stated views. Previously, the researcher had been engaged for four years as an educational consultant for the secondary schools within the MCSS, and provided professional assistance to the school system being studied. The fact the researcher is a senior employee of MCSS has implications from a methodological perspective, which will be outlined later in this thesis.

1.2 Background of the study

The researcher's interest in secondary school reform resonates with the priorities of educational systems around the world. The school improvement agenda has moved to the top of education policy matters in many countries in the western world. Leaders and citizens have become increasingly alarmed by low secondary school retention rates, low academic achievement of students, and the large number of secondary school graduates who are challenged when they undertake tertiary education (Mourshed and Barber, 2007; Wrigley, 2006). A

recent report released by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15-year-old students' performance in science, reading and mathematics skills, indicates Australia is slipping backwards relative to other countries, and that we are getting worse at preparing our students for the everyday challenges of adult life (Thomson, De Bortoli and Underwood, 2016). Worldwide, school systems have allocated significant proportions of their budgets to school improvement, yet this has not always yielded sustainable results. Elmore (2003) approximated that in the 20th century in the United States of America (USA), there were many established exemplars of quality classroom instruction; however, even those recognised as being the most effective are seldom implemented by more than 20 per cent of teachers. To encourage greater adoption of good practice, he argues that energy needs to be expended on standardising mechanisms for describing and using teaching standards in the education. Australia is also moving towards a more national, and thus standardised, educational portfolio; this study will contribute to identifying what initiatives or practices are successful in improving teacher practice. Recognising and describing what quality teaching looks like is not the biggest hurdle in the improvement of teaching instruction; rather, the biggest hurdle is the development of structures and processes that facilitated the professional learning needed to improve teaching practice.

Thus, the task of recognising and defining what constitutes quality teaching is not really the biggest challenge. The main challenge is to develop organisations and professional frameworks (such as professional organisations) and approaches that can ensure new graduate teachers, and those already in the teaching profession, extensively and fulsomely adopt successful teaching practices (Darling-Hammond

and Bransford, 2007; Elmore, 1996; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005).

1.2.1 International context

In the USA, the national government has identified serious problems with school quality. Even though the country has augmented the education spending budget by over 50%, there is little nationwide evidence of growth in terms of student outcomes (Peterson, 2003). Despite this generalisation, great success has been achieved in some school districts. The school districts that achieved this success had certain key features: an unambiguous vision that is able to be clearly communicated; a staunch focus on improving students' literacy; a strategy and charter for unceasing school improvement; data-informed teaching practice; a focus on building leader and teacher capacity; and a desire to work towards the school becoming a professional learning community networked with other schools in its district (Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis, 2010).

Similar studies in the United Kingdom (Brown, Rutherford and Boyle, 2000; Cameron, 2007; Muijs and Harris, 2006) have come to the same conclusions about the factors that bring about improved student learning outcomes. Research that has been undertaken in the areas of school effectiveness and school improvement (Bollen, 1996; Wikeley, Stoll, Murillo and De Jong, 2005; Wrigley, 2012) has concluded that home and societal factors notwithstanding, teachers are the most powerful determinant of improved student outcomes, followed by the school principal, the school and finally the local area authority. It has been argued that focusing on teacher practice within schools will have the single biggest influence on student outcomes (Reynolds, 2010; Sharratt and Fullan, 2006). A syntheses of research projects across eight European countries and Australia

investigating factors that would have the most powerful effects on improving student learning, has led to the same conclusion (Wikeley et al., 2005; Zammit, 2007); that is, the classroom teacher has the most significant influence on student outcomes. When excellent, expert teachers deliver lessons, it has been shown their students exhibit an understanding of lesson concepts that are of a higher order, and the students are able to achieve highly desirable levels of understanding and abstraction (Hattie, 2009). This study has shown it is of great benefit to a system if excellent teachers can be identified, valued and encouraged. The researcher hopes to add to the body of research on improving teacher quality, as the school improvement initiative in question, was largely centred on using a school-based middle leader to support teachers in improving their classroom practice.

Consequently, school improvement research suggests the kind of educational change worth pursuing, is change that targets the extensive implementation of effective teaching practice. Good quality teaching not only leads to improved student outcomes, but it can also address the inequity that exists across schools within a system. Many school systems have therefore invested resources in improving student outcomes by developing reforms focussing on improving teacher quality.

1.2.2 National context

According to the Australian Constitution (Commonwealth Government Australia, 2010, p. vi), State and Territory governments have the authority for school education. However, in the last fifteen or so years, there has been increasing Federal government intervention in education at both the school system and school levels (Cranston et al., 2010, p. 184). Federal and State governments have collectively acknowledged significant global fluctuations are putting fresh stresses

on the education systems around the country (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008, p. 4). There is a commitment in the recent Ministerial Council on Education that reform needs to occur such that "socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes" (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). In 2010, the Australian government initiated a *Smarter Schools National Partnerships* (SSNP) funding and reform agreement, which marks the beginning of a new way schools in all education sectors will work with State and Federal Governments to develop better outcomes for students. Whilst the language and rhetoric of the above National Partnership documents suggest a stronger emphasis on public purposes, the accountability requirements, such as nationwide basic skills testing and increased accountability requirements for school principals run contrary to the rhetoric. Many researchers and educators would argue that authentic school change will only occur if ideas outside top-down, test-driven, reductive accountability measures are implemented (Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley, 2012, p. 3). The SSII that is the subject of this study is intended to be more teacher-controlled and community-engaged; a bottom-up (as well as top-down) set of strategies that work horizontally across teachers, students and the school community.

The stated aims of the SSNP funding reform are to "improve student engagement, educational outcomes and wellbeing in participating schools and make inroads into entrenched disadvantage" (Australian Government, 2008). The partnership is also promoting more wide-ranging social and economic objectives by building a knowledge-base for strategies that can be used in Australian schools to nullify the factor of educational disadvantage, and that can then be cascaded for use

in other, non-partnership, schools. This concept was the basis for the development of the system initiative that is the subject of this dissertation.

1.2.3   New South Wales (NSW) context

In NSW, much work has already been undertaken to target teaching practice (pedagogical reform) as a major means of improving student outcomes and reducing the achievement gap of indigenous and low socio-economic students. In an ambitious effort to achieve reform across NSW, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), working in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, created *Quality Teaching*, a pedagogical model for classroom instruction that is organised around three scaffolds: Intellectual Quality, Quality Learning Environment and Significance (Amosa, Ladwig, Griffiths and Gore, 2007; Ladwig, 2005). There has also been a collaborative study between NSW DET and the University of Newcastle that researched and documented the strong association between the quality of classroom instruction and pupil outcomes. One of these studies ran for four years after starting in 2004, and was entitled "Systematic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in NSW Public Schools" (SIPA) (Ladwig et al., 2007). The research demonstrated if a schooling system has equity as a priority, it is crucial that all students, particularly those from a low-socio-economic background who have historically been disadvantaged by existing school systems, are afforded high quality teaching, and first-rate assessment tasks in order to stimulate their very best achievements (Amosa et al., 2007; Ladwig, 2005, 2007, 2009).

The Federal government's SSNP reforms, as implemented in NSW, build upon the pedagogical reforms that have been the focus of the NSW government. The SSNP reforms provide schools with the opportunity to concentrate on a wide-

ranging suite of initiatives that will raise students' education outcomes. The intended aim of these reforms is that participating schools will consolidate existing, successful practices, and also develop tailor-made plans and approaches to meet the education needs of the students in their community contexts, especially those students who need extra support. The NSW Final Implementation Plan for the SSNP has been developed on the reliable research evidence that "teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes", and that "literacy and numeracy attainment is a cornerstone of schooling" (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010).

The SSNP reforms can be described as pioneering and bold, involving both government and non-government sector schools labouring collaboratively to make discernible and measurable improvements to the educational results of all students across NSW. They are a suite of reforms with funding accountability to the Federal government and in turn, each school is accountable to the NSW government.

1.2.4 MCSS context

MCSS administrators have identified a number of secondary schools within the MCSS as persistently underperforming (in relation to schools of similar socio-economic status on national basic testing of literacy and numeracy), and that serve low socio-economic communities. These schools have not received Federal Government Low Socio-economic Status National Partnership funding, but it is thought they might benefit from participation in an initiative that is focused on change leadership with system support.

The secondary school improvement initiative, the focus of this research, is a system-sponsored and initiated project, which provides an opportunity to advance the current research on secondary schools, especially urban secondary schools. In

particular, the SSII aims to improve the achievements of all students, but most importantly, those students who demonstrate an achievement gap when compared to students in other schools.

After examining NAPLAN results in Years 7 and 9 across the MCSS school-system, and comparing the results of schools within nationally identified socio-economic funding categories, six secondary schools within the MCSS were assessed as appropriate to join the SSII. The lead strategy of the initiative was to appoint a middle-level leader, a school improvement middle leader (SIML), to each participating school. The roles of the SIML are to:

- Contribute to building the capacity of teachers;

- Promote professional learning communities;

- Contribute to the development of the school's leadership;

- Critically review teaching practice;

- Manage the collection and analysis of the data required for accountability purposes;

- Contribute to the effective promotion of best practice pedagogy across the MCSS;

- Transform the pedagogy in their secondary school; and

- Work with the MCSS Low SES NP Manager and the SIMLs in other schools to assist in the transformation of pedagogy across the system of schools.

The objective for appointing a middle leader role is to provide support for each school's leadership team to implement a clear, school improvement reform agenda, inspired by the Low SES NP partnership agenda.

The definition of a middle leader differs across the body of educational research, and according to the particular structure and context of each school campus or school system. For instance, in a secondary school, a subject coordinator or pastoral coordinator would be a middle leader, while in the context of the relationship between a school system and a principal, the principal is a middle leader (Crow, 1992). For the purposes of this research, the definition of middle leader is that used in an OECD report (2012), in which a middle leader is a teacher with a leadership responsibility for a team, year level or curriculum area (Schleicher, 2012, pp. 21-22). An extensive review of the literature, and specifically the empirical research, in this area is undertaken in Chapter 2; this review forms a platform for the present study.

The MCSS school improvement middle leader's duties and responsibilities were developed at the local school level, and were based both on the local school Annual Improvement Plan (AIP) and the areas for development subsequently identified at the local school level. Nevertheless, the accountabilities of the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative, which were established by the system, dictated that certain common strategies were to be implemented across the system of schools and these were incorporated into the each school's AIP. For example, each school improvement middle leader was expected to oversee the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for any student at or below the National minimum benchmarks for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The purpose of an IEP is to describe a set of considered approaches intended to tackle the particular learning needs of the child or young person.

The school improvement middle leaders were expected to carry out the responsibilities of school middle-level leaders, with much of their training

delivered by officers of the MCSS who positioned system priorities at the heart of their work in school improvement. There was a duality evident in the SSII; it was a localised reform initiative that was strictly a result of system intervention. The key messages to each of the six schools participating in the SSII were that they seek to effect:

- Innovation not compensation, to transform schooling;

- High expectations for substantial, ongoing improvements in student learning outcomes, that is, lasting value;

- Improvement in teacher capacity;

- A change of outcomes, not experiences; and

- Maximum use of the school's total resources, and where appropriate, all the resources available across the MCSS system.

1.2.5 The influence of leadership on school improvement

This study is concerned with the teachers who undertake a particular leadership role within the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative: the school improvement middle leaders. There is an over-abundance of research studies that describe the development of teacher leadership, as this is generally thought to be an essential requirement for school improvement (Crowther, 2010; Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009; Harris, 2004a; Robinson, 2008; Smylie, Conley and Marks, 2002). Many of these research studies concentrate on re-defining the traditional teacher's role to specifically include the authority for each teacher to make decisions about the teaching and learning cycle (such as modes of instruction and assessment) that had previously been in the remit of administrators. However, non-teaching middle leaders taking the role of a middle-level, full-time school improvement leader, is comparatively unchartered. The few studies that do exist

suggest a middle level, facilitator role is important for reform efforts, and involves a tricky balance of multiple, sometimes conflicting, activities (Muncey and McQuillan, 1996; Nunnery, 1997; Office for Standards in Education, 2003; Otto, 2009).

Much of the research supports the view that "leadership not only matters: it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 3). Effective leadership is extensively acknowledged as a key element in achieving school improvement. In fact, "the links between school leadership and the quality of teaching were clear" (Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 2000, p. 22). Research findings from across the globe, and encompassing schools from varying contexts, illustrate the formidable influence that leadership can have on bringing about educational change (Fullan, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2004; Van Velzen et al., 1985).

In educational research, the term "leadership" is used liberally to describe an important, real phenomenon, without serious engagement with the issues surrounding the term as a socially constructed label that has an assumed empirical reality. The term "leadership" is often used to describe an individual or team as being different to others, but without explaining how they are different. "Leadership" is seen as a crucial driver of educational change, and often a causal link is assumed between it (leadership) and improved student outcomes. Australian education policy is driven strongly by the principle that improved teacher quality is desirable, and brought about by having strong leadership from school principals; that is, strong school leadership is a key driver to improving student educational outcomes (Ministerial Council for Education, 2011). "Great" schools, schools with

higher than average student results, are assumed to have "great" leaders, an assumed causal link.

The strategic actions of leaders have been published in the work of Leithwood et al (2008), which contended that leadership practices can be grouped into four broad categories, and which can be seen in the leadership practices of successful leaders: "setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the teaching and learning programme" (p. 6). Subsequent research has identified eight core characteristics exhibited by successful leaders, and which build upon the four core practices previously listed. Successful leaders: "(1) define their values and vision to raise expectations, set direction and build trust (2) reshape the conditions for teaching and learning (3) restructure parts of the organisation and redesign leadership roles and responsibilities (4) enrich the curriculum (5) enhance teacher quality (6) enhance the quality of teaching and learning (7) build collaboration internally and (8) build strong relationships outside the school community" (Day et al., 2010). This example of the current scholarship on leadership illustrates the tendency towards being a shopping list, or toolkit, for school principals to adopt. Further, the research emphases are mostly on leadership at the "top", the principal, rather than leaders in the "middle".

This study will specifically explore the impact of a school-based middle-level leader, the school improvement middle leader, on teacher practice, and thereby add to the body of knowledge in this area. In order to explore the practices of the school improvement middle leader, it will be important to be sensitive to the influence of the time, space and context in which the initiative has been implemented.

1.2.6   The influence of the school system on school improvement

In addition to research supporting the impact of leadership on student outcomes, it is also important to review the literature that has investigated the importance of school system influence in the implementation and support of school-based and system-wide reform. Waters and Marzano (2006) have published research where they interrogated the connection between system-level leadership and mean student achievement from a collective of schools within a district. The analysis encompassed twenty-seven studies from 1970 to 2005 across two thousand seven hundred and fourteen districts. They concluded the effect size relating system-level leadership and mean student achievement was statistically significant [0.24 ($p < 0.05$)]. Furthermore, they distinguished leadership practices at the school system level that had statistically significant correlations to student attainment, four of which have also been associated with leading second-order change: the goal-setting process, non-negotiables for achievement and instruction, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and defined school autonomy (Waters and Marzano, 2006, p. 18). It has been acknowledged that without intervention from the school system, it is hard to "upscale" single incidents of great merit and brilliance at the classroom level to the school system level, enabling the system to ensure all children experience learning equity (Balfanz and MacIver, 2000).

Mourshed and Barber (2007) in a McKinsey & Company report undertook research into the world's best performing school systems, the essential structure in these systems that underpins performance, and how each school system ensures equity of opportunity for its students. To improve student outcomes, high-performing school systems "(a) get the right people to become teachers … , (b) develop these people into effective instructors … , (c) put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent

instruction …" (p.13). In a follow-up report, Mourshed et. al (2010) analysed the practices of twenty school systems from around the world that reported noteworthy, "sustained and widespread gains" in student achievement (p. 7). These authors found the sustaining practices were characterised by the internalisation of teaching practices, which includes changing how teachers think about teaching (p. 21). This can be achieved in school systems that sustain improvement "… by establishing collaborative practices between teachers within and across schools, by developing a mediating layer between the school and school-system administrators, and by architecting tomorrow's leadership" (p.21). Within the improving school systems in the sample, teachers and school leaders worked together to identify and consolidate routines of instructional and leadership excellence, de-privatise classroom practice and "develop(ing) teachers into coaches of their peers" (p.22). Typically, these school systems institutionalised collaborative practices in order to move the impetus for change away from the school-system administration to the teachers in each classroom, helping to make system improvement sustainable.

Grattan Institute research into the Australian school system has clearly found "that investing in improved teacher quality rather than simply increasing the size of the teaching cohort is the most effective method of improving student learning and creating top performing education systems" (Jensen, 2010, p. 10). Other Australian research findings echo the international evidence that "reduction in class sizes has little or no impact on improving student learning" (Jensen, 2010, p. 8). It was this kind of research that prompted the MCSS to implement an initiative that focused on improving teacher practice, and encouraged distributed leadership with system support so that student outcomes would ultimately improve.

"One of the constants within K-12 education is that someone is always trying to change it - someone is always proposing a new program or a new practice" (Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005, p. 65). Even though school improvement strategies have been tried countless ways using many different models throughout the last century, successful reform has yet to get a foothold in sizeable, comprehensive, metropolitan secondary schools in Australia. Although numerous research projects have been undertaken to fully comprehend the introduction and execution of particular school improvement models, the enduring influence of noteworthy models have hitherto not been quite fully understood. This study is designed to augment the body of research on secondary school improvement, and shed some further light into what is required to make sustainable change, long after the school improvement change agents have completed their jobs. The SSII that is the subject of this study is an attempt to implement educational reform across six comprehensive secondary schools; however each individual schools' context needs to be taken into consideration when introducing and implementing change.

In order to respond to all the challenges that present themselves in the secondary school context, it is necessary to explore the importance of school and system level leadership, and its contribution to improving teacher practice, and ultimately, achieving improved student outcomes. Furthermore, it is prudent to investigate stakeholders' perspectives of the leadership practices adopted by school improvement middle leaders, principals and system administrators who implemented a system-initiated and funded school-based improvement model. It is then possible for the researcher to establish if such leadership practices are the

same as those practices shown in research as being likely to smooth the progress of reform, and where possible bring new insights to this literature.

1.3   The research problem

If schools are to improve and become "mechanisms for continuous learning", they must foster a school ethos that promotes continuous change (Fullan, 1993). Some school improvement initiatives, or models, have focused on the use of a school-based change agent (Otto, 2009; Rust and Freidus, 2001; Stoll et al., 2003), whilst others have involved the implementation of a system-sponsored intervention (Fullan, 2004a; Kronley and Handley, 2003; Wikeley et al., 2005).

There is no clear sense of the way in which an initiative, which involves both a school-based middle leader and a SSII, may work. This is of specific relevance to this study, which focuses on the SSII implemented by an urban, Catholic school system in Sydney, Australia (the MCSS). The implementation of this school-specific intervention model is likely to challenge most participants to make substantial changes to their teaching practice which, in turn, necessitates a questioning of prevailing concepts and theories, requires the acquisition of fresh skills, and the possible adoption of new roles. The way that schools and the school system interact may also experience significant change. School leaders and system administrators need to take time to appreciate the sheer size of the change required, and be appreciative of their role in leading the change within their organisation. It is not always easy to manage change successfully, as it is dependent on the different degrees of willingness to enact change, perceptions of the change, and any perceived forfeiture of status associated with individuals within the organisation. The school improvement middle leaders who are the subject of this study will be implementing research-based leadership strategies in their respective schools. A

question of interest to the researcher is: Was the implementation of the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative successful; that is, did it change teacher practice and ultimately, improve student outcomes?

1.4   The research purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which a system-initiated and funded school improvement initiative, using system-appointed, school-based, middle-level leaders, is able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools.

1.5   The research question

The central question for this dissertation is: In what ways did a system initiated and funded SSII, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, influence and change secondary school teaching practice?

There are also four secondary questions :

- In what ways were changes in teacher practice evident?
- How did the school improvement middle leader try to influence teacher practice?
- What factors in the school assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?
- What factors in the system assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?

1.6   Significance of the Study

The examination of research literature revealed limited findings regarding a system-funded and initiated school improvement model that involved a system-appointed, school-based middle leader who also acted as a reform facilitator at the secondary school level. If improved teaching practice is the key to improved

student outcomes, a school improvement model with a new approach to teacher professional learning may produce positive, sustainable change. A better understanding of the processes involved in the implementation of the SSII will have implications for anyone undertaking a change agent or change leader role in schools.

In particular, this study will provide insight into whether all or part of the comparatively expensive process of appointing a dedicated specialist pedagogical expert as a middle level leader to a secondary school leadership team, with system-support, is worth replicating in other schools. Should the SSII be successful and viable, lessons can be learned from the six case studies that may inform future secondary school improvement initiatives.

1.8   Summary

This chapter has presented the rationale for the proposed research and the reasons for the study. The significance of the research problem is explored in terms of the importance of improving teacher practice and the efforts of the MCSS to meet that challenge. There is limited research regarding the implementation of a system-sponsored, school-based change agent in a secondary school context. The central research question is stated along with the four secondary questions that will explore the influence of the school improvement middle leader within the SSII, and the effectiveness of this initiative in driving change in teacher practice. This chapter also provides a brief overview of this thesis.

Chapter 2 will provide a detailed literature review relevant to this study.

Chapter two provides a detailed look at the research literature relevant to this study and the existing empirical research that provides insight into aspects of system initiated school improvement, school leadership and on-site professional

learning. Chapter three examines the methodology utilised and the precise steps,
which will be taken to conduct the study.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1   Introduction

In order to study the influence of the MacKillop Catholic School System's (MCSS) secondary school improvement initiative and its impact on teacher practice, it is important to review the literature on large-scale school reform (which includes the fundamental need for school improvement), professional development and professional learning for teachers. Without this information in order to improve teacher practice, contemporary and established theories of change, and change leadership (that is, what is the role of the school leader in achieving successful school change). Mutual characteristics emerge from the literature review to steer this research: the importance of a shared vision and communication, collaboration, management of change and an outline of leadership qualities necessary to achieve an impact on teacher practice. Together, these form a scaffold for this study, and a lens through which to analyse the data.

The first section on system-wide school reform emphasises the moral purpose of school improvement initiatives, which is the desire to improve student-learning outcomes. The best way to do this is by improving the quality of teaching in each classroom. Furthermore, there is research that discusses the models that can be implemented at all levels of a school system, combinations of support and accountability, that builds collective capacity of all levels of the organisation (system and school) with an unrelenting focus on school improvement. The following section on professional development and professional learning for teachers reviews what is known about the best ways to provide professional learning that improves teaching practice. The next section on leading educational change focuses on the role of the middle leader and the particular behaviour traits

needed to smooth the progress of successful school improvement. Finally, the section on change leadership looks at what the body of research tells us about what is key for leaders to do in order to manage change.

2.2　School Reform

Contemporary Australian educators currently confront the formidable challenge of raising the academic standards of students with common core standards that are more rigorous than ever before, and which are aligned to the highest international benchmarks (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). In addition, schools are expected to bring *every* student to this high standard of achievement at a time when schools are serving students who have historically struggled with traditional schooling. This occurs in the context of an education system that can be described as basically conservative. The way schools are organised, teacher training and government policy-making reflect a propensity to stick to the status quo. When educational reform is attempted in such a context, it results in resistance and superficiality at best, described in the literature as first order change (Marzano and Waters, 2009). School reform, aimed at bridging student achievement gaps, will only be effective and sustainable if there is second order change; that is, a change in values, beliefs, culture and behaviour at all levels of the system (Waters, Marzano and McNulty, 2003). The SSII that is the focus of this research is an attempt by a school system to drive change at all levels of the system, right down to the classroom coalface.

2.2.1　The Fundamental Need for School Improvement

Schools are formal educational institutions that can be seen as having a multitude of purposes. In David Labaree's seminal work (1997) on the purposes of education, the primary purposes of schooling are described as both public (the

advancement of society as a whole) and private (promoting the interests of the individual), with each contributing to the other. Using Labaree's framework, the purposes of schooling are to: achieve democratic equality (students as future citizens), achieve social efficiency (students becoming productive workers), and promote social mobility (students are given skills to compete for desirable situations) (Labaree, 1997; Reid, Mulford, Cranston and Keating, 2008). Secondary schools are arguably at the focal point between schooling and adult citizenship and hence, can be expected to play a pivotal role in achieving these purposes of schooling. The situation is made even more problematic due to other demands placed on schools.

The purpose of schooling is, however, liable to continue to be disputed. In Australia, the aspirational language of the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008), suggests a more balanced product in terms of principles of schooling with the actuality yet to be realised.

There are obvious consequences for leaders in schools because they are at the confluence of dealing with the inevitable strains that arise when a new nationwide or system policy is implemented, and the more urgent, pressing demands of their local school community. Researchers have reasoned that of late, these external demands have had a strong influence on the basic principles of school education and have manifested in practice in many different ways.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships (Australian Government, 2008), the federal and state reform that inspired the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative, is grounded on the evidence, which shows that, in contemporary Australia, "there remains a strong association between socio-economic disadvantage and schooling outcomes – and that early educational disadvantage has

long-term implications for individuals and the State". Bridging the gap for students from disadvantaged backgrounds will address both the public and private functions of schooling: "democratic equality, social efficiency and social mobility" (Labaree, 1997, p. 41).

School improvement projects concentrate on finding the 'silver bullet' in order to bridge these known gaps; that is, the types of policies and practices that will bring about school transformation. Curriculum revision, innovative modes of delivery, and new mandated requirements for reporting student achievement, such as the plain-English school report policy of the Howard government (Parkin and Anderson, 2007, p. 295), are touted as instances of significant school improvement and as such, possible 'silver bullets'.

The body of research into school improvement both nationally and internationally would support the idea that there is no 'silver bullet'. Some researchers also warn that if schools are to realise positive transformations through the efforts of school reform and improvement initiatives, attention must be paid to building trust amongst all concerned (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). When school systems implement reforms in their schools, they are often met with distrust and anxiety amongst teaching staff. Finding ways to overcome this distrust is vital to achieving the improvement (Bridges, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Curriculum and resources do not bring about change; rather, it is people who enact change. Given that the largest budget line for a school system would be for its personnel, it logically follows the training of these personnel must be the central focus of any school improvement reform. Over a quarter of a century ago, Ernest Boyer (in Sparks, 1984) observed:

When you talk about school improvement, you are talking about people improvement. That's the only way to improve schools unless you mean

painting the buildings and fixing the floors. But that's not the school, that's the shell. The school is people, so when we talk about excellence or improvement or progress, we're really talking about the people who make up the building. (p. 9)

The most successful way to change an organisation is by targeting the people within it. Organisations as specific entities, do not change by themselves; rather, it is the individuals within the organisation who change. It is only when a critical mass of personnel within an organisation change that the organisation as an entity can be transformed (Fullan, 1993). If the assumption that school personnel are at the heart of school improvement is correct, a corollary is that the essential role of the school system, principal and middle-leaders is to help establish an environment that supports and empowers educators within it to change and improve their teaching practice. In summary, a key to school improvement in this study is the capacity of the system to nurture and support the school improvement middle-leaders to develop a site-specific professional learning program that assists teachers to improve their teaching practice, and therefore improve teacher quality.

The predominance of educators and researchers of school reform argue the way for schools to enhance their student achievement results is to have improved teacher quality. The school system in Finland is regularly mentioned as an example of a top performing school system, with educators visiting the country and attempting to implement some of the Finnish reforms into their school systems. However, when one looks more closely at the school system in Finland, it becomes clear that this is a simplistic response to complex situations. It is useful to consider what Finland and other high performing school systems have done to get the most out of their schools. Compared to other Western nations, teachers in Finland have more authority and decision-making power over the design of their teaching

program, pedagogical approach, and student assessment. They are therefore more enthused and motivated to teach than other teachers who are pressured to deliver externally prescribed programs, and who must prepare their students to sit for external standardised tests to determine progress (Sahlberg, 2011; Sahlberg, 2013). Similarly, Finnish students are encouraged to become more autonomous in their learning without fear of failure, and most will achieve better results in international testing than students in systems where they are compelled to achieve academically, but under the pressure of regular testing (Sahlberg, 2013).

Further, because the Finnish school system regards teaching as a complex profession, a scientific approach is taken to teacher education. Teaching as a profession is highly regarded in Finland, with teachers required to have post-graduate degrees in education; in other parts of the world, people can change profession and become teachers by undertaking brief bridging courses and then be set to teach in classrooms. In the Finnish school system, the entry-level credential to join the teaching profession has been raised to a master's degree level, not unlike other highly esteemed professions such as medicine or law.

The independence Finnish teachers have to make decisions about when, how and what they teach has led to the flourishment of teacher leadership (Sahlberg, 2013). The approach to teacher training, and the emphasis on teachers as leaders in their own classrooms, seem to at the Finnish school system avoid competition between schools, resist mandating curriculum and modes of its delivery, and discount regular testing as an accountability tool for school reform.

2.2.2   School-based reform

The MCCS, like other school systems, implements reform efforts aimed at achieving improved student outcomes. A variety of reform models have been used

to achieve such outcomes in many school systems and in many countries. Reform models include the use of school inspections as an accountability strategy (Hateey, Judkins, Atkinson and Rudd, 2005; Nelson and Ehren, 2014), increased competition between schools (Belfield and Levin, 2002; Hanushek and Rivkin, 2003), establishment of teacher professional standards (Blank and de las Alas, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2004) and site-based school initiatives (Caldwell, 2005; Harris, 2000; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006; Nevo, 2002). The underlying assumption of all of these models is that holding schools accountable will activate schools into improving themselves (Blok, Sleegers and Karsten, 2008).

However, boosting the school's site conditions to improve teacher pedagogical practices and improve students' learning outcomes is a crucial task for school systems and for the schools themselves. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that building a school's capacity for continuous improvement is essential, there is no substantial evidence to support this as yet (Hallinger and Heck, 2011). The results of research into educational change and school reform point to the important factors that are present in schools where students have improved outcomes, namely, leadership practices, teacher motivation, and teacher professional learning. However, there is limited longitudinal research into school-based initiatives that would shed light on the processes that have led to the improvements.

Two views have emerged from the body of theories and research into school improvement and educational change within the context of system-wide reform. The 'inside' and 'outside' views, as described by Sleegers and Leithwood (2010), seem to have dominated the research. The 'inside' view concentrates on the "capacity of schools to transform themselves into supportive environments for teacher learning and change", while the 'outside' view relates to "the

implementation of external developed reform designs into schools" (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort and Peetsma, 2012, p. 442). Whilst these views about school reform inform each other, they are underpinned by two different assumptions, the normative-reductive and the empirical rational approaches as described in the landmark work of Chin and Benne (1969). The normative-reductive approach of change concentrates on the professional development of individuals who constitute the collective system, and the capacity of the system to address its identified challenges. Using this approach, change is contemplated as part of a bigger picture of creating meaning of the context in which educators function, and by processing their shared and individual thoughts on their practice. Research models of change based on an empirical-rational approach assume teachers apply changes that have been purported to improve student outcomes, in their classrooms, that is, the teachers behaving as rational human beings.

Results from studies that focus on the ability of schools to change themselves (inside view, normative-reductive approach) suggest the professional learning of teachers is central to improving teacher practice, and that school surroundings such as a positive school climate, collaboration, and shared decision-making foster the teachers' professional learning. These are studies where school organisational conditions, such as leadership, are believed to be the foremost drivers of a school's ability to transform itself (Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006; Mitchell and Sackney, 2000).

Research that has an empirical-rational approach (outside view) is characterised by putting into practice improvements and systems created by school system leaders, which is then transferred to multiple settings, known as scaling up (Borman et al., 2003; Desimone, 2002; Murphy and Datnow, 2003; Siskin, 1997;

Slavin and Madden, 2001; Sondergeld and Koskey). The impact of different aspects of a school (instruction, assessment, parental involvement) are assessed in such studies, and found to have a modest and unsustainable impact on student achievement. The research also suggests schools with a pre-existing strong propensity and capability for improvement are more able to integrate externally developed reforms without difficulty, in comparison to schools whose capacity to improve is low (Thoonen et al., 2012).

While inside and outside views on school reform are predicated on different beliefs about school improvement and educational change, some research studies suggest they are inextricably linked, and one can enlighten the other. Effective school reform needs to be adapted for each school site, informed by the school's actual capacity to improve, encourage and motivate teachers to be more involved in their own professional learning. As described by one research study, "building school-wide capacity to improve teacher practice and enhance students' learning seems to be a key challenge for practitioners to cope with the current and growing pressure to change, including the push for strong terms of accountability and systematic reforms, and beliefs about the effectiveness of 'evidence-based' decision-making" (Thoonen et al., 2012, p. 444).

One of the limitations of current research is that there have been limited studies that document change in schools over time; rather, they provide point-in-time snapshots. It is difficult to find research on how changes in motivation, school settings and capacities influence a teacher's instructional skills over a longitudinal period of time. There has been much research into turning around under-performing schools (Lee, 2012; Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Snowden, 2012) in specific contexts (high poverty, low SES, racial segregation); however

findings are not necessarily easily generalised and applicable to other schools in differing contexts. Furthermore, it has been noted that although school-based reforms can produce changes to classroom practice, countless schools basically do not have the wherewithal to improve on their own (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Chau and Polhemus, 2003), and school networks have been found to enhance school capacity for reform ongoing collaboration. In the SSII that is the subject of this research, there was an emphasis on SIMLs networking with one another during the course of the initiative, and it will be interesting if this research supports the findings of Wohlstetter et al (2003). Longitudinal studies will assist and inform educators about the role of building school-wide capacity for continuous school improvement (Day et al., 2010; Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Smylie and Wenzel, 2003).

2.2.3 System-wide school reform

It is argued that for over fifty years, educational systems have relied on "top down" school reform measures that fail to provide lasting total solutions (Fullan, 2009b). Hence, the task for today's school systems, such as the MCSS, is to devise a school improvement scaffold, which can change their schools' long-established organisational structures to ones that produce unrelenting, continuous school improvement, and thus support a self-sustaining culture of change.

In 2007, McKinsey & Company reported on research carried out with the objective of understanding the reasons why the world's top performing school systems outperform others and also, why some reforms employed were successful and others failed (Mourshed and Barber, 2007). The focus of the research was on how differences at the level of the school system impact on the outcomes of students in classrooms in the context of enabling better teaching and learning. It was found the top performing systems are "relentless in their focus on improving

the quality of instruction in their classrooms" (p.27). There were four general strategies utilised by top performing systems to assist educators improve their classroom instruction, make them more conscious of limitations in their practice, present them with particular information of exemplars of best practice, and inspire them to make the required changes to their practice. These strategies were: "(1) building practical skills during initial teacher training, (2) placing coaches (expert teachers) in schools to support teachers, (3) selecting and developing effective instructional leaders as principals, and (4) enabling teachers to learn from each other" (Mourshed and Barber, 2007, p. 27). However, there are some concerns about this report, and the strategies used to disseminate 'best practice'.

Evidence for the effectiveness of placing expert teachers in schools to support teachers is limited. The outcomes tend to be described as either varying or challenging to distinguish (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2007) . The conclusion of most studies is that what commences as a 'cascade' at the centre becomes a 'trickle' in the classroom (Hayes, 2000). The flaw in this strategy is that teachers at the receiving end of the training are passive in relation to the content and process of the 'best practice', and they tend to exert their professional independence by appearing to comply, while adapting, ignoring or rejecting top down reforms (Coffield et al., 2008). Rather, teachers who are both the creators and recipients of 'best practice', tend to learn from each other in equal partnerships, based on mutual trust (Fielding et al., 2005).

Building the capacity of teachers by refining and improving their instructional skills is a strategy that increases a school system's capacity to deliver improved teaching, which in turn leads to better student outcomes. The 2007 McKinsey & Company report found that high performing systems go even further

than building capacity: they employ interventions at the school level, identify schools that are under-performing, and intervene to raise levels of attainment (Mourshed and Barber, 2007, p. 34). Student outcomes are monitored by results in examinations, and school reviews that assess the performance of a school against published benchmarks (Mourshed and Barber, 2007, p. 37).

This use of data for accountability is more likely to create exam workshops than communities of learning. It has been argued that school systems use such mechanisms as a 'silver bullet' solution; standardised tests have their place in assessing educational achievement, but teaching to the test is corrupting the learning process. "Testing is not a substitute for curriculum and instruction. Good education cannot be achieved by a strategy of testing children, shaming educators, and closing schools" (Ravitch, 2011). Authentic education involves qualities that are not always easy to measure, and that are also contributed to by parents and communities. Further, even the best teachers cannot improve the scores of every student. Only implementing school improvement initiatives when tests scores fail to rise may be a short-sighted approach to fixing education, and in some education systems, such as in the U.S., it has not been successful.

In the context of this study, the secondary school improvement initiative, as initiated by the MCSS, is a clear attempt to engage the strategies used by highly performing systems to improve teacher practice in order to improve student outcomes. The school improvement middle leader is an on-site expert teacher who is able to work with teachers to motivate them to reflect upon and refine their teaching practice. In the MCSS, the SIML was a system-appointed middle leader in each school, with a requisite that this middle leader be incorporated into the senior leadership team. Each principal was a member of the appointment panel of the

SIMLs; however, the majority of the appointment panels were made up of MSCC system leaders. The SIMLs were remunerated above what a three-point curriculum coordinator would receive and they were not allowed to teach any classes within the secondary school. This appointment and recruitment process may have a bearing on the way the SIMLs were received and utilised in each school's context.

The accountability requirements of the secondary school improvement initiative are also an example of continuous monitoring of students' performances. The exploration of this initiative will add to body of knowledge of what school systems can do to improve student outcomes for all students within them.

In a follow-up to their 2007 report, McKinsey & Company (2010) did further research into school systems, including school systems that have all been set on a course of school improvement but each beginning at varying starting points – from "poor to fair, from fair to good, from good to great, and from great to excellent" (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 7). The study distinguished a collection of six strategies that appear with the same regularity, no matter what stage a school is at in respect to their school improvement journey; however, these strategies are demonstrated and revealed in a different way at each improvement journey stage. The strategies were:

1. *Technical skill building: strengthening professional development for new and tenured teachers and principals.*
2. *Student assessment: assessing students at the regional or national level for various grades and subjects.*
3. *Data systems: gathering, analysing, and sharing data on system performance (schools, students, educators, geographic areas), and using data as a tool to direct the allocation of system support.*
4. *Revised standards and curriculum: defining what students should know, understand, and be able to do, and creating the accompanying teaching content.*

5. *Teacher and principal compensation: introducing a reward schemes for high performance, and structuring teacher and principal compensation in accordance with the role they play.*

6. *Policy documents and education laws: facilitating the improvement journey by articulating the aspirations, objectives, and priorities of the reform program.* (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 52)

Harris (2010, p. 197) also makes the case that whole system reform requires change "at all levels in the system". The body of research into unsuccessful initiatives has found in those schools there is a tendency to repeat past errors, teachers do not successfully grasp the implementation plan, educational changes are made at an overly ambitious rate, changes are uni-directional (often top down), there is little evidence of a strong commitment from the leadership team, and there is little or scant consideration given to networking with other schools to build a system-wide capacity. Moreover, achieving system-wide change requires all members of the system to collaborate and converse, to adopt a forward-thinking impetus to change, and make a conscious decision to bring the efforts of personnel into alignment. The model of change employed needs to have the elements of tension and accountability, in addition to support and encouragement, a model that espouses "collaborative competitiveness amongst schools", in conjunction with an unrelenting focus on improving outcomes (Fullan, 2010).

The secondary school improvement initiative initiated by the MCSS is an example of a reform initiative that has been tailored to each of the six schools, with each school's context being taken into account. Whilst there were commonalities across each of the sites that formed the framework for accountability (for example, data analysis reports, Individual Education Plans published for each student at or below the National benchmarks), each school was able to have its SIML focus on identified priorities within each school's Annual Improvement Plan. For example,

one of the schools was in an area with a high proportion of Sudanese refugee students, and the SIML was able to develop a specific program for the needs of this student group that involved ongoing parental involvement, and the acquisition of 'English as a second language' programs. These students also required ongoing psychological support for their war experiences and the SIML, together with the Principal, was able to bring the school's resources together in order to address the pastoral needs of the students.

The interventions are more likely to achieve their full impact because of this. The support of key stakeholders was gained by the individualisation of the program for each school context and, in particular, involved making decisions about when the MCSS would make an action part of its accountability framework, and as such, part of compliance. To achieve the large-scale reform desired by the MCSS, the strategies proposed by McKinsey and Company (2007) to improve student outcomes, must be implemented by school improvement middle leaders and principals, with a strong focus on change management. Once these leaders understand change management, and value its criticality to the success of a project, they will have the skills to transform the contexts that constrain them (Fullan, 2009a).

2.3 Professional Development (PD) and Professional Learning (PL) for Teachers

The commonly held view that quality teachers are born not made is contradicted by the research evidence (Berliner, 2004; Scott and Dinham, 2008). This is not to say that just anyone is suited to teaching, but rather innate ability and personality together with ongoing mentoring, feedback, support and professional development provide the opportunities for teachers to become more effective.

Teachers must be well trained for students to achieve and be successful, the major purposes of schooling, "It is generally acknowledged that promoting teacher quality is a key element in improving education" (Harris and Sass, 2008, p. 798). Consequently, the MCSS's focus in the implementation of the SSII is to build the capacity of the educators in the six secondary schools that are part of the initiative.

2.3.1 Improving teacher quality

At present, international evidence has found the most significant school-based effect on student success is the quality of the classroom teacher (Hattie, 2003; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005; Rowe, 2003).

To this end, a synthesis of contemporary research has led to significant agreement about what quality teachers know and do (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009, p. 99), and these characteristics are articulated in the many professional standards frameworks for teachers around the globe. Australian research has synthesised ten attributes of quality teachers (Dinham, 2002):

1. *A high level of knowledge, imagination, passion, and belief in, and for, their field.*
2. *An overriding commitment to, and high aspirations for, their students' learning.*
3. *A rich repertoire of skills, methods and approaches on which they are able to draw to provide the right 'mix' for the specific needs of individual students.*
4. *A detailed understanding of the context in which they are working; of the specific expectations of the community; and of the needs of the cohort of students for whom they are responsible.*
5. *A capacity to respond appropriately to students, individually and collectively, and to the context, through their teaching practice.*

6. *A refusal to let anything get in the way of their own or their students' learning, and what they perceive as needing to be addressed.*

7. *A capacity to engender a high level of respect and even affection from their students and colleagues, a by-product of their hard work and professionalism.*

8. *A great capacity for engagement in professional learning through self-initiated involvement in various combinations of professional development activities, some provided by the employing authority; others sought out by the individual.*

9. *A great capacity to contribute to the professional learning of others, and a willingness to do so.*

10. *Moral leadership and professionalism, in that they exemplify high values and qualities and seek to encourage these in others.*

The kinds of reforms that are desired in education are the ones that result in the wholesale implementation of quality instructional practice; however, as Elmore (1996) has described, it is difficult to achieve this wholesale implementation as the profession has a culture that traditionally finds teachers doing their own thing behind their classroom doors. Accordingly, the biggest stumbling block in improving teacher quality is not the identification of the necessary attributes required for such improvement but rather, the creation of structures and processes within schools that encourage collaboration and facilitate the adoption of best practice to each teachers' common practice (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Elmore, 1996; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005).

In the next sub-section, the research on professional development (PD) and professional learning (PL) is presented and considered in the context of this particular study in secondary schools within a school system.

2.3.2 Professional Development and Professional Learning

From the stance of a school system, professional development needs to be a
" planned, comprehensive, and systemic program designed by the system to
improve all school personnel's ability to design, implement, and assess productive
change in each individual and in the school organization" (Burke, 2000, p. 29).
There is great frustration often experienced by school system administrators when
substantial funds are expended on professional learning experiences (conferences,
workshops), but there is only a negligible difference in teaching practice when the
teachers return to their classrooms. In this study, the researcher is interested in
exploring the outcome of a secondary school improvement initiative, and if there is
any change in teacher practice.

The use of the terms professional development and professional learning,
regularly used synonymously, is worthy of clarification. Scholars are at pains to
distinguish between what the terms actually refer to, such that researchers are
generally disparaging of professional development efforts presented as an activity
that a teacher "does" or "undertakes", or which is "provided" for staff. This has
promulgated the idea it is an activity that is inextricably linked to the teaching
environment and the capacities of teachers (Little, 1999; McLaughlin, 1994).
Fullan (2007a) firmly maintained that "professional development as a term and as a
strategy has run its course" (p. 35). The change in the lexicon has meant the term
"professional development" is no longer in common usage across Australian school
systems, and may be attributed to these views, in addition to the manner in which
educators have had to participate in ill-considered, disjointed, one-off in-services.

As previously mentioned, research has revealed that teachers are the
essential drivers of effective educational reform efforts (Fullan, 2001b). However,
change often proves to be problematic, since any course of action that brings about

positive and effective change involves concerted and concentrated efforts. Researchers have postulated that change occurs actively through the interaction of fresh thinking, interpretations and authentic experiences (Johnson, 2010; Stiles et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2009). The greatest hindrance to this type of change is an expectation educators will alter their knowledge by actively participating in learning opportunities in a manner that is completely different to the experiences they had in their initial teacher training (Stiles et al., 2009).

Conventionally, teachers have been helped in regard to improving teacher practice through professional learning programs. The educational backgrounds of secondary teachers in their discrete disciplines vary; thus, professional learning programs are required to be tailor-made to meet the needs of specific groups of teachers. Whilst different professional learning programs meet the needs of a wide variety of teachers, the central intent of all professional learning programs should be the improvement of student outcomes (Joyce and Showers, 2002; Ong and Lundin, 2003). Moreover, whilst an improvement in student outcomes is the key measurement of success in professional learning programs, it can also be argued an effective professional learning program, that is, one that changes teacher practice, is one with classroom follow-up as this is an effective strategy to encourage this (Garmston, 2003; Joyce and Showers, 2002, p. 187).

In a synthesis of the research into effective teacher professional learning, Drago-Severson (2007) concluded the requisites of professional learning programs are they should be "embedded in and derived from practice, on-going rather than one shot experiences, on-site and school based, focused on student achievement, integrated with school reform processes, centred around teacher collaboration, and sensitive to teachers' learning needs" (p.73). Hawley and Valli (1999) also claim

professional learning opportunities need to be perceptive ones that are informed by teachers' specific learning requirements. It is also widely recognised that practice in professional learning programs needs to be situated in teachers' actual classrooms (Alton-Lee and Timperley, 2008; Dell'Alba and Sandberg, 2006; Harwell, 2003; Leu, 2004). The research literature demonstrates that effective professional learning can positively influence teacher and student learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, et al., 2009; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009). Sound professional learning programs result in enriched teacher learning, followed by improved teacher practice, and eventually lead to improved student achievement; however, insufficient research has studied these links systematically and longitudinally (Garet et al., 2001).

In the next sub-section, the research on the best way to deliver and implement teacher professional learning will be examined.

2.3.3 School-based Teacher Professional Learning

There has been much research over the years into what constitutes successful teacher professional learning. Factors that appear to ensure successful teacher professional learning are that it is grounded in the needs of the school, continues over time, and is allied to the improvement in student outcomes (Joyce and Showers, 2002; Yoon et al., 2007). Furthermore, educators will only utilise fresh strategies that are easy to employ and are effective (Cornett and Knight, 2009; Knight, 2004; Knight and van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). This is in sharp contrast to the usual practice of an expert delivering an idea during one short, professional learning session, and teachers leave with no implementation plan to meet the specific needs of their students. Broadly speaking, if school educators do not consider the professional learning is worthwhile, it is highly doubtful they will put

it into practice. Teacher growth and the desired improvement in student outcomes is fostered by continual professional learning that is best embedded within a school-based, coaching framework (Cornett and Knight, 2009; Knight, 2009a; Knight and van Nieuwerburgh, 2012).

In order to respond to the research question proposed in this study, it is therefore important to investigate the role of the school improvement middle leader in the context of a leader working towards improving teacher practice. It is the expectation of the MCSS that professional learning will be delivered on-site within a framework tailor-made for the school's needs. The professional learning opportunities provided by the school improvement middle leader can be seen to be an essential ingredient for school and system educational reform. It can be considered a significant strategy in building the capacity of teachers, their schools and the system. In order to generate real change at a school and system level, it is necessary to have a coordinated approach that is constructed on teachers' personal commitment to teaching and their ongoing professional learning. The critical issue for this research is how the teachers in each school perceive their respective SIMLs. Do the staff perceive the SIML as an external expert delivering a series of professional development opportunities? Or, is the SIML perceived as a supporting mentor or coach, working collaboratively on professional learning that is co-constructed? What will be of interest in this study, is how well did the process of engaging an on-site SIML encourage teachers' personal professional enquiry and shared, cooperative professional learning. Conversely, was the engagement of an SIML in each of the six secondary schools reduced to a minimised, cascading professional development process?

2.4   Change

In this sub-section, the literature relating to the research into educational change will be reviewed in the context of the school-based school improvement initiative, SSII.

2.4.1   Educational change

Interest in the concept of educational change has been growing over the last few decades with researchers delving into phenomena such as why there is teacher resistance to change (Gitlin and Margonis, 1995; Hjelle, 2001; Knight, 2009b), the difficulty in spreading innovations and improvements (Bowden, 2007; Chin and Benne, 1969; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006; Havelock and Zlotolow, 1995; Rust and Freidus, 2001), and why it is so challenging to "scale up" reforms from one school or pilot group to a district (Barber and Phillips, 2000; Cameron, 2007; Cameron, 2010b; Fullan, Rolheiser, Mascall and Edge, 2005; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). Secondary schools have proved to be especially impermeable, given their complexity, faculty structures, size and often, quite diverse student bodies (Busher and Harris, 1999; Earl, Torrance and Sutherland, 2006; Foster, 2005; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013; Harris, 2001b; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993).

There have been numerous attempts to design reforms for schools that have failed to make a lasting impact. The reforms fail because "it is unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms, in a situation which is basically not organised to engage in change will do anything but give reform a bad name" (Fullan, 1993, p. 3).

There have been many large-scale reform movements that were forcefully implemented in school districts that showed some initial gains; however, there was a plateauing of positive effects in secondary schools compared to primary schools. These large scale initiatives include the Comprehensive School Reform movement

(Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan, 2002; Murphy and Datnow, 2003), the Secondary School Reform mandates in Canada (Volante, 2007), and the Key Stage 3 Strategy in the United Kingdom (Cameron, 2007; Office for Standards in Education, 2003).

From the recent research it can be argued educational change occurs best when a tailor-made plan is created to support teachers' specific school sites, the desired change has time to develop, the plan includes long-term objectives with a shared strategic vision from all involved, and the benefits of the educational change embrace the knowledge, strengths and values of the wider community (Cole, 2004; Fullan, 2005). If the desired change is to improve teaching practice, research would point to the notion that teacher professional learning should be job-embedded; that is, occur on the school site (Cole, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, et al., 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, 2008).

Professional learning should not be considered as an activity that is distinct from what a classroom teacher actually does in their teaching space. Rather, professional learning is entrenched in actual classroom practice, and is very apparent; for example, when a teacher integrates an action (implements a plan) with research (develops an understanding of the effectiveness of this implementation). In offering "top-down" assistance for "bottom-up" professional learning programs that entail considerable educational change, the function of system leaders "is critical in ensuring safe environments in which teachers are willing to risk failure in learning new techniques and strategies" (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 2011, p. 82).

2.4.2 Change and school systems

The review of literature now turns to the influence that a school system has on the transformation of schools. For over fifty years, educational systems have

relied on "top down" school reform measures that fail to provide lasting, complete solutions (Fullan, 2009b). The call for today's school systems, such as the MCSS, is to construct a school improvement framework, which can revolutionise their schools' established infrastructures. The aim is to one that produces continuous school improvement, and supports a co-created, self-supported culture of change. Improving a school system one school at a time has its limitations, not only in terms of the sheer scale of the task, but also in terms of the pace of change. If system-wide improvement is to be more than just rhetoric, then alternative models of change that can deliver on such a large scale need to be investigated. Whole system reform will require collective capacity, not just the individual capacity of single schools; it will require change at all levels of the system (Harris, 2010).

In 2007, McKinsey & Company reported on research carried out with the objective of understanding the phenomenon of the world's top performing school systems surpassing the outcomes of others and why some reforms implemented flourished when others were futile (Mourshed and Barber, 2007). The focus of the research was on how differences at the level of the school system impact on the outcomes of students in classrooms in the context of enabling better teaching and learning. It was found that the top performing systems are "relentless in their focus on improving the quality of instruction in their classrooms" (p.27). There were four general strategies used by high performing systems to assist teachers in improving their instruction, develop a self-awareness of the limitations of their classroom practice, make available exemplars of best practice and inspire them to transform their classroom practice. These strategies were "(1) building practical skills during initial teacher training, (2) placing coaches (expert teachers) in schools to support teachers, (3) selecting and developing effective instructional leaders as principals,

and (4) enabling teachers to learn from each other" (Mourshed and Barber, 2007, p. 27).

In the context of this study, the secondary school improvement initiative as initiated by the MCSS, is a clear attempt to engage the strategies used by highly performing systems to improve teacher practice. The school improvement middle leader is an on-site expert teacher who is able to work with teachers to motivate them to reflect upon and refine practice. The accountability requirements of the secondary school improvement initiative are also an example of continuous monitoring of students' performances. The exploration of this initiative will add to body of knowledge of what school systems can do to improve student outcomes for all students within them.

McKinsey & Company (2010) followed up with further research into school systems included school systems that are at different points in the journey of improvement from "poor to fair, from fair to good, from good to great, and from great to excellent" (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 7). The study was able to categorise a collection of six interventions that transpire with equal regularity across all performance journeys, however, are revealed differently at stage of school improvement. The important message from these findings is that school improvement initiatives need to be contextualised to meet the needs of the school depending on where it is in its reform journey. The secondary school improvement initiative initiated by the MCSS is an example of an initiative that has been tailored to each of the six schools with each school's context being considered. The interventions are more likely to achieve their full impact because of this. The objective for contextualization for each school context was to garner the cooperation and endorsement of the school community (staff, students and parents)

and, in particular, involved decision-making about when the MCSS would dictate a strategy must be implemented or when it. To achieve the large-scale reform desired by the MCSS, the strategies proposed by McKinsey and Company (2007) to improve student outcomes must be implemented by school improvement middle leaders and principals, with a strong focus on change management. Once these leaders have a clear awareness of change as a phenomenon and understand its criticality to a success initiative, they will possess the skills to transform the contexts that constrain them (Fullan, 2009a).

2.4.3   Change within a secondary school

As mentioned in the introduction to educational change (2.4.1), the literature on school reform would seem to suggest that reform has continued to be somewhat unachievable, especially within sizeable, comprehensive, metropolitan high schools (Busher, Harris and Wise, 2001; Cameron, 2007; Grubb, 2015). In particular, top-down reforms have had a history of failure (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015, p. 43). The population growth in school districts/systems, departmentalisation of faculties, opposing objectives of these faculties, isolated teachers, poor leadership, school communities resistant to change, long-standing traditions, and school ethos collectively combine to make the process of reform in sizeable, comprehensive, metropolitan high schools quite difficult. In Raywid's (1999) seminal work on secondary school reform, she states (in relation to secondary school reform):

> *There is the well-known and powerful resistance to change, which has made the high school largely impervious and impossible to improve. And there is the growing list of features that have been linked to effectiveness and productivity, which appear fundamentally incompatible with the comprehensive high school* (p. 306)

Even though small educational changes have been initiated and implemented in secondary schools, such as the use of new pedagogical approaches, schools have remained the same, at the most fundamental levels (Elmore, 2007). Although many external agencies (such as governments and school systems) persist in allocating funding in a bid to introduce the implementation of a range of school reforms, the reforms continue to be unsuccessful on a large scale, because of the complex obstacles to change that exist in large, comprehensive secondary schools (Berends et al., 2002; Marzano et al., 2005; McLaughlin, 1991). To make substantial and sustainable reform in schools it is crucial the distinctive ethos of each school is considered alongside what is typical of the secondary school culture.

> *A site-specific intervention-to create or identify an intervention that addresses the specific needs of the school. The logic behind this option is that every school is different in some way. Consequently, no predesigned comprehensive school reform program will address the unique characteristics of a given school.* (Marzano, 2003, p. 81)

Thus, due to the nature of the typical comprehensive secondary school, educational change has remained challenging, and will persist in being exceptionally complicated. The publication of standardised test results has complicated the educational landscape even more.

In the field of education, standardised tests, of which results have been made publicly available, have had a large impact on the way teachers instruct in the classroom. Given the results of standardised tests are used as measures for school systems and schools, instead of the improvement and reformation of classroom instruction, teachers are faced with the high stakes burden of students meeting, and exceeding, the national test benchmarks. Consequently, teachers and schools are disinclined to embrace educational change reforms such as no grading, team

teaching and deprivatised classrooms. More time, energy and resources are therefore devoted to ensuring the school's public image of being a "good" school, rather than on reforms that have pedagogic and curricular substance (McNeil, 2002, p. xvii).

Current school reform researchers are in favour of devolving educational change strategies to schools and giving them greater autonomy. However, bottom-up innovation does not have a strong track record in being able to spread educational change successfully either (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015). Thus, in our current era, if top-down strategies for school reform have been unsuccessful in addition to bottom-up strategies making minimal impact, school systems such as the MCSS look to models of school improvement where systems, schools and teachers are improving together. School reform experts are advocating adoption of a middle level approach. Middle level leaders can adopt a prominent role in implementing educational change from the top and at the same time, implement strategies that are coming at them from the bottom – a middle level leadership model (Schleicher, 2015).

The next sub-section will focus on the research literature on leadership skills and traits that are necessary to implement and support change within an organisation, in this case, an educational organisation.

2.5   Change Leadership

Internationally, educational reforms mirror the demand for schools to find contemporary ways of improving students' outcomes (Brown et al., 2000), and thus directly impact the development of leadership roles within schools. Models of change have regularly assumed a particular style of leadership, whereby the leader is assigned individual responsibility and control. The focus of Government

legislation has contributed to school systems targeting the school as the "unit of change", that is, it is: the school's national testing results that are examined; the school that is given funding in targeted intervention initiatives; the school that has to write accountability reports; and it is the school whose national testing results are published on national websites such as *myschool* in Australia. These changes have had a significant influence on the manner in which principals manage their schools, and how leadership is revealed in their schools (Brown et al., 2000). Principals are now more publicly accountable for their students' performance in national testing. The evidence points to the direct link between the leadership demonstrated by the Principal and the leadership team, and the effectiveness of the team (Sanders and Simpson, 2005; Waters et al., 2003).

Some school improvement projects have had a different perspective, and have focused on quality teaching and the settings that support quality teaching. For example, the "Improving the Quality of Education For All" (IQEA) school improvement project (Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth and West, 1994; Hopkins, 1994), which recognises that if there is not an evenly balanced focus on developing the capacity of the teachers in the school and the school's actual learning culture, modern strategies that are implemented will soon be disregarded. At its foundation, the IQEA Project operates on the principle that a school will be best able to improve the learning outcomes of its students if the reform agenda strategies implemented are synchronous with what the teachers are already implementing and value. It was found in the IQEA project, the externally engaged trusted colleagues not only endow the school with an important source of impetus for change but also guarantees that schools recognise and manage anything that is an impediment to change (Harris, 2001).

The IQEA project has also given researchers a valuable insight into how leadership has sustained the school improvement process. What has emerged in these schools is a dispersed leadership model, where school leaders expand their repertoires of leadership, offer a context for the development of new understandings of leadership, and promote collaborative enquiry in such a way that teachers study, learn and share leadership (West, Jackson, Harris and Hopkins, 2000). In the more advanced IQEA schools, which have sustained their improvement journey, leadership is evident within the context of mutual learning, opportunities for growth and collaborative processes.

In a meta-analysis of the literature about what form of leadership improves student outcomes, it has been found that schools should consider re-structuring themselves at a whole school level, with a view to also re-structuring leadership positions in the school and how they are performed (Harris, 2004a). Such a re-structure calls for a shift from the traditional, established views on leadership, to leadership roles that encourage positive changes (Fullan, 2001a; Hopkins and Jackson, 2003; Stoll, 2009). Distributing leadership within a school compels principals to re-shape their roles. Leadership for collaboration suggests alternate images of school leadership in which leaders recognise and learn to manage, rather than to deny the emotional aspects of their work (Slater, 2005), and who are "humble rather than heroic, emotional rather than intellectual, and possess more 'soft' than 'hard' skills and who are people-oriented rather than system-oriented" (MacBeath, 2003).

The heroic style of traditional forms of school leadership (Johnson, 1997) are being challenged. This will be explored in the next section.

2.5.1 Established and contemporary theories of change leadership

The significance of leadership in the fulfilment of a school's improvement agenda has led to a wide-ranging pursuit of the most effective model of leadership. The concept of school leadership is conventionally inclined to be restricted to the notion of lone educators taking up substantive and official principal positions, inferring "lone, heroic leadership" (Etcher, 1997). From this viewpoint, the ideal leader is a principal who exhibits heroic traits such as "authority, courage, control, confidence and the capacity to size things up and make them right, promote allegiance and compliance" (Johnson, 1997). Harris and Day (2003) argue that in order to deal with the unparalleled speed of change in education, schools need to challenge the orthodoxy of the traditional style of principal leadership, in favour of one that is "inherently collective, collaborative and shared" (p. 91). The heroic role of a leader defines leadership as an activity that is exclusive rather than inclusive, personal rather than social, and individualised rather than collective (Haslam, Reicher and Platow, 2013). Haslam et al. (2013) argue that leaders and followers are bound together by being part of the same group, a common "we", and that effective models of leadership should include an understanding of the psychology of the social group (p.162).

A school's traditional hierarchy and structures limit the exercise of leadership to formal opportunities. In a conventional school structure, a teacher can only exercise leadership when she/he occupies a function such as an assistant principal, faculty leader or other recognised leadership positions, or when placed in such a role as an assigned duty. Leadership responsibility is assigned to a teacher, either through an official appointment, or in a more extemporised way based on the conviction of the principal or executive team, usually with a resulting implied or precisely defined accountability (MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse, 2004). These,

and other researchers, contend that the traditional principal's role of the lone leader should be dispensed with in favour of a model that encourages collaboration and collegiality.

Lambert (2003) reviewed the changes in the definition of leadership from the nineties onwards, and found there have been many changes in the way we understand and define leadership: definitions range from being centred on culture and learning, to being centred on persons and are co-constructed, to being situated in a pre-determined skill set for individuals. This conclusion is supported by the work of Møller and Eggen (2005) who researched the Norwegian "Successful School Leadership Project" in secondary schools. They argue the concept of leadership in schools describes collaborative practice between teachers and stakeholders, and despite different contexts and challenges (geographical location, school history and size), they could identify success because of a continuous team effort.

The form of leadership which is being generally advocated as one measure of improving student outcomes in schools is distributed leadership (Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey, 2003; Crowther, 2010; Harris, 2004a; Jacobson, 2011; MacBeath et al., 2004; Robinson, 2008; Sanocki, 2013).

2.5.2 Distributed leadership

In reviewing the relevant literature, it would seem that distributed leadership has taken root, and is quite widespread in nations like Australia, Canada and the United States (Bennett, Wise, et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006; Jacobson, 2011; MacBeath et al., 2004; Muijs et al., 2004; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson and Myers, 2007). Even in the U.K., distributed leadership forms part of the formal debate and language around school leadership (Frost and Harris, 2003; MacBeath

et al., 2004; Muijs and Harris, 2006) and in fact, "Leading from the Middle" is a key, innovative professional development program being provided by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL).

In a review of the literature on distributed leadership, Bennett et al (2008) concluded there are only a limited number of clear-cut definitions of distributed or devolved leadership, and those that do exist may have different names (delegated, democratic, dispersed) but are, in essence, the same or very similar concept. The definition used in this study is that proffered by Elmore (2000), which states that distributed leadership means "multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture" (p. 15). Distributed leadership is "not something done by an individual to others, rather it is a nascent characteristic of a group or association of people in which members of the group combine their skills" (Bennett et al., 2008, p. 3).

Some of the definitions of distributed leadership resemble earlier leadership qualities such as collegiality. Is the notion of distributed leadership the re-badging of previous concepts? A review of the literature would support that many researchers could describe distinctive elements about the concept of distributed leadership, however, different elements can also be identified (Bennett et al., 2008, p. 7). According to Bennett et al. (2008), the distinctive elements of distributive leadership can be summarised as:

1. *Distributed leadership highlights leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals. This contrasts with leadership as a phenomenon which arises from the individual;*
2. *Distributed leadership suggests openness of the boundaries of leadership. This means that it is predisposed to widen the conventional net of leaders, thus in turn raising the question of which individuals*

and groups are to be brought into leadership or seen as contributors to it; and

   3. *Distributed leadership entails the view that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few.* (p. 8)

These elements are not dissimilar to the characteristics of distributed leadership proposed by Day and Harris (2003): brokering, the translation of school improvement principles into each classroom; participative leadership, the sense of ownership amongst teachers; mediation role, that is, finding external resources and expertise when needed; and the forging of close relationships. In conclusion, these identified elements of teacher leadership are primarily to do with forms of agency and empowerment. As such, the findings of Day and Harris (2003) have a direct link to the present study, as the school improvement middle leader works to implement a system initiative (brokering) within a school context by trying to improve teacher agency (participative leadership). The school improvement middle leader can draw upon both the school's and system's resources (mediation) and ultimately, forge close relationships with other teachers of whom they are also a part.

Whilst there is widespread agreement amongst educators that distributed leadership is a desirable way for teachers in schools to work cooperatively together, this expectation places the responsibility within the role of the classroom teacher, irrespective of their training or role within the school. There have been studies undertaken to explore these assumptions, one in particular being the work of Torrance (2013a), who explored distributive leadership in three Scottish primary schools by analysing the experiences and perspectives of head teachers and staff drawn from interviews and questionnaires. The study found distributed leadership does not always measure up to the aspirations of educators who seek to implement

such a model in their schools. In this study, participants identified five main issues (challenges) with a distributed leadership model: not every staff member is able to lead nor is willing to lead, head teacher endorsement is not enough to legitimise teacher leadership, leadership does not occur naturally, and can actually be quite problematic and encounter friction, anxiety and resistance (pp. 362-365). Distributed leadership can lead to a form of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 2000) or as a "gift of the headteacher" (Torrance, 2013b, p. 60) that can only be avoided by school leaders overtly discussing respective roles within the school and engaging in such conversations consistently with teachers. Involving all teachers in school leadership requires a focus squarely on educational outcomes rather than staff performance in order to avoid negative political outcomes.

Distributed leadership is an approach that involves individuals leading a group. Therefore, understanding the latest theories on group psychology should lead to an enhanced understanding of distributed leadership. For effective leadership, the framing principle is the existence of a shared identity among those who constitute the collective (Haslam et al., 2013). Where people have a shared sense of identity ("us"), it is argued there are four key rules to effective leadership:

1. Leaders need to be in-group prototypes: Group members are more willing to follow an individual the more he or she is one of them;

2. Leaders need to be in-group champions: Leaders need to advance the collective interest as group members perceive it;

3. Leaders need to be entrepreneurs of identity: Leaders work hard to construct identity in order to prove they and their policies are influential; and

4. Leaders need to be embedders of identity: The sense of the group and its sense of social identity needs to be embedded in social reality (Haslam et al., 2013).

In essence, this new psychology of leadership argues that effective leadership is essentially a process of social identity or group management. In the context of this study, it would be useful to analyse the secondary school improvement initiative using the framework of these four principles in order to ascertain to what extent the school improvement middle leader was able to lead a process of forming the school teaching staff into a *group* identity.

2.5.3   Teacher Leaders – who are they?

Reading through the literature, there is some uncertainty as to the definition of teacher leaders. They have been described as "teachers who are leaders in and beyond the classroom, who identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners, and influence others towards improved classroom practice" (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009, p. 5). It has also been claimed a teacher leader is a person "in whom the dream of making a difference has been kept alive, or has been reawakened by engaging colleagues in a professional culture" (Lambert, 2003, p. 422). Other definitions refer to teacher leadership as "the exercise of leadership by teachers regardless of their position" (Anderson and Cawsey, 2008; Day and Harris, 2003; Harris, 2003, p. 316).

Teacher leaders can be either official or unofficial: unofficial teacher leaders choose to act strategically to contribute to school improvement (Frost and Durrant, 2002), whilst official teacher leaders operate within the hierarchy of the established school structures (MacBeath, 2003). In this dissertation, teacher leadership is defined as teachers who exercise leadership in formal, official

positions, who implement the initiatives of the school's and/or system's administration, and who try to influence their followers. Teacher leaders include those teachers commonly referred to as middle leaders, and hold such positions as subject coordinators, and for this study's purposes, the school improvement middle leader (Hannay and Ross, 1999; Harris, 2001b; Wise, 2001).

2.5.4 Importance of teacher leaders

As elucidated previously, the concept of cultivating teacher leaders as a collaborative change force and a mechanism for forging a group identity in the school improvement context, has resulted from external pressures (both systems and governments) to improve students' outcomes, and a steady growth in teachers' expectations to contribute to initiatives and have some ownership. For example, in the UK, teachers and principals are targeted by government to improve students' literacy and numeracy standards (Møller and Eggen, 2005). A school's ability to improve in a sustainable way has been found to be reliant on its capacity to cultivate professional learning communities (Holden, 2002). Teacher leadership has been found to substantially contribute to the achievement of both school and classroom improvement (Day and Harris, 2003; Holden and Durrant, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999). In fact, in a research study by Leithwood et al., (1999), the authors concluded that teacher leadership has a far more important effect on school improvement than principal leadership, notwithstanding the effects of the students' family backgrounds.

Furthermore, studies in teacher leadership have found that the emboldening of classroom educators to undertake leadership positions has a positive effect on the educators' confidence and job satisfaction. Ultimately, this results in improved levels of performance (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009). In a close study of

seventeen teacher leaders, a direct correlation was found between teacher leaders and their intrinsic motivation. These teacher leaders reported they had improved their self-efficacy and could even encourage others (Lieberman, Saxl and Miles, 2000). Teacher leadership also enhances collaboration amongst colleagues, with evidence suggesting that nurturing and encouraging teacher leadership, even with its increased accountabilities, has positive effects on schools transforming to learning organisations (Crowther, 2010).

Teacher leadership has also been found to improve the take up and sustainability of school reform initiatives, as was reported in a study by Weiss and Cambone (2000). In a series of six school case studies, they found when leadership was distributed with teachers, implementation of school reform went more slowly and was mostly borne and put into operation by all teachers. In schools that implemented the school reform without teacher leadership as a basic construct, resistance to the reform continued. Finally, teacher leadership has also been found to alleviate the negative effects of changes in principalship (Davidson and Taylor, 1999). The distinct lesson that can be gleaned from the literature on teacher leadership is that school reform is more likely to occur when leadership is distributed, and when teachers have a personal and vested interest in leading school improvement (Day and Harris, 2003; Gronn, 2000; Holden, 2002; Lambert, 2003).

2.5.5 Middle leaders - who are they?

Many researchers have written about middle leaders and have attempted to define the term middle leadership (Busher and Harris, 1999; Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2006; Flessa, 2012; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013; Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain, 2011; Hannay and Ross, 1999; Hunter-Heaston, 2010; Koh, Gurr, Drysdale and Ang, 2011; Marshall, 2012; Ribbins, 2007; Turner and Sykes, 2007; Wise, 2001),

mainly because the term "middle leaders" can refer to a range of categories and teachers in schools.

It can be argued that principals themselves occupy a classic middle leader role. They sit at the top of a school hierarchy, yet they are expected to implement policy mandates from higher authorities (Flessa, 2012, p. 332). In a Canadian study of the role of principals in the implementation of primary class size reductions, principals described how they were responsible for, but had no authority to change, the initiative. They also explained how they used their authority, within boundaries, to smooth out difficulties encountered (Flessa, 2012). In this study, principals, like other middle leaders, needed to mediate potentially contradictory mandates from system administrators for their local context (Haslam et al., 2013).

Wise's (2001) definition acknowledges a number of sub-groups that exist in schools, all of which contribute to the school's curriculum. That is, middle leaders are "those responsible for an aspect of the academic curriculum, including departments and faculty heads, curriculum team leaders and cross-curriculum coordinators who are expected to have responsibility for one or more teachers" (Wise, 2001, p. 334). Gunter and Ribbins (2002) refer to middle leaders as those who have subject department or pastoral responsibilities, and who receive a special allowance. In such a scenario, these middle leaders are remunerated for occupying their positions and implementing reforms. This may go some way to explaining why principals in secondary schools expect middle leaders to undertake quite a number of tasks.

For the purpose of this study, the school improvement middle leaders can be considered to be leaders who are responsible for implementing a system initiative across the entire staff of a secondary school.

2.5.6 Middle leaders as a school-based change agent

Middle leaders work with, and guide, teams of teachers to assist them put whole-school strategies into the regular operation of their classrooms. They also focus on achieving improved and reliable teacher quality within their sphere of responsibility, through leadership in teaching programs, pastoral care and wellbeing, being invited to observe lessons, setting accountability measures, and by coaching and mentoring teachers. In the secondary school context, middle leaders also ensure uniformity in curriculum delivery across the school by sharing best practice, working together with their fellow middle leaders from other areas, challenging these fellow middle leaders when necessary, and influencing whole school norms. "Middle leaders have more day-to-day impact on standards than head teachers. Middle leaders are, simply, closer to the action. Teachers' and pupils' experience of leadership comes most frequently from their middle leaders. And the essential work of curriculum planning, monitoring and developing teaching belongs with middle leaders." (Hobby, 2016). When considering what kind of school improvement initiatives will enhance student outcomes, it is important to consider what occurs within each school in respect to teacher practice. For example, "variation in pupil performance within UK schools is four times greater than variation in performance between schools" (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, 2009). Within-school variation is driven at two levels: by variation in teacher quality within departments, and between departments. Middle leaders sit at this critical junction in schools (Teaching leaders, 2016).

The studies considered highlight the critical role of the middle leader in the implementation of local strategically planned projects, and initiating and leading change. Two main sources of friction are recognised that affect how middle leaders

define and carry out their responsibilities. These frictions are between the school's leadership team's hope the middle leader will lead at a whole-school level, versus the widespread "belief among other middle leaders that their loyalty was to their department or subject responsibilities and between a developing line management culture within a hierarchical school structure and a belief in collegiality" (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003, p. 4). Middle leaders operate amongst diverse echelons within the school and within different cliques of influence and change. It has also been found there can be ambiguity surrounding the role and position of middle leaders who experience different expectations at the various levels in the school's line management infrastructure. There is a need to "investigate in more depth the extent to which collegiality exists in practice, its different forms, where its boundaries lie within the school, how tensions with hierarchical contexts and expectations of strong leadership are dealt with, and the factors that enhance or hinder its development" (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003).

The research reviewed maintains it is unfounded to assume that only introducing an innovation into a school is enough. Introducing a school improvement initiative without working to institutionalise the change is likely to bring failure (Blase, Blase and Yon Phillips, 2010). Middle leaders such as the school improvement middle leaders in this study, should understand their role provides the stimulation for the change process to continue and be successful. Fullan (1991) emphasizes that "(e)ach school must be assisted by someone trained in supporting the endeavour. (Such) assistance is directed toward facilitating and prodding the process" (p. 414).

The role of the principal in relation to middle leaders in a school is also worthy of close consideration. In a report that examined the challenge of

contemporary principalship across "five Canadian provinces, four US states, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Victoria, Australia" (Renihan, Phillips and Raham, 2006, p. 12), it was found that leading learning cannot be the sole purview of the principal but rather, it is the principal's role to "convene coalitions of individuals, organisations and additional resources required to accomplish targeted objectives to improve educational outcomes" (p. 18). It has recently been concluded the principal cannot successfully implement a school improvement initiative as a sole agent: "Even the best principals cannot single-handedly transform a school" (National Staff Development Council, 2000, p. 6). Researchers have ascertained that other significant stakeholders, playing the role of middle leaders, can help move reform models forward. Nevertheless, because her/his position and authority, the principal greatly influences the work of a middle level leader and the reform initiative that is being implemented (Datnow and Castellano, 2001; Datnow et al., 2002; Fullan, 2007b). Moreover, Datnow et al. (2002) concluded:

> *In sum, active agency on the part of the principal in supporting reform was critical for its success. Active support meant not only speaking out in favour of the reform, but also organising school structures and resources to support it, and creating a school culture in which the reform was not only seen as a given, but one in which it could go and thrive.* (Datnow et al., 2002, pp. 67-68)

The principal, due to her/his leadership position, naturally carries out specific functions. Hord et al. (2006) contended that the principal should "sanction change, identify it as a priority, provide resources and endorse the position and activities of the other change facilitators" (p. 86). The actions of the principal set the bounds for the work of the change agent. The change agent style of the principal directly impacts on the role of any other change agent within the school

(Hord, Stiegelbauer and Hall, 1984; Roach, Kratochwill and Frank, 2009). Deal and Peterson (1990) stated: "nothing will happen without leadership. From someone- or someplace- energy needs to be created, released, channelled, or mobilised to get the ball rolling in the right direction" (p.4). This leadership is, however, not only contained in the principal or system administrators, but in middle leaders, teachers, parents and many external to the school system (Cameron, 2010a; Harris, 2001; Rust and Freidus, 2001; Tajik, 2008).

In conclusion, if the principal is not supportive of the middle leaders within their school, the middle leader may not accomplish the goals set by the school or those of the reform. Therefore, an important dimension of the work of school improvement middle leaders in this study is the interplay of their work with the principal, system leaders and other school middle managers.

2.5.7   System leadership

The term system leadership is becoming more prominently referred to in school reform literature. Early research would suggest where sound system leadership is exercised, there are benefits to school staff (Briggs, 2012). External partnerships within the system and collaborative contexts expand the range of skills and resources accessible to staff and to learners within the system. Working within a collaborative system creates opportunities for shared staffing and career pathways, and forms the basis for further partnerships with other providers (Arnold, 2006).

However, system leadership is a term that necessitates some definition. Recent work by McKinsey Education on how well-performing education systems can continue to improve into the future (Barber and Mourshed, 2009, p. 7), suggests that, internationally, consolidating thinking around building system

efficacy, and acting on it, is the challenge for this decade. This is also borne out in the largest single study into system leadership in education, which was conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008).

In a paper written for the National College of School Leadership, the following definition was stated: "System leadership involves a shift in mindset for school leaders, emphasising what they share with others over how they differ. Where they can, system leaders eschew 'us and them' relationships – with their community, with other schools and professionals and with the Department for Education (DfE) – and model a commitment to the learning of every child" (Craig and Bentley, 2005). This definition calls school systems to be more deliberately collaborative and interdependent, and move away from headship or institutional leadership as a driver for change.

In his book, *Systems Thinking in Action* Fullan (2004b) argued that:

> *… a new kind of leadership is necessary to break through the status quo. Systematic forces, sometimes called inertia, have the upper hand in preventing system shifts. Therefore, it will take powerful, proactive forces to change the existing system (to change context). This can be done directly and indirectly through systems thinking in action. These new theoreticians are leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help develop other leaders within similar characteristics.* (p. 7)

As described by Fullan, a capacity for system thinking in action is a key skill and competence required of system leaders. Quite simply, "system leaders are those who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other schools as well as their own" (Hopkins and Higham, 2007, p.

147). As such, system leadership is a recent concept that comprises the myriad of accountabilities developing locally and nationally that, when combined, have the capacity to bring about system transformation. In the context of this study, the SSII appointed a middle level leader, the SIML, to work on school improvement in a network of six schools. Networking, sharing of ideas, and reporting on successes and failures, were part and parcel of the SIML's role. It will be most interesting to analyse the data collected from these school sites to see whether this 'system leadership' aspect of the role was significant in promoting educational change.

2.6   Conceptual Analytical Model

The purpose of this study is to explore a system initiated and resourced school improvement initiative implemented in secondary schools to improve teacher pratices and student outcomes. The initiative, implemented by the MCSS school system, is a structured program, in which the school improvement middle leader is required to fulfil certain duties as outlined by the MCSS (See Appendix A, Role Description).

To pursue this objective, the research concentrates on the practices of the school improvement middle leader, examines how the fidelity of the secondary school improvement initiative is supported by the school improvement middle leader, and how in turn the school improvement middle leader's role is impacted by a series of influences, some of which are school-driven, while others are external to the school.

This study relies on the available literature on the role of the system in school improvement, change management in the educational context, change leadership (traditional, and the new understandings involving group psychology),

and distributed and team leadership, the <u>role of middle leaders</u> and the <u>influence of on-site professional learning</u> for teachers.

Clear communication and collaboration continually emerge as determinants of success in school reform initiatives. Strong school leadership, and the ability to authentically distribute leadership, can reduce fear and anxiety during change, and also emerge as common characteristics of successful system-wide school reform models.

Based on the related literature, the study will explore the impact of a "top-down", "bottom-up"school improvement initiative, and investigate how this affects the work of the school improvement middle leader. Analysis of the data will draw upon what is known about distributed leadership (Harris, 2004a), middle leaders (Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Wise, 2001) and the psychology of working with groups (Haslam et al., 2013). Figure 2-1 arranges these interrelated, complex areas into a conceptual framework for the research.

Figure 2-1: Conceptual Framework for the exploration of a pedagogical change initiative by a middle leader
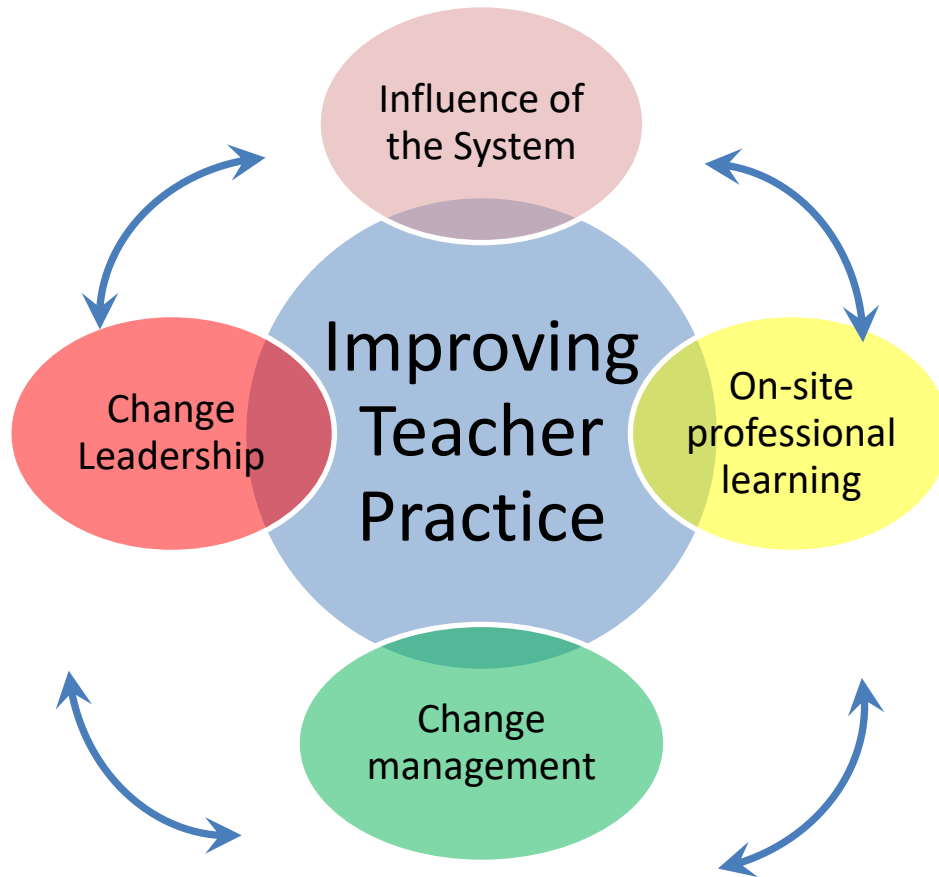
2.7 Summary

Chapter 2 examined the research and theory on school reform, professional development and professional learning for teachers, change and change leadership.

First, the researcher reviewed the literature on school reform. The body of research on the fundamental need for school reform, system wide school reform initiatives as an attempt to transform schools in a large scale way and thence the research into school based reform initiatives and the conditions that assist schools to transform themselves.

Second, the researcher provided the current research on professional development and professional learning with a synthesis of the research on the efficacy of on-site, school-based professional opportunities clearly linked to enhancing students' achievements.

Next, the researcher reviewed the literature on educational change and the conditions that have been found to support and facilitate change in teacher practice. The researcher mainly drew upon the work of educational change experts, Darling-Hammond, Timperley et al, and Cole, who collectively have arrived at the conclusion educational change is effected when professional learning experiences for classroom teachers are not seen as distinct from what they do daily in their classroom space.

Finally, the researcher presented the established and contemporary theories of change leadership, and then focused on how this is manifested within the hierarchical structure of a secondary school. Concepts such as distributed leadership, teacher leaders, middle leaders, system leadership, and the issues surrounding the use of middle leaders as school-based change agents were considered.

The next chapter will outline the methodology, techniques and processes used to generate and analyse participants' data.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study, and provides an explanation of the techniques and processes used for generating data and data analysis. This chapter is organised into the following sections: the research questions are presented along with how they link to the purpose for the study, the study's context, how schools were identified and selected, and the purposeful sampling of participants. All material related to the validity and reliability of the research and questions asked of participants, is documented.

3.2   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which a system-initiated and funded school improvement initiative, using system-appointed, school-based, middle-level leaders, is able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools. The primary research question to guide this study is:

> ***In what ways did a system-initiated and funded, secondary school-based pedagogical initiative, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, influence secondary school teaching practice?***

The secondary school improvement initiative (SSII) implemented by the MCSS school system is a structured program in which the school improvement middle leader is required to fulfil certain duties as outlined by the MCSS. Based on the related literature, it is anticipated the study will explore the influence of a "top-down, bottom-up" school improvement initiative, and explore how this affects the work of the school improvement middle leader. Analysis of the data will draw upon what is known about distributed leadership (Harris, 2004a), middle leaders

(Bennett, Newton, et al., 2003; Wise, 2001), and the psychology of working with groups (Haslam et al., 2013). Current literature argues the influence of the system, and the dynamics of being a middle leader affects the practices of the school improvement middle leader. In order to ascertain perceived changes in teacher practice, and the factors that assisted or hindered the work of the middle leader, the additional research questions to guide the study are:

- In what ways were changes in teacher practice evident?

- How did the school improvement middle leader try to influence teacher practice?

- What factors in the school assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?

- What factors in the system assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?

The goals of the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative are to improve teaching practice in persistently under-performing secondary schools, build the capacity of teachers throughout the school system for the potential extension of the model into other schools, and to create a foundation of research that will inform the development of the SIML's role and support its refinement and growth. In order to answer the stated research questions, the study will need to generate abundant, substantial, and informative data that will inform the moral purpose of the MCSS's secondary school improvement initiative. Furthermore, this dissertation will explore the contributing or challenging influences on the SSII as a model for secondary school reform across the school-system.

The methodological approach adopted was intended to focus on the perspectives of the participants, provided through individual, semi-structured interviews; the participants were school improvement middle leaders, principals, leadership team members, teachers and system leaders at six secondary schools participating in the SSII. This intrinsic case study of multiple school sites was designed to expose the narratives of the participants within these schools, based on the compilation and forensic analysis of data, over the period of the intervention, approximately twenty-four months.

3.3   Overview of Research Design

The general approach and rationale for the research design was driven by the purpose of the study. As the intent was to ascertain the perspectives of participants, specific approaches and processes were utilised in the research, and are outlined more thoroughly below. The methods utilised reflect the interpretive research paradigm, both in philosophy and execution, drawing on a social interactionist perspective that influences the design of the research, methods of data collection and qualitative data analysis. This was a multi-site case study methodology, and as such appropriately fits in with the research design in a cohesive and dynamic way. Before the methods are described, the epistemological framing of the study is necessarily outlined below.

Table 3-1: Overview of Research Design and Timeline

Timeline	Participant group	Research Questions	Stage of Research	Data Gathering Strategy	Data analysis methodology
Sem 2 2013	SIMLs, Principals, Curr.Coords, KLA Coords at 3 school sites	**Question 1- 4**	Exploratory	Individual interviews	• Collation, Analysis and Coding of data • Verification and triangulation • Pattern matching • Confirming themes • Constant comparative analysis
Sem 1 2014	SIMLs, Principals, Curr. Coords, MSCC System Leaders	**Question 1- 4**	Exploration	Individual interviews	• Collation, Analysis and Coding of data • Synthesising trends and themes • Constant comparative analysis
Sem 1 2014	Teachers	**Question 1- 4**	Exploration Confirming and inspection	Web electronic surveys	• Coding of data • Synthesising trends and themes • Semi-structured interview plan developed from themes from individual interviews • Constant comparative analysis
Sem 2 2014	All		Report writing and checking		• Member checking and narrative writing

3.4   Epistemology

Epistemology is understood as a world view which offers an understanding of knowledge and how knowledge is created, making conscious how humans know what they know (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). As this research design explores the perspectives of the school improvement middle leaders, school leaders, system leaders and teachers in six secondary schools within the MCSS, it was deemed appropriate that a constructionist epistemology underpinned the research design.

Principals, school improvement middle leaders and those within leadership positions are imbued in the actuality of their own experiences, their circumstances, their daily workflow and operations, and the way they make meaning within particular work environments. As these leaders to do not work in a solitary environment, their experiences develop through the dealings with a range of people, environments and circumstances. The way that leaders make meaning or sense of their experiences is fashioned from their daily interactions, and is linked to the different contexts within which the individual leader operates, such as their social interactions, politics of administration, cultural influences, and the past history of the school. The making of meaning is underpinned by the social actualities of language and symbolism, which all contribute to the meaning-construction, reality-creation that is the experience of the school improvement middle leader.

In seeking to understand the phenomenon of the school improvement middle leader, careful recording of the lived experiences of those within the role, and the perceived experiences of those interacting with them within each of the secondary schools involved. It is for this reason that not only were the perspectives of school improvement middle leaders explored in this study, but also those of other teachers, school leadership team members and system leaders who interacted with them in the complex processes of making sense of their interaction in specific contexts. As participants of this study drew on their situations, personal backgrounds and knowledge, they made sense of the world that is the school improvement middle leader within a secondary school, a role that focused specifically on school improvement and improved teacher practice.

Consequently, constructionism was selected as the epistemology underlying this research design, as it asserts human beings generate and co-construct meaning as they engage within a given context. Two key principles have been noted in regards to this process:

> 1. Humans make sense of their own experiences based on their individual historical and social perspectives; and
>
> 2.Knowledge "emerges only when consciousness engages" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43).

The way an individual plans and engages in a context are important, for it is only when the individual chooses to undertake and action and also work with others within a given context that knowledge is negotiated and developed.

Constructionism views meaning as neither objective nor subjective. Further, meaning is not created, but constructed, and it must be constructed within a social context, in this case the dynamic interactions of a specific school. Social context and the interrelated notion, culture, are chief concepts that underpin constructionism; without culture, the human being cannot function, because culture influences behaviour and is a dynamic in how knowledge is negotiated and organized (Crotty, 1998). This is evident in all organisational settings, and in this study, the cultural contexts of each of six schools involved in this study. Organisational work life is influenced by culture because it is the school culture that gives meaning to and supplies the framework within which the individual operates and makes sense of what is going on around her/him.

In a similar manner, constructionism asserts the one constructs meaning of the world through social interactions with others and that a person's view of the world is influenced by historical, cultural and social roots. Because meaning is the

product of social dynamics, constructionism focuses upon the quality and nuances of interaction, as well as the human context. So, from a constructionist perspective, knowledge exists within the daily interactions of people, for example, the participants in this study, in context, within some time frame; everything we know is local and dynamic (De Koster, Devisé, Flament and Loots, 2004, p. 75). Consequently, for the constructionist, the meaning that is generated is rooted in the experiences, perspectives and values of participants. The meaning that is generated is a social construct that is never fixed, for knowledge is dependent upon the social context and interaction and is not stationary over time (De Koster et al., 2004, p. 75). So, it was important to embed this study in a series of different school contexts in order to explore the perspectives of participants and how they constructed and co-constructed meaning about the phenomenon under study within the particular context of the study. The deep interrogation of the ways in which participants made meaning individually and collectively, taking into consideration their socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-historical positioning, lies at the heart of this methodology.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which a system-initiated and funded school improvement initiative, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, is able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools, the research paradigm of interpretivism was adopted (Crotty, 1998). The lens of symbolic interactionism was adopted as the theoretical perspective and case study adopted as the methodology.

3.6 Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective provides the set of assumptions about reality, which underpins and informs the choice of the research methodology, and provides a context for the research process. Interpretivism is a particularly appropriate lens through which to look at this study, serving to either focus or distort what we see within the constructionist epistemology, because interpretivism "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67) and as such, is consistent with research focusing on the world school leaders inhabit. A fundamental principle of an interpretivist approach is that knowledge is constructed out of our experiences with others. It is this process of meaning making that is significant in this study.

In this study, the researcher was seeking to understand what is meaningful or relevant to people within the social and shared setting of a secondary school. The study explored the work of school improvement middle leaders within complex secondary school settings, where they intersected with existing organisational structures and roles. The researcher's intention was to look for a "complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). An interpretivist approach to the research design aims to produce a profound, wide-ranging and detailed portrayal of the lived reality of the participants. In this research design the aim was to more fully understand the accountabilities and duties undertaken by school improvement middle leaders from the perspectives of the participants. An interpretivist perspective holds that the social world can only be understood from the individual viewpoint, and while interaction is crucial to the construction of meaning, that meaning can only be

completely understood when the researcher begins by studying the individual viewpoint (Charon, 2007).

Several common assumptions lie beneath interpretivist research. Researchers are deeply rooted in their training and reinforced by the scholarly community in which they operate. There is also a general acknowledgement that it is difficul to obtain total research objectivity. Interpretivism holds that "any single event or action is explicable in terms of multiple, interacting factors, reflecting the view that the world is made up of multi-facetted realities" (Candy, 1989, p. 20).

Any inquiry conducted within the interpretivist perspective is field-focused, and the researcher is the principle means by which data is collected, with qualitative analysis conducted within the particular context. The researcher is concerned with process rather than just outcomes, and the research is idiographic in the sense that it studies individual cases (or small groups) searchingly (Gibbons and Sanderson, 2002, p. 9). In this case, it was an attempt to focus on the observed experiences of individual school improvement middle leaders as they negotiated their function as an expert in pedagogy, and the perceptions of those who interact with them and may even desire to occupy such a position in the future. In other words, this study was a "… systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain the social world" (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006, p. 78).

A particular way of making meaning in inquiry that facilitates and influences perception, comprehension, or evaluation within the interpretivist perspective, is that of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism can be defined as a lens representing a theoretical perspective based on an image of the

individual, rather than a collective image of society (Charon, 2007). The very essence of symbolic interactionism and the way it can be used to analyse a context, is explained succinctly as follows: "… by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviours. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, each context is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bond" (Crossman, 2017). The advantage of using a research approach based on symbolic interactionism is that it offers the researcher, as an outsider, a framework within which to define and identify the cultural scene, language and frame of reference. It also provides a model for the systematic study of how teachers interact with one another in a complex secondary school setting. Finally, it affords the researcher another dimension in which to understand the teachers who struggle with implementing educational change reforms.

A constructionist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective was well-suited to this research design, since the focus was on making sense of how the role of the school improvement middle leader was perceived by those in the role, and by those interacting with the SIML in each school context, and further, how this in turn impacts on teacher practice (people in this view of the world react to the world as they have constructed it, which is why their perceptions are so important). Subsequently, it was hoped that some understanding or substantive theorising would emerge around how change occurs in a secondary school, and the strategies needed to encourage each school site to continue to grow as a professional learning community. It was essential to comprehend the daily

interactions of those within the school improvement middle leader positions, to examine their active role descriptions, and to appreciate how the SIML negotiated and defined such a newly established leadership role.

'Taking the role of the other' is central to an understanding of how an individual negotiates and defines his/her role. To facilitate the understanding of the experiences of executive and middle leadership, it is critical to develop a sense of what the teachers, executive and middle leaders themselves believe about their world (Charon, 2007). Thus, it was essential to collect data through researching school improvement middle leaders in their workplaces. Research on people should describe people in real settings, and should focus on their perceptions and definitions of the world in which they exist. For the purpose of this study, "… the researcher must … interact with the actors, observe, partake in their activities, conduct formal interviews and try to reconstruct their reality" (Charon, 2007, p. 93). Investigating the construct of leadership through the perspective of symbolic interactionism allows the researcher to be aware of how school improvement middle leaders describe their world and interact with other school leaders.

3.7   Research Methods

Research methodology is "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods do the desired outcome" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The primary research question guiding this study is: *In what ways did a system-initiated and funded, school improvement initiative, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, influence secondary school teaching practice?* A case study approach was used so that the individual perspectives of those in leadership positions and those of classroom teachers were relevant. This approach provided a systematic way of

exploring events or themes, collecting multiple forms of data, analysing

information, and reporting results for a given time frame and within a set of

boundaries (Creswell, 2013). Using the case study approach aided in illuminating

the research questions from an individual perspective. Furthermore, the use of a

case study approach was in harmony with both the epistemology of

constructionism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism.

3.7.1   Case Study

The design of this research was a multiple site case study of six large, urban

secondary schools that experienced a SSII, nitiated by the MCSS and led by a

middle leader, The researcher used a chronological approach because this study

aimed to better understand the implementation of the SSII, and to determine, from

the perspective of participants, how much of the SSII influenced teaching practice

three years after the commencement of the initiative. The reform efforts of the

school-based school improvement middle leaders in six secondary schools was

investigated through interviews and online surveys.

There are numerous definitions for the concept of case study, dependent

upon the theoretical perspective adopted by the researcher. Merriam (1998)

maintains, "The case study is an intensive description and analysis of a

phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution or community.

The case is a bounded, integrated system" (p. 8). An alternative description by Yin

(1994) couches case study in terms of the actual research practice as "... an

empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life

context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not

really evident" (p. 13). In this particular inquiry, case study was viewed as an

approach to research that investigated a present-day experience within its authentic context.

All definitions of case study typically position the case within a setting or context, circumscribed by time and place, and data collection occurs within this circumscribed situation. Hence, for the purpose of this research, the phenomenon under examination were the perspectives of the school improvement middle leader, principal, other middle leaders, system leaders and teachers involved in the SSII implemented within six secondary schools; particular emphasis was placed on the influence the school improvement middle leaders were making on teacher practice, in addition to the influence on the existing school leadership structures. The study is bound by the physical construct of the six secondary schools in question within the MCSS, an urban school system in NSW.

A benefit of the case study approach was that it accepts the use of a wide variety of data collection strategies (Merriam, 1998). This case study used two means to draw on the experiences of those involved in the SSII in six secondary schools within the MCSS. The means were by individual, semi-structured interviews, and online surveys of school staff. It was the concrete and contextually rich data, which made this study so conducive to a case study approach.

Researchers have categorised case studies in a variety of ways, ranging from explorative, descriptive and explanatory (Yin, 1994), interpretative and evaluative (Merriam, 1998), intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2003). Regardless of the categories used, the central purpose of a case study remains the same – to provide insight into the experiences under examination and some understanding of these experiences by concentrating on the research questions. In seeking to understand the perspectives of the school improvement

middle leaders and their capacity to influence teaching practice in a secondary

school, this researcher undertook a collective case study, a case study that has been

extended to several cases (Stake, 1995). That is, the particular school sites were

examined to provide insights into a school improvement initiative from the

perspective of participants. The cases were of secondary interest as rather, they

facilitated the understanding of something else, the dynamics of educational change

in a secondary school context. The school sites chosen may or may not have

manifested common characteristics. They were chosen because they were the sites

where a school improvement initiative had been implemented, and the collective

responses, once qualitatively analysed, would lead to a better understanding of, and

improved theorising about, school improvement initiatives in large, urban

secondary schools (Stake, 2003, p. 138). Undertaking a collective case study

assisted the researcher to understand the leadership impact of the SIML from the

perspective of participants. Of crucial importance is the phenomenon of the school

improvement middle leader within the bounded context of the secondary schools

within the MCSS.

Focusing on case study research in educational settings, Bassey (1999)

asserts it needs to be conducted in such a way that permits the researcher to

investigate noteworthy characteristics of the case, and construct a reliable and

realistic narrative of what has been revealed by the participants. The researcher can

then examine and assess the trustworthiness of these narratives, and go on to

construct a meaningful story that describes the data. The story can then be

correlated to the pertinent, contemporary academic body of research, and be

presented to a scholarly audience as a compelling case that can be reviewed and

appraised by similarly interested researchers who can ratify or reject the research

findings. This highlights the centrality of the research questions, for "the research questions are the engine which drives the train of enquiry" (p.67).

The methodology of case study has the distinctive attribute of enabling the researcher to centre on the quality of the data, which are collected. An authentic case study generates strong and lucid descriptions, focuses on participants or clusters of participants and their unique viewpoints on certain situations, provides a constant contrast between participants' descriptions and the researcher's analysis of events, focuses on particular events or phenomenon, and allows the researcher to play an essential role within the case study (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

This case study focused on school improvement middle leaders, teachers, other middle managers and system leaders in six secondary schools within the MCSS to provide a better understanding of how change was effected in an educational setting. Particular emphasis was placed on those within the role of the school improvement middle leader who could provide a great richness and depth to the lived reality of that role.

Since the researcher adopted the position of the principal research tool, it is the researcher who plays the principal role in the collection of data and its qualitative analysis, and it becomes critical that the researcher is aware of her/his personal biases and leanings. It is advisable for the researcher to be open and transparent about these issues, for it is in this area that case study, as a research design, receives major criticism (Stake, 2003). These criticisms centre on the ethical issues most commonly associated with case study, and with the criticism that the researcher's bias and subjective appraisals may distort the results. Although case study is a rigorous methodology, there is a need for tests of verification and validity to ensure objectivity and credibility (Flyvberg, 2004). It was necessary to

check back with the research participants to ensure the transcripts of their interviews accurately reflected their intended responses. Participants were contacted where the meaning of their responses was unclear, and they were given the opportunity to provide clarification.

There are a number of reasons that made case study advantageous. Case studies produce context-dependent knowledge that is tangible and centred on reality. The conclusions that result from an individual case study can be used to shed light on the single phenomenon being researched, may be extrapolated to other similar cases, and may be utilised to add to the expanding body of scholarly research on the phenomenon under study. In this research, the insights gained from the lived experiences and realities of those working as school improvement middle leaders in the MCSS helped contribute to a greater understanding of leadership and its contribution to school improvement, and helped to shed light on reasons why school improvement initiatives fail to thrive in secondary schools. In this way, attention could be better focused on the real issues and the lived realities, as opposed to research and theories generated in contexts very different to that of a large and diverse school system such as the MCSS.

3.8   Qualitative Research Limitations

All research studies have limitations, and case studies are no exception (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2013). One of the limitations is the observer effect on those being observed. The observer is likely to arouse curiosity on the part of the participants, and thus produce other than usual behaviour. Furthermore, the behaviour of those being observed may be influenced by the researcher's purpose (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2013, p. 438). Observer bias is also a limitation, as past

experiences may bias what is being observed, or the observer expects particular behaviours that will possibly not eventuate (Wallen and Fraenkel, 2013).

In this study, the brief of the researcher was to be an observer who obtained the insights and perspectives of respondents about the influence of the school improvement middle leader, perspectives on their leadership role within the study, and perspectives on changes in teacher practice.

This was a multiple site case study and as such, when analysing responses from several participants within the framework of the study, there were various inferences as opposed to one, single "real truth" (Thomas and Brubaker, 2007, p. 109). Further drawbacks of this multiple case study were that the study may have been too long and detailed to prove useful, the window of opportunity and financial resources devoted to the study was limited, and the resulting conclusions may have been oversimplified or exaggerated. As the principal tool for the collection of data, the researcher could be questioned particularly in respect to ethical considerations (Merriam, 1998).

To tackle these constraints, the researcher utilised two data collection methods, namely individual, semi-structured interviews of school improvement middle leaders, Principals, middle managers and system administrators, and an online web survey to all teachers in participating schools. In this way, data is triangulated to facilitate credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2002). Furthermore, limitations were tackled using participant checking to appraise the data and views collected from the participants to guarantee the authenticity of the qualitative results (Merriam, 1998).

Subsequently, this research project continued to be accessible and adaptable to allow the study of the secondary school improvement initiative in further research (Patton, 2002a).

3.9 Participants and context of the study

As the purpose of this study was to deal with research questions, which focused on the influence of the school improvement middle leader, their perspectives of their leadership role and their role in leading change in pedagogical practice, it seemed logical to ask those most closely involved for their perspectives. For this reason, it was decided to focus on those people in school improvement middle leader roles and staff in positions most closely involved with the lived reality of those middle leaders and the challenges and dilemmas facing those implementing a reform agenda. These included school improvement middle leaders, principals, other leaders within the school, and teachers who worked most closely with the school improvement middle leaders. By employing this strategy it was easier "to discover, understand and gain insight ... from those (from) which most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61).

There are two central areas of focus when undertaking the selection of participants for case study research. These areas centre on the selection of the sites around which the study will occur and secondly, the selection of the participants themselves (Merriam, 1998). This case occurred in the naturally circumscribed area of the MCSS, an urban Catholic school system in Sydney.

These schools are located across an urban diocesan boundary and serve students from a diverse demographic area. While no secondary school in the MCSS could be described as wealthy, four secondary schools fall into the Commonwealth Governments category of Low SES (Australian Government, 2008), and the six

secondary schools in this study were very close to the Government's identified cut-off. The Commonwealth Government funded schools received in the order of $250,000 per school, per annum for five years; such resourcing is outside the usual scope of targeted intervention by a school system such as the MCSS.

It was decided to include only the six MCSS system-funded schools in this study, as it was considered that this funding model is a realistic and sustainable one. The study gave accurate information on the ways in which a system-sponsored and resourced school improvement initiative, using school-based middle leaders, was able to bring about improved teacher practices in schools.

One hundred and twelve (112) staff members of all six schools were asked to partake in this study. Of these, six were school improvement middle leaders, with the balance occupying a variety of positions, which included principal, curriculum coordinator, Heads of Department of English and Mathematics and classroom teachers. Participants were from a range of ages, school experience and gender. The decision to include the curriculum coordinator who is a leadership team member was a purposeful one, echoing the desire to gather as much wide-ranging and authentic data as feasible. The school improvement middle leader role intersects with many previously established duties of the curriculum coordinator.

Purposeful sampling, based on the role descriptions, was adopted as the sampling strategy (Creswell, 2002). It was thought desirable to capture the experiences of staff in a variety of roles: all those in leadership positions within the schools, as their interplay will be of significance; teachers, so the researcher is able to get a sense of any changed practice; and finally, MCSS system leaders, given the significance of the change initiative for the school system. The sample of those to be interviewed was as follows:

- School improvement middle leaders (who are school-based middle
  leaders who are implementing the secondary school improvement
  initiative); and

- Teachers occupying leadership positions in each school such as
  principals, curriculum coordinators, middle managers (who interact
  with the school improvement middle leader as leaders of educational
  change);

- MCSS system leaders (who designed the secondary school
  improvement initiative, train the school improvement middle leaders,
  and who set all accountability and monitoring requirements)

It was anticipated that this would maximise the opportunity to access the
richest data. Table 3.2 outlines details of the potential participants, and the data
gathering strategies that were employed.

Table 3-2: Anticipated participants

Category of Participant	Individual Interview	Survey (Electronic)
School improvement middle leader	6	0
Principal	6	0
Curriculum Coordinator	6	0
Heads of Department	12	60
Classroom teachers	0	180
MCSS System Leaders	2	0
Totals	30	240

Each member of the six schools was invited to participate in an online
survey. Furthermore, invitations were sent to the Principal, Curriculum Coordinator

and School improvement middle leader in each of the six schools. The Heads of Department (two in each school) were specifically the Mathematics and English Coordinator due to their responsibility in leading improvements in students' literacy and numeracy. The researcher provided potential participants with all the details of the study, data storage and so on in order to minimise their hesitation to give fulsome answers. The MCSS system leaders, the three Regional Secondary Consultants and the Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning were asked to participate as they have initiated, led and supported the secondary school improvement initiative since its implementation. Appropriate material was provided for participants to be comfortable with the study and the degree of confidentiality.

The researcher requested consent from the Executive Director of the MCSS in order to gain permission to approach the principals of the six schools of interest to this study. Once permission had been granted, requests to participate in this study were sent to all participants, accompanied by details such as the purpose of the study, criteria for partaking in this study, description of the research design and a plan for data collection, along with expectations of the study, how results were to be communicated to participants, and specific details of ethics approval. Any letters were given to the principal for distribution, which negates the need to access any contact information for teachers.

3.10 Protocol

Initially, the researcher contacted the executive director of the MCSS to explain the proposed secondary school improvement initiative study, request the authority to include MCSS secondary school personnel and system leaders in the study, and to request consent to contact the Principal of each of the six identified

secondary schools. The executive director of MCSS gave written approval for the study, and gave permission for each Principal and system leader to be approached. The Principals of the six secondary schools were contacted by letter, requesting informed consent of the Principal and other participants. The letters and information pamphlets provided to the potential participants are included in Appendix ?

Informed consent and an acknowledgement that each potential participant understood the nature of the study was obtained by the researcher prior to the participants commencing either a face-to-face semi-structured interview or an online electronic survey.

Before each **semi-structured interview, t**he participant was read, and then signed, an informed consent form that explained the study, how the findings would be used, and the possible consequences for the participant. It also included a list of the questions that were to be asked. By signing the consent form, participants acknowledged they understood the information they had been given about the study, and they agreed to be involved in the study. It was clearly specified on the form that their participation was voluntary, and that they could elect to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Following the interviews, participants were sent a transcript of the interview to allow them an opportunity to authenticate their previously recorded responses and the overall meaning of their interview. This process of "member-checking" is fundamental to the gleaning of the true words of the participants (Merriam, 1998).

When launching the **electronic online survey** to teachers in each of the six participating schools, the first online page explained the study, how the findings would be used, and the consequences for the participant, in addition to the list of

the questions. Subjects proceeded with the online survey with the understanding this would imply both informed consent to partake in the study, and acknowledgment they understood what was involved being a participant. The online survey made very clear in the opening screen that participation was not mandatory, and should they not wish to complete the survey, they could contact the researcher and withdraw their participation at any time.

3.11 Data Gathering Strategies

Data gathering strategies need to be consistent with the epistemological framework underlying the specific study. For the present study, strategies such as online surveys and interviews are all appropriate for use with a symbolic interactionism approach within an epistemology of constructionism (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1994). As this research is fundamentally interpretative in its intention, it was apt to choose data collection methodology, which allowed for participants to communicate their insights and the trials, which they themselves have endured in their various leadership roles. Individual interviews were held with school improvement middle leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators and two subject coordinators in each school, the Mathematics and English coordinator.

This study did not include the use of focus groups because the data collected may be closely identified to the performance of each school improvement middle leader and the other leaders in the school. It is possible that the participants' views on the efficacy of the secondary school improvement initiative may have included their opinions on the leadership practices and qualities of their school leaders. Caution was taken, as participants may have been reluctant to give frank, candid and helpful observations if their confidentiality could not be ascertained.

In a focus group situation, staff who worked closely with the school improvement middle leader may be inhibited to comment freely and openly about the factors that helped or hindered the implementation of the secondary school improvement initiative. Electronic online surveys were utilised to canvass the opinions of all other members of each school community in order to help explore the lived reality of the world that is that of the school improvement middle leader. Figure 3-3 provides a summary of the theoretical framework underpinning the research design of this study.

Table 3-3: Overview of the Research Design

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism Symbolic Interactionism
Methodology	Case study of multiple sites
Data Gathering Strategies	Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews Online staff Survey (Electronic)

3.11.1 Individual, In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews can provide a wealth of information, focusing as they do on the perspectives of those interviewed. Referred to as "a conversation with a purpose" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.100) they are "face to face encounters between the researcher and the informants directed towards understanding the informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations, as expressed in their own words" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p.77). Semi-structured interviews permit the interviewer to deeply explore the participant's answers, providing the researcher with an opportunity to fully understand the perspective of the participants.

The purpose of the study was to explore the ways in which a school improvement initiative, using school-based middle level leaders, was able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools. It may well be that the effectiveness of the school improvement middle leader was a factor that helped or hindered the implementation of the initiative. It was thus considered that individual interviews would allow the researcher to drill down into the lived realities of those currently working within the middle leader role, and staff working with those in the role, and provide school staff an opportunity to critically reflect and comment on the work of the change agent (the middle leader), whilst protecting their confidentiality. Consequently, it was possible for the researcher to arrive at a richer appreciation and awareness of exactly how the role of the middle leader is perceived. From this foundation, it is then possible to more fully grasp the challenges characteristically involved in establishing such a position in a secondary school, and come to some understanding of why it is so difficult to promote and sustain change. The participating school improvement middle leaders also possessed the reality-driven knowledge of what could be put into place to better prepare aspirants to undertake the role of school improvement middle leader.

The premise that the perspectives of others are significant and comprehensible, underpinned both the interviews and this study, generally. An interview protocol was developed (Section 3.11.2), to make certain the same fundamental line of questioning was employed with each interview participant. The interview protocol was a scaffold for questions that were asked and expanded upon in addition to assisting the researcher to make a considered judgement about which information should be probed more during the interview (Patton, 1990).

There are several advantages to the use of interviews as a data collection strategy. Interviews are flexible tools that enable multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, nonverbal, spoken and heard. The researcher is able to control the order of the interview, whilst at the same time allow for spontaneity and the facility to probe responses (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Disadvantages of interviews focus mainly on the coordination and planning, as they can be costly, difficult to schedule, prolonged and prone to the bias of the researcher. Consequently, the researcher needs to be an accomplished listener and questioner, and must be careful the participant is not led by biased questioning (Cohen et al., 2007).

In this research, six school-improvement middle leaders, six principals, six curriculum coordinators, fourteen KLA coordinators and two system leaders were asked to undertake an individual, in-depth, semi-structured interview. It was argued that this purposeful sampling could provide a complete collection of viewpoints on the effectiveness of the school-improvement middle leader strategy, that are characteristic of all those within the six secondary schools being researched.

The Heads of the Departments of Mathematics and English were specifically chosen for in-depth interviews as it was considered their work and experience in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for students would provide quite speciaised and valuable data for this research. Two MCSS system leaders who manage the secondary school improvement initiative will also be interviewed, to gain insight into their perspectives on the effectiveness of the secondary school improvement initiative in the MCSS secondary schools. These interviews provided the system view of the impact of the school improvement middle leader and affirmed or contradicted the perceptions and insights of those

school improvement middle leaders and secondary school personnel currently working in the six schools being researched.

3.11.2 Developing the Interview Protocol

Consideration of the research problem, literature review and research questions resulted in the creation of an interview protocol (Patton, 2002a). An interview protocol was used when interviewing each participant in this study to ensure they were all asked the same questions. The employment of a protocol ensured that a consistent base line of information was acquired during the interviews. The questions allowed the participants to express their opinions about the secondary school improvement initiative and factors concerning its implementation in their schools. Merriam (1998) hypothesises,

> *Usually, some specific information is desired from all the respondents in a semi-structured interview, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is determined ahead of time* (p. 75).

For this dissertation, a critical mass of qualitative data regarding the school improvement middle leader in relation to the SSII was gathered from the interviews and was collated to help the researcher to make distinctions in the data in addition to digging down more deeply to find the salient issues. The questions formed the scheduled interview protocol asked of every participant. However, here were many unscheduled questions and probing during the conduct of the interviews to allow for the exploration of previously unanticipated subject areas; these "unscheduled" questions and the dialogue during interviews was recorded using a Panasonic Digital Voice recorder and transferred to digital text files.

The first set of questions was designed to obtain contextual data that would assist the researcher to comprehend the participants' perspectives. The other four scheduled questions were derived from existing literature on middle leaders, system improvement and professional learning of teachers. All questions were asked purposefully to permit system leaders, principals, school improvement middle leaders, middle managers and teachers to provide deep and characteristic information about their experiences in a system-sponsored and resourced, school-based secondary school improvement initiative in secondary schools. Depending on the participants' responses, additional questions and probes were used.

The overall aim of each scheduled, primary question was to initiate dialogue, then clarify the participants' responses with follow-up questions. The researcher made decisions during the course of the ongoing conversations as to which follow-up questions could be used to elicit more fulsome responses. The researcher used a notebook to make field notes that would assist and record the use of supplementary and more incisive questions. During the course of the study, the researcher became more efficient in the task of choosing follow-up questions, and more adept at taking notes, active listening and foreseeing responses.

The interview protocol is set out in Table 3-4, and includes the underlying principles of each scheduled question.

Table 3-4: The semi-structured interview protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Information about the research participants.
What is your name?
What is your role in this school?
How long have you been employed in this school?
What is your teaching background?

2. To what extent was change in teacher practice evident?
Please describe how your teaching practice has changed or improved over the last three years?
Describe how teaching and learning is changing in your school right now.
What is the greatest change you have seen in the teaching and learning of students?
What are the purposes of the changes implemented in the secondary school improvement initiative?

3. What did the school improvement middle leader do to influence practice?
Are teachers involved with the school improvement middle leader as individuals?
Can you give any examples of when you or a faculty team worked with the school improvement middle leader?
Do you have any specific examples of changes or programs that had a positive impact on improving teaching practice?
Who was responsible for or initiated this?
How was the change accomplished?

4. What factors in the school assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?
What is the role of the school improvement middle leader in the secondary school improvement initiative?
What is the role of the principal in the secondary school improvement initiative?
In your opinion, should the school improvement middle leader be on the school executive team?

5. What factors in the MCSS (system) assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?
How did the training offered by the MCSS prepare the school improvement middle leader for working in schools?
Did networking with other school improvement middle leaders help or hinder your work in schools?

Note: Planned questions are in bold font, and questions in italics are characteristic second order questions that were used frequently to seek deeper clarification.

3.11.3 Electronic Survey (on-line)

The survey serves a unique purpose as a means of data collection. Surveys are frequently employed to identify beliefs and attitudes (Creswell, 2002), providing valuable insights into the currently held beliefs, mindsets and beliefs of participants. Typically, "surveys gather data at a point in time with the purpose of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 209). When participants respond to a survey, they are able to give responses to a variety of questions specifically intended to explore the lived reality of their experience of a certain phenomenon, in this case the phenomenon of being a school improvement middle leader or working with a school improvement middle leader. When subjective perspectives are required, the survey can be considered a useful form of data collection (Neuman, 2010), especially when it is necessary to collate the responses from a substantial number of respondents (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). By utilising this survey approach, valuable data can be collected and then used to underpin further data collection and examination, or used to shed light on matters that may emerge using other data collection techniques.

Survey research has its own unique features, which comprise purposeful sampling, questionnaires or conversations that collect data, an effective design and a significant rate of participant response (Creswell, 2002).

The use of the electronic (online) survey as a data collection instrument has many advantages for a researcher. Electronic surveys are cheap to set up and distribute, and they can more easily collect data from a wider and much larger group of participants than a paper-based survey. Data can be processed automatically and can be completed in a private, self-chosen setting. Electronic

surveys are impersonal and thus remove the issue of researcher bias. They also enable the researcher to reach difficult populations under the cover of anonymity and non-traceability (Roztocki and Lahri, 2003). The disadvantages of electronic surveys as a strategy for data collection have been well documented (Cohen et al., 2007; Dillman, Smyth, Christian and Stern, 2003; Smyth, Dillman, Christian and Stern, 2004), mainly focusing on the heightened importance of the visual aspect of the survey. Care needs to be devoted to the layout of questions, colours and the spacing of response categories. For example, separating items into sections with headings can have a 'dramatic effect' on responses (Cohen et al., 2007, p.235), with respondents feeling more compelled to complete all subgroups. In planning a web-based survey, the researcher needs to consider the primacy effect (tendency to select items higher up in a list), and the satisficing effect (respondents giving the minimum sufficient response rather than working down to find the optimal response).

In web-based surveys, respondents' eyes are focused on the computer screen, while their hands are either on the keyboard or the mouse; this makes completion of the survey more difficult than a paper-based survey where the eyes and hands are focused on the same area (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 227). The researcher is advised to avoid asking respondents to answer too many open-ended responses; rather, questions should be mainly answered by using either radio buttons or by clicking the click.

The questions included in a survey, and their quality, are the most important part of the survey. Questions must be succinct, simple to understand and designed to elicit as much information from the participants as possible. Consequently, the survey is trialled experimentally (pilot test) with a small number of participants

prior to its full deployment: "A pilot test of a questionnaire or interview survey is a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument" (Creswell, 2002, p. 402). The responses gleaned in the pilot test can be analysed and dealt with in a think-tank approach so that questions can be deconstructed to ensure they are concise, clear, easily understood using language that encourages the valuable participant responses necessary to further inform the research questions.

In this study the pilot test consisted of sending electronic surveys to Heads of Department and teachers in one of the six schools being researched.

Thus, all those within middle management or who held teaching positions in the six secondary schools involved in implementing the secondary school improvement initiative were invited to participate in this survey, using an online questionnaire designed to gather the perspectives of the participants.

3.12 Data Analysis

The following section refers to the analysis of the qualitative data collected from participants, in the individual, semi-structured interviews and the electronic, online survey of staff in each school.

Academic research is not an iterative or lock-step process. Consequently, data is collected and analysed concurrently for the duration of the case study. The relationship between the collection of data and its analysis helps the researcher in generating conclusions that are sound and credible (Merriam, 1998). The analysis of data in this study required a process that reduced the large volume of data into themes and categories, and was then able to interpret that data. In this study, a process of constant comparative method analysis was applied to test for agreement or disagreement against preceding or other emerging data (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg

and Coleman, 2000). By utilising this strategy, the researcher compared parts of the qualitative data throughout the length of the project (Merriam, 1998). To further explain the constant comparative method, Boeije (2002) noted:

> *The researcher decides what data will be gathered next and where to find them [the data] on the basis of provisional theoretical ideas'. In this way it is possible to answer questions that have arisen from the analysis of and reflection on previous data. Such questions concern interpretations of phenomena as well as boundaries of categories assigning segments or finding relations between categories. The data in hand are then analysed again and compared with the new data. (p. 393)*

Pivotal to the procedure of constant, comparative data analysis is the use of codes. Coding is a three-stage "process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2002, p. 450): open coding, axial coding, and finally selective coding. This allows the researcher to recognise repeating patterns, which generate the emerging themes that, in turn, generate a scaffold within which the data can be qualitatively analysed. The conclusion of this process is signalled by the occurrence of duplication and repetition of data (Merriam, 1998).

The initial stage of coding is known as open coding, which is the practice of breaking down, comparing, examining and categorising data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Codes can be based upon themes, topics, ideas, concepts, terms or phrases, and be *a priori* (drawn from pre-existing theories) or grounded (emerging from the data) (Gibbs and Taylor, 2010). Open coding is critical to the initial stages of data analysis, because it helps to distinguish between ideas and phrases in order to develop categories of data that relate to one another. Put simply, the data is read through several times by the researcher in order to fashion draft descriptions for data that naturally groups together. The goal is to build a descriptive, multi-

dimensional preliminary framework for later analysis. As it is built directly from the raw data, the process itself ensures the validity of the work.

Accordingly, all individual semi-structured interviews and online survey responses were openly coded as the initial step in data analysis. The researcher's objective was to sum up what is actually being seen in each school context by the study participants. The theories emerge from the meaning that develops from the data only. Examples of participants' words and recorded and categorised within the codes and thus the properties of each code materialises.

The second process in the analysis of data is axial coding. Axial coding is, "A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interaction, strategies and consequences" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The process of axial coding is critical to making sense and meaning out of the data. It is a strategy whereby the open codes are meticulously examined, honed and then expounded upon. In the strategy of constant, comparative data analysis, axial codes are used to develop connections in the data. The subsequent coding model represents the relationship of causal conditions, strategies, contexts and consequences (Creswell, 2002). The development of links and connections proceeds into selective coding.

Selective coding is "(t)he process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116). The utilisation of this strategy results in the emerging production of a broad synopsis of the phenomenon under analysis. Selective coding provided the foundation for creating relevant central propositions.

It is through the processes of open, axial and selective coding that the full picture of the impact of the school improvement middle leader in secondary schools emerges. One specific example of the coding results for this study is outlined in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5: Axial Codes and selective codes based on open coding: Question: In what ways were changes in teacher practice evident?

Open codes	Axial codes	Selective code
Changes to the program and delivery of curriculum; Targeting of literacy and numeracy and ESL learners; Student-centred approach; Support with professional learning; Integration of units of curriculum; Data-informed practice; Collaboration between teachers; Use of technology	Believing that the teaching cycle needs to be student-centred	Wanting to improve student outcomes
Data analysis; Strong relationships; Vision for learning; Targeting literacy; Personalisation of learning; Professional Learning; Modelling; Integration of content	Believing that teachers need support and adequate resourcing to change their teaching practice	
(A) Availability; (A) Clarity around role description; (A) Leadership Team (LT) member; (A) Resourcing; (A) Skills and traits of SIML; (A) Strong Principal leadership; (A) Teacher collaboration; (A) Change management	Believing that teachers needs a clear vision for learning, set by the Principal, complemented with on-site professional learning experiences	
(H) Fear of change; (H) Imposed initiative; (H) Lack of clarity in school roles; (H) Lack of vision in LT; (H) Skills of SIML; (H) Limited resourcing; (H) Appointment processes for SIML; (H) Non-teaching position	Believing that on-site professional learning is best delivered by a member of the leadership team who is also a classroom teacher, in collaboration with other middle managers	
(A) Alignment with school goals; (A) System initiative; (A) PL for SIMLs; (A) Resourcing	Believing that a system initiative implemented in a school should align with school-identified needs and goals	

| (H) Accountabilities; (H) SSIISSII imposed on school; (H) Limited skills of SIML; (H) Introduction of SSIISSII in school; (H) Poor recruitment; (H) Limited resources | Believing that a system initiated initiative needs to be well resourced and careful thought given to skills required of personnel | |

In this study, the three distinct coding stages of data analysis correlated closely with the stages of data collection, as represented in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Multi and Concurrent Data Analytic Processes through Stages
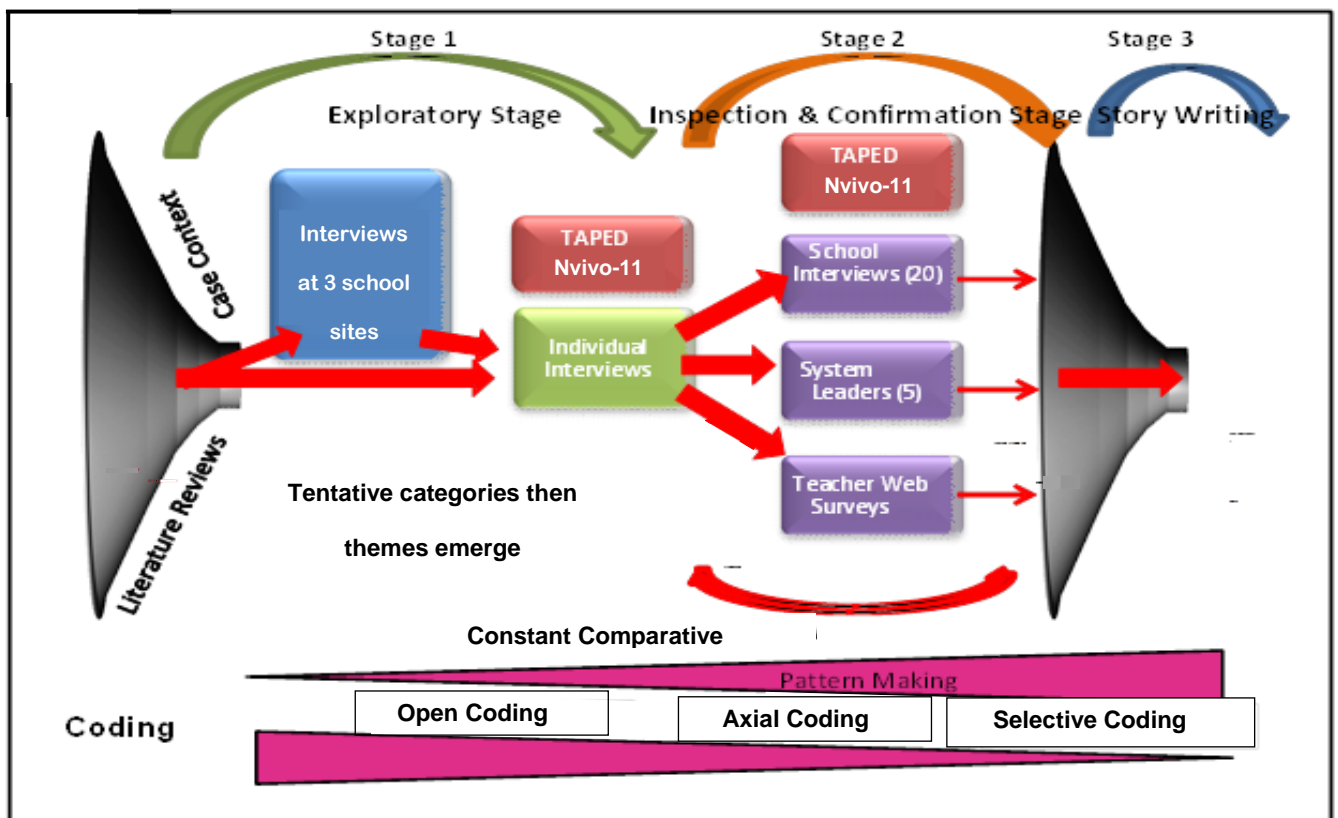
The first data collection stage, *exploration*, includes data gathered from the analysis of documents and individual interviews of the four stakeholder groups (school improvement middle leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators, and subject coordinators in three of the six schools. During this stage, emerging themes

were explored, re-affirmed or discounted. In this stage, constructive analysis began with open coding to assist in the generation of themes and categories.

In the second stage, *inspection and confirmation*, a deeper analysis was applied to the individual interviews held in the remaining four schools with the four stakeholder groups. Individual interviews were also held with MCSS system leaders, two from central office and one from each of the three regional offices. During this stage, the web-based online survey was sent to each teacher in each of the six schools.

This second stage allowed further themes to be presented, the emerging themes identified in stage 1 to be confirmed, and for the elaboration, collaboration and depthing of themes where this is necessary. In this stage, constructive analysis began with open coding utilised to assist in the generation of themes and categories. Theories drawn from the data were thoroughly assessed for likenesses and dissimilarities and constant comparative data analysis was a continuous feature of the research study.

The final stage of analysis was *story writing*, in which the real practice of data deconstruction began. Data groupings that had been previously identified were sharpened and simplified with the axial coding strategy instituted to help with the process of distillation and refinement.

Subsequent to the final *story writing* stage, the researcher's focus turned to the generation of the "narrative", the discussion which centres on the impact that the school improvement middle leaders had in their respective secondary schools, their impact on the leadership structures of the school, and their contribution to changing teaching practice. This "narrative" was shared with participants to confirm the accuracy of the data described, and the conclusions that had been

drawn. Lastly, a final report was published that reflected the viewpoints, insights, convictions and sentiments of the participants as precisely and ethically as possible. Table 3-6 correlates the stages of data collection and analysis.

Table 3-6: Correlation between stages of data collection and data analysis

Data Collection Stages	*Stages for Data Collection and Analysis*	
Exploration Phase Individual Interviews at 3 school sites (15)	Step 1	Seek and receive ethics clearance; complete consent forms, Semester 1, 2013
	Step 2	Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with school improvement middle leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators, KLA Coordinators of English and Maths (3 schools), Semester 2, 2013
	Step 3	Analyse responses for trends and patterns
	Step 4	Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with MCSS system leaders, Semester 1, 2014
Inspection and Confirmation Phase Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews Web based, electronic Survey	Step 5	Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with school improvement middle leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators, KLA Coordinators of English and Maths (3 remaining schools), Semester 1, 2014
	Step 6	Analyse data collected in Step 3 and 4 Generate web survey for teachers to assist in clarification
	Step 7	Administer web survey Analyse survey returns
	Step 8 Step 9 Step 10 Step 11	Constant, comparative data analysis, Semester 2, 2014 Write up analysis/discussion (analytical interpretation) Give participants analysis to check their responses Final analysis Production of final report
Story Writing, Final Analysis Phase Report writing	Step 12	

3.13 Issues of power in data collection

An issue facing the trustworthiness of the findings in this research was the influence of power relationships between researcher and participants. Participants feel involved because of the examination of their personal experiences. Researchers are involved because of their in-depth study of the others' experiences and the

aspiration to understand them. This relationship is even more complex owing to the researchers' and participants' significant, and sometimes conflicting roles (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009, p. 279).

Power is not held by a participant or researcher, rather, it moves between the roles of the participant and researcher (Das, 2010). In this study, power relationships need consideration owing to the high profile role of the researcher (principal, and past consultant within the same school system) and participants (school staff). By adopting appropriate research methodology that afforded participants confidentiality and anonymity, the issue of power was reduced. The researcher shared some personal characteristics (gender, teaching background, leadership experience) so that commonalities helped reduce the social distance between researcher and participants. The main similarities between participant and researcher were the connection of experience in secondary schools, and the role of a learner. It is possible that power issues, relating to ethical parameters, may have existed, but in recognising the agency of each of the participants, the researcher endeavoured to manage obstacles positively and actively to enable the voices of the participants to be heard.

3.14 Triangulation, reliability and validity

To bring about trustworthiness and consistency in a qualitative case study Yin (Yin, 2003) proposed there must be components of both validity and reliability:

1. *Construct validity: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied.*
2. *Internal validity: establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships.*

3. *External validity: establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized.*

4. *Reliability: demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results.* (p. 34)

Trustworthiness and consistency were important issues for the researcher to safeguard in this study. This was accomplished by ensuring accuracy in all documentation, coding, and data collection. The researcher carefully filed and scanned all contacts details, correspondence, e-mails, planned individual interviews, and interview schedules. Microsoft Outlook afforded the researcher the capacity to keep a digital footprint of all correspondents and correspondence so the recall of any information was a simple and straightforward task.

The researcher adhered to the the Australian Catholic University's ethics guidelines for recruiting the participants, collecting and analysing data, and using the appropriate letterhead, text and preferred software programs. Journal notes, audio files of interviews, interview transcripts, and additional documents were safely secured with access attributed exclusively to the researcher. All written documents were scanned and uploaded to an encrypted cloud account ensuring there was a backup of all material that had been collected and collated. Moreover, all the individual interviews undertaken and recorded by the researcher were transcribed and reviewed by a peer educational researcher and supervisors to further corroborate credibility.

The validation process can be described as the challenge of assessing the accuracy of the findings as described by the researcher and the participant. Creswell (2013) outlines eight strategies frequently used by researchers to ensure validity:

- *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* in the field including building trust with participants and checking for misinformation or distortions.

- *Triangulation* by using multiple and different sources and methods to corroborate evidence.

- *Peer review or debriefing* to provide an external check of the research process.

- *Clarifying researcher bias* by commenting by the researcher on past experiences or biases that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study.

- *Member checking* by taking data, analyses and interpretations back to the participants so they can check the accuracy and credibility of the conclusions.

- *Rich, thick descriptions* that describes the participants or setting of the study in detail so that the readers are able to transfer information to other settings.

- *External audits* allow for an external consultant, unconnected to the study, to examine the process and the product of the account.

- *Negative case analysis* where working hypotheses are refined as the enquiry advances in the light of negative or disconfirming evidence.
  (pp. 250-251)

Numerous interpretive researchers refer to the use of triangulation to safeguard the credibility of research data (Creswell, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 1989; Merriam, 1995). This involves the use of several investigations, data sources, data collection techniques, and the validation of emerging conclusions.

Over a number of years, through prolonged engagement in this study, some of the strategies described above were employed to ensure the study's credibility: triangulation, sounding out with peers, participant checking, and external checks by thesis supervisors. Additionally, an unambiguous declaration of the extent of the researcher's involvement with the data collection process, the intention of the

researcher to act as the instrument of data collection, her work history, assumptions and biases was nominated from the study's inception and commencement.

3.15 Ethical Issues

The researcher recognises that educational research is always research that at its core, is for the betterment of the students in our schools, and rightly attracts political and social attention. As such, the research can traverse some controversial areas and reflect the actual view of teachers, which is not always in full agreement with school, system or government objectives. In order to assure participants that all ethical considerations have been considered and planned for, the researcher must be able to champion the purpose of the research ("respect for truth"), be sure that the insiders' perspectives are fearlessly documented ("voice, respect for persons"), and that it safeguards participants from prejudice (like race, gender and class) ("respect for democracy") (Bassey, 1999, p. 37). These three principles were realised by the researcher guaranteeing all aspects of this research were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Research Projects Ethics Committee.

Ethical approval was sought from the ACU and the MCSS office with the ethical considerations concentrating on the protection of participants, the giving of informed consent, disclosure and the role of the researcher, data storage, privacy and confidentiality. In meeting these requirements, the following took place:

- Informed consent was obtained from the MCSS;
- All participants were reassured their participation was not mandatory, and their participation in the study would not bring any disadvantages or benefits to their work;

- The research objectives, the research question and its purpose, how data was to be collected, analysed and reported upon were conveyed in writing to all participants;

- Participants were informed and reassured about the voluntary nature of their involvement, and they provided signed consent before data collection commenced;

- Systems for maintaining confidentiality and the safeguards for guaranteeing anonymity were described clearly to the participants;

- Data was stored in accordance with strict ACU protocols and recommendations;

- Interview transcripts were made available to all interested participants;

- Drafts of the study and its conclusions were made available to participants for member checking; and

- Participants were advised they could revoke their permission for the research project at any time.

Given all of the above, this dissertation can be deemed ethical in its planning, methodology, choice and management of participants, qualitative analysis, and development of its narrative.

3.16 Summary

The principal question on which this research work was based is: *In what ways did a system-initiated and funded, secondary school improvement initiative, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, influence secondary school teaching practice?* There were alo specific research questions that focused the design. Adopting an interpretivist approach to research with a symbolic interactionist theoretical approach within it has merit because it allows the

participants' perspectives to emerge, explains why participants react in certain ways in the context of their perspectives, and assists the researcher to understand the emerging themes, which become evident when participants' perspectives and actions interact over a prolonged period.

The researcher was the primary tool for data collection, with the additional use of online surveys that complemented and informed traditional case study techniques. The overall result was the availability of abundant and valuable data, which was systematically analysed using a documented process, all of which was utilised in preparation for reporting within this dissertation.

It is hoped people who constitute the secondary school education sector will deem this research as beneficial, coherent and enlightening . Moreover, by concentrating on significant educational issues in the Catholic context, it can also be seen as "a recognisable reality by others outside the innovation"(Brady and Kennedy, 2007, p. 100). The researcher not only has immediate objectives, but also the more long-standing objective of enlightening an emergent but pressing field of study: that is, school improvement in the secondary school context. To conclude, it is also hoped this study will make a noteworthy contribution to the corpus of wisdom and information currently present in this area.

Chapter Four provides further details about the organisation of the data analysis, outlines demographic information, and presents the findings from the interviews and surveys. The qualitative research is based upon data collected through individual, semi-structured interviews conducted with system leaders, principals and subject coordinators, and web surveys conducted with teachers in six secondary schools within the MCSS. The participant sample has been described in this Chapter.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which a system-initiated and funded school improvement initiative, using system-appointed, school-based, middle-level leaders, is able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools. The literature review examined the research and theory on school reform, professional development and professional learning of teachers, educational change and change leadership. The focus of this enquiry was to explore the influence of the school improvement middle leader on teaching practice within the context of a secondary school improvement initiative in a secondary school setting.

This Chapter will report the perspectives of the participants on how teacher practices have changed, and the influence of the school improvement middle leader on teaching practice within their respective schools. The data was collected through individual, semi-structured interviews conducted with system leaders, principals and subject coordinators, and web-based surveys conducted with teachers in six secondary schools within the MCSS. The sample has previously been described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will review the content and responses to the interview and survey questions. The list of scheduled questions used appears in Appendix B.

4.2 Organisation of Data Analysis

4.2.1 Part 1: Demographic Data

Six schools were purposefully selected by the MCSS to receive funding and participate in the secondary school improvement initiative after being identified by MCSS administrators as persistently underperforming (in relation to schools of

similar socio-economic status on national basic testing of literacy and numeracy) and that serve low socioeconomic communities. All schools were located in an urban Catholic school district in NSW, an eastern state of Australia. The socio-economic status of each school is recorded using the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA), which was "created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia" (Australian Curriculum, 2015).

An algorithm that includes several key factors particular to that school's student body determines a school's ICSEA score. As described by ACARA, "key factors in students' family backgrounds (parents' occupation, school education and non-school education) have an influence on students' educational outcomes at school. In addition to these student-level factors, research has shown that school-level factors (a school's geographical location and the proportion of Indigenous students a school caters for) need to be considered when summarising educational advantage or disadvantage at the school level. ICSEA provides a scale that numerically represents the relative magnitude of this influence, and is constructed taking into account both the student- and the school-level factors". (ACARA, 2014)

In this study School A has 509 students, Years 7-12, and has been in enrolment decline over the last five years. It is a single-sex, male school, with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 82%. 1% of the student population is recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 39%, compared to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

School B has 1050 students, Years 7-12, and has experienced enrolment growth over the last five years. It is a single-sex, male school with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 62%. 1% of the student population is recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 60%, compared to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

School C has 513 students, Years 7-10, and has been in enrolment decline over the last five years. It is a single-sex, male school with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 81%. 4% of the student population is recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 42%, compared to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

School D has 524 students, Years 7-10, and has been in enrolment decline over the last five years. It is a single-sex, female school with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 70%. 2% of the student population is recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 25% compared, to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

School E has 671 students, Years 7-12, and has seen enrolment growth over the last five years. It is a single-sex, male school with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 32%. 8% of the student population is recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 51%, compared to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

School F has 561 students, Years 7-12, and has been in enrolment decline over the last five years. It is a single-sex, male school with a Language Background other than English (LBOTE) population of 42%. 1% of the student population is

recorded as Indigenous. The distribution of students in the top two quarters of ICSEA ratings is 95%, compared to the national figure of 50% (ACARA, 2014).

4.2.2 Part 2: Findings

The ensuing research questions were dealt with by the qualitative analysis of collected data:

1. To what extent was change in teacher practice evident?

2. What did the school improvement middle leader do to influence practice?

3. What factors in the school assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?

4. What factors in the system assisted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teacher practice?

Principals, curriculum coordinators, school improvement middle leaders, middle managers (English and Mathematics Coordinators) and MCSS administrators were interviewed. An online electronic survey was sent to each member of the teaching staff of the six schools. Interview recordings and online survey results were transcribed, imported into NVivo 11; and a coding process within this software used interrogate and synthesise the data to reveal any relationships in the participants' responses and create labels and themes. Interviews and online survey results were referred to so that data could be triangulated and verified.

4.3 Participants

Tables 4-1 to 4-8 present information associated with the participants in the individual, semi-structured interviews and online surveys.

Table 4-1: Participants from Secondary School A

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	AP	Principal
2	Individual	ASIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	AM	Mathematics Coordinator
4	Individual	AE	English Coordinator

Note: n = 4 participants

Table 4-2: Participants from Secondary School B

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	BP	Principal
2	Individual	BSIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	BCC	Curriculum Coordinator
4	Individual	BM	Mathematics Coordinator
5	Individual	BE	English Coordinator

Note: n = 5 participants

Table 4-3: Participants from Secondary School C

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	CP	Principal
2	Individual	CSIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	CM	Mathematics Coordinator
4	Individual	CE	English Coordinator

Note: n=4 participants

Table 4-4: Participants from Secondary School D

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	DP	Principal
2	Individual	DSIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	DCC	Curriculum Coordinator
4	Individual	DM	Mathematics Coordinator
5	Individual	DE	English Coordinator

Note: n = 5 participants

Table 4-5: Participants from Secondary School E

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	EP	Principal
2	Individual	ESIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	ECC	Curriculum Coordinator
4	Individual	EM	Mathematics Coordinator

Note: n = 4 participants

Table 4-6: Participants from Secondary School F

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Individual	FP	Principal
2	Individual	FSIML	School improvement middle leader
3	Individual	FCC	Curriculum Coordinator
4	Individual	FE	English Coordinator

Note: n = 4 participants

Table 4-7: Participants from MCSS administration

	Type of Interview	Participant	MCSS Position
1	Individual	MRC	Regional Consultant
2	Individual	MAD	Assistant Director

Note: n = 2 participants

Table 4-8: Participants in online survey

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
1	Online survey	OS1	Member of school executive
2	Online survey	OS2	Member of school executive
3	Online survey	OS3	KLA Coordinator
4	Online survey	OS4	Learning Support teacher
5	Online survey	OS5	Teachers' Aide
6	Online survey	OS6	Teacher Librarian
7	Online survey	OS7	Year Coordinator
8	Online survey	OS8	Careers Adviser
9	Online survey	OS9	Member of school executive
10	Online survey	OS10	Learning Support teacher
11	Online survey	OS11	KLA Coordinator
12	Online survey	OS12	Classroom Teacher
13	Online survey	OS13	Member of school executive
14	Online survey	OS14	KLA Coordinator
15	Online survey	OS15	Classroom Teacher
16	Online survey	OS16	Member of school executive
17	Online survey	OS17	Member of school executive

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
18	Online survey	OS18	KLA Coordinator
19	Online survey	OS19	KLA Coordinator
20	Online survey	OS20	Member of school executive
21	Online survey	OS21	Classroom Teacher
22	Online survey	OS22	KLA Coordinator
23	Online survey	OS23	Classroom Teacher
24	Online survey	OS24	Classroom Teacher
25	Online survey	OS25	Classroom Teacher
26	Online survey	OS26	Member of school executive
27	Online survey	OS27	Classroom Teacher
28	Online survey	OS28	Member of school executive
29	Online survey	OS29	Member of school executive
30	Online survey	OS30	KLA Coordinator
31	Online survey	OS31	Classroom Teacher
32	Online survey	OS32	KLA Coordinator
33	Online survey	OS33	Classroom Teacher
34	Online survey	OS34	KLA Coordinator
35	Online survey	OS35	Classroom Teacher
36	Online survey	OS36	Member of school executive
37	Online survey	OS37	KLA Coordinator
38	Online survey	OS38	Member of school executive
39	Online survey	OS39	Classroom Teacher
40	Online survey	OS40	Member of school executive

	Type of Interview	Participant	Secondary School Position
41	Online survey	OS41	Classroom Teacher
42	Online survey	OS42	Member of school executive
43	Online survey	OS43	Member of school executive
44	Online survey	OS44	KLA Coordinator
45	Online survey	OS45	Teacher Librarian

Note: n = 45 participants

4.4   Methodology Conclusion

The case study approach is a rigorous scientific method (Stake, 1995, 2009; Yin, 1994, 2003) that is in harmony equally with the epistemology of constructionism and with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. For this study, six secondary schools were involved, making a case study approach an appropriate way to analyse data from multiple sites in order to illuminate the phenomenon under discussion. In this case, the phenomenon in question is the influence of the school improvement middle leader on teaching practice in their respective schools.

Since the next section will focus on the analysis of the qualitative data collected, it is important to note that the propositions generated were elicited from the data collected from the interviews and surveys. The researcher read the transcripts of all the semi-structured, individual interviews and online surveys, and imported this data into Nvivo 11 to be organised and coded.

4.5   Results and Discussion

4.5.1   Results

This section articulates the four key propositions identified by the data analysis, and will describe, and thoroughly discuss, each of these propositions,

The previous chapters have established the ongoing efforts of schools and school systems to implement school improvement initiatives as an evolving phenomenon in under-performing schools within the current Australian educational context. Importantly, in the Secondary School Improvement Initiative (SSII) that is the subject of this study, the school improvement middle leader (SIML) is charged with the responsibility of implementing system initiatives, addressing local school needs, and delivering quality, on-site professional learning for the teachers at their school. The SSII can be described as a "top down" (system initiated), "bottom up" (meeting a school's local needs) initiative that re-positions the centrality of teacher practice in the process of schooling as the key to improving students' outcomes. Delivery of professional learning on-site by a SIML represents a paradigm shift for teachers by inviting them to determine their own learning needs, inviting them to work in teams and collaborate with one another and extend their knowledge and practice beyond their current situation.

Perspectives concerning the role and influence of the SIML, which emerged from this research, were generated from system leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators, SIMLs, middle leaders and teachers with broad and diverse experiences in secondary school settings. These perspectives are reported, not as individual responses to interview and survey questions, but rather, as an analysis of the comprehensive data set collected throughout the life of this study. These themes have been created from a detailed analysis of all transcribed data from interview texts and online surveys recorded for this study as described in the previous chapter. From this analysis, four central propositions were generated. The four central propositions are that it is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative implemented in secondary schools:

1. Should be focused on changing teacher pedagogy so that the teaching cycle is strongly student-centred;

2. Should be focused on the delivery of quality, on-site professional learning by a SIML;

3. Requires a clear vision that is shared with teaching staff; and

4. Should be led by a SIML with a focus on forging a shared identity among those who constitute the collective.

Each central proposition is presented in a section of its own in this chapter, and a visual summation of the central propositions is shown in Figure 4-1.

Figure 4-1: Central Propositions
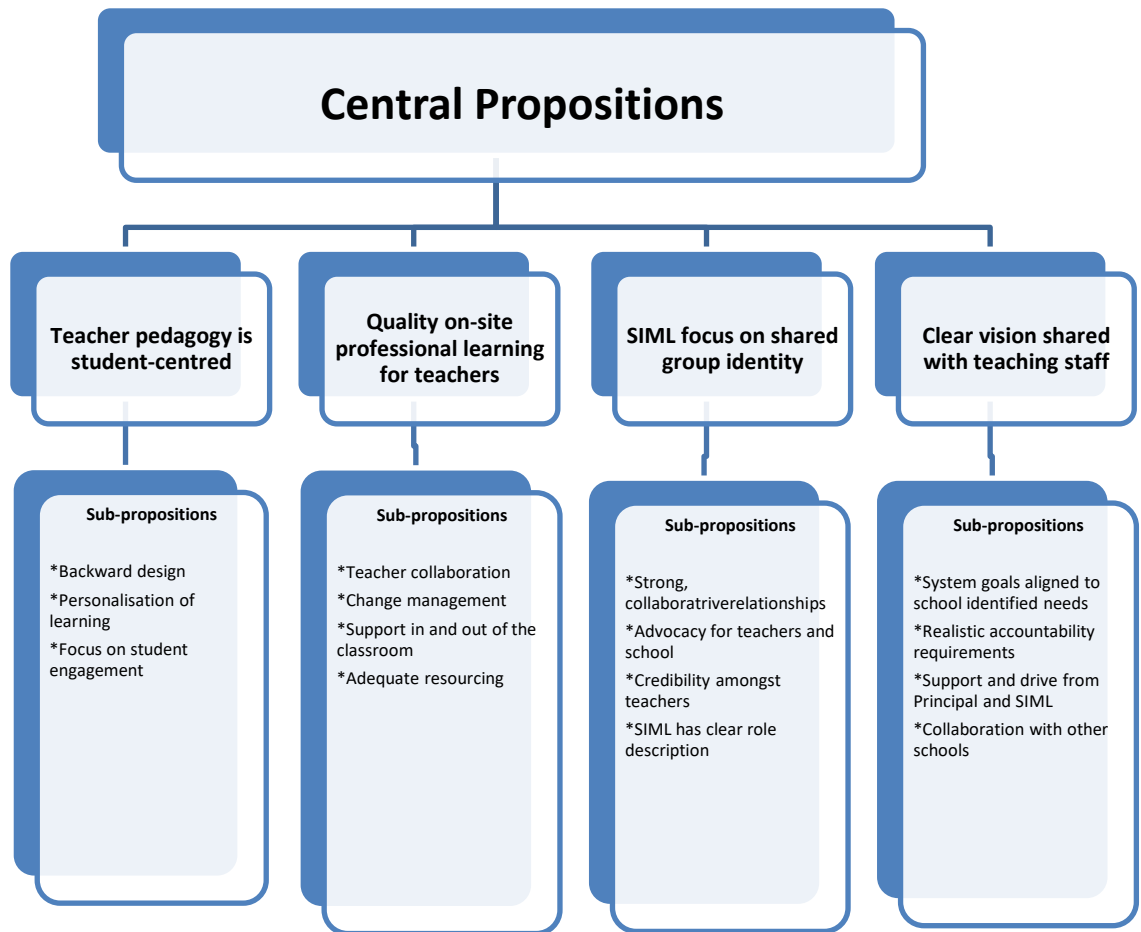
The sub-propositions (themes) identified within each of the central propositions, provide more convergent elements for each of the central propositions and are presented as the first step in the formation of a substantive theory concerning a school improvement initiative, led by a school improvement middle leader (SIML). The central propositions presented in Figure 4-1 were produced from the analysis of wide-ranging data with emphases reflecting the diverse perspectives from which the participants were speaking. Through this interpretive multiple case study approach the data was deciphered using labels and categories acquired by coding that support and/or challenge the hypotheses made from them. The researcher will then extend the analysis by adding her judgement to the phenomena or concepts that emerge. Yin (1994) warns researchers they should not attempt to break up these categories, or to consider them as having an inherent hierarchy. Yin (1994, p. 15) proposes that:

> *A common misconception is that the various research strategies should be arrayed hierarchically. Thus, we were once taught to believe that case studies were appropriate for the exploratory phase of an investigation that surveys and histories were appropriate for the descriptive phase, and that experiments were the only way of doing exploratory or causal inquiries.*

Consequently, the central propositions are posed as theoretical components, reflecting a multiplicity of findings, in addition to the emerging sub-propositions and concepts.

4.5.2 Central Proposition One: Pedagogy focused on Student-centredness

It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools should be focused on changing teaching practice so that the teaching cycle is strongly student-centred.

This section is designed to firstly:

- Pose and analyse central proposition 1: <u>It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools should be focused on changing pedagogy so that the teaching cycle is strongly student-centred; and</u>

secondly, identify and analyse the three sub-propositions:

- Planning of the teaching cycle should employ a "backward design" approach;

- Delivery of curriculum should be personalised in order to meet the needs of individual students. This includes pre- and post-testing students to inform the planning for the class; and

- Strong student engagement is a feature of lessons to encourage student voice and participation.

The main strategy of the Secondary School Improvement Initiative (SSII) was the appointment of a School Improvement Middle Leader (SIML) to the executive team of the school, part of their role being to deliver on-site professional learning opportunities and support for teachers. When asked to comment upon what initiatives had impact in the classroom, participants described the professional learning they had undertaken that lead to their pedagogy becoming increasingly student-centred.

Participants in the study made frequent references to having student-centred classrooms with student-centred instructional techniques (such as project-based learning). In investigating the concept of student-centredness, the traditional role of the teacher is immediately in the spotlight, because for a program of instruction to be concentrated on the student, the educator cannot equally inhabit that centre ground. Carl Rogers has been posthumously recorded as stating "teaching is a

vastly overrated function and only the facilitation of learning is important" (Rogers and Lyon, 2013). The participants in this study support such a sentiment. Some of the frequent references to instruction becoming more student-centred are:

> *Whilst I was aware three years ago, for the need to target set individually with students, set individual goals with students, and really create a differentiated learning environment, it's now become even more apparent through all the research that I've done that that's the way to go. That's the way that you meet the students' needs and also in myself, knowing the different types of pedagogies for the different learners within the classroom. (ESIML)*

and

> *I think probably the main difference is I try to be less visible in the classroom now than I did three years ago. I think my best classes now are classes that are set up to ultimately be a little bit more self-contained. In that I provide direction, I provide help, I provide – I actually teach the content and that - but I do try to put the onus back on the students to help each other and work together and a lot more group work. (AM)*

Clearly, over time, the role of the teacher in the classroom has gradually, but significantly, evolved. New teaching and learning methods have emerged, many of which favour a student-centred approach or small group learning. As a result, the teacher's role has evolved from being the source of content knowledge to being a facilitator of instruction. Teachers' focus is on confirming that learning happens, not just teaching and assuming what was taught was learned (McTighe and Wiggins, 2012) .

Data from the participants relating to the first central proposition are presented in the following sub-propositions, which include comprehensive perspectives from teachers concerning what changes to pedagogy (teaching practices) they implemented in order to improve student outcomes. The important

sub-propositions are summarised in Figure 4-2 below. Each will be dealt with, in turn, in the ensuing text.
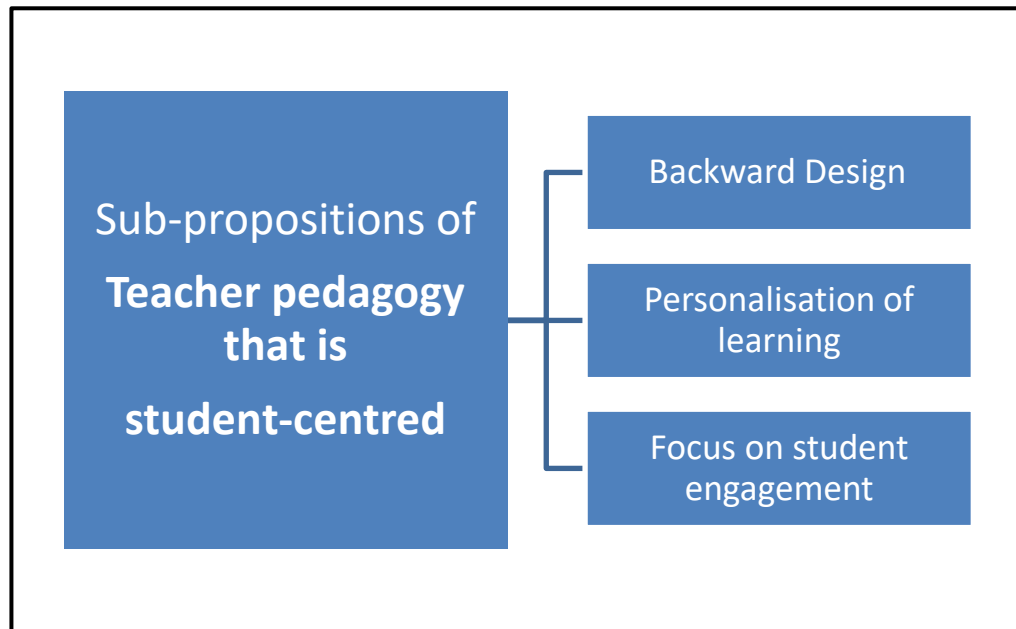
4.5.2.1 *Sub-proposition 1: Teaching cycle is planned using "Backward Design"®*

In each of the six schools in the study, SIMLs trained staff in the use of "backward design" processes when planning their teaching cycle. Within this study, teachers referred to this framework as backward design or understanding by design (UbD). This refers to a well-known, researched and published, three-stage design process that delays the planning of classroom activities until goals have been clarified, and assessments designed (Wiggins and McTighe, 2011). This process helps to avoid the common problems of exclusive use of textbooks and lessons in which no clear priorities and purposes are noticeable. Learning gains are realised through frequent data reviews, quantitative (external tests) and qualitative (student work samples) resulting in targeted individual adjustments in pedagogy and content. It was the perspective of teacher participants that teachers become

most effective when they request feedback from students and fellow teachers and apply that feedback in the design of their lessons. Many participants spoke of the impact that backward design had in their classroom and within the school. Some of the comments from participants in this study that lend support this perspective are:

> *UbD, would be the thing that really had an impact ... They really embrace that programming method and they bring it forth into the classroom in the way that they're doing things. The whole idea of setting essential questions, planning their assessment and then going in teaching towards the achievement of that, has impacted on all of the teaching areas that I've managed to observe. I've seen some real changes in approach from some of - what I would have called the last one around, tired practitioners, people who are just waiting for the bell, so to speak. They're engaged and they're happy to not just do the things, but to showcase it so to speak (AP)*

Another teacher elaborated on this endorsement:

> *I think backwards design, which is the process - the pedagogical change that has been implemented since ASIML has been here - with that key understanding that the end is in mind - has been the way that I've always taught. But I think what has happened is that now it's been really formalised and you're constantly going back to those essential questions. (AE)*

The multiple perspectives in the study affirming the impact of backward design can be captured by the comment:

> *The practice of UBD us allowing the students to become more focused with their tasks. (BM)*

Comments such as those listed above, were evident across the cross-section of participants: Principals, SIMLs, middle managers and classroom teachers. The voices of the participants were loud and clear in describing the impact that professional learning and support in the use of backward design had in teachers' classrooms, and the foregrounding of the student as central to the learning process.

4.5.2.2 Sub-proposition 2: Personalisation of Learning

When participants were asked about what changes in teaching practice were evident as a result of the SSII and the SIMLs' on-site support, there was a substantial amount of positive feedback about how the focus on personalising learning (curriculum differentiation) impacted on teacher pedagogy (thirty-three references from fourteen sources). Curriculum differentiation is defined as the structuring of lesson plans, rubrics and resources for specific student engagement, based on their individual aptitude, and teachers noted this term is frequently referred to withinin this school system..

This gives the classroom practitioner two options - either teach everyone in the same way with the same content, or find a way to differentiate the instruction in order to allow students to achieve and grow according to their developmental level. There can be a large degree of variation in learning among any group of students despite any similarities in their age and/or background. Therefore, differentiation seems to be an obvious choice when participants in the research schools have been asked to adopt a method of instruction. However, despite their strong comments about differentiation as a principle of classroom instruction, participants reported there are some operational challenges to this method, not the least of which is that experienced secondary teachers have been trained to be subject specialists, and generally have adopted a teacher-centred approach, not one of variability. One of the participants best describes the challenge as follows:

> *I think as the evolution of my classroom teaching practices just come down to my comfort with the content that I'm teaching. I came from a very structured environment where it was really stand and deliver, a really teacher centred model approach and moved away from that to looking for other ways to find hooks for students, to find things that are going to be more interesting to them. (FCC)*

Some realisations, based on the perspectives reported in the study, were very self-critical, demanding a reconceptualisation of the ways of working required a different approach. This one sample illustrates the point:

> *I actually was probably a lousy teacher before I did this job to be honest because of the – how I teach (sic). So it's very, very much student-centred learning now and especially with I suppose my discipline being history I was very - and teaching HSC as well, I was very, very much content-driven. Whereas now it is very much of how the students learn, so it's very much student centred learning. (CSIML)*

This is testament to the rethinking of pedagogical practices that unfolded in this study. Participants also described how they used pre-testing and post-testing of students to personalise students' learning and where possible, compact the crowded curriculum.

> *I think we're pushing a lot of pretesting now. I'll ask them what do you know or what can you tell me about this? I tend to make it more centred around the student now. Student centred has been a change. (DM)*

Participants described being forced to pre-test and post-test students as part of the SSII in order to personalise their teaching programs; however, they soon realised the benefits of this practice:

> *The fact that everything is being constantly evaluated and adjustments are being made which should be a normal part of what we do anyway. But because of the National Partnership you don't have a choice, you have to do it. It's been more productive, I think than I originally thought. (DP)*

This realisation let to the reconceptualisation of pedagogy for many teachers as was aptly reported:

I think overall I'm much more aware of the impact that analysing pre-testing data and looking at data can have on our teaching. That's a pretty big change in my awareness. (DE)

It is evident from the above discussion that a focus on personalisation of learning for students had a positive impact on the teachers renewed pedagogical practice. The participants in this study reported they had learnt and grown through on-site support from the SIML in the differentiation of curriculum. This finding is noteworthy in the context that secondary teachers have been trained to be subject specialists and, as a consequence, traditionally adopt a teacher-centred approach. Participants' feedback was clear: adopting a student-centred approach, with in-school support and training, has positive results for students' learning outcomes and enhances a newly constructed pedagogical approach to teachers' work.

4.5.2.3 *Sub-proposition 3: Focus on student engagement*

The six schools involved in the SSII implemented on-site professional learning for teachers in differentiated instruction using a backward design framework. This was due to the basic tenet of the initiative, which was to improve the student outcomes in under-performing, low-socio-economic status schools within the MCSS. Implementation by SIMLs of differentiated instruction allowed for the establishment of a classroom setting in which all students could thrive and gain better support and assistance (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). Educators are aware students broadly differ in readiness, interests and learning profiles. In a classroom where differentiation is a priority, the teacher plans for these differences in order to maximise the learning potential of each student (Tomlinson, 2003).

The qualitative data collected from participants in this study would strongly support the research that differentiated instruction increases authentic student engagement, and enables their voice in the classroom. Participants were able to

describe the positive benefits of taking steps to make certain that students were engrossed in the learning process using a variety of techniques. They described their efforts and results as follows:

Changes in practice have been influenced by professional development. Like I said, the student voice, listening to the class, listening to the cohort, listening to their needs. (CP)

But I know that with the SMART Data and all the other data that we track at the moment, I know how important that is in terms of making sure you identify those students that already know particular content, so that in terms of differentiation you can target them and make sure that they're not getting bored in the classroom. (BM)

She (the SIML) also helped with our differentiation a lot. We did a fair bit of study on digital games based learning after finding that the students here weren't engaged in mathematics all that well and not motivated. The past three years that's translated, in our opinion, to improved NAPLAN results. (EM)

The perspectives of teachers were not always positive. There was resistance from some teachers to the attempts to implement student-centred approaches to their pedagogy. There was evidence of teacher dissent with the system directive to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms. This system directive impacted on some teachers' sense of self-efficacy and as such, was not well received. Other impediments included teachers who treated differentiated instruction as a passing fad, and adopted a "this too shall pass" attitude. Some teachers were apprehensive to implement differentiated instruction because there was no time allocation devoted to them that enabled them to better plan for differentiated lessons, and there was anxiety around developing quality, formative student assessments and a perception that is was all in aid of preparation for

external testing. Other teachers described their uneasiness in the changes they needed to make to their classroom management style with a student-centred classroom, raising insecurities over a change in the traditional role of the teacher. The feedback included:

> *There are people resistant to change. There are inevitable questions or - sorry, not inevitable, cliché questions as to why do we need this, why do we need to do this, blah, blah, blah. I'm not telling you anything new. I figure I'm not telling you anything new, so the answer to that question is exactly the same in terms of what hindered the project: it's the staff. (FE)*

Another set of perspectives focused on some teachers' limited experience and reticence to change. For example, one teacher stated:

> *There were very entrenched practices here. We have a number of staff here who went to school here, came to teach here and have never left. So their understanding of the school context is limited to this one. There were hindrances in terms of them not wanting change, being very much that the practices were when I talked of innovation, they see it as work. So that acted as a hindrance. (BSIML)*

Even though teacher participants acknowledged that teaching practice could be more effective when it is student-centred and personalised, in reality, there was fear of change, and the amount of work necessary to facilitate curriculum personalisation. This was succinctly summarised by one participant:

> *Teachers who did not want to improve their practice as they are averse to change and feel that they already know how to teach. (OS33)*

The resistance encountered with the initiative that is the subject of this study, is not unlike the resistance documented in school improvement research that has been undertaken in large, urban secondary schools. As highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2 focusing on change with the secondary school

context, research findings suggest that reform has remained relatively unachievable in secondary school settings. In order to make any meaningful or lasting change in schools of this type, it is crucial to consider typical secondary school culture, and further, each school's unique culture (Marzano, 2003). This was a key point captured in the data. Clearly, the teachers' perceive the unique culture of each school prevents or hinders change due to a variety of factors.

4.5.2.4 *Summary Central Proposition 1*

It is the perspective of stakeholders that a system-initiated change initiative, implemented in secondary schools by a school improvement middle leader be focused on changing teacher pedagogy so that the teaching cycle is strongly student-centred. Each of the three sub-propositions generated from the analysis of the interview data and online surveys of participants have been described. Essential to the focus on changing teacher pedagogy so that it is strongly student-centred, it is clear from the data there is a need to adopt a backward design framework for the teaching cycle, curricula should be personalised to meet identified student needs, and there should be renewed efforts to encourage student engagement in the classroom. This proposition is a significant finding of the study, and can be added to the growing body of literature and research into secondary school reform initiatives in this context of an urban school system.

4.5.3 Central Proposition Two: On-site professional learning
It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools be focused on the delivery of quality, on-site professional learning, by a SIML.

As the previous section documented, research participants believe that in order to improve student outcomes, their teaching practices (pedagogy) need to adopt a student-centred approach. The second central proposition explores ideas

relating to quality, on-site professional learning led by the SIML, and the extent to which these experiences encouraged teacher collaboration. This section is designed to firstly:

- Pose and analyse central proposition 2: <u>It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools be focused on the delivery of quality, on-site professional learning by a SIML;</u>

secondly, to identify and analyse the four sub-propositions:

- Support for the classroom teacher should occur in and out of the classroom by the SIML;

- The SIML needs to be cognisant of change management techniques in order to minimise resistance from teachers;

- Quality, professional learning experiences require adequate resourcing from the school and the system; and

- All professional learning experiences should aim to encourage or improve teacher collaboration; and

thirdly, provide a conclusion to the section. Central proposition 2 and its four sub-propositions are presented in Figure 4-3.
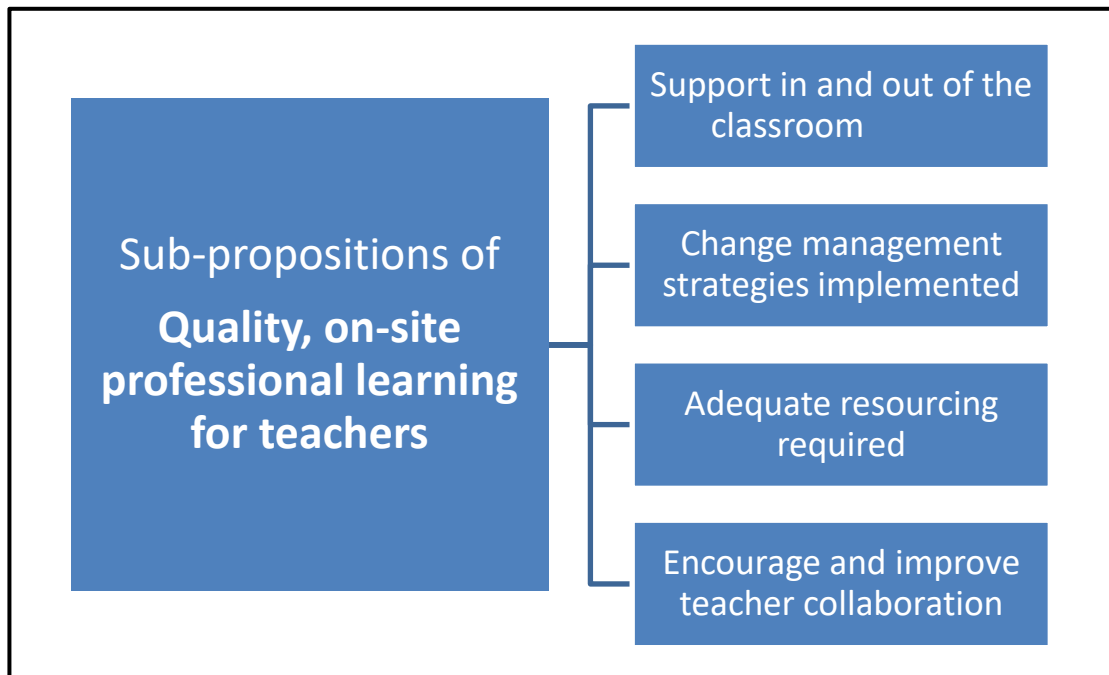
4.5.3.1 *Sub-proposition 1: Support in and out of the classroom by the SIML*

When research participants were asked to comment upon what the SIML did or implemented at their school that improved their teaching practice, a significant number of participants described the professional learning experiences in which they had participated. They described both formal and informal interactions with the SIML that supported their work in the classroom.

When the MCSS appointed a SIML to each of the six school sites in this study, it was mandated that the SIML would be a non-teaching member of the school executive, with the full class release dedicated to implementation of the SSII. Most of the participants were able to positively describe the benefit this kind of resourcing had in the school, and recognised the investment the school system had made. One perspective was:

The SIML was not just able to facilitate good practice but helping staff and students to do (so). The SIML was a non-teaching position therefore the SIML had the time to facilitate good practice, present good practice to staff, run seminars, facilitate personalised learning. (OS1)

Staff frequently described the professional learning opportunities provided by the SIML, such as *"opportunities for teaching forums/PD and class room support" (OS14), "Conduct(ed) seminars and tutorials for different purposes and targeting different teacher groups" (OS24)* and "(The SIML) brought conversation about teaching and learning to the foreground"(OS28). The SIML was seen to have had the time, space and authority to get a range of initiatives off the ground, which others simply would not be able to achieve. The participants also described their appreciation in having these professional learning experiences on their school site, and timetabled into existing structures, rather than having to attend professional learning events at MCSS offices in a "sheep dip" approach; that is, a series of one-off experiences that are not subsequently implemented in the classroom. One participant stated:

You don't go out and do a one-shot in-service at the (MCSS) where the lunches are good and you catch up with your friends. That's important sometimes, but rather, professional learning really happens when you work with another person on the staff preparing the Year 9 program for next year which you've been given the responsibility for make that an opportunity for professional learning. (FP)

The responses from this study's participants would support the empirical research into teacher professional learning that such programs need to be "on-going" rather than "one-shot" experiences, integrated with the school's reform processes, centred around teacher collaboration, and sensitive to their needs (Drago-Severson, 2007, p. 73).

Unexpectedly, a number of participants (six in total) also mentioned the physical location of the SIML within the school environment had an influence on their work with staff. In short, staff commented that in order for the SIML to get traction with the teaching staff, they needed to be conveniently and centrally located so that teachers could drop in when they needed support, often in an informal way. For example:

> *The space where she was set up, needed to be central, and it needed to be a room that welcomed people into do their work. So you saw a lot of workshops happening up there, teachers working on their own, with direction, KLA coordinators coming in. A bit of door stopping, in other words I'm not too busy to work with you, you don't have to go through a series of interviews to get to my front door. (EP)*

Another teacher participant endorses this liberating space by stating:

> *I think it was good that (*name omitted*) was able to have her own room and a meeting room. It was a space that was hers and people could go to. (BCC)*

Clearly, the physical space set aside for teachers to work with the SIML is an important resource in supporting teachers' learning. In one of the schools involved in the study, a new principal changedwhere the SIML was located; this thinking would support the data that speaks to the importance of teachers getting easy access for support:

> *The SIML deliberately wanted her own office, but I said, no, I want you to be in the middle of the coordinators and people could argue positives or negative for that but that was, now, looking back on it, the coordinator - well, the SIML understands the reasoning behind that and has now got a collaborative room, people coming, can I help you with things, offering to be part of things. They can't just be working hard, they've got to be seen to be working hard as well. (CP)*

The physical location of the SIML and the space to conduct professional learning needs not only to be central, but also to be large enough to facilitate collaborative learning for teachers.

Participants described the positive impact the SIML had on their pedagogical approaches as a result of classroom observations, team teaching and modelling of best practice. This was described variously as *"modelling how to use an approach and then joint construction"(ASIML)*, or "… getting into some classrooms and working with some teachers*"(FP)*. One teacher concluded:

> *Most recently our project around using video for teacher reflection has been a hit I think. We called the project Peers and Pods and it's been significant with our staff and helped with their reflection. (FSIML).*

Alternatively, some participants were at pains to advise the researcher that the SIML had had minimal impact in their school. In each case, the reasons given for this minimal impact on the professional learning of staff were that the SIML did not have strong interpersonal skills or experience in leading learning experiences, there was a "*lack of credibility",* or the SIML was not seen to be co-leading the vision for learning the Principal had:

> *For the first two years there was very little happening and there were a number of reasons for that. Most of them were out of her control but the impact on the school was absolutely minimal and sometimes she was really struggling to get anything done. No traction. For us it was very poorly done. (CE)*

The impact of this void in terms of impact led to a long-term lack of credibility that remained difficult to overcome. As one teacher quipped:

> *She never came to the classroom, merely sent emails requiring extra 'paperwork', sent copies of forms from American institutions (claimed as her own) to design a PBL unit of work. (OS34)*

Despite this lack of impact in one context, there were broad-brush successes across other contexts. The SIML was generally perceived to be a *"support"* and positive role *"model"* for teachers in the classroom. Staff appreciated the SIMLs' role in keeping abreast of *"current research"* and *"best practice"* and expected them to "see what the program was about, make an initial judgment as to whether they thought it would be effective or not and then to take it forward and see if it was worth running with*" (AP).* The place of evidence-based change in pedagogy was celebrated.

In each school context, the efforts of most of the SIMLs involved working with teachers to implement changes to their pedagogical approaches. These efforts to support teachers in bringing about change to their practice required some thought to the dynamics of change management, and strategies to deal with staff resistance and fearfulness. Such strategies can be described as change management, which is discussed in the next sub-proposition.

4.5.3.2 *Sub-proposition 2: Change management strategies implemented*

It was generally perceived by the participants that SSII was concerned with staff making appropriate changes to their pedagogical practice in order to make learning more "personalised*"*, "engaging*"* and ultimately, *"improve students'* outcomes*".* This required the SIML to be able to work collegially and collaboratively with staff in order to effectively implement innovative classroom strategies. The factor that emerged from the data that contributed to the effective implementation of the SSII by the SIML was the capacity of the SIML to manage change.

From the perspective of participants, it seemed there was a general acknowledgment that to achieve better student outcomes, the SIML would need to

the lead a change process within the school that would ultimately lead to improving teacher capacity in sustainable ways for long-term benefits (there were over twelve references to this). One participant expressed this succinctly by saying:

> *I think that if the - all the staff in the school understood that this was an opportunity for change and that the vision was shared and understood then there was more momentum in the school on the change process and more ownership. (MAD)*

Of course, this management of change required different strategies on the part of the SIMLs across contexts. The voice of participants was clear that for supporting teachers to change or adapt their pedagogical approaches, a clear focus and purposefulness upon change management was required.

> *I think to make it happen there needs to be a certain level of people skills and ability to bring people along with you on that. Change management and the support from the Principal. (CM)*

At some school sites, there was an openness and readiness for change. In other places, this was not initially present, and the perspective of participants was that there needed to be time devoted to building relationships, sharing the moral purpose behind all changes, and respectfulness around the time it would take to implement changes on top of already busy workloads. As participant CP described:

> *So it would have been pivotal in that the SIML understand strategic management, could I dare say, didn't understand the concept of the change and how change occurs and how you bring people with you. To get that shared purpose. That really was a factor, not having a clear understanding of that, perhaps things have changed now, really hindered the work. (CP)*

The readiness of staff to adapt to changes, or even consider changing their pedagogical practice, proved to be an important factor in change management. At

some school sites, there were early-adopters (Rogers, 2010, p. 279) amongst staff keen to try new things. As participant AE went on to describe:

> *I think that we were ready for a change because we were stuck in a rut. I think that that particular context that she came in to, that environment definitely helped her. That people wanted to change their style of programming, they wanted to reinvigorate their strategies. There was definite readiness. (AE)*

From participants' perspectives, having early adopters on staff was not enough to ensure willingness by all staff to participate in the SSII.

> *… we've got a lot of early adopters here, which is good and they're open to change. Having said that and conversely there are also a lot of others who don't see, some that are quite vocal that this is not going to work, that this is not the correct way, the right way to go forward. Then others who are trying their best but have still got a fair bit of work to go with it. (EEC)*

The resistance to change in these secondary schools is not unexpected. As was revealed in the review of literature on educational change in the secondary school context, change has remained relatively unachievable, particularly in large, comprehensive, urban high schools (Busher, Harris, and Wise, 2001; Cameron, 2007; Grubb, 2015). Even though small educational changes have been initiated and implemented in secondary schools, such as the use of new pedagogical approaches, at the most elemental level, schools have not changed (Elmore, 2007). The different faculties, resistance to change, customs, and school ethos all contribute to the complexity of trying to reform sizable, comprehensive high schools. The resistance to change was one frequently commented upon by the participants in this study. For some, their concerns arose from not having a clear idea about the SSII. As one participant noted:

> *I know very little about the shape of the SSII program and where it came*

from and how it evolved. I really need to emphasise that point that the people who are on-board are the people that we don't necessarily need to worry about and are self-motivated. (FCC)

and another states:

I think initially if I was really honest, a lot of staff were very hesitant. I think a lot of people were a little bit hesitant that this person's coming to our college and is - well is portrayed to be an expert. Suddenly we're supposed to embrace her and she's talking about going into classrooms, so perhaps people felt a little bit intimidated by that. But I think as time has gone on - I suppose respect is something that we naturally show, but it's more easily given once you see someone putting the hard work. (BM)

As the research has confirmed, in order to get traction for educational change in a secondary school context, it helps if the change is site-specific and tailor-made to each school culture (Marzano, 2003). In this study, many participants described the scepticism that was encountered by the SIML in regard to a system-initiated initiative that was imposed upon each school site. As such, comments such as these were reported:

I think there is a fear around, is what I'm doing not adequate? So it's really important to describe SSNP as a way of enhancing pre-existing strengths in the school. Unfortunately people do perceive it as a - somebody who is there to remedy inadequacies. (CE)

Some respondents reported feelings of inadequacy or discomfort around the SSII, largely due to misunderstandings, but there were also some elements of perceived threats to experienced teachers. One participant captured this into words:

I suspect that the nature of the work, which naturally makes teachers uncomfortable at times is a significant hindrance. For experienced teachers who have not had another adult in their classroom since they completed their own studies the SIML as an executive member can be daunting. (OS28)

Classroom teachers were not the only ones to report these feelings of uneasiness and discomfort. One of the SIMLs was very clear about how a deficit in planning for change management affected her work with staff in her school:

Well I was told I wasn't wanted when I first came here. Even by the principal. Well that's difficult. One of the things that hindered me was the fact that I was imposed upon the school. Then I was told we don't do the bxxxxxxx, that's the very word, and ... (t)his is what has to be done, okay. The school bought into the initiative and the messages I was hearing was but we're really not going to do it. I was put in a conflict around the accountability that obviously set me up. (CSIML)

To have such feelings of coercion expressed by the participants created a culture of fear and tension for all concerned, in all contexts.

In summary, it would seem that when the MCSS made the decision to implement the SSII in the six under-performing schools in this study, much energy went into establishing accountability structures for SIMLs and Principals in the schools. From the viewpoint of many participants, including the SIMLs, not enough thought was given to training the SIMLs in change management techniques, or in establishing the moral purpose for even implementing the SSII in each school. Whilst it was conceived to be a program of on-site support for teachers, in lieu of adequate establishment of the vision for the program in each school, it very quickly came to be perceived by many secondary teachers and coordinators as a tool to supervise teachers or even, a tool to conduct surveillance in classrooms. Positive gains were reported by teachers in schools where teachers and SIMLs experienced a well-established, collaborative working environment. This concept will be discussed further in the next section.

4.5.3.3 Sub-proposition 3: Encourage and improve teacher collaboration

In order for the SIMLs to gain traction in the schools they worked in, the aggregated participant data suggests they needed to work collegially and collaboratively with staff in order to effectively implement innovative classroom strategies. One of the other factors that surfaced from the data that contributed to the effective implementation of the SSII by the SIML was the capacity of the SIML to encourage and improve teacher collaboration. Although some resistance to change was encountered by some SIMLs, the view of the majority of participants was the SSII and the focus on backward design and differentiation of the curriculum led to improved collaboration amongst teachers. One principal participant described the collaboration that he witnessed when staff worked together in Stage 4:

> *So what we have today - back to the question - is a pedagogy in Stage 4 that's deeply embedded now which is about integration of curriculum with a really high, high, high focus on engaging kids and building relationships with a key teacher (the SIML), where teachers have planning time together and integrated planned curriculum on a regular basis in a collaborative way far more than I'd ever seen in any of my school experience. (FP)*

Similarly, principal participant AP said:

> *You've got much more of a climate of people going into each other's room, observing, collaborative planning and gathering of evidence or of your capacity to teach, going on in a school (AP)*

Data collected from the online survey sent to all teachers in the six schools supports the finding that stronger teacher collaboration was a positive outcome of the SSII. Classroom teachers made frequent reference to a *"culture of collaboration"* and the use of cloudshare tools to encourage teachers to participate in a *"culture of sharing"*. From the viewpoint of participants, the interpersonal

skills of the SIML influenced and directed the overall collaboration and sharing of teachers with one another. This was mentioned several times by principals, executive team members, middle managers and teachers alike. The feelings of participants can be best described by the words of principal participant BP:

If you've got the wrong person in this role personality-wise, people would turn off very quickly. It needs to be someone who is collegial and collaborative and takes staff, particularly entrenched staff, with her. If it was the wrong sort of person the door would be slammed shut because we have here and in many schools I suppose, some entrenched older staff members particularly amongst the KLA coordinators who took more sort of convincing and more work to come on board. The younger, more dynamic, keen to learn type teachers, they embraced her more quickly. (BP)

Another participant noted that:

It was really important that that person worked really closely and built a relationship with people. (ECC)

Improved teacher collaboration was not only limited to staff within schools. The participants of the study also noted the SSII encouraged collaboration between the SIMLs in each school. Teacher participants were able to describe their observation of strong connections between the six schools involved in the SSII. For example, principal participant FP explained:

The networking that (name of SIML removed) did with other people in similar positions across a number of schools helped enormously. There's no question in my mind that the [SIMLs] feel a sense of collegiality and camaraderie. I suspect that if someone suggested to them let's have a Christmas party together they'd all think it was a wonderful idea. I say that not facetiously, but there's a real sense that they are genuine colleagues so that's a very good thing. A sense of team. (FP)

Middle managers within the schools were able to describe the same phenomena:

The networking that (name omitted) was involved in, with other SIMLs doing the same work in other contexts, was a positive factor in her work … So it's all that sharing that's a really good factor… it's very important. You come back and you can see how you can implement it. To be able to sit down and say look, this isn't working at my school. Why is it working in yours? It's just very important for your professional development. (BE)

Classroom teachers described this valuable teacher collaboration between schools as a positive outcome: "Participating in communities of practice across the SSII schools and sharing initiatives and learning's across the MCSS leads to a collaborative culture*" (OS6).* This perspective is strengthened by an opinion that "Providing network opportunities for the SIMLs to work collaboratively and subsequently invite staff to work within this framework was of benefi*t.*" (*OS35).* Overall, this study's participants perceived that when the SIML facilitated opportunities for collaboration and sharing, they were well received, and teachers reported a change in their practice. There were also comments about the interpersonal skills of the SIML, that is, some SIMLs had the skills to encourage teachers and were able to *"*take them with them*".*

These findings agree with empirical research that has found that the biggest stumbling block in improving teacher quality is not the identification of the necessary attributes, but rather the creation of structures and processes within a school that encourage collaboration and facilitate the adoption of best practice to each teachers' common practice (Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Elmore, 1996; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). In the analysis of the participants' perspectives, there were findings about the resourcing of structures and processes that encourage collaboration and facilitate

the adoption of best practice. This concept of "resourcing" will be discussed in the next section.

4.5.3.4 Sub-proposition 4: Adequate resourcing required

When participants were invited to comment upon what may have assisted or hindered the SSII, an initiative that was designed to support teachers, on-site, to improve their pedagogical practice, there was both positive and negative feedback about resourcing. At issue was what was realistically required to achieve the desired outcomes. The overwhelming perspective of participants was that teachers' workloads are heavy, and any initiative brought to their attention was seen in the context of possibly adding to an already burgeoning workload.

In some schools in the study, the principal supplemented the resourcing of the SSII by adding to the release days already granted to the school by the system MCSS. Comments such as *"the boss had to put his/her money where mouth was so to speak and say, okay well done with that suggestion or can we resource it appropriately?" (MRC)*, indicated that staff were appreciative of any steps taken to adequately resource their work. Staff repeatedly made observations to the effect *"we appreciated the time to plan and deliver initiatives"* and *"new technology and resources assisted in influencing teaching practices"*. From the principals' point of view, they were unanimous in their appreciation for the funding of an additional executive team member, with release days, in order to drive the school improvement agenda. A representative comment from principal participant BP is:

> *The system assisted (School B) by the fact that we got the funding, the resourcing. We were financed and very generously and it came with significant release days. We couldn't have done anything like we're doing in this school without this appointment and without that level of resourcing. (BP)*

In other schools, teacher release was not as well resourced. In these instances, teacher perspectives were reiterated in regard to the demands on their time, and the inadequacy of processes and structures to undertake what was being asked of them. These perceptions in comments such as:

> *Time is of critical importance and must be factored in when change occurs. Teachers' loads have become more and more demanding and for some this becomes a tipping point. (OS42)*

and

> *A factor that hindered the SSII was the time needed to implement new pedagogical teaching practices within the normal teaching hours and pressure to complete programmes on a day-to-day basis. Not enough release days to get the job done (CSIML)*

Consequently, in schools were the resourcing of processes and structures was adequate in releasing teachers to plan, create and collaborate, the adoption of best practice was reportedly more widespread.

4.5.3.5 *Summary Central Proposition 2*

Stakeholders in this study perceive that a system-initiated change initiative, implemented in secondary schools by a school improvement middle leader should be focused on the delivery of quality, on-site professional learning by a SIML. Essential to the focus on the delivery of professional learning at the school, is the need for the SIML to support teachers in and out of the classroom. the SIML being cognisant of change management planning in order to minimise teacher resistance. There must also be a strong focus on releasing teachers so they can collaborate and share, and a realistic funding model must be in place to allow for this collaboration and planning time. This second proposition is another significant finding of the

study, and it makes a contribution to the current body of literature and research into secondary school reform initiatives in an urban school system context.

4.5.4   Central Proposition Three: Clear vision for the SSII

It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools benefits from a clear vision that is shared with teaching staff.

As the previous section documented, research participants believe that in order to improve student outcomes, teachers should be provided with quality, on-site professional learning. The third central proposition explores the ideas relating to the vision for the SSII: the study particiapnts perceive the SSII requires a clear vision that is closely aligned to the school's self-identified needs, with a reasonable accountability framework, and which is strongly supported by the Principal and SIML.

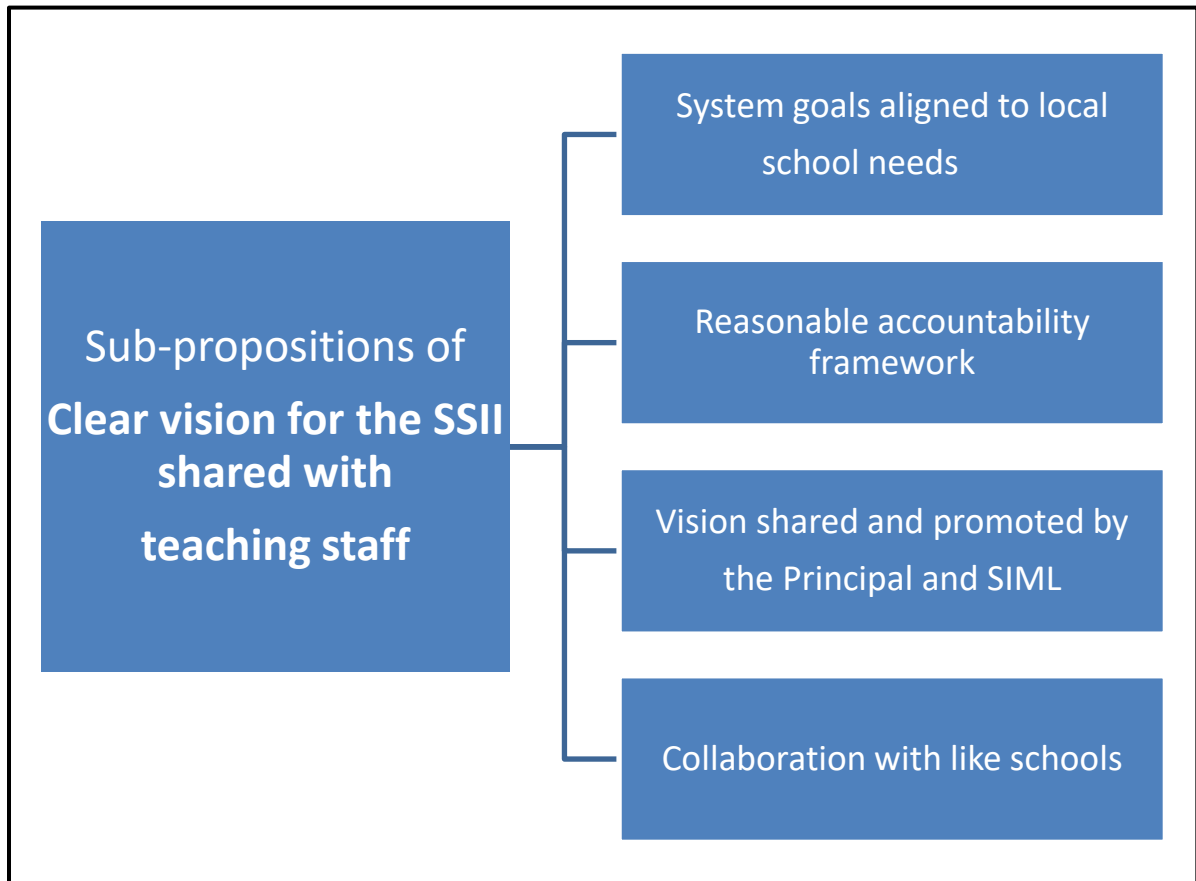This section is designed to firstly:

- Pose and analyse central proposition 3: It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools requires a clear vision that is shared with teaching staff;

secondly, to identify and analyse the four sub-propositions:

- System goals should be closely aligned to the school's self-identified needs;

- The accountability framework should be realistic;

- The vision for the SSII benefits from the clear support of both the Principal and SIML; and

- Collaboration with other schools involved in the SSII can assist in promoting and embedding this vision

and thirdly to provide a conclusion to the section. Central proposition 3 and its

four sub-propositions are presented in Figure 4-4:

Figure 4-4: Sub-propositions of a clear vision that is shared with teaching staff

Sub-propositions of **Clear vision for the SSII shared with teaching staff**

- System goals aligned to local school needs
- Reasonable accountability framework
- Vision shared and promoted by the Principal and SIML
- Collaboration with like schools

A synthesis of the data from the participants relating to the third central

proposition is presented in the sub-propositions that follow. A widespread

perspective among teachers is a need to understand the purpose and vision for a

school improvement initiative, such as the SSII, in order to establish the impetus

for them to improve their practice and ultimately, improve student outcomes.

4.5.4.1 Sub-proposition 1: System goals for the SSII closely aligned to local needs

The six schools in this study are those identified by MCSS administrators as

persistently underperforming (in relation to schools of similar socioeconomic status

on national basic testing of literacy and numeracy), and that serve low socio-economic communities. The MCSS school improvement middle leader's duties and responsibilities were developed at the local school level, based on the local school Annual Improvement Plan (AIP), and the subsequent areas for development were also identified at the local school level. Nevertheless, the accountabilities of the MCSS secondary school improvement initiative, which were established by the system, dictated that certain common strategies were to be implemented across the system of schools, and these were incorporated into the school's AIP.

The collective voice of this study's participants was vociferous in asserting the purpose and vision of the SSII was not well established with schools. This was by Participant FSIML succinctly described this perception by stating: "I don't think it was introduced to the staff well enough from the MCSS.*"* Even the system administrator MAD stated: "I think we missed an opportunity there to build on the strengths of not only the leaders of pedagogy but involvement with the school principals in the change process*".* MAD went on to say:

> *I found it quite challenging to help the principals understand that their leadership team had to be a key part of the program. That goes back to having a shared vision and shared purpose of the change process in a school. There were some principals who chose not to be part of the process and wouldn't come to things and wouldn't support their leadership team to come to things. I think that was our responsibility as a system to build the relationship with them and ensure that they understood the importance and the possibilities. That was challenging at the beginning. (MAD)*

Principal participant AP arrived at similar conclusions from one at the school level:

> *I've got real questions around the team, if you like, the head office who were driving it. I don't get the sense that they were particularly in tune with the learning's that the SIMLs were coming up with on the ground and wanting to take forward. If anything it was probably fairly stifling, keeping*

things lockstep and I realise there's things to do with the funding and accountability that would drive that. But for the - this group of schools, I think there is scope for a bit more freedom and almost an opportunity missed there. (AP)

Further, teaching staff were similarly keen to articulate the consequences resulting from a lack of a shared vision. The following comment was representative of many others gathered and synthesised: "I think it was badly thought through initially and poorly sold to the general teaching staffs*"*. Over and over again, staff comments reflected their perspective the MCSS "imposed" this initiative upon schools, and staff were very candid about this imposition. Principal participant FP said:

> *Well because everything's so deeply contextually based, and for here it was the system saying well School F's up the sxxx, we need to find ways to support it or to improve it. They would have been saying from their angle here's a big fat blunt instrument we can use to influence change and we will impose this upon the system and have an opportunity to push our agenda, and the boss won't mind because we're giving him an extra body. (FP)*

and then went on to say:

> *There's a Catholic principle called [subsidiarity] which the office (MCSS) sometimes forgets. They want us to and expect us to lead. The things that they put in place there are very, very high quality people (the SIMLs) trying to do their best, but at the end of the day what they offer should be, must be, interpreted as support and guidance not chains to bind us. (FP)*

The system (MCSS) believed it was allowing Principals and SIMLs to develop programs at each school site that met local needs; however, the mandated programs and accountabilities only served to frustrate and overwhelm the schools. One SIML, participant ASIML, put her case very clearly in regard to this:

> *Something that hindered us was being forced to do projects. Word generation is a good example. That was just a nightmare. I mean, we were*

given no choice. That didn't help. That wasn't what we were after at the time. It wasn't the right group that we wanted to do it with. The logistics of that, which was a primary based project, just an absolute nightmare. So being forced to do projects that aren't going to meet the needs of your learners, definitely hindered us.(ASIML)

Thus, this study affirms and strengthens the body of knowledge on secondary school improvement initiatives in portraying the sense of frustration teachers' experience, and the counter-productive result of implementing an initiative in a large secondary school without adequate consultation and preparation. Without the necessary consultation and planning, using existing school metrics, this research confirms that staff can view the entire initiative with cynicism: *"we have a lack of faith in MCSS initiatives as many teachers see change for change sake with no reality to what is practical in classroom" (OS44).*

For the successful implementation of a school improvement initiative in large urban, secondary schools within a school system, it is vital system leaders take the time to consult with the relevant school principals so that the initiative is well understood. The synthesis of participant perspectives in this study reports emphatically that schools are more than happy to meet accountability requirements; however, these requirements need to be realistic and meaningful in each local school context. The next sub-proposition deals with what can be gleaned about accountability requirements.

4.5.4.2 *Sub-proposition 2: Reasonable accountability frameworks*

In the previous sub-section, the perspective of participants in regard to any school improvement initiative needing to have a clear purpose and vision was illuminated. In this sub-proposition, the researcher will turn to the qualitative data gathered and synthesised about the SSII accountability framework developed by

the MCSS, and what can be learned from its implementation. This finding makes a significant contribution to current research in this field.

From the body of empirical research, it is evident various models of implementation can be adopted at all levels of a school system. Some models included combinations of support and accountability, intended to build the collective capacity of all levels of the organisation (system and school) with an unrelenting focus on school improvement. The underlying assumption of all system school improvement models is that holding schools accountable will activate schools into improving themselves (Blok, Sleegers, and Karsten, 2008).

In the context of this particular study, one of the common themes within the accountability framework was that the areas the SIML was expected to regularly report upon was unrealistic, and detracted from their ability to support teachers in their school. For instance, a middle manager stated:

> *I think there was a lot of accountability put onto the SIML, which distracted her from what she really should have been doing, and that was being here with the teachers and at times in the classroom. (BE)*

Likewise, executive team member participants felt they were overwhelmed by accountability measures: "We were given too many tasks to do and not enough time to do it*." (BCC)* Another participant challenged the relevance of the tasks, in terms of long-term commitment:

> *MCSS then asking her to do so many, many things that were mandatory like IEPs for individual students and word recognition and all of that, was never going to get traction because there weren't people willing to work with her. That's the story of School C. It's a great idea but it's got to be more locally (sic) - it's got to be an initiative that's got a groundswell and it's local. That people feel belongs to them in some way and is going to be useful.*

Otherwise in the secondary context it's another one of those things where this, too, shall pass. (CE)

The experiences of participants in this study suggest they would have preferred to be part of an initiative where mutual responsibility of teachers was better promoted. The accountability measures in the project (for example, pre- and post-testing, student IEPs) served to hold the school and its teachers accountable to the MCSS for student outcomes. Participants understood the need for strict accountability measures, given the funding offered to the school in order to implement the SSII. However, it would seem the collective view of participants was the MCSS should also be held accountable for providing schools and their students, teachers and principals with the resources, circumstances and opportunities needed to accomplish mutually agreed educational goals. This view is also shared by researchers who have reviewed accountable measures in contemporary educational settings (Sahlberg, 2010).

To sum up, it is clear that when the MCSS made the decision to implement the SSII in six, system-identified underperforming schools, there was a strong focus on setting up an accountability framework, a necessity given the investment of resources by the system. The emerging perspective of participants, including Principals and SIMLs, was that this framework was too rigid and detailed, and took SIMLs away from the valuable work of supporting teachers at their "coal-face", in the classroom. The researcher was repeatedly told more time should have been spent in not only settling upon mutually agreed educational goals for each school, but also providing the time and resources for accountability measures, so that there was no impact on local teacher support. In schools where teachers and SIMLs experienced an environment in which a well-defined vision and education purpose

were made clear to all participants, the SSII had a more constructive impact. These findings will be elaborated upon in the next sub-section.

4.5.4.3 *Sub-proposition 3: Vision shared and promoted by the Principal and SIM*

In sub-proposition 3, the researcher will address the qualitative data amassed and synthesised in regard to what influence the vision, promoted by both the Principal and the SIML, has on the successful implementation of the initiative. In the empirical research on large-scale school reform, successful initiatives were found to be the ones where the local school plans included long-term objectives with a shared strategic vision from all involved (Cole, 2004; Fullan, 2005). Research into district initiatives that are "scaled up" (implemented at many sites), shows new practices will be effective and sustainable if there is a shared vision of effective instruction that guides teachers' work, and forms part of a common discourse (Cobb and Smith, 2008).

Participants in this study made numerous references to the significance of having a clear and well-understood vision for the SSII. From their perspective, it was crucial the vision for the SSII be well articulated and understood within the school. The following comment reflects this finding:

> *Within the school there has to be a shared vision of learning, of pedagogy in our school. A shared vision otherwise no way, no support. (DE)*

Respondents also described the need for the Principal to understand and lead the vision for learning what the SSII was trying to achieve, and further, this clear articulation needed to be echoed by the SIML. Comments such as "I think for the SIML to be successful the Principal needs to have the same vision for learning*"* (FE) were frequently referenced in the synthesis of qualitative data. The SIMLs, when reflecting upon the efficacy of the SSII, were found to consistently describe

the benefits of leading an initiative with the full backing and support of the Principal. A typical comment from an SIML is:

> *The role of the principal is absolutely crucial because they're your red and green light. Anything you want to do or want to talk about if they don't agree it's a red light. Sometimes I think you can be left too much to your own devices and you've kind of been given a job to do so, well, come in and do it and kind of need direction. You need to be given their vision.(ASIML)*

MCSS leaders who took part in this study, were also of the view the Principal played a pivotal role in establishing the purpose for the SSII in his/her school and with the SIML, responsible for managing the change process to suit the local contexts. This response from an MCSS administrator was able to expound this viewpoint:

> *The principal was the most important part of the whole reform agenda in terms of implementation in that local context because every school is so different. We might have, say the reform agenda about innovative teaching and learning, what that looks like in School A will be different in School B. The SIML had a responsibility around the change process and focusing on building the teacher's capacity. But the principal was the one who shared the vision, revisited the vision, helped the whole staff understand the purpose of the vision and engage them in that vision in order to bring about the change. (MAD)*

Some of the data described this phenomenon in, that is, instances when the SSII suffered from a lack of vision and consistency in driving the vision by key school leaders within the school. For instance:

> *What hindered here was the lack of commonality and vision of the leadership team. The ability - the capability and capacity of the leadership team or lack of capacity. The capacity of the leadership team, if there's no capacity or little or lack of vision or lack of experience – this hindered badly. (SIML)*

When the MCSS initiated the implementation of the SSII in the six schools involved in this study, the decision was made to appoint the SIML to the executive team of each of the schools. It would seem this was a positive strategy to assist in the establishment of the vision for the SSII. From the collective perspective of participants, there were a number of comments suggesting the SIML benefited from being on the school's leadership team. The principals made many comments about the benefits of the SIML's leadership team membership, including the following:

> *Having the SIML specifically on the school leadership team, one of the strings attached to the rollout, was a factor that helped our initiative. It's significant. (FP)*

Principals went on to describe the support the SIML was in the SSII, in particular, being able to track what was being implemented within their school and providing regular reports on the progress of different school initiatives.

> *Her role (the SIML) on the exec is really important because first of all, she keeps track of what we are doing - we get a report every exec as to where we're up to and what we're doing and what needs to be done. It has to be supported from the top. (DP)*

This was also a perspective shared by middle managers. For middle managers, the fact the SIML was a member of the school executive team, gave the SIML the authority to mandate the implementation of initiatives.

> *Having the SIML on the leadership team gives her the authority, the credibility and just that kind of professional status. She really needs that, because she came into a school - I don't know if you're going to put this in - she came into a school that was very - I might say stuck in its ways. (BE)*

In contexts were the SIML and the Principal did not effectively establish the need and vision for the SSII, middle managers were astute in describing the

difficulties this posed: *"If there's no shared purpose that's hard. I picked that up. This is just from observation." (DM)*

Developing a well-defined and realistic vision for a school improvement initiative, a well understood common agenda might seem to be a simple task. However, from the perspective of this study's respondents, it is not an easy task to agree on a common agenda with sufficient clarity to support a shared system of accountability, and shape mutually reinforcing activities. Setting a clear vision for the SSII actually requires a couple of steps: creating the boundaries of the teaching practices to be addressed, and developing strategic projects that are understood and communicated from the Principal and the SIML down to members of the teaching staff. The school executive needs to drive the desired changes with clarity of vision for this vision be shared and understood by the teachers in the classroom.

The synthesis of the data from respondents described how the networking opportunities for the schools in the SSII was of benefit to the Principals and SIMLs to share their work and processes, and were also an opportunity to collaborate. This finding will be described and elaborated on in the next sub-section.

4.5.4.4 *Sub-proposition 4: Collaboration with other like schools*

Educational research on school improvement has emphasised a school system has a significant role in the improvement of classroom teaching by imparting "vision, focus, support, and policy coordination and by building commitment at the school level. However, large school districts have always had difficulty carrying out these tasks and persisting with a reform focus long enough to see results" (Corcoran, Fuhrman and Belcher, 2001, p. 15). Three times a year the MCSS administrators provided opportunities for SIMLs, principals and executive teams to meet and discuss the implementation of the SSII.

Respondents, including the teachers, regularly commented upon the positive effect the networking of the six SSII schools had on each school. One of these positive benefits was the building of a sense of team amongst the SIMLs. One comment illustrated the sense of camaraderie that developed amongst the SIMLs.

The networking that (the SIML) did with other people in similar positions across a number of schools did networking with those people helped enormously. There's no question in my mind that the [SIMLs] feel a sense of collegiality and camaraderie. I suspect that if someone suggested to them let's have a Christmas party together they'd all think it was a wonderful idea. I say that not facetiously, but there's a real sense that they are genuine colleagues so that's a very good thing. A sense of team. (FP)

This sense of team in regard to the SIMLs is an important finding of this study. The networking opportunities provided by the system served to give an opportunity for the SIMLs to develop a collective moral purpose, that is, "raising the bar and closing the gap" (Hopkins, 2007, p. 9) for students within their schools and within the MCSS. This would correlate to research findings on school systems worldwide (Fullan, Bertani and Quinn, 2004). The opportunity for SIMLs to network and collaborate fostered a culture where SIMLs were concerned about the outcomes for all schools with the SSII, not just their own. Consequently, there was much sharing of resources for the collective good of the students, as exemplified in the following comment:

Having the opportunity to network with other SIMLs was very helpful. Just because you could talk to people, put ideas to other people, so how did this work in your school? We shared resources. We still share resources. So you're not reinventing the wheel constantly. It also allowed schools to work together, which I don't think - whilst were a system of schools, we don't work enough together. That has helped tremendously. I've got a lot of stuff

from other SIMLs and vice versa. Their openness to share has been
fantastic. (ESIML)

Furthermore, classroom teachers were able to describe the positive benefits of school-to-school collaboration, described as "communities of practice" in a representative comment: "Our school was participating in communities of practice across the SSII schools and sharing initiatives and learning's across the MCSS*"* *(OS12).* The opportunities afforded to the SIMLs and their respective teams to meet regularly to share best practice, and also share what was not going so well, led the respondents to describe a growth in capacity of the SIMLs:

In helping this change process was not just us being able to collaborate on
the school level but also to be able to collaborate as leaders of pedagogy at
a system level. (BSIML)

It would seem the counter-productive behaviours recorded in the empirical research on system-wide reform where internal system competition turns "friends into enemies" (Pfeifer and Sutton, 2000, p. 120) were not a feature of the SSII. In fact, the inter-dependency, trust and loyalty described by most of the respondents, served to foster a constructive and positive identity for the SSII that extended beyond one's school to other schools in the system.

Hence, the synthesis of data in this study would support the finding that the SSII was successful, not only in building the capacity of the SIMLs, Principals and school personnel, but it also served to build what Fullan et al (2004) describe as lateral capacity, connecting schools within a district (p. 44). The purposeful focus the MCSS had on providing networking opportunities for each school in this study had the two-fold effect of building the capacity of each SIML and fostering a culture of high trust and collaboration between schools. These opportunities assisted and supported the schools in the study to focus on the demanding job of

lifting students' achievements. The ability to share failures as well as successes, described by one participant as *"You feel like there are people like you beyond your own place where you can share war stories. (FP)"*,helped school personnel withstand frustrations and disappointment, and encouraged all staff, especially the SIMLs, to persist with worthwhile reform. This shared group identity, of the SIML and the teaching staff, and its influence on the implementation of the SSII, will be the subject of the next central proposition.

4.5.4.5 *Summary Central Proposition 3*

This section presents the central proposition that captures the perspectives of stakeholders that a SSII, implemented in secondary schools by a school improvement middle leader benefits from a clear vision that is shared with teaching staff. Each of the four sub-propositions produced from the synthesis of interviews and online surveys of respondents have been explained. There are several essential factors necessary for the clear vision of the initiative to be communicated to, and shared with teaching staff: the MCSS's goals need to be closely aligned to each school's locally identified needs, there must be a realistic accountability framework, the Principal and SIML must provide strong support for the vision, and there must be collaboration with other like schools to assist in the embedding and sustainability of this vision. This central proposition is another noteworthy result of this study, and it makes a contribution to the current empirical research into secondary school reform initiatives in an urban school context.

4.5.5   Central Proposition Four: SIML needs to forge a shared identity with staff

It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools be led by a SIML with a focus on forging a shared identity among those who constitute the collective.

As the previous section documented, research participants believe that in order for the SSII to improve student outcomes, there needs to be a clearly articulated vision for the reform agenda that is to be shared with teaching staff. This fourth and final central proposition explores the ideas relating to how the SIML went on to forge a shared group identity with the teaching staff in their local school context.

This section is designed to firstly:

- Pose and analyse central proposition 4: <u>It is the perspective of stakeholders that, a system-initiated change initiative (SSII) implemented in secondary schools be led by a SIML with a focus on forging a shared identity among those who constitute the collective</u>

secondly, to identify and analyse the four sub-propositions:

- The SIML requires a clear role description;

- The SIML needs to develop strong, collaborative relationships that will encourage a team approach;

- The SIML needs to be a leader with credibility; and

- The SIML should operate at all times as an advocate to the MCSS for the school and its teaching staff; and

thirdly, to provide a conclusion to the section. Central proposition 4 and its four sub-propositions are visually summarised in Figure 4-5:

Figure 4-5: Sub-propositions of SIML focus on forging a shared group identity
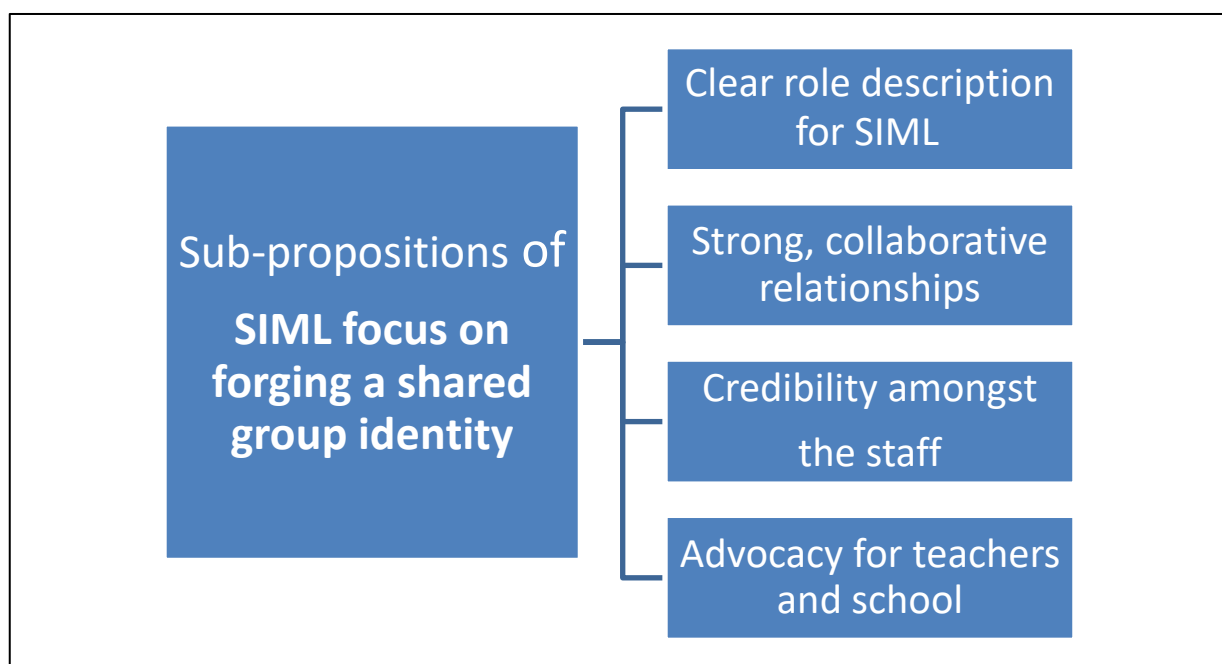
A synthesis of the data from the study's respondents relating to the fourth central proposition is described in four sub-propositions, and which include the prevalent perspectives from teachers about what they consider is necessary for the SIML to become a fully-fledged member of their school faculty, but who is also in a position to manage the SSII and advocate to the MCSS such that it (the SSII) meets the needs of the local context.

4.5.5.1 Sub-proposition 1: SIML requires a clear role description.

The MCSS implemented the SSII in the six secondary schools in this study, by employing a SIML for each of the schools, who was a non-teaching member of the executive team in the school. This was an attempt to delegate support for school improvement and change back to the school local level. The SIMLs' role description concentrated on the provision of professional learning for teachers in addition to developing data-driven local learning initiatives. This work, in the MCSS secondary school context, would ordinarily be in the ambit of the work of

the curriculum coordinator, a key middle manager in a school who is a member of the school executive and a key leader coordinating the subject/faculty heads. When the SIML was introduced to the executive team of each school, in a non-teaching capacity and earning a salary greater than the existing curriculum coordinator, it was likely to disrupt and unsettle the leadership balance of each school.

This study has found the social and professional interactions of the SIMLs within schools and within the system to be an important part of understanding exactly what reforms the SSII did, or did not, achieve. As such, the experiences of the SIMLs within schools and the MCSS are the main focus of this sub-proposition. In positioning the SIML as a non-teaching executive team member in each school, the MCSS attempted to use SIMLs to: cascade projects and/or strategies throughout the system of schools, use pressure on schools to mandatorily take up these reforms, and then support them. However, the model of reform described previously in the sections 1.3 and 1.4 (the research problem and research purpose, respectively), did not sufficiently allow for the existing social and political cultures of each of the secondary schools, within which the SIMLs' work took place.

Given the size and nature of secondary schools, it is characteristic for them, as organisations, to have complex social, administrative, leadership and departmental structures. Accordingly, the SIMLs' role description should have served as a tool that articulated and clarified their role, in addition to setting a course for their work within each school. At times, the role description was utilised as a political instrument and talisman to defend the work of the SIMLs and their leadership status, or to map their course in each school. The SIMLs within this study all had experiences in which they felt 'uneasy' about their role on the executive team of the school, doing a job they knew would traditionally have been

done by the conventional members of the executive team themselves. A curriculum coordinator's comment is reflective of the feeling in the schools:

> *I'm not exactly sure that I knew what my role and her role - where the differentiation was. So I think that was also hard - I don't think we found it hard together but I think that was hard for us - not personally, but I just think where the overlap was and where we fitted. So we just figured it out for ourselves. All of that could have been implemented in a much tighter way. Initially it hindered the progress. (BCC)*

This confusion amongst the SIMLs was also described by the SIMLs themselves:

> *What hindered my work was my own uncertainty as to what a SIML really did and was. (FSIML)*

Principals in the study also expressed their concern about the clarity of the SIMLs' role within the existing school structure, as portrayed by a representative comment:

> *Look, the crossover in area of influence between curriculum coordinator, SIML, I don't think was particularly helpful. It was pretty clear that it attacked the SIML, or that style of work was becoming the dominant paradigm if you like, whereas the curriculum side of things - we're increasingly looking at it. Well, if you take the pedagogy out of the curriculum role, you're basically left with a secretarial job. So why devote an executive member of staff to a task like that? I see a lot of that emerging in the next year or two. We'll do away - well, we have already done away with curriculum coordinator. (AP)*

MCSS became aware of the tensions that had resulted following recruitment of the SIMLs to school executive teams:

> *I think in the initial stages one of the things that was a barrier in the context of the school was the freedom that the SIML had. I don't think was well understood in terms of the potential that that could provide a school community. (MAD)*

Far removed from the classroom and the student, the role of a middle leader such as a SIML within the political arena of a secondary school, is a key aspect within the SSII. Despite near unanimous agreement amongst the SIMLs that working with teachers to improve their practice was worthwhile, there is no doubt there is little space within the secondary school that is not politically charged. A clearly defined, understood and communicated role description for the SIML would have assisted all stakeholders during the initial implementation stages. As summarised by a system leader respondent:

> *I think in terms of the system's approach, I think it could have been a little bit more structured and organised in its first instance. I don't know that as a system that the backward mapping had occurred to ensure that all of the professional development was completely relevant right from the beginning. I think giving us more insight into how to undertake change management at the school level would have been much more useful. Processes are important but that absolute understanding of how do we effect change and change entrenched practices in the school context would have been more relevant. (MAD)*

The findings of this study would indicate the work and experience of the SIMLs varied across school contexts because there was some ambiguity in their role descriptions, expectations and purposes. It would have been preferable for the MCSS to plan a clear reform model for the SSII, in which the role of the SIML within the existing school hierarchies was very clear to all stakeholders. The SIML role was initially perceived as having a dual purpose, a privileged position from which teachers could be supported, and/or a tool of control imposed upon the school by the MCSS; this was succinctly described by one respondent, as the SIML having to be a *"servant of two masters" (FP).* These findings signal the complexity of each school context, and the social relationships in which the SIMLs operated.

In the next sub-section, the findings in relation to the influence that relationships at the school level had on the implementation of the SSII.

4.5.5.2 *Sub-proposition 2: SIML needs to develop strong, collaborative relationships.*

Many respondents described awkward moments and situations, which created questions as to exactly how much of the structure of the SSII was actually understood by local school staff, and to what degree the reform actually served to empower teachers' work, both in and out of the classroom. What became very clear in the synthesis of the qualitative data, was the importance of relationship building for a middle leader, in this case the SIML, who was placed by the MCSS into each secondary school context to provide on-site support for teachers, in the improvement of their teaching practice. The school improvement initiative, the SSII, is an example of a "top-down" (system initiated), bottom-up" (meeting the local school's needs) project, one in which there is a leadership from the middle approach, where the school and its system leaders are collective drivers of change and improvement together (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015).

In addition to establishing a clear vision for the SSII and navigating the school politic landscape, the SSII reform efforts also needed to concentrate on the impact the change would have on the individuals involved. In Evans' (1996) seminal work on school reform, he explored the impact of school change on individuals. He stressed it is vitally important school leaders need to support all school staff. Leaders need to possess and be able to articulate their vision for the school, and then plan for and introduce changes. However, there also needs to be a structure and plan for more wide-ranging involvement in school reform by school personnel. Innovation should foresee there will be tension and resistance, tackle this in a constructive fashion, and settle these feelings of resistance and tension

appropriately to develop the best possible atmosphere of concord among school staff. To accomplish this requires, among other measures, building a critical mass of supporters, exerting pressure, and throughout, making appropriate use of power (Evans, 1996, p. 96).

Instructional coaching (that is, teaching) success can be achieved when the important aspect of fostering positive relationships is a priority (Boatright and Gallucci, 2008; Knight and van Nieuwerburgh, 2012; O'Mahony, Matthews and Barnett, 2009; Steiner and Kowal, 2007), and almost all school improvement initiatives that involve a system-appointed middle leader have signalled an expectation that building relationships should precede tangible work on curriculum and instruction with teachers (Neufeld and Roper, 2003; Otto, 2009; Sumner, 2011). In the training given to all the SIMLs at the commencement of the SSII, such expectations around the primacy of building relationships was not communicated clearly, nor was it planned for in the context of change management. One of the respondents in this study summarised the perspective of participants in regard to relationships:

> *If you've got the wrong person in this role personality-wise, people would turn off very quickly It needs to be someone who is collegial and collaborative and takes staff, particularly entrenched staff with her. If it was the wrong sort of person the door would be slammed shut because we have here and in many schools I suppose, some entrenched older staff members particularly amongst the KLA coordinators who took more sort of convincing and more work to come on board. The younger, more dynamic, keen to learn type teachers, they embrace her more quickly. (BP)*

In each school, the SIML was a newcomer to the school, and those SIMLs who cultivated an atmosphere of collegiality, confidence and respect before any

professional development training of staff, were able to maximise their efficacy. As described below:

> *The other thing that got her (the SIML) on side very quickly was working with small groups of teachers and they realised very quickly that she was able to assist them in the development of their practice. They became better teachers because of her input and her expertise. Everyone wants to be better but she certainly challenged people to be better but she did it in such a positive way and such an affirming manner that people realised that this person is going to make me a better practitioner. The things that assisted her were probably a combination of her own interpersonal skills and qualities in addition to the fact that she was obviously helping teachers, helping them achieve their goals. (CM)*

In some contexts, the SIML appeared to lack the inter-personal skills needed to build a learning community of high trust and mutual support. This can be illustrated by this comment:

> *I know this sounds pretty bxxxxx but … She was unable to connect … To get traction with anyone in the school and so she was desperately trying to do anything that would be helpful. She tried to work with the very young teachers who didn't have any background with the school. (CE)*

The SIMLs were engaged for a three-year period and as such, tried to implement changes at the school level with varying degrees of success. Conceivably, it is the prolonged nature of getting to know new people and build authentic relationships that hindered some of the SIMLs' efforts to implement a sustainable, effective professional learning program in a school. For those SIMLs who wished for quick results in student growth data, waiting an inordinate length of time to establish trust was a challenging dilemma. Some of these SIMLs went ahead with programs, and their zeal to complete and implement system priorities was misread as the SIML having poor inter-personal skills:

> *On the other hand, youth revealed inexperience in relation to interpersonal skills that weren't always evident. A perceived lack of modesty and humility with staff was a hindrance. (OS12)*

Some SIMLs were even described as lacking empathy for the staff, and the increase in workload they (the staff) perceived was being imposed upon them and they noted: "Her inability to be empathetic to the impact of change on staff*" (OS25).* As the empirical research has found, relationship-building as a foundation for building a culture of high trust and morale, is essential for any SSII. As was discussed in the previous sub-proposition, it is important the SIML is able to clearly communicate their role in the school, and their role within the existing hierarchy. Respondents were quick to describe how important it is for the SIML to have strong inter-personal skills in addition to a clear purpose and role within the school:

> *The biggest challenge is getting the trust of staff; that any person in that role coming in, if there isn't that clarity around their job description and the process they're going to employ they're not going to have that trust. (FCC)*

In schools where respondents were able to understand the vision for the SSII, and the SIML was effective in relationship-building, impressive benefits were recorded. Staff commented on *"increased collaboration", "a culture of sharing", "opportunities for teacher self-reflection"* and the deprivatisation of classrooms with *"a climate of people going into each other's room, observing, and collaborative planning" (AP).*

It has been established in this research study that relationship-building, whether with teachers or school leaders, is of great importance in encouraging collaboration and a team approach to improving student outcomes. The strategies used to develop and nurture these relationships in order to work with teachers and assist them to improve the quality of their instruction, varies from school to school.

The variation in each school's culture and ethos accounts for some of the issues faced by SIMLs who had limited experiences in secondary schools. Some found it particularly hard to adapt to their new school's culture. This matter of SIMLs with perceived limited experiences is of note in this study, and the significance of the credibility of the SIML will be discussed further lin the next sub-section.

4.5.5.3 *Sub-proposition 3: SIML needs to be a leader with credibility*

As described in Chapter 2, the literature review, secondary schools have proved to be especially impermeable given their complexity, faculty structures, size, and often, quite diverse student bodies (Busher and Harris, 1999; Earl et al., 2006; Foster, 2005; Gurr and Drysdale, 2013; Harris, 2001b; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). Secondary school teachers take their faculty environment as primary to their work and professional identity, and content delivery is traditionally their primary focus (Harris, 2001b). In this study, from the perspective of respondents, the SIMLs in this study benefited from having a clear vision of their role in the school, and the possessing interpersonal skills required to build positive and constructive relationships with staff. One of the significant objectives of the SSII was to improve student outcomes by improving teacher practice. The professional learning required to achieve this involved the SIML working closely and collaboratively with teachers and faculties. The synthesis of the data in this study described the need for the SIML to have credibility with teachers and leaders within the school.

Feedback from respondents in the study included their perspective on the recruitment process. In one school, the staff perception was that there was an issue of nepotism in relation to the appointment of the SIML:

There was another element that I probably need to mention which is quite unique to our scenario here at (school name omitted) and that is a point

that relates to perceived nepotism. Because our ex-principal knew her (the SIML) and her family before she got the role and then to that get that role with very little teaching experience was perceived as nepotism from the staff. That can hinder the work from a very clearly talented person. That can hinder and it didn't go down well. (CE)

In reality, this was not the only school where respondents had the same concern:

(SIML name) came here at a time, brought in by a principal who everyone on our staff understood, his wife was very good friends with her. We all knew about (the SIML) before she came. Someone at the school had in some way been involved with her earlier on ... so the credibility was up the creek from the beginning. She was totally misplaced in this school and that principal did not either realise it or did not care. He must have known the back story and brought her here anyway. So when I say opposition, I mean full on we're not talking to that woman. We're having nothing to do with that woman because of whatever, true or not true, whatever happened, we all had some feelings ... So this was a really important factor. If you're going to put someone on a leadership team, to do this important work with teachers. Making sure they're the right fit for the school and someone who will be - have credibility from day one and respect people is really important. (DCC)

In another school context, the SIML appointed was a current member of the school staff. Although that SIML met the essential criteria for the position, there was a belief it was difficult for that person to get traction from the school staff:

The system should have been more, really careful about not appointing someone here from within the group. It actually held her back even though she's a very capable person ... Had it have been someone from the outside it would have been better for the school and for her. (EM)

Consequently, perceived nepotism and the appointment of an internal candidate hindered the effective implementation of the SSII. While staff in some schools never doubted the SIML's ability to carry out their role, there was overall

dissatisfaction with a person getting such a job with little teaching experience, under-refined interpersonal skills, or who had been projected to a position of authority with a group of teachers who would find it difficult to acknowledge the authority of the position.

A feature of the appointment of an SIML to participating schools was that the SIML would be a non-teaching, executive team position within the school. In the secondary schools in this study, this system directive was found to be problematic. Comments illustrating the SIML, as a non-teaching member of staff, lacked credibility were frequently heard, an example of which is:

> *The SIML wasn't going to have a class, was going to be floating around, doing whatever they felt like doing. We weren't impressed by the idea of it. We thought we're working really hard, what we need is another teacher on the ground here. We need someone that's actually working, not coming in telling us what to do or what we're doing wrong. Thank you very much, what we're doing right. The* (SIML name) *was unable to get any traction. (DCC)*

Classroom teachers also echoed this feeling, as this one quote illustrates:

> *The SIML does not have a teaching load, therefore the SIML does not have first-hand experience in implementing strategies they have put in place - with this in mind a majority of strategies have had a "hit and miss" approach. (OS35)*

In two of the schools in the study, the principal went against system advice, and in the second year of the implementation, assigned the SIML a teaching load. This was perceived to have a positive impact in those schools, with comments such as: "Those initial concerns or scepticism around the person coming in and not being a classroom teacher have dissipated because she's now part of the fabric of what's happening*"(CP).*

The directive to have SIMLs appointed as non-teaching members of each secondary school compromised their mutual sense of social identity in the school, a sense of "us". This would resonate with the current empirical research on the psychology of leadership (Ajzen, 2006; Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2003; Haslam et al., 2013). The SIMLs, given their focus on working with teachers who belong to an already complex, hierarchical structure, needed to be in-group prototypes. As described by Haslam et al (2013), the more representative an individual is seen to be of a given social identity, the more influential she or he will be within the group, and become "one of us"(p. 183). In the context of the SSII, the more the SIML took on the local social identity as a member of staff, the more willing other teachers were to follow her or his direction.

In the next sub-proposition, the researcher will explore findings about the advocacy role that the SIML needed to adopt in order to establish a strong social identity within each school group.

4.5.5.4 *Sub-proposition 4: SIML should operate as an advocate to the MCSS for the school*

In the previous three sub-propositions, based on the perspective of participants, the researcher has outlined what the SIML needed to do in order to be effective in implementing the SSII. It has been argued the SIML needed to be able to convey and promote a clear vision for learning outcomes, within a clearly defined role description that met the needs of each local context. Furthermore, the SIML needed to have the inter-personal skills that promoted strong and collaborative relationships with teachers, and the capacity to establish conditions that enhance her or his credibility and connectedness with the social identity of the group.

In this sub-proposition, the perspective of participants in regard to advocacy to the system, the promotion of group interests, is explored. Pope Francis described this phenomenon in 2013, when he urged priests around the world to act like *"shepherds living with the smell of the sheep" (The Catholic Telegraph, 2013).*

The MCSS required each school in this study to implement certain projects and strategies in order to improve students' outcomes. Whilst this was used as an accountability framework for system leaders, it caused much consternation at the school level. Respondents were able to describe the conflicts of interest imposed on their schools with comments such as:

> *I believe the MCSS places constraints on the focus of the SIML, especially where the latter has first-hand knowledge of the specific needs of the school population - teachers and students. (OS21)*

One of the principals commented:

> *I don't get the sense that they (MCSS leaders) were particularly in tune with the learning's that the SIMLs were coming up with on the ground and wanting to take forward. If anything it was probably fairly stifling, keeping things lockstep. I realise there's things (sic) to do with the funding and accountability that would drive that … (AP)*

As the three-year time frame for the project drew to a close, the MCSS allowed greater flexibility for the SIML in each school. At last, schools were able to jettison projects and initiatives that did not meet their local needs, and staff they worked with appreciated this. One representative comment from a classroom teacher was:

> *The SIML was largely self-directed here at school, but she was very, very clear about the strategic direction of the school because she was a member of the leadership team and as such was a co-author in the strategic*

directions. In the moments when she thought herself directly responsible to carrying out head office's agenda, she was weirdly conflicted. (OS12)

Even though staff recognised there needed to be some form of accountability requirement due to the large investment in resourcing (both personnel in the form of the SIML and release days for teachers), they had a strong sense this detracted from the important work the SIML should have been undertaking at the school. As exemplified in the following comment from an English Coordinator:

I think there was a lot of accountability put onto the SIML, which distracted her from what she really should have been doing, and that was being here with the teachers and at times in the classroom. (BE)

What became evident in the synthesis of respondents' opinions was that SIMLs were seen to be more successful when they promoted the group (school) interest in the terms specified by the group's own norms and values. SIMLs who took care to advocate the group (school) interest, or colloquially, who operated towards the system as "in-group champions" (Haslam et al., 2013, p. 293), received stronger affirmation from the teachers (the followers). With this strong endorsement, SIMLs who were perceived as school advocates, mediating between the school and the system, were more likely to be able to engage the efforts of teachers in bringing their vision for learning to fruition.

4.5.5.5 *Summary Central Proposition 4.*

This section represents the final central proposition that captures the perspectives of stakeholders that a SSII, implemented in secondary schools by a school improvement middle leader benefits from a strong focus in forging a shared identity among those who constitute the collective. Each of the four sub-propositions produced from the synthesis of interviews and online surveys of

respondents have been elucidated. Essential to the forging of a shared identity is the need for the SIML to: have a clear role description that corresponds to other leaders within the school, have a focus on developing strong and collaborative relationships with teachers, have effective credibility as a leader (adopting the social identity of their school), and be a leader who takes on the role of an "in-group champion", a leader prepared to advocate and mediate on behalf of the school with the MCSS. This central proposition is another noteworthy result of this study, and it makes a contribution to the current empirical research into secondary school reform initiatives in an urban school context.

4.6   Summary

This Chapter has outlined and discussed the four central propositions distilled from the perpectives of the study participants concerning the role and influence of the SIML in a system initiative. The perspectives of system leaders, principals, curriculum coordinators, SIMLs, middle leaders and classroom teachers were gathered to gain a broad and diverse collection of experiences in six secondary schools. The four central propositions emerged from a detailed analysis of all the transcribed data from interviews and the online surveys distributed to the teachers in the six schools. The sub-propositions (themes) that were identified within each of the central propositions are a result of the convergent elements that emerged. The overall propositions are a faithful record and representation of the perspectives and experiences of system leaders and school staff in six secondary schools of the MCSS, and offer much to the body of limited research around school improvement initiatives in systemic schools.

In the next, and concluding, chapter of this dissertation, a number of outcomes will be achieved:

1. A substantive model of leadership based on the four central propositions will be generated, effectively theorising the findings of the study from a significant position;

2. The implications for policy and practice will be elaborated upon in regard to what can be added to the existing empirical research into system-initiated, secondary school reform initiatives; and

3. The limitations of the study and implications for further research will be outlined.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter consists of three sections. The first is an overview of the study, identifying its key features and reiterating the rationale for significance. The second section will provide a summary of the central propositions framed as a result of the data analysis and then, the interpretation of the synthesis of the emerging themes. A summary of the critical treatise that was associated with the revelation of each of the central propositions will be included here. The final section will make recommendations for policy, practice and further research and propose a model for the effective use of middle leaders in secondary schools to support and work with teachers to improve their pedagogy and ultimately, improve student outcomes.

5.1 Summary of Findings

Educational research into how school systems develop and implement large scale reform models in schools is quite extensive; however, when one delves into the particular realm of secondary school reform at an operational level, the research is much more limited. For over half a decade, school systems have frequently relied upon "top down" reform measures that have failed to provide long-term improvement to raising the level of student achievement (Fullan, 2009b). In 2007, research undertaken to establish why some school systems out-perform others, it was found that the most successful systems were "relentless in their focus on improving the quality of instruction in their classrooms" (Mourshed and Barber, 2007, p. 27). These successful systems implemented strategies to improve teacher pedagogy, helping them to create and awareness of weaknesses in their practice,

providing models of best practice and motivating teachers to make the necessary changes in their pedagogy.

Two of the strategies discussed in McKinsey and Company report (2007) were the placement of expert teachers or coaches within schools and offering opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other. However, the empirical research on the value of placing expert teachers in schools to support teachers is rather scant. Within the existing research in this area, outcomes are varied and challenging to articulate with any certainty (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2007). In the meta-analysis of these studies, researchers concluded that what commences as a 'cascade' at the core of a school's plans becomes a 'trickle' in the classroom (Hayes, 2000). Such a strategy has a weakness when it comes to the teachers at the receiving end of the support who can appear to be passive participants in learning about best practice when indeed, in the secondary school context, will adapt, ignore or reject the reforms being asked of them (Coffield et al., 2008). Rather, strategies that encourage teachers to be co-creators of best practice better encourage teachers to learn from one another in a culture of mutual trust (Fielding et al., 2005).

For the purposes of this study the school improvement middle leader (SIML) was an on-site expert teacher who was able to work with, and support, teachers to motivate them to reflect upon and refine practice. The SIML was a system-appointed middle leader in each school, who was incorporated into the senior leadership team as a non-teaching member of the teaching faculty. Each school principal was a member of the appointment panel for the SIMLs; however, the majority of the appointment panels were made up of MSCC system leaders. The SIMLs were remunerated above what a three-point curriculum coordinator

would receive, and the appointment and recruitment processes were found to have a bearing on the way the SIMLs were received and utilised in each school's context.

In this study, the secondary school improvement initiative, as initiated by the MacKillop Catholic School System, was an attempt to engage the strategies used by highly performing systems to enhance teacher practice, to improve student outcomes. The study explored ways in which a system-initiated and funded school improvement initiative, using system-appointed, school-based, middle-level leaders, is able to bring about changed teacher practice in secondary schools. Accordingly, the central question for this dissertation was: *In what ways did a system initiated and funded, secondary school improvement initiative, led by system-appointed school improvement middle leaders, influence secondary school teaching practice?*

In this study, the principal task of the researcher was to seek the perceptions and perspectives of participants on the influence of the school improvement middle leader, perspectives on their leadership role within the study, and finally, their perspectives on changes in teacher practice as a result of the SSII. To tackle the limitations referred to in Chapter 3, the researcher used two methods of data collection, namely individual, semi-structured interviews of school improvement middle leaders, Principals, middle managers and system administrators, and an online web survey to all teachers in participating schools. In this way, data was triangulated in order to assess credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2002). Limitations were also dealt with using participant checking to appraise the data and information provided by participants to assure authenticity of the qualitative findings (Merriam, 1998). Consequently, this qualitative study

remained sufficiently open and adaptable to allow further research into the secondary school improvement initiative if any new data emerges (Patton, 2002b).

The four scheduled questions in the individual, semi-structured interviews and the web-based, online surveys, were derived from existing literature on middle leaders, system improvement and professional learning of teachers. The other questions stimulated the collection of background information to allow the researcher to form an insight about the participating teachers. In particular, those questions allowed system leaders, principals, school improvement middle leaders, middle managers and teachers to provide valuable and relevant information about their experiences in a SSII in secondary schools. Information in regard to participants and data collection was outlined in Chapter 3. The general objective of each question was to launch a conversation so the researcher could probe the participant with further questions that became relevant after asking each primary question. Determining the follow-up queries was a practical process built within the planning of the interview protocol.

Verbal responses to the interviews were taped, with authorisation from each participant, and then transcribed, and along with online survey responses, were imported into Nvivo11 for analysis and coding. The qualitative data was analysed to develop key themes that might emerge. A coding process was used to "form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2002, p. 450). In the exploratory, inspection/confirmation and story-writing stages of data analysis, a process of open, axial and selective coding was utilised to confirm, abandon and test themes and descriptions that had emerged (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). At the conclusion of the coding process, four inter-related central propositions arose from the data with their own sub-propositions, which were also embedded into the four,

central propositions that captured the key perspectives of SIMLs, principals, other school middle leaders, system leaders and teachers regarding the implementation of the SSII in each school. These perspectives were reported as an analysis of aggregated data, not the analysis of individual responses. The four central propositions were critically discussed in Chapter 4. In the next section, a summary of these critical commentaries will be provided.

5.2   Interpretation of Findings

In 2010, after examining NAPLAN results in Years 7 and 9 across the MCSS, and comparing the results of schools within nationally identified socio-economic funding categories, MCSS administrators identified six schools which persistently underperformed on national basic testing of literacy and numeracy in relation to schools of similar socio-economic status; these six schools also served low socio-economic communities. The objective of the SSII used in this research, was to improve the achievement of all students in these under-performing schools, and more specifically, those students who demonstrated an achievement gap when compared to like students in other schools.

The lead strategy of the SSII was the appointment of a middle-level leader, a school improvement middle leader (SIML) to each participating school, who was expected to:

- Contribute to building the capacity of teachers;

- Promote professional learning communities;

- Contribute to the development of the school's leadership;

- Critically review teaching practice;

- Manage the collection and analysis of the data required;

- Contribute to the effective promotion of best practice pedagogy across the MCSS;

- Transform pedagogy in their secondary school; and

- Work with the MCSS SSII Manager and the school improvement middle leaders in other schools to assist in the transformation of pedagogy across the system of schools.

The objective for implementing such a middle leader role was to provide support for each school's leadership team to implement a clear, school improvement reform agenda (the SSII), so that student achievement was improved, especially for those students who were achieving below the national minimum benchmarks.

It is very difficult to describe what a middle leader is, given the nature of their work and the issue of school context. The definition of a middle leader differs across the body of educational research, and according to the background and organisation of the school or school system. For instance, in a secondary school, a subject coordinator or pastoral coordinator would be a middle leader, while in the context of the relationship between a school system and a principal, the principal is a middle leader (Crow, 1992). For the purposes of this research, the definition of middle leader was that used in an OECD report (2012): a middle leader is a teacher with a leadership responsibility for a team, year level or curriculum area (Schleicher, 2012, pp. 21-22).

Participants' perspectives concerning the role and influence of the SIML emerged from individual interviews and online surveys, in six schools. Selective coding was used with the data obtained because a broad impression of the phenomenon under discussion emerged, and formed the basis for generating

themes. Following further analysis, the four central propositions and their accompanying sub-propositions were formulated. This process was consistent with a key precept of interprevist, case-study research methodology: "theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research" (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p. 85).

The four central propositions and the associated sub-propositions that emerged encapsulated the key perspectives of respondents regarding the implementation of a SSII in secondary schools. A SSII should:

1. Be focused on changing teaching practice so that the teaching cycle is strongly student-centred

    a. Planning of the teaching cycle should employ a "backward design" approach;

    b. Delivery of curriculum should be personalised in order to meet the needs of individual students. This includes pre- and post-testing students to inform the planning for the class; and

    c. Strong student engagement is a feature of lessons to encourage student voice and participation.

2. Be focused on the delivery of quality, on-site professional learning, by a SIML with previous experience in leading quality professional learning who encourages teacher collaboration

    a. Support for the classroom teacher should occur in and out of the classroom by the SIML;

    b. The SIML needs to be cognisant of change management techniques in order to minimise resistance from teachers;

    c.   Quality, professional learning experiences require adequate resourcing from the school and the system; and

    d.   All professional learning experiences should aim to encourage or improve teacher collaboration.

3.   Have a clear vision that is closely aligned to the school's self-identified means, with a reasonable accountability framework, and which is strongly supported by the Principal and the SIML

    a.   System goals should be closely aligned to the school's self-identified needs;

    b.   The accountability framework should be realistic;

    c.   The vision for the SSII benefits from the clear support of both the Principal and SIML; and

    d.   Collaboration with other schools involved in the SSII can assist in promoting and embedding this vision.

4.   Be led by a SIML with a focus on forging a shared identity among those who constitute the collective

    a.   The SIML requires a clear role description;

    b.   The SIML needs to develop strong, collaborative relationships that will encourage a team approach;

    c.   The SIML needs to be a leader with credibility; and

    d.   The SIML should operate at all times as an advocate to the MCSS for the school and its teaching staff.

Each of these central and sub-propositions was critically commented upon in Chapter 4. The findings are significant for research in this field.

This multiple-site case study confirmed the significant role of the principal and the SIML in the implementation of a large-scale SSII. The capacity and leadership approaches of the school system, principals and SIMLs appeared to noticeably influence the attitudes, conditions, approaches and improvement trajectory in the school. This study has highlighted the impact of imposing an initiative on a secondary school without adequate preparation and planning on the part of the system. Respondents were vocal in communicating the necessity for all personnel to share and understand a clear vision for a school improvement initiative, and that this initiative should have the school's local needs incorporated into the basic tenets of this vision.

Another finding of the study was that in the implementation of an expert teacher leader on-site to support teacher pedagogical change, consideration of and preparation for change management issue ought to be a key feature of the pre-planning and training. The secondary schools in this study, were similar to those researched globally, and were resistant to change. The process of reform in these large, urban secondary schools was complicated by the large school populations, departmentalisation, departmental goals that differed from whole school one, teacher isolation, ineffective management, wide-ranging opposition to change from community stakeholders, politics, historical traditions, and school ethos . Employing a non-teaching executive team member in a school, without considering the school's existing hierarchical structures, can significantly influence the reception they will receive, and the cooperation from other existing school staff.

SIMLs with strong interpersonal skills and extensive experience as a middle leader were able to implement the SSII successfully, sometimes to take it beyond the system's parameters; they were also to positively influence others both in the

school and outside. Sometimes these advances were made despite limited support within the school. Conversely, some SIMLs who had limited experience, poor interpersonal skills or perceived nepotistic relationships with principals created acrimonious relationships, blocked improvement, and frustrated those who were eager to improve, unless they could be circumvented. This case study has confirmed the positive and negative influence of a school's context on a school improvement initiative, and the need to take this into consideration when implementing change.

The SIML was expected to work with individuals and groups within each school, adopt a devolved leadership approach to the implementation of school improvement initiatives, and engage school staff in the co-creation of strategies. The goal of devolving leadership, that is distributing leadership, means there will be numerous founts of guidance, "following the contours of expertise in an organisation and made coherent through a common culture" (Harris, 2004b, p. 14). The findings of this study would support existing research into group psychology and the conditions necessary for effective, distributed leadership (Haslam et al., 2013); that is, for the SIMLs to forge a shared identity amongst those in their school who constitute the collective, they needed to be an in-group prototype ('one of them'), an in-group champion (advocating and advancing the collective interest), and an entrepreneur of identity (working relentlessly to construct identity) (Haslam et al., 2013). The findings of this study conclude that if the SIMLs were successful in forging a group identity in their respective schools, it was more likely their practices and policies would be influential when working with staff and communicating to the school.

The next sub-section, describes how it is possible to build a substantive theoretical model that demonstrates how middle leaders in different secondary school contexts, and whose role it is to implement system initiatives, can establish a group identity and support those who constitute the collective on-site, to improve teaching practice.

5.3 Four conditions that enable a Middle Leader in Systemic Secondary Schools

This research study has endeavoured to review a system-initiated school improvement initiative in six secondary schools led by system-appointed middle leaders, the SIMLs. The review of the body of research on leadership reiterates what is widely accepted, that leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on student learning. One of the strong claims about leadership and its impact on student learning is that "leadership acts as a catalyst" for many positive effects, including student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 4). When discussing the findings of this study, it is valuable to reflect upon the changes to school leadership practices over the years. There have been many models of leadership proffered over the years, and have informed the model drawn out for Middle Leadership for this study.

Instructional leadership approaches, or leadership for learning as it has commonly evolved to, is one of the longest established models relating leadership actions to learning. One of the challenges of such a model is the focus on the principal as the "centre of expertise, power and authority" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). Another challenge is that in a secondary school where teachers are subject specialists, the intention to provide instructional leadership is complicated by the

fact that in many cases, principals have less expertise than the teachers they supervise.

Transformational models of leadership focus predominantly on the process employed by school leaders to influence outcomes, rather than the nature of the outcomes themselves. Leithwood's model of transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2003, p. 336) has seven components: individualised support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations and modelling. In its construct, this model is not focused solely on the principal's expertise. A summation of the behaviours of a transformational leader are that the leader can communicate their vision in a distinct and engaging way, can describe how to attain the vision, can act optimistically and with confidence, can express confidence in the organisation's followers, can lead by example, and empower followers to achieve the vision (Yukl, 2002). Critics of such a model are quick to point out that it is not always clear as to whose vision is actually being focused on. Is it a vision highly prized by the principal, or is it the vision articulated by system leaders? Bush and Glover (2014) argue that a transformational leadership model can be seen as a "cloak for imposing the leader's values, or for implementing the prescriptions of the government" (p. 558).

The two models described above are largely based on an individual, usually the school principal, and the way the principal exercises leadership. On the other hand, there have been many models researched that involve a shared approach to leadership. Collegial, participative leadership approaches have become known contemporarily as distributed leadership approaches. Distributed leadership is not tied to hierarchical authority, a critical element to consider in a secondary school context, where definite hierarchies and subject specialists exist. In a secondary

school context, distributed leadership requires the active support of the principal, as authority needs to be redistributed in an authentic way. It has been argued that a distributed leadership model requires much thought in its theoretical underpinning. To begin with, principals need to be deliberate and purposeful in creating the conditions and space for distributed leadership to occur (Hopkins and Jackson, 2003). Further, if teachers are to adopt distributed leadership practices, more work needs to be done in order to properly implement its core principles. Torrance's (2013a) research into this kind of leadership model challenges five assumptions of this leadership paradigm: "that every member of staff is able to lead; that the leadership role of staff is legitimised solely by the head teacher's endorsement; that a distributed perspective occurs naturally; and that a distributed perspective is unproblematic" (p. 367). However, as described in the literature review (Chapter 2), school reform is more likely to occur when leadership is distributed, and when teachers have an individual and vested interest in leading school improvement (Day and Harris, 2003; Gronn, 2000; Holden, 2002; Lambert, 2003).

In the context of a secondary school, middle leadership as a construct has been discussed as an effective way of implementing educational change. In a secondary school, there are teachers who have pastoral or subject responsibilities, and who are key personnel in the implementation of any school reform (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002). As described previously, middle leaders have more day-to-day impact on standards than the school principal; in essence, they are closer to the action (Hobby, 2016). Research studies into the efficacy of middle leaders in initiating and leading change have identified areas of challenge they encounter. Whilst leading at the whole school level, are middle leaders loyal to the school executive or to their department or subject area? Middle leaders in secondary

schools operate within defined hierarchies and within differing arenas or cliques of influence and change.

Consequently, after a brief review of leadership models that support school improvement, it is clear that introducing an innovation or change in a school without serious thought to support the change process is not enough. "[E]ach school must be assisted by someone trained in supporting the endeavour. [Such] assistance is directed toward facilitating and prodding the process" (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 414).

In this research study, a middle leader, the SIML, was given the role of implementing a "top down", "bottom up" school improvement initiative. The SIML needed to exhibit strong school leadership and the ability to authentically distribute leadership, and thus reduce fear and anxiety whilst implementing change. The researcher, following forensic data analysis, was able to distil the conditions necessary to ensure the efficacy of a SIML to implement education change. The proposed middle leadership model for a secondary school is founded on the four conditions that participants collectively cited as being necessary to enable the middle leader (SIML) to implement school improvement initiatives. The geneses of these four conditions are the central propositions that emerged from the data, and they are visually represented below in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1: Conditions that enable Middle Leaders to implement school improvement initiatives

Clear Vision	• All teachers share a vision that includes a common understanding of students' needs, and a co-creation approach to meeting these needs through agreed-upon strategies. Accountability processes should be reasonable, and draw upon existing data. Networking with like schools to encourage sharing of best practice.
Student-Centred Practice	• Teachers adopt a 'Backward-Design' approach to the planning of their teaching cycle. There is a shared commitment to strategies that maximise student engagement.
On-site Professional Learning	• Support for the teacher to occur in and out of the classroom. Opportunities provided for regular teacher collaboration.
Forging a shared identity	• SIML requires training in change manangement strategies, a clear role description, strong interpersonal skills and credibility as a leader and classroom practitioner. SIML's role to include advocacy for the school to the system

This research showed improving teacher practice was most effective when it took account of the context of the school, the capacity of the SIML, and the capacity of the school leaders and teachers. The middle leader was successful in improving teacher practice because, based on the perspective of teachers and the body of literature on coaching, the professional development opportunities offered were "ongoing, deeply embedded in teachers' classroom work with children, specific to year levels or academic content, and focused on research-based approaches" (Russo, 2004, p. 2). The middle leader's work helped to deprivatise classrooms so that teachers could observe and support one another; this would generate a culture that is characteristically more collaborative, and which has a stronger sense of the collective good among teachers in schools. It is also evident from this school improvement research that for capacity building to be most successful, it needs to be enacted at various levels in secondary schools; one-off

and isolated innovations are of limited value. Teachers welcome, and benefit from, the support of an on-site expert teacher who can assist them in a culture of mutual trust and professionalism. It also appears that a clear focus on a small number of data-driven priorities may well be more valuable than a scattergun approach (Harris et al., 2006).

The findings of this study conclude that when a system appoints a school improvement middle leader, they (the SIML) should be expected to identify the needs of the local context, build positive and collaborative relationships, and drive changes with executive team involvement. This research indicates that SIMLs should be able to offer challenge and support at system, executive team, and middle leadership and teacher levels. The SIMLs benefit from having external support and networking with other SIMLs, as this provides an opportunity to share best practice, and collaborate with other SIMLs working on similar strategies.

The study also concludes that the training and support of SIMLs and their principals must encourage and enable them to be discerning about school improvement initiatives. It is particularly important to focus on improving teacher practice, especially in student-centred curriculum delivery, in order to improve student outcomes. Understandably, this places an obligation on the school system to give comprehensible and consistent messages about the nature, implications and demands of any school improvement initiative they wish to adopt and implement. Considering the implications of change management in secondary schools, as a result of this research it is recommended the system should thoroughly think through and test the implications of any future change initiative through effective professional training and piloting. In turn, this will support schools to incorporate and contextualise any external innovation that may need implementation.

5.4   Anecdotal Findings

It is of interest to include some of the anecdotal findings of this study that fall outside the remit of this thesis. At the commencement of the SSII, the MCSS chose to fund this school improvement initiative in six schools identified as persistently underperforming. These schools, in comparison to similar schools, were seen to have a weak or falling enrolment pattern, and the literacy and numeracy results of their students in national testing was below what students in similar schools were achieving. It is worthy to note the student learning gains in each of these schools, which are represented diagrammatically below for each school in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. This information is available from the *myschool* website, where it is possible to view the student learning gain as they progressed from Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015). When interpreting the graphs, the following legend is useful:

Average achievement of students in the selected school

Margin of error at 90% level of confidence
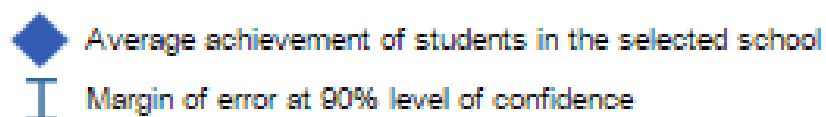
School A

In 2012, School A had an enrolment of 509 male students. In 2015, its enrolment was 494, a slight decline.

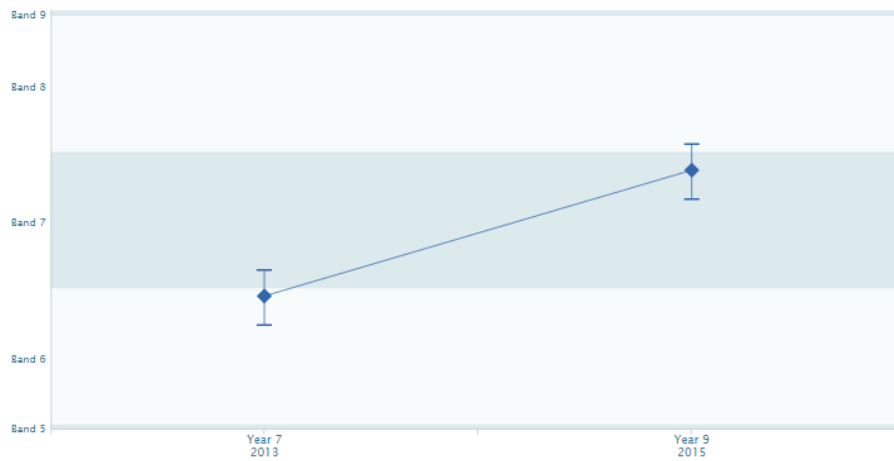The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:
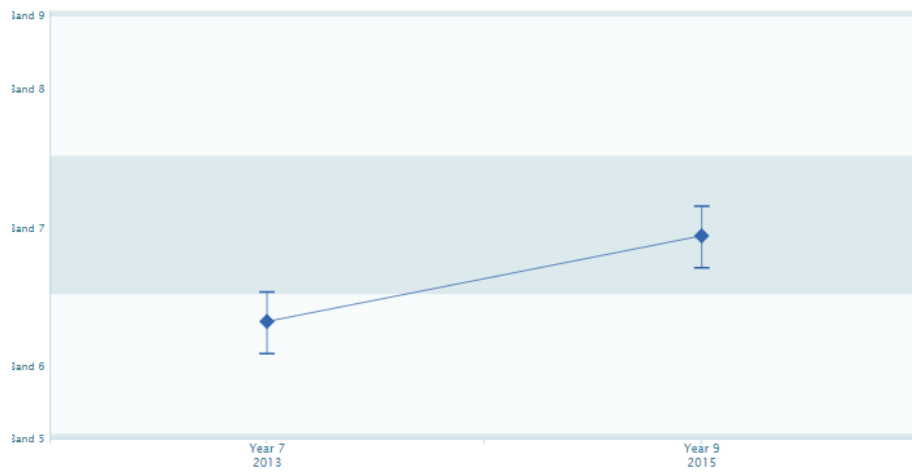
Reading

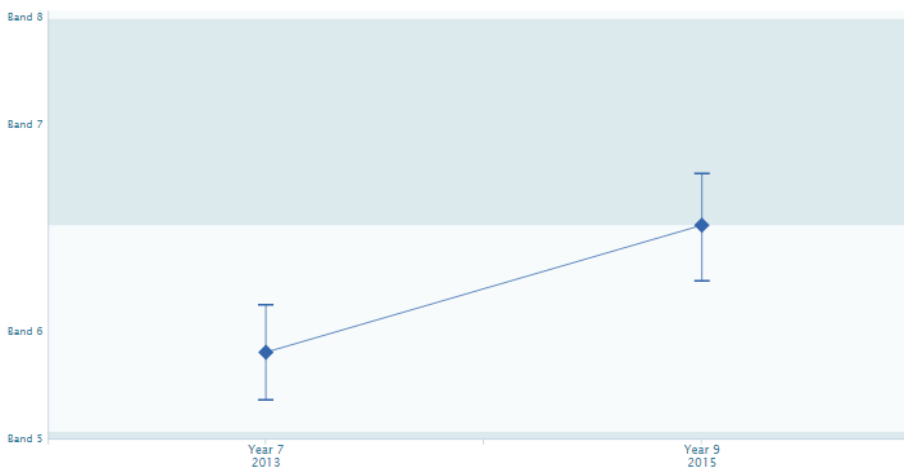**Figure 5-2: School A, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015**
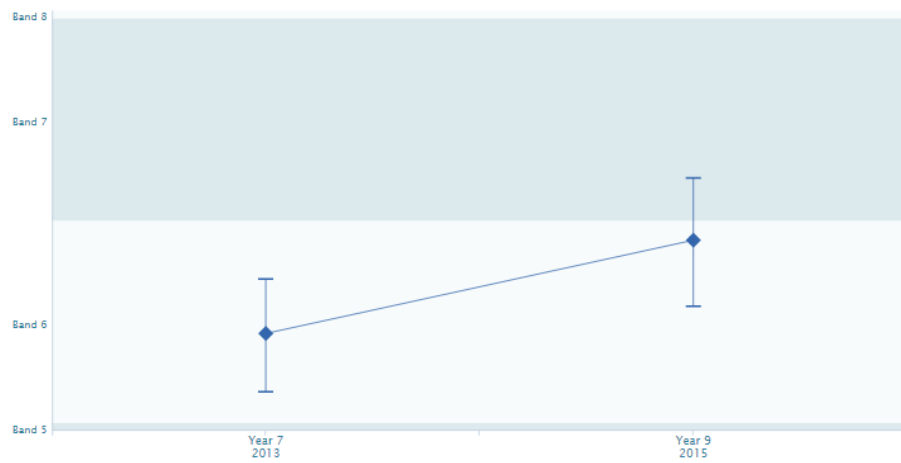
Writing

Figure 5-3: School A, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015
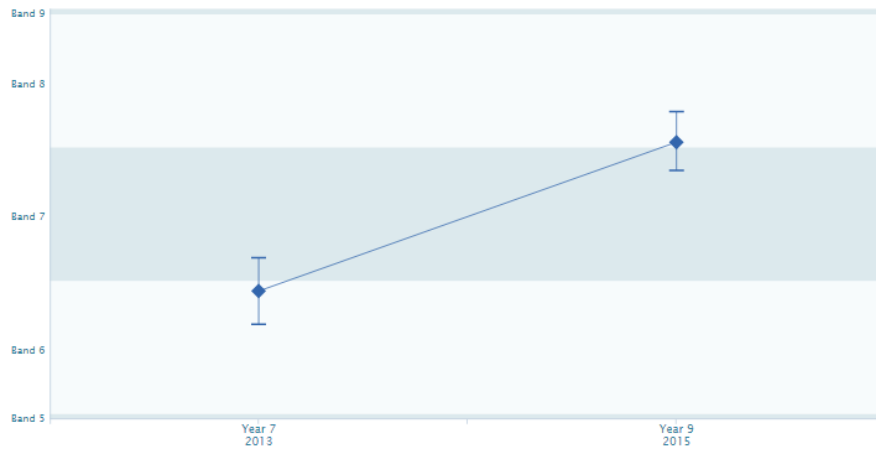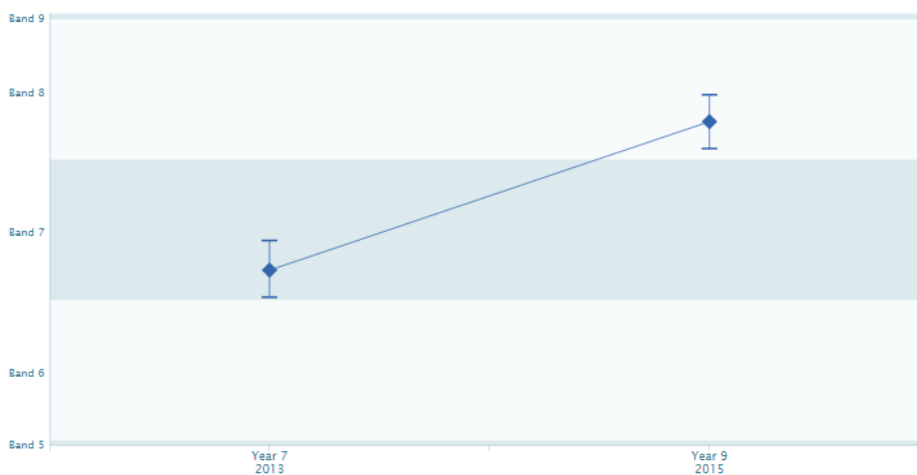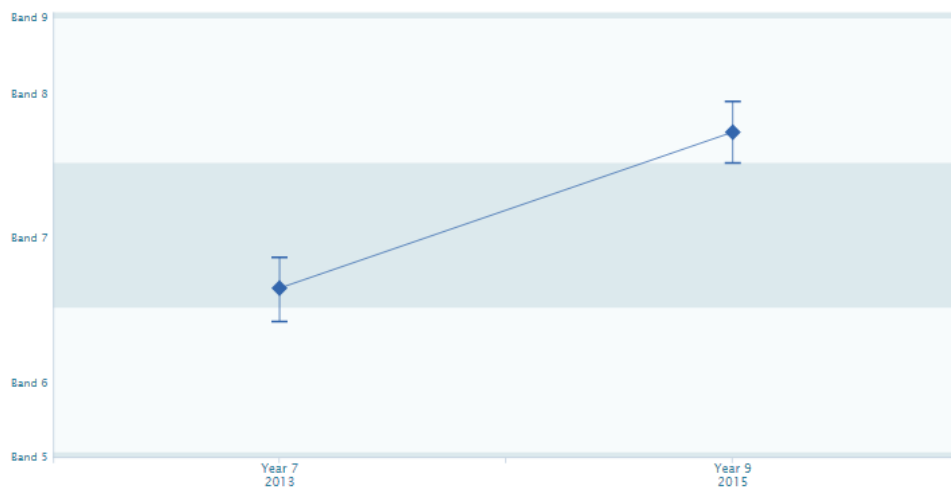
Numeracy

Figure 5-4: School A, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

School B

In 2012, School B had an enrolment of 1050 male students. In 2015, its enrolment was 1049, a negligible difference.

The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:
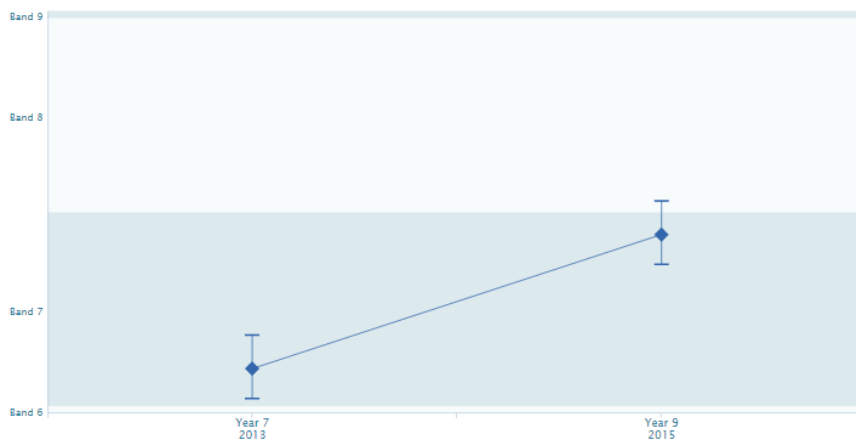
Reading

Figure 5-5: School B, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015
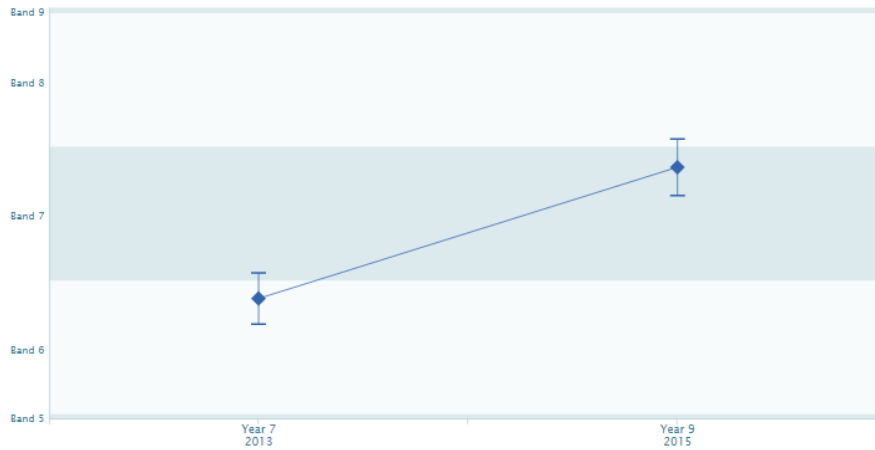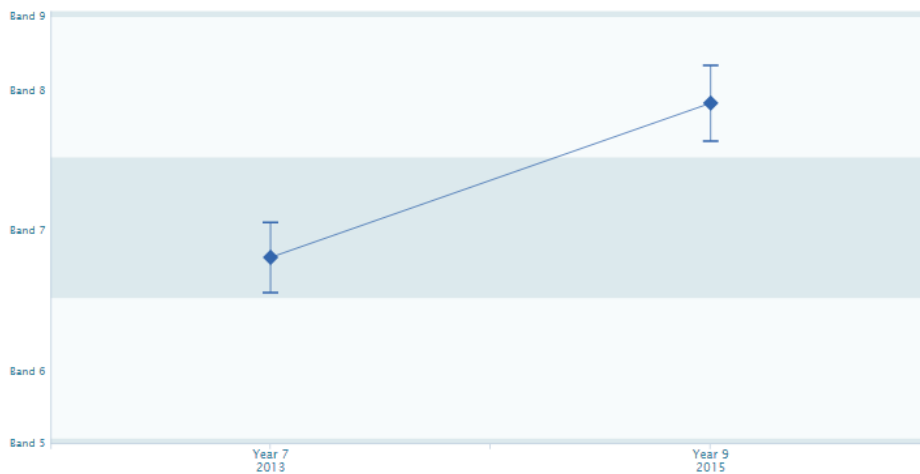
Writing

Figure 5-6: School B, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015
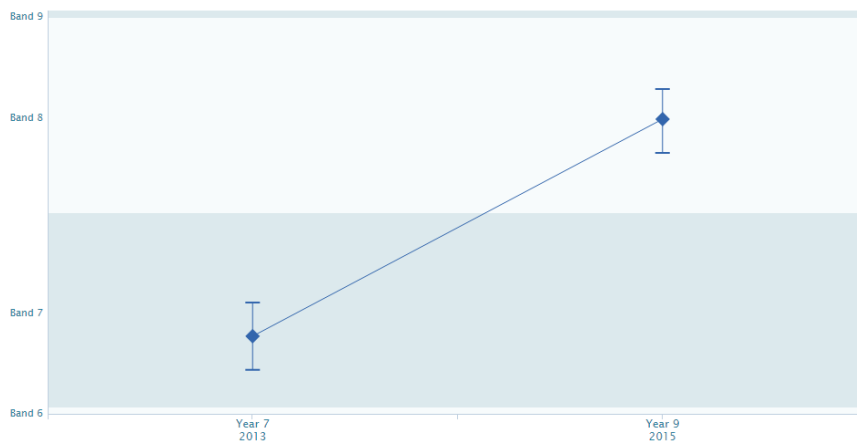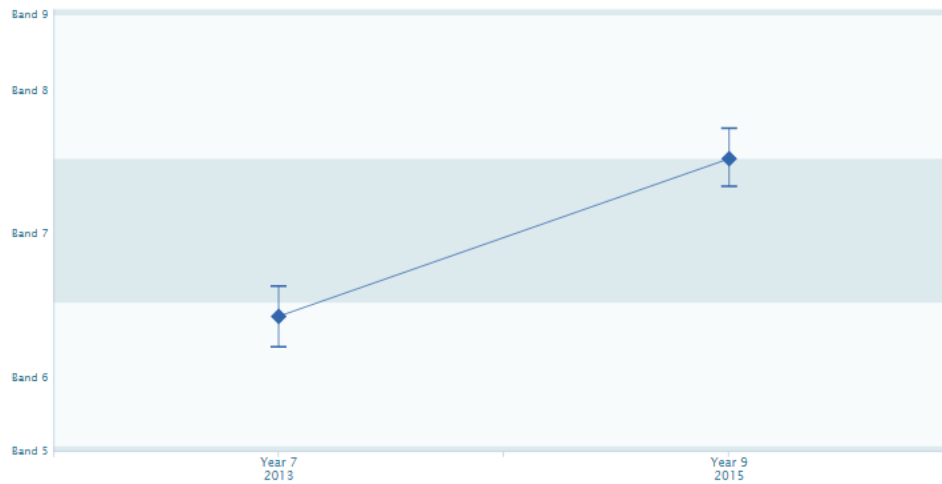
Numeracy

Figure 5-7: School B, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

School C

In 2012, School C had an enrolment of 513 male students. In 2015, its enrolment

was 493, a decline in enrolments.

The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:
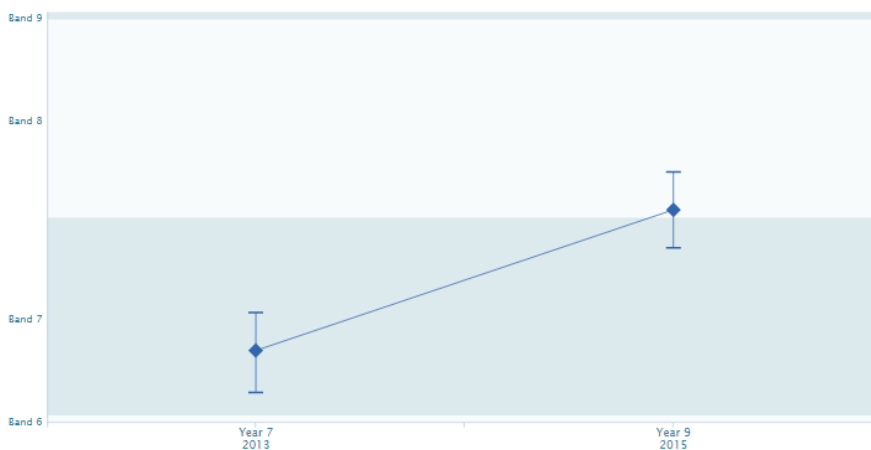
Reading

Figure 5-8: School C, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015

Writing

Figure 5-9: School C, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015

Numeracy

Figure 5-10: School C, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

School D

In 2012, School D had an enrolment of 524 female students. In 2015, its enrolment was 504, a decline in enrolments.

The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:

Reading

Figure 5-11: School D, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015
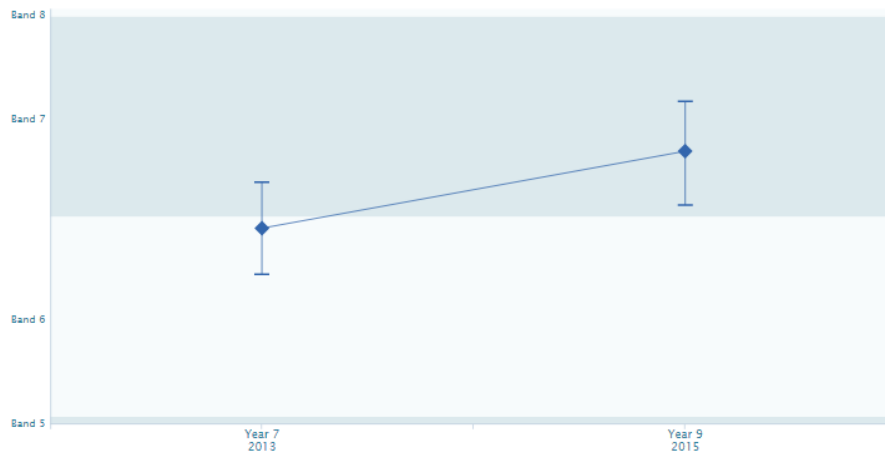
Writing

Figure 5-12: School D, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015

Numeracy

Figure 5-13: School D, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

School E

In 2012, School E had an enrolment of 671 male students. In 2015, its enrolment was 708, a significant growth in enrolments.

The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:

<u>Reading</u>

Figure 5-14: School E, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015

<u>Writing</u>

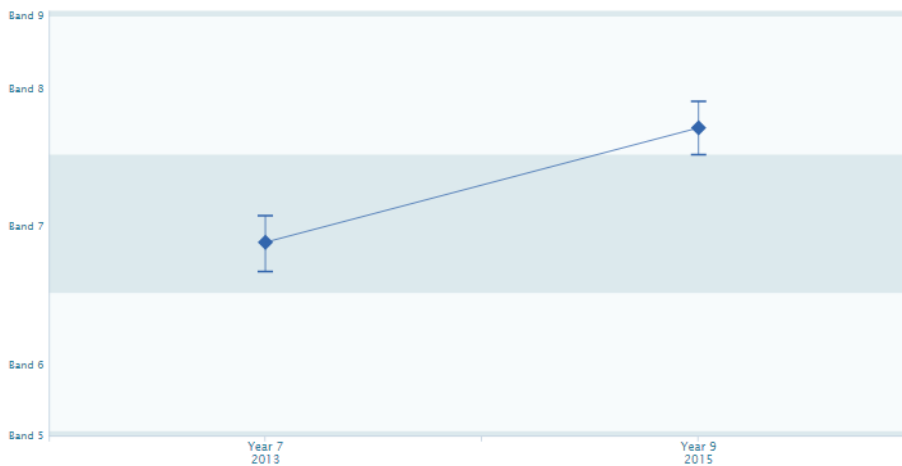**Figure 5-15: School E, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015**

Numeracy

Figure 5-16: School E, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

School F

In 2012, School F had an enrolment of 561 male students. In 2015, its enrolment was 600, a significant growth in enrolments.

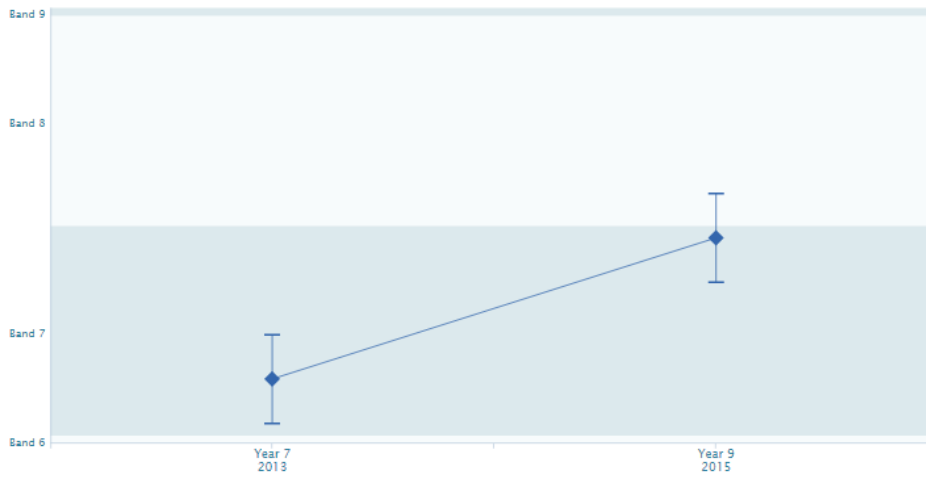The student gain data for Year 7 (2013) to Year 9 (2015) is as follows:

Reading

Figure 5-17: School F, Year 7 to 9, Gain in reading 2013-2015
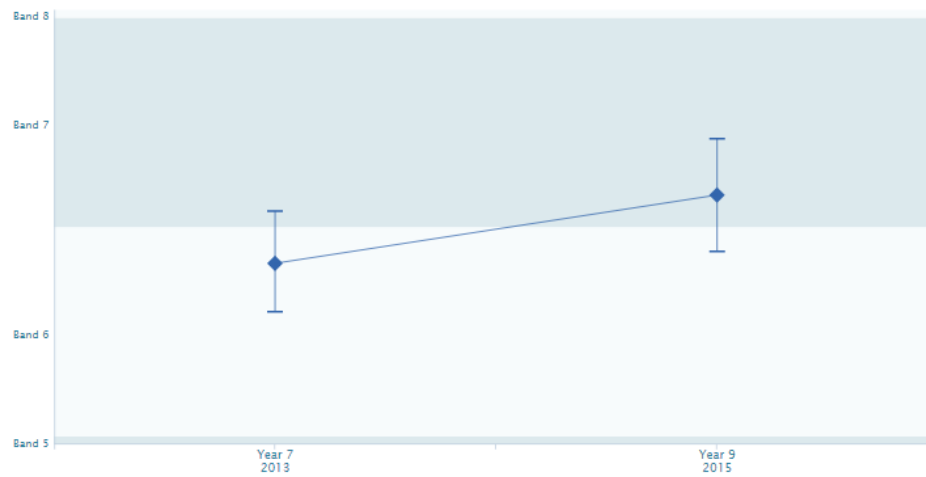
<u>Writing</u>

Figure 5-18: School F, Year 7 to 9, Gain in writing 2013-2015
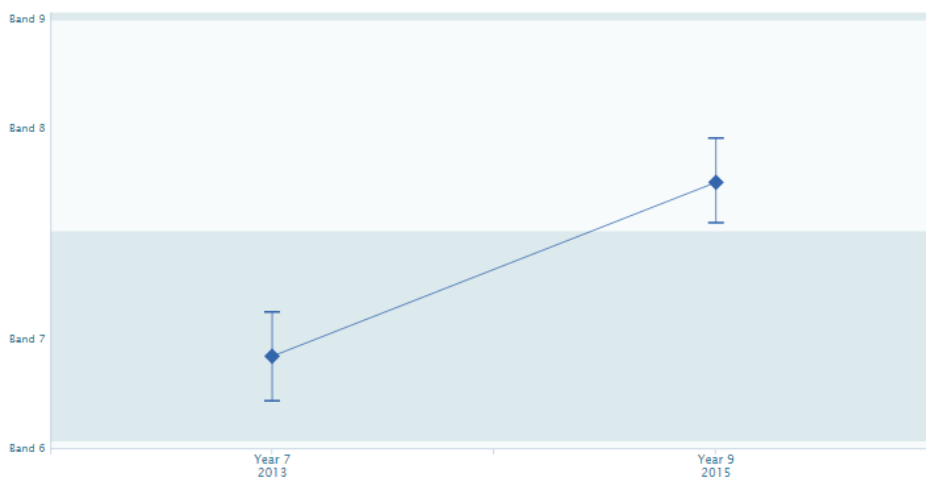
<u>Numeracy</u>

Figure 5-19: School F, Year 7 to 9, Gain in numeracy 2013-2015

The student gain data would suggest teachers were effective in actualising growth in literacy and numeracy for students in their classes. Whether this was directly attributable to the SSII is question for further quantitative research.

The enrolment data would suggest the SSII may have had an effect on the arrested decline in enrolments in these six schools and in fact, contributed towards growth in School E and F; School E was the school with the highest indigenous enrolment. More research would be needed to identify all of the factors that assisted in arresting enrolment decline; however, it could be argued the SSII, a significant school reform, assisted in improving the learning culture of the six schools.

Additionally, what is of even greater significance, each of the six schools continued to self-fund the SIML after funding by the MCSS had ceased. Staffing is a precious resource in all schools, and the fact that six Principals re-arranged their human resource budgets to accommodate a SIML is of profound interest and significance. A further longitudinal study in these six schools in the post-MCSS funding period, would further describe the narrative of the SSII and the influence of a SIML on improving teaching practice.

5.5   Conclusion

A collection of four inter-related central propositions have emerged as the significant findings of this study. The main problem investigated in this dissertation was the perspectives that system leaders, school leaders and teachers have on the system-appointed school improvement middle leader's role in influencing secondary school teaching practice.

The Four Conditions that enable middle leaders in secondary schools to make a valuable contribution to the field of work nationally and globally around the engagement of expert teachers and coaches on school sites to support and assist teachers in the improvement of their pedagogy. It is recognised that whilst the engagement of a school improvement middle leader offered teachers many wonderful opportunities to learn, collaborate and improve their practice, concerns have been expressed about the careful planning that needs to go into the communication of a clear system vision for any initiative, the appointment of the SIMLs and their duties so that the SIMLs are seen as credible classroom practitioners and an exploration of each school's local needs as they all serve different communities.

It is argued in this dissertation that this extensive analysis of a system-initiated, large-scale reform initiative for under-performing secondary schools will offer new understandings to system leaders, principals and teachers in urban secondary schools about how to go about meeting the professional learning needs of all secondary school teachers so that they maximise student engagement and ultimately, improve student outcomes. Previous research into secondary school change literature suggests that one of the main reasons efforts to reform schools is impeded is that teachers resist change because they feel burdened or conflicted by the process. Based on the findings of this study, the proposed model focuses on realistic expectations concerning consideration being given to having a dedicated school improvement middle leader in a school who has to drive and monitor the pace of reform and the performance of teachers. It offers practical advice on problem solving, communication, and how to maximise collective staff identity and motivation.

In future systemic secondary school contexts where reform is the objective, four key theoretical propositions should be used in framing the thinking of the system leaders: a shared and well-understood vision for the intiative; a mutual commitment to adopting student-centred practices; quality, on-site professional learning in and out of the classroom; and the commitment of the middle leader to co-create and forge a shared identity with the staff. These elements were visually represented previously in Figure 5-1.

The introductory quote to this thesis challenges the reader to consider the cultural changes that need to occur for an organisation to transform (Hesselbein, 1999). In a secondary school within a school system, middle leaders appointed to the school to implement change and transform the school's learning culture, can look carefully at the Four Conditions the researcher has described, and use them to work more effectively with classroom teachers in their daily lived reality, and try to transform their practice, one classroom at a time.

5.6   Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation concentrates on a school improvement initiative led by a unique group of teacher leaders, the school improvement middle leaders, who were system-appointed staff within six system-identified, persistently underperforming schools. The findings of this study suggest that many more studies can be carried out using comparable methods locally, interstate and internationally. Comparative studies could be conducted in other secondary schools, even those that are not identified as underperforming, that wish to implement changes to their pedagogical practice. The strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of a particular school improvement initiative could be compared and put into practice.

Theoretical propositions in other areas might be guided by the findings of this study. System leaders and Principals who have to implement new policy/policies into school practice may have perspectives about the policy/policies, and consequently defer its/their implementation; as a result the school may not benefit from the policy/policies.

Studies could also be undertaken at other levels of the education sector. For example, Principals of primary schools might be invited to participate in similar studies, and the results used to improve the implementation of the study.

Internationally, this study bears resemblance to the one conducted by Freeman in 2007, in which he examined the approaches and effectiveness of internal and external change agents in building the capacity to implement a national improvement strategy in different schools. Freeman used respondent categories in his analysis, and summarised the key characteristics using a four-phase consultancy process. The characteristics of successful consultants included strong interpersonal skills: personal attributes and school experience, credible pedagogical technical skills, in addition to change management and consultancy skills. Like this study, the change agents in the Freeman study needed to demonstrate skills of listening, flexibility, understanding pressures on teachers, sharing their own problems, acknowledging failure, having the ability to move people forward 'without belittling them', and finding ways to work with, or work around, resistant teachers and heads of department.

Evidence from the perspective of respondents on the six school sites in the present study revealed agreement on the characteristics of highly effective school improvement middle leaders; they were collaborative, inspiring, enthusiastic and motivating. They also had the skills to build relationships based on trust, and

demonstrated flexibility. They had a credible knowledge of their subject area and of teaching, including current educational research. These school improvement middle leaders were seen to be strong advocates for their schools, able to promote the needs of the teachers who constitute the collective. They provided high quality training and support, which enabled teachers to apply new strategies in their own classroom.

This thesis has provided a fulsome analysis of teacher and leader perspectives on the implementation of a school improvement initiative in the secondary school sector. It is anticipated the results from this research will offer new insights to system leaders, principals and teachers in large, urban secondary schools. It is hoped the findings will provide opportunities for ongoing support and on-site professional learning to teachers who aspire to deliver enriched educational opportunities to our future secondary students who will then be able to take their place in society as critical and creative thinkers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Role Description for School improvement middle leader in the MCSS

POSITION TITLE: School improvement middle leader (SIML)

REPORTS TO: The Principal

PURPOSE OF ROLE

The role exists to improve the quality of teaching within secondary schools to maximise student-learning outcomes.

The school improvement middle leader will model and promote contemporary learning principles, including eLearning. In particular, the SIML will implement and account for initiatives relating to teaching and learning that derive from the National Partnership Agreements and the MCSS Learning Framework. The SIMLwill be a member of the College Leadership Team and co-lead with this team in driving the College's Annual Improvement goals.

This is a system-based appointment, with accountabilities to the school principal.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE PRINCIPAL

1. **Ensures the implementation of the vision of Catholic Education as expressed in the *Building on Strength* Strategic Leadership and Management Plan by:**

    1.1 Promoting the Archdiocesan Vision and Mission formally and informally in day-to-day professional accountabilities, tasks and responsibilities;

    1.2 Actively promoting the integration of Catholic values across the curriculum; and

    1.3 Evaluating and monitoring teaching and learning practices to ensure students' experiences, including their home and culture, are valued and respected.

2. **Ensures the promotion of school learning cultures in accordance with 21st Century Learning Principles by:**

    2.1 Working closely with KLA coordinators to identify the best strategies and opportunities to maximise student learning;

    2.2 Promoting and modelling classroom strategies that maximise student learning and incorporate principles of contemporary learning (including eLearning);

    2.3 Exploring a range of structures and practices, which support and promote improved pedagogy and teaching practice in a practical way;

    2.4 Establishing professional learning communities within and across schools;

2.5   Supporting teachers in identifying new experiences for their continual professional development; and

2.6   Developing a school-wide approach to the differentiation of the curriculum to cater for English as second language (ESL), Gifted and Talented and Special Needs students.

3. **Contributes to building the capacity of teachers by:**

3.1   Modelling collegial practices for evaluating and sharing best practice in teaching strategies, professional knowledge and practice;

3.2   Critically reviewing research on best practice in teaching and learning to assist colleagues to further develop their teaching expertise;

3.3   Initiating strategies for developing a climate for accepting and providing constructive feedback and recognition of achievement, including student voice; and

3.4   Mentoring teachers through sharing ideas about the creation, selection and use of appropriate teaching strategies and resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) and other techniques to make content meaningful to individuals and groups of students.

4. **Contributes to the development of leadership by:**

4.1   Working with (selected) Key Learning Area (KLA) coordinators to assist them in their own improvement in educational leadership;

4.2   Making significant contributions to educational policy and practice at the school and in wider professional contexts;

4.3   Organising, promoting and delivering professional development through participation in professional networks; and

4.4   Consistently, systematically and critically reviewing all aspects of practice to inform and improve student learning.

5. **Manages the collection of school data required to demonstrate evidence based teaching by:**

5.1   Supporting teachers in the analysis of the HSC/SC/NAPLAN student and school performance data;

5.2   Monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify areas where support is required;

5.3   Assisting teachers in the design and implementation of intervention strategies for students at risk and requiring support; and

5.4   Informing target-setting for improved student outcomes.

6. **Contributes to the effective promotion of pedagogy across the Archdiocese through:**

6.1   Participating in communities of practice across the National Partnership Agreement schools, and sharing initiatives and learnings across the Archdiocese;

6.2   Engaging in continuous professional learning with the curriculum team;

6.3 Supporting and liaising with advisers/leaders of pedagogy across the archdiocese;

6.4 Collaborating with regional consultants and advisers in the development, implementation and presentation of curriculum policies/issues; and

6.5 Assisting teachers to integrate an analysis of student assessment data into overall program evaluation to inform and improve teaching and learning programs.

Signed: _____   _____

   [Name]   [Name]

     School improvement middle leader   School Principal

Date: _____   Date:_____

QUALIFICATIONS

Essential Criteria:

- Excellent tertiary qualifications in Education

- Experience in a middle management position

- A flexible and professional approach to school improvement initiatives

- Ability and demonstrated experience in initiating and managing complex projects.

- Working with Children Check clearance

- First Aid Certification

Desirable Criteria:

- Preference will be given to applicants who have applied for accreditation with the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) at the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher level, and who are currently involved in an evidence-based submission process, including external observation.

- Post graduate qualification/s, such as a Master of Education or Master Educational Leadership

- Post graduate qualifications in Gifted Education, Special Education or ESL.

- Proven skills in the use of the Cloudshare learning management system (Drive, Sites, Teacher Dashboard) and Sentral Welfare Database (Personal learning plans, reporting and markbook)

- Availabilty to be at school during some school holiday periods in order to meet the requirements of her/his role, being a member of the Leadership Team

- Demonstrable support of the College by attending functions outside of school hours, and representing the Principal when necessary.

Appendix B. Interview/Survey Questions

Does a system-sponsored and resourced, school-based pedagogical initiative influence teaching practice?

1. Identifying questions:

    1.1. What would best describe your position in the school (system)?

    1.2. What is your teaching subject area(s)?

    1.3. How long have you worked in this school (system)?

2. To what extent was change in teacher practice evident?

    2.1. Please describe to the best of your ability how your teaching practice has improved over the last three years?

    2.2. Who was responsible for or initiated this?

    2.3. How did they accomplish that?

    2.4. Do you have any specific examples of changes or programs that had a positive impact on improving teaching practice? Please describe.

    2.5. Describe how teaching and learning is changing in your school right now.

        2.5.1. What is the purpose of the changes?

        2.5.2. What procedures or guidelines are followed?

        2.5.3. What is the greatest change you have seen in your teaching and the learning of students?

3. What did the SIML do to influence practice?

    3.1. What is the role of the school improvement middle leader?

    3.2. What did the school improvement middle leader do to influence teaching practice?

    3.3. Are teachers involved with the school improvement middle leader as individuals?

    3.4. Can you give any examples of when you worked with together with teachers and school improvement middle leader on a project?

    3.5. What is the role of the principal in the secondary school improvement initiative?

4. What factors in the school aSSIIted or hindered the school improvement middle leader in influencing teaching practice?

5. What factors in the MCSS aSSIIted the school improvement middle leader in influencing teaching practice?

    5.1. How did the training offered by the MCSS prepare the school improvement middle leader for working in schools?

    5.2. Did networking with other school improvement middle leaders help or hinder your work in schools?

Appendix C. Sample of Data Coded for Student-Centred Learning (using Nvivo 11)

Name: Student-Centred Learning
Coding Description: Differentiation, Student-Centred Approach, Personalisation, Engagement strategies

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\FP> - § 2 references coded [0.99% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 0.32% Coverage
The first thing we had to do was to say we've got to teach in a way that engages students.
Reference 2 - 0.68% Coverage
So what we have today - back to the question - is a pedagogy in Stage 4 that's deeply embedded now which is about integration of curriculum with a really high, high, high focus on engaging kids

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\DP> - § 4 references coded [5.81% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 1.80% Coverage
In general, as a maths teacher, I've incorporated a lot of differentiation into my program so that I'm differentiating for the varying abilities of the kids in the class.
Reference 2 - 2.75% Coverage
I obviously use different technologies that are appropriate - program software et cetera that are appropriate to the topics that we're using, that are appropriate to the needs of the kids, to help them further develop their abilities and love of maths as well.
Reference 3 - 0.62% Coverage
it's about trying to personalise the learning for each kid.
Reference 4 - 0.64% Coverage
In this school, a lot of work has gone into differentiation.
<Internals\\Individual interviews\\FSIML> - § 1 reference coded [5.44% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 5.44% Coverage
whilst I was aware three years ago, for the need to target set individually with students, set individual goals with students, and really create a differentiated learning environment, it's now become even more apparent through all the research that I've done that that's the way to go. That's the way that you meet the students' needs and also in myself, knowing the different types of pedagogies
for the different learners within the classroom.
<Internals\\Individual interviews\\FCC> - § 2 references coded [5.82% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 3.21% Coverage
I came from a very structured environment where it was really stand and deliver, a really teacher centred model approach and moved away from that to looking for other ways to find hooks for students, to find things that are going to be more interesting to them.
Reference 2 - 2.62% Coverage
that's what I would say has been my biggest movement and putting things online so that students can self-pace, but can also go over things a little bit easier later on...It's a bit of a flipped classroom approach.
<Internals\\Individual interviews\\FE> - § 2 references coded [5.08% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 1.75% Coverage
In terms of pedagogical approaches, making it far more student and group centred
Reference 2 - 3.33% Coverage

Each person can be assigned their different role, and they are comfortable in that way and they engage more than kids at my previous school would have.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\AM> - § 1 reference coded [5.35% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 5.35% Coverage

I think probably the main difference is I try to be less visible in the classroom now than I did three years ago. I think my best classes now are classes that are set up to ultimately be a little bit more self contained. In that I provide direction, I provide help, I provide – I actually teach the content and that - but I do try to put the onus back on the students to help each other and work together and a lot more group work.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\BM> - § 2 references coded [5.43% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.06% Coverage

so a SMART Board is something that I've been using I'd say for a good eight years. But the fact that it's interactive and it engages the students

Reference 2 - 3.37% Coverage

I know how important that is in terms of making sure you identify those students that already know particular content, so that in terms of differentiation you can target them and make sure that they're not getting bored in the classroom.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\BP> - § 1 reference coded [0.29% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.29% Coverage

More student centred learning.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\ECC> - § 1 reference coded [1.58% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.58% Coverage

Student centred has always been a big thing [of] mine. So I haven't changed that dramatically from what I've done three years ago.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\AP> - § 1 reference coded [3.01% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.01% Coverage

She also helped with our differentiation a lot. We did a fair bit of study on digital games based learning after finding that the students here weren't engaged in mathematics all that well and not motivated.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\CSIML> - § 1 reference coded [3.57% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.57% Coverage

I actually was probably a lousy teacher before I did this job to be honest because of the – how I teach. So it's very, very much student centred learning now and especially with I suppose my discipline being history I was very - and teaching HSC as well, I was very, very much content-driven. Whereas now it is very much of how the students learn, so it's very much student centred learning.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\CP> - § 1 reference coded [1.70% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.70% Coverage

I would definitely believe that my lessons are more student centred and more listen to student voice and basically trying to meet the needs of the individual learner where they're at. I am personalising more than I did.

<Internals\\Individual interviews\\DM> - § 1 reference coded [2.57% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.57% Coverage

I think we're pushing a lot of pretesting now. I'll ask them what do you know or what can you tell me about this? I tend to make it more centred around the student. Student centred has been a change

<Internals\\Online survey\\Online School Survey> - § 13 references coded [2.14% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.04% Coverage

Student centred not teacher centred learning.

Reference 2 - 0.08% Coverage

The difference is that have been made perhaps a little more engaging and technology

Reference 3 - 0.20% Coverage

Evolving learning as needs change.

Reference 4 - 0.20% Coverage

Responding to identified student learning needs and on strong evidence based analysis of results

Reference 5 - 0.20% Coverage

dynamic, to meet student engagement

Reference 6 - 0.20% Coverage

Greater use of constructivist activites and improved feedback.

Reference 7 - 0.09% Coverage

Larger emphasis on classroom discussions

Reference 8 - 0.20% Coverage

More variety and understanding of the learner to allow for differences in the way students learn.

Reference 9 - 0.10% Coverage

There is a stronger focus on relfective practice for students and their learning

Reference 10 - 0.20% Coverage

everything is broken down more. we do written activities in pairs before doing them alone

Reference 11 - 0.20% Coverage

More focused on student achievement

Reference 12 - 0.20% Coverage

Greater reliance on technologies as both an instrument to deliver curriculum and monitor student progress and achievement.

Reference 13 - 0.20% Coverage

All students have apple macs - email is the principal form of communication, feedback on tasks, etc.