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Middle leadership for improved learning outcomesPeter Grootenboer*Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Gold Coast, QLD, Australia*

It is well known that leadership is critical for educational reform and this is no less the case in promoting mathematics education development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. In general, the literature related to leadership focuses on the role and practices of principals, and indeed their work is crucial, but they are often limited in their capacity to actually make a difference in the classroom. Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) found that the “principal effects on student outcomes were small and indirect” (p. 51), and, “teachers have the greatest impact upon student learning of all ‘educational variables’”. However, unlike principals, middle leaders are positioned much closer to the classroom, and so have opportunities to ‘lead social transformation’

While learning occurs in a range of sites within and outside the school, the classroom is where all the intentions and requirements of the curriculum meet learners, and it is where the effects of decisions made by principals and educational leaders have to be interpreted and enacted. It is the teacher that is the interface between the curriculum and learners, and so all the educational decisions made ‘before or above’ to the classroom site, they are always mediated through the teacher. In the classroom the intentions for social transformation and equity are actioned and realised (or not) with learners.

With this in mind, it is clear that middle leaders are critical in the development of quality educational outcomes because they exercise their leading in and around classrooms. Middle leaders are those who have an acknowledged position of leadership in their school, but also have a significant teaching role (e.g., senior teachers, faculty heads) (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, in press). Also, middle leaders can more directly impact classroom practices, and so they can be ‘transformation’ leaders through the core business of schooling - learning and teaching.

The focus here is on a number of schools where attention was given to their middle leaders in order to bring about improved mathematical learning outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. Professional development and support was provided for middle leaders, who in turn led the development of mathematics pedagogy in their particular sites. To develop and enhance the pedagogy in mathematics across their classrooms the middle leaders engaged in a process of *Action Learning* that allowed them to improve the quality of teaching and learning through a data-driven, site-based, collaborative approach.