



**Reviewing the Multi-layered Work of Middle Leaders:  
A Hong Kong Study**

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Conventionally, the work of middle leaders in schools has focused on managerial tasks of subject area administration. More recently, research in the field of educational leadership suggest the potential of middle leaders in leading innovative practice, participating in school-wide leadership and engaging the professional and local communities beyond the school. This conception of middle leadership requires of senior leaders, teachers and MLs themselves a significant shift in understanding the nature of school MLs' work: a change in focus from managing to leading. However, the research base on secondary school middle leadership is very limited, typically focusing on MLs' subject area responsibilities, formal job preparation, and issues of hierarchy and influence within schools, the last of which may have particular significance in high power distance societies. This study aims to address two research questions: What opportunities do middle leaders in Hong Kong secondary schools have to engage in the three levels of leadership? What challenges and tensions do they face when doing so? It does so by reviewing the international literature on middle leadership. It then examines what is known of middle leadership in the Hong Kong context in order to frame a qualitative analysis of the work of middle leaders across three dimensions of leadership: teaching and learning, school capacity building and external work beyond the school proper (c.f. Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Gurr 2015).