



## Perceptions of the Role of Primary Mathematics Leaders

Kate Copping

*University of Melbourne*

<kcopping@unimelb.edu.au>

This paper reports the initial stage of a research project examining how primary mathematics leadership is conceptualised and experienced and discusses findings regarding teachers and leaders' understanding of primary mathematics leadership.

Primary mathematics leadership has become a focus for improving the teaching of mathematics within Australian primary schools. Improving teacher capacity and confidence in teaching mathematics is a priority as mathematics and numeracy performance in national and international testing have generally remained unchanged in the last 15–20 years (ACARA, 2017). One initiative designed to improve teacher competency and confidence in mathematics has been to appoint mathematics leaders as part of the leadership team in primary schools. This aims to support generalist teachers in improving mathematics teaching and learning within schools (State of Victoria, 2017).

A key factor in the work of middle level subject leaders is the middle leader's expertise as a teacher and in the subject matter that they are teaching (Harris, 2009). The nature of the role means they are working both with and between the school leaders and teachers, strategically implementing school goals and influencing what happens in classrooms. The role of middle leaders is critical to the successful implementation of improved practices in mathematics, connecting the vision of the school to the enacted curriculum at the classroom level (Jorgensen, 2016). There are currently no guidelines or standards in place to support the complex and multi-faceted roles and responsibilities of primary mathematics leaders. The challenge therefore for practising primary mathematics leaders is to understand their own role and to develop their leadership skills in a context where there is often little guidance.

Teachers and mathematics leaders were surveyed online about their conceptions of primary mathematics leadership. There were approximately 60 respondents. Analysis of the survey data for the question "What do you think mathematics leadership is?" saw recognition of the complexity of the role and highlighted a clear need for expertise in primary mathematics content and pedagogical content knowledge. Five themes emerged via inductive analysis, reflecting the perceptions of the respondents: culture, knowledge expertise, administration/management, teacher development, and student learning and assessment. These themes show alignment with previous research on middle level leadership (De Nobile, 2017).

## References

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA]. (2017). *NAPLAN achievement in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy: National report for 2017*. ACARA.
- De Nobile, J. (2017). Towards a theoretical model of middle leadership in schools. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(4), 395–416.
- Harris, A. (2009). Distributed leadership: What we know. In A. Harris, & K. Leithwood (Eds.), *Distributed leadership: Different perspectives* (pp. 11–21). Springer.
- Jorgensen, R. (2016). Middle leadership: A key role of numeracy reform. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 21(3), 32–37.
- State of Victoria. (2017). *Literacy and numeracy strategy*. Department of Education and Training.