INFLUENCE OF MIDDLE LEADERSHIP IN PROMOTING TEACHER CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
PERSPECTIVES FROM MIDDLE LEADERS IN SINGAPORE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education of The University of Western Australia

Graduate School of Education

2018
I, Goh Sock Pio, certify that:

This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in the degree.

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Date: 22 August 2018
ABSTRACT

The study reported in this thesis aimed to formulate a set of propositions regarding the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have concerning the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. This study is positioned in terms of middle leaders’ ‘perspectives’, a notion that represents what middle leaders think, believe and conceptualise with regard to their leadership roles in teacher continuing professional development, and the resulting actions, orientations, dispositions and attitudes they adopt when promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools.

Qualitative methods have been used for data collection and analysis. Data were collected from 13 middle leaders from different primary schools over a series of individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Analysis was based on the methods of data reduction, data displays and drawing conclusions.

A set of two interrelated theoretical propositions has emerged as the central finding of this study: (i) In regard to continuing professional development in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development from the perspectives of middle leaders; (ii) In regard to continuing professional development in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspectives of middle leaders.

It is anticipated that this comprehensive analysis of middle leaders’ perspectives on teacher continuing professional development will offer new insights to policy makers, educators and professional practitioners in Singapore with a view to generating on-going support and professional development in creating a holistic education system that provides each student with a broad and deep foundation for a lifelong learning journey.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Applied Learning Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>AST</td>
<td>Academy of Singapore Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCE</td>
<td>Character and Citizenship Education</td>
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<td>CONNECT</td>
<td>Continuity, Experience and Commitment in Teaching Plan</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edu-Pac</td>
<td>Education Service Professional Development and Career Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPMS</td>
<td>Enhanced Performance Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXCO</td>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>GROW</td>
<td>Growth, Recognition, Opportunities and Well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>INSET</td>
<td>IN-Service Education and Training</td>
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<td>KP</td>
<td>Key Personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAMPplus</td>
<td>Enhanced Leadership and Management Programme</td>
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<td>LGM</td>
<td>Leader Growth Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Level Head</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLP</td>
<td>Learning for Life Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Medical Certificate (Medical Leave)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>Management and Leadership in Schools Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIE</td>
<td>National Institute of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPAL</td>
<td>One Portal All Learners</td>
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<td>PCDM</td>
<td>Professional Development Continuum Model</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
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<td>PSLE</td>
<td>Primary School Leaving Examinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Reporting Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>Subject Head</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>School Management Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>School Staff Developer</td>
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<td>STEM</td>
<td>Skilful Teaching Enhanced Mentoring programme</td>
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<td>TE&lt;sup&gt;21&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Teacher Education Model for the 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Century</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>TGM</td>
<td>Teacher Growth Model</td>
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<td>TLC-FA</td>
<td>Teacher Learning Communities focusing on Formative Assessment</td>
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<td>TLLM</td>
<td>Teach Less, Learn More Movement</td>
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<td>TLP</td>
<td>Total Learning Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSLN</td>
<td>Thinking Schools, Learning Nation Vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTT</td>
<td>Time-tabled Time</td>
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<td>TWA</td>
<td>Teacher Work Attachment programme</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction
The study reported in this thesis aims to develop theoretical propositions regarding the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have on their roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development (CPD) in schools and as agents translating policies into practice. Developments of a knowledge-based society have led to major transformations in the role of education worldwide. Correspondingly, these global shifts also highlighted the need for Singapore to reshape its education system. In Singapore, the shift in strategic paradigm was encapsulated in the *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (Goh, 1997) vision that was announced in 1997. A series of nation-wide initiatives ensued as the Singapore education system entered a new era. With this new vision, teacher quality was acknowledged as a key determinant of quality education.

There has since been an increase in reports of empirical studies in research journals and academic literature related to the topic of teacher quality. Essentially, the literature highlights reasons for pressing forward with the concept of teacher continuing professional development (CPD) to enhance teacher quality. The common implication in the literature is that teacher quality is one of the key factors in enhancing student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Harris & Sass, 2011; Hattie, 2003). Besides benefits realised by students, the literature also identifies continuing professional development of teachers as a crucial aspect in ensuring the effectiveness of educational reforms and school improvement. To cope with educational changes, research on school development has called for a paradigm shift in the field of teacher development, placing teachers at the centre of the learning process. The focus has also shifted from the development of individual teachers to the development of schools as institutions. The central concept points to schools as learning organizations where the beliefs, values and norms of people are brought together in support of sustained learning.
To support educational changes, systems and structures in Singapore were established by devolving more autonomy to schools to encourage innovation and to cater to a wider variety of interests and aptitudes in students. This resulted in a series of new strategies that involved creating flatter and more collaborative organizational structures, with more opportunities for teacher involvement. This movement called for a more distributed form of leadership to be practised in schools. Consequently, more middle leadership positions were created to support school principals and with that, the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders have also evolved.

Although there is an increasing range of literature and studies that examine different aspects of teacher development, the available literature indicates an explicit lack of empirical work conducted on teacher continuing professional development in Singapore, particularly in primary schools. There is a need to address the influence of middle leaders on teacher continuing professional development in Singapore. This is due to the fact that their work now requires them to be at the forefront of leading learning not just for students, but also for teachers. In the light of these developments, pursuing empirical work to investigate middle leaders’ perspectives on continuing professional development in practice and the influence of middle leadership in helping to promote continuing professional development in local school context is critical.

Focussing on the potential issues and concerns that are likely to arise from the situation described in the preceding section, this study aims to empirically investigate the perspectives of middle leaders on continuing professional development and their influence in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools. As such, the study is framed around the following key research question:

What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

The use of interpretivist, inductive qualitative research methodology to collect and analyse data to formulate theoretical propositions regarding this research
focus are described and justified throughout this thesis. As a result, authorities involved in policy design, development and implementation; as well as teacher practitioners, can benefit from local empirically based research findings and recommendations. The findings are particularly relevant in the light of the fact that teacher continuing professional development will continue to be Ministry of Education’s key thrust in enabling teachers to fulfil a holistic education system that provides each student with a broad and deep foundation for a lifelong learning journey.

This chapter presents an overview of the study reported in this thesis and does so by organising it into three sections. The first provides a brief contextual and conceptual background to the study. The second section outlines the central research problem. The third elaborates the theoretical framework with regards to the research methods employed for data collection and analysis.

1.2 Contextual Background
Since becoming a sovereign state in 1965, the education landscape in Singapore has been undergoing transformational change. Education has been central to building both Singapore’s economy and nation. A country devoid of natural resources, Singapore relies heavily on the development of human capital to strive as a nation. It is with this belief that Singapore is consistently driving towards enhancing the quality of its education system through the preparation and continuing professional development of its teaching force.

Singapore’s primary concern after its independence was to survive and to build a nation out of immigrants in the former British colony. The government embarked on a series of plans to reshape its education system, using it as a vehicle for nation building as well as a tool for building up skills base to serve the broader goals of economic development. To address the urgent issues of low student enrolment and mass unemployment, an education system that would equip the people with basic skills and made them employable in labour-intensive work was of paramount importance then. Free education was made available to all during this period. Teacher recruitment correspondingly increased as pupil enrolment surged. The strategy of large-scale recruitment of
teacher-in-training (1960 - 1963) at the then Teachers Training College – a central body that trained teachers, was employed in order to cope with the increasing demand for trained and qualified teachers.

As Singapore moved from fulfilment of quantitative demands to upgrading and providing quality education by the end of 1970s, a review of the education system with an emphasis on efficiency was undertaken in 1978 (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008). Major shifts in the earlier years saw a strictly state-initiated, top-down approach in planning, disseminating and enforcing of educational changes. Although this approach facilitated the prompt implementation of policies from headquarters down to the schools, it inevitably brought about a lack of autonomy and initiative, and a sense of detachment from policy makers among principals and teachers. Concerns over the impact of a top-down approach and increasing expectations of teachers and school leaders underscore the importance that the nation places on teacher professional growth and school leadership development in the post-1996 educational phases. This adds value to the research problem that frames the study reported in this thesis, namely the perspectives that middle leaders hold on teacher continuing professional development in Singapore.

The impact of globalisation in the late 1980s led to the culmination of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation vision in 1997 which signalled a new era for Singapore education system. The primary intent of the vision was to motivate Singaporeans to continually acquire new knowledge, learn new skills; gain higher levels of technological literacy; and embrace innovation, enterprise and risk-taking without losing their bearings or commitment to the local community and the nation. The Teach Less, Learn More (2005) movement which was launched in 2005 supports the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision by highlighting the shift in focus from ‘quantity’ to ‘quality’ in education. The movement catalysed the transformation of teaching and learning in schools, moving away from the traditional rote-learning and passive memorising of content to engaging students in building character through innovative and effective teaching approaches. One of the key areas of focus that guided the initiatives was Enabling Teachers (MOE, 2016a). This highlighted the Ministry of
Education’s (MOE) emphasis on teacher quality as a key determinant of quality education and teacher continuing professional development as an approach to enhance teacher quality.

To realise the vision of Thinking Schools, schools are now expected to translate educational policies, align them with the school vision to realise organisational excellence and produce the desired outcomes of education. These changes have a direct impact on school leadership. Having to juggle with more responsibilities, principals could no longer take sole authority in schools (Harris, 2003a). This called for more decision-making participation from the middle leaders in schools. Middle leaders have sometimes been described as the ‘human link’ (Chew, 2008, p. 135) between national education policy and the teaching staff and the key element of leadership and management in primary schools. One key competency required of middle leaders in the 21st century is the ability to look beyond departmental interests and be able to act as a channel of communications to cascade information from MOE and school leaders to teachers. Middle leaders also play a crucial role in creating a climate that promotes effective teaching and learning not just for students, but also for teachers.

As such, empirically investigating the central research problem of this study, which focuses on middle leaders’ perspectives regarding teacher continuing professional development in practice is of significance. The fundamental aim of this study is to formulate theoretical propositions regarding the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have of their roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools and as agents translating policies into practice. The findings and recommendations of this study have the potential to inform policy, praxis, continuing professional development and further research. The foregoing section of this introduction chapter positioned the study reported in this thesis within its contextual background. This will be revisited in greater depth in Chapter 2. The next section enumerates the conceptual framework that underpins the central research problem of this study.
1.3 Conceptual Background
Continuing professional development is not entirely a new concept in the field of education. Traditional notions of teacher development comprise in-service training such as workshops and short-term courses that offer teachers new information on a particular aspect of their work. This notion of professional development, however, has been criticised as having little impact on student outcomes and school improvement. Social, political and economic changes in the last decade have transformed the meaning and the orientation of the work of teachers. To cope with these changes, research on school development has called for a paradigm shift in the field of teacher development that places teachers in the centre of the learning process.

The literature is abundant reflecting multiple rationales for pressing forward with the concept of teacher continuing professional development. Extensive research over the years suggests that teacher quality is one of the key factors in student achievement. Besides benefits realised by students, the literature also identified professional development of teachers as a crucial aspect in ensuring the effectiveness of educational reforms and school improvement. Over the past two decades, an increasing volume of literature on teacher continuing professional development portrays the process as complex and challenging. The lack of a clear definition on what teacher continuing professional development really is within the literature makes it a challenging task to provide a comprehensive conceptual background with clearly demarked definitions of continuing professional development. This literature will be reviewed in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Attempts in the literature to define continuing professional development resulted in a myriad of descriptions about the nature an effective continuing professional development and explanations on the different aspects of continuing professional development that are considered imperative. As a result, there are significant variations in the models, approaches and modes of implementation of teacher continuing professional development that are adopted by education authorities.
In providing a conceptual background to the influence of middle leadership on teacher continuing professional development in schools, several significant developments in the concepts of teacher professionalism, teacher continuing professional development and middle leadership involvement in continuing professional development have to be noted. Firstly, the notion of teacher professionalism as a social construct that is subjected to geographical and cultural differences in interpretation is of significance. As a result, perspectives of teachers’ own professional identity determines their attitudes towards educational changes, the way they teach and develop as teachers. Secondly, the concept of continuing professional development as an interaction between individual and organisational goals; and elements that facilitates adult learning is fundamental in shaping the learning culture in schools. And lastly, middle leaders as change agents. They play a vital role in promoting continuing professional development by bridging the work of institutional leadership and the development of classroom teachers. The common factor in the policy to develop teachers to create a holistic education system that prepares students for the future world is the fundamental role of teacher continuing professional development within these policies. These developments have led to varying perspectives on what is considered an effective continuing professional development and on how middle leaders help in shaping the learning cultures in their schools.

Continuing professional development demands change or there is no true growth and development. However, the way teachers actually use knowledge gained from continuing professional development is often not taken into account. How teachers make their own meaning is crucial in terms of how the knowledge transforms their practice. Many research studies that examine perspectives of middle leaders were also quick to assume their receptivity to and understanding of continuing professional development in terms of its rationale and outcomes. In actuality, middle leaders need to understand what continuing professional development entails and how it applies to their daily work, school and education system for them to genuinely belief that they can effect change.
There is currently a lack of research done on how middle leaders locate themselves in educational reforms on continuing professional development, especially those in primary schools. It is, therefore, the aim of this study to uncover the perspectives of middle leaders with respect to their roles in continuing professional development, in particular implementation difficulties and issues they face as agents in translating policies into practice.

1.4 Research Methodology
This study was conceptualised within the interpretivist paradigm that assumes that reality is a human construct. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define a paradigm as ‘a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research’ (p. 24). At the core of the interpretivist paradigm is the importance placed on the perspectives of people as individuals. Interpretivists assert that in order to understand social reality, it is crucial to study how individuals interpret the world around them. This is because the interpretivists portray the social world as being subjective and social reality as being constructed and negotiated by individuals acting according to the perspectives they confer on the phenomena in their environment (Reid, 1986). Crucial to the aim of this study, interpretivists believe that an understanding of the context in any research is vital to the interpretation of data gathered (Willis, 2007).

The guiding principles of this study were developed based on a review of the literature. Due to the lack of empirical research in the field of study and in the local context, a qualitative case study design was selected so as to gain a deeper understanding of teacher continuing professional development at the operational level as it occurs in its natural setting. It was decided that the basic principles of qualitative epistemology and methodology were particularly suited to investigate the central research problem of this study regarding how middle leaders in Singapore primary schools perceive the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. Adopting a fundamentally interpretivist orientation for the conduct of this study allowed the focus to be positioned on the ‘personal face to professional life’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). The adoption of qualitative methods within a case
study research enabled the researcher to conceptualise how middle leaders in different primary school contexts perceive their roles in managing teacher continuing professional development. This provided a rich and deeper understanding of the phenomena in this study.

1.5 The Research Problem

The focus of this study is primary school middle leaders in the context of teacher continuing professional development. The purpose of the study was to address the question: What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools? Based on interviews with middle leaders, the study aimed to capture the reality of middle leadership and its influence on teacher continuing professional development.

Defining the research questions represents one of the most important steps to be taken in any empirical research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of the key criteria for the appropriate use of case study strategy remains in the type of research questions posed. Yin (1994) explains that case study research is most likely to be appropriate for studies seeking to answer the how and why questions, within the contexts of a study based on the perspectives of participants.

In pursuit of the main research question, a set of guiding questions was developed. These guiding questions were proposed at the inception of the study as they represented the interesting facets and foci of attention (Miles & Huberman, 1994) pertinent to the research focus and were viewed as being productive pointers to generate the richness of data important to the central research question. The data gathering process was therefore guided by the following questions:

Guiding research questions

1. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools understand by the term ‘continuing professional development’?
2. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think continuing professional development entails?

3. What are the intentions of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools towards continuing professional development?

4. What strategies do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools say they used to realise these intentions? What are the reasons they give for the strategies they used?

5. What is the importance of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What are the reasons they give for the significance which they attributed with these intentions and strategies?

6. What are the outcomes of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What reasons do they give for these expected outcomes?

7. What are the conditions that promote or impede continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools?

8. In what ways do the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think are factors that will help them to promote continuing professional development in their schools?

These questions were not designed to be answered specifically, but as a means to generate data. A number of further questions based on the above-mentioned guiding questions served as aide memoirs at the interview stage of the conduct of this study. The next section elaborates on the selection and characteristics of the study population.

1.6 Study Population

As is consistent with qualitative case study research, “purposive sampling” (Merriam, 2001; Punch, 2005; Yin, 2009) was employed to select the participants in this study. Purposive sampling was deemed most appropriate given the central and guiding research questions formulated, the time frame available and access to participants. In view of the above-mentioned issues, the identification of the study population proceeded as follows.

Participants for the study were chosen to reflect their roles in school. Data was collected from participants representing middle leaders in their schools. They
were recruited through personal contact by the researcher as building the interviewing relationship begins the moment the potential participant hears of the study (Seidman, 1991). They were invited to participate in in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews, but were under no pressure to accept. Inclusion criteria for the interviews were that the study participant:

- is currently working as a middle leader (Head of Department, Subject Head or Level Head) at a Singapore primary school;
- has worked as a middle leader (Head of Department, Subject Head or Level Head) at a Singapore primary school for at least three years;
- is willing to participate in an interview over the period of 12 to 18 months.

The first criterion was attended to as it enabled the researcher to find out the perspectives of middle leaders working in different Singapore primary schools. The second criteria was included as an attempt to find participants who had some informed knowledge of the background and development of teacher continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools. This criterion is important in that experienced middle leaders could then better provide insights into how continuing professional development is practised in schools.

To ensure diversity within the samples, 13 middle leaders from different Singapore primary schools were selected for this study. In total, 26 interviews were conducted. The issues of practicality and manageability limited participation selection. Where it was possible, the sample would aim to be as diverse as possible. Personal contact was used where possible, and where it was not possible, contact was made by email or telephone.

1.7 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected for this study is designed to formulate theoretical propositions regarding the perspectives of middle leaders on continuing professional development policies and their roles in supporting continuing professional development of teachers in their schools. As consistent with a key tenet of interpretivist qualitative research methodology, data were concurrently gathered and analysed for patterns and themes embedded in the
words of the participants. Thematic coding was employed for the study reported in this thesis as it involves exploring the particular perspectives of a group of educators with regards to notions of teacher continuing professional development.

Data obtained from the transcript of each interview were first sorted in order to conceptualise and develop propositions regarding the nature of continuing professional development in schools. During the first stage of coding, the entire segment of the transcript that reflected the participant’s response to the nature of continuing professional development and middle leadership was read thoroughly. Key words and phrases that were considered by the researcher to make meaning were identified during subsequent reading. These were then labelled with a theme. Multiple occurrences of these descriptive themes were uncovered in many instances. New descriptive codes were also added to reflect new themes. To help the researcher move from the empirical to the conceptual level, data were constantly refined and possible conclusions noted as data were being analysed. In keeping with the practice in interpretative, inductive qualitative research data analysis, memoing was carried out at each level of inferential coding in order to capture the researcher’s thinking process, ideas and interpretations. This led to the formulation of the main theoretical propositions that would address the central research question.

Upon completion of coding for each transcript, recurring themes were grouped into smaller number of sets to form overarching themes through pattern coding. This level of coding captures the more abstract issues and concerns. Generic sub-theoretical propositions, which encapsulated the inferential codes, were developed; making new connections between the categories that arose from the two stages of coding. These sub-theoretical propositions were then embedded into a conjunction of two main interrelated theoretical propositions that reflect the key perspective of middle leaders regarding continuing professional development and middle leadership. This process of data analysis and the generation of propositions will be fully explained and exemplified in Chapter 4.
1.8 Conclusion
This chapter set out to present an overview of the study reported in this thesis. This was done by firstly, outlining the contextual and conceptual background to the conduct of this study. Next, global and local issues and concerns that informed the formulation of the central research problem, the main research question and the guiding questions were enumerated. This was followed by a discussion of the rationale behind identifying the participant samples provided. This led to the disclosure of the research methodology appropriate to generating theoretical propositions related to the central research problem. Finally, a brief description of the method by which data was analysed was provided by way of introduction.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides the background and outlines the local historical, social, political and economic contexts within which the study is conducted and in which the teacher development policy is set. Chapter 3 presents the conceptual background that frames and positions the research focus of this study. Chapter 4 focuses on the central research problem and how an appropriate research methodology to gather and analyse data is determined. This chapter also provides samples of the coding processes employed in the formulation of the main theoretical propositions. Chapters 5 and 6 reveal analysis of the data as two interrelated theoretical propositions building theory on the perspectives of middle leaders regarding continuing professional development policies and their roles in supporting continuing professional development of teachers in their schools. Chapter 7 comprises the summary of findings, the limitations of this study and recommendation for policy, practice and further research related to practitioner’s perspectives on policy and their impact on praxis.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction
This chapter analyses the relevant contextual literature that shapes the study reported in this research that is framed around the following key research question:

What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

The emergence of the information era and the establishment of a knowledge-based society have led to a major transformation in the role of education worldwide. The need for a knowledge society with life-long learners, capable of transforming and revitalising organisations, was quickly recognised by education systems around the world (Aspin et al., 2012; Coffied, 1996; Hake, 1999; Jarvis, 2007; Senge, 1997). These global shifts resulted in a series of educational reforms in various aspects of education. Among them is teacher continuing professional development. The concept of teachers as learners has since been widely recognised as of crucial significance to educational reforms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1995; Kwo & Intrator, 2004) around many parts of the world, including Singapore.

The study reported here aims to offer a greater understanding of continuing professional development (CPD) in practice by examining the perspectives held by middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. Such an investigation will help to uncover the influence of middle leadership and the challenges faced by middle leaders in helping to promote continuing professional development in local school context in Singapore. The study also seeks to contribute to, and to close a gap in the existing literature in this field by examining the relationship between policy and practice, and assessing middle leadership as a potential mediating factor in these relationships.

The role of middle leaders in Singapore has evolved significantly over the past decades due to rapid changes in the education scene and increased accountability at the leadership level in schools. The term ‘middle leaders’ or
commonly known as ‘middle managers’ in the Singapore school context refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools (Heng & Marsh, 2009). Their role is of a dual nature in such that it includes managerial responsibilities and classroom teaching. In Singapore, middle leadership encompasses roles such as heads of department, year heads, subject and level heads. In a typical primary school, at the apex of the school organisation structure is the senior management team comprising the school principal and vice-principals. Reporting to these senior leaders are the middle leaders, followed by the classroom teachers.

With the move in Singapore schools to create flatter organisational structures and to encourage school-based development and innovation, middle leaders are now at the forefront of leading learning and improving student outcomes. During the past decade, the roles of middle leaders have become more complex in nature. They now have a key role in creating a climate that promotes effective teaching and learning not just for students but also for teachers. Middle leaders are expected to develop the department and its teachers; they are also responsible for ensuring school success in comparison with other schools at a national level (Chew, 2008).

This chapter provides a comprehensive contextual background with regard to the key elements framing the research problem. The first part of the contextual literature review presents the development of the education landscapes in Singapore to illustrate how it has evolved with changing national and global circumstances. Next, the interaction between of Singapore educational reforms and teacher continuing professional development is discussed. This is followed by an examination of the influence of Singapore educational reforms on the role of middle leaders and their involvement in teacher continuing professional development in Singapore school contexts.

Each of the above mentioned areas of influence that have reshaped teacher continuing professional development and the role middle leaders play in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools will now be
discussed in turn. The following section positions the study contextually by examining the historical background of Singapore education.

2.2 Development of Singapore Educational Landscape
Since becoming a sovereign state in 1965, the education landscape in Singapore has been undergoing transformational change. Education has been central to building both Singapore’s economy and nation. A country devoid of natural resources, Singapore relies heavily on the development of human capital to strive as a nation. It is with this belief that Singapore is consistently driving towards enhancing the quality of its education system through the preparation and continuing professional development of its teaching force (Ellis, 2014).

Former Minister for Education, Heng Swee Keat (2012a) accentuated that to have a deeper understanding of Singapore educational landscape, it is crucial to consider policies and priorities seen in the context of the country’s stage of development and the challenges it faces at each point. Goh and Gopinathan (2008) described how Singapore education landscape has evolved through 4 broadly defined phases with changing national and global circumstances:

(i) survival-driven phase  
(ii) efficiency-driven phase  
(iii) ability-based, aspiration-driven phase  
(iv) student-centric, values-driven phase

The following section provides a general introduction to the impact of historical circumstances on policies and general education trends in Singapore in the last five decades. This analysis will to provide a background for discussion of the impact of these circumstances and practices specifically on the development of teacher continuing professional development and roles of middle leaders in schools.

(i) Survival-driven phase (1965 - 1978)
Singapore’s primary concern after its independence was to survive and to build a nation out of immigrants in an ex-British colony. The government embarked on a series of plans to reshape its education system, using it as a vehicle for nation building as well as a tool for building up skills base to serve the broader goals of
economic development. To address the urgent issues of low student enrolment and mass unemployment, an education system that would equip the people with basic skills and made them employable in labour-intensive work was of paramount importance. National integration through a national education system was also seen as the key condition for economic survival. To attain these goals, basic curriculum was developed and the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) was introduced in 1960. The bilingual policy and the 6-year compulsory education act were also approved at parliament. Free education was made available to all during this period. These policies led to a period of rapid construction of school buildings and an increasing annual expenditure on education from 1969 to 1967 (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008).

Teacher recruitment correspondingly increased as pupil enrolment surged. Goh and Gopinathan (2008) noted that the teaching work force almost doubled from 10,590 to 19,216 between 1959 and 1968. To keep pace with rapid developments in technical and vocational education, there was also an urgent need for teacher training and retraining programmes. The strategy of large-scale recruitment of teacher-in-training at the then Teachers Training College – a government funded central body that trained teachers, was employed in order to cope with the increasing demand for qualified teachers. Teachers attended part-time training in the morning and taught in the afternoon or vice versa. The central focus then was to ensure supply of sufficient teachers to schools (Goh & Lee, 2008).

(ii) Efficiency-driven phase (1979 - 1996)
Goh and Gopinathan (2008) described the next stage of Singapore education as the efficiency-driven phase. It marked the shift of focus from fulfilment of quantitative demands to upgrading and providing quality education. By the end of the 1970s, Singapore had achieved universal primary education and the nation’s economy was undergoing a transitional phase from a labour-intensive to a more sophisticated technological base. To support the effort towards sustainable development and to reflect economic restructuring, a major review of the education system with an emphasis on efficiency was undertaken in 1978. The review resulted in a *New Education System* in 1979 that aimed to raise the
quality of education and address the issue of education wastage - failure to achieve the expected standards and premature school leaving. Some key structural changes under the recommendations of the New Education System (1979) included:

a. streaming of students at primary and secondary school levels to cater to different learning needs. This was aimed to enable each student to go as far as possible in school, thereby achieve the best possible educational takeoff for training and employment;

b. a national curriculum focusing on bilingualism, moral and civics, science, mathematics and technical education;

c. standardized curriculum materials produced by the Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore;

d. school appraisals to help schools evaluate their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement; and

e. clear lines of progression to university, polytechnics and vocational institutes (Goh, 1979).

These transformations had an impact on the teaching force as educators struggled to keep up with the rapid changes and trying to make sense of these new policies. Training constraints, poor social status, ineffective supervision and bleak career prospects for educators were issues that continued to plague the education system in the 1980s and early 1990s. This led to despondency among principals and teachers who suffered low morale. Revisions in salaries and career prospects were made in an attempt to attract high-quality people into the teaching profession.

Major shifts in the earlier two phases saw a strictly state-initiated, top-down approach in planning, disseminating and enforcement of educational changes. While the approach facilitated the prompt implementation of policies from headquarters down to the schools, it inevitably brought about a lack of autonomy and initiative, and a sense of detachment from policy makers among principals and teachers (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008). The unambiguous concerns over the impact of a top-down approach and increasing expectations of teachers and school leaders underscore the importance that the nation places on teacher professional growth and school leadership development in the post-1996
educational phases. This adds value to the research problem that frames the study reported in this thesis, namely the perspectives that middle leaders hold on teacher continuing professional development in Singapore.

(iii) Ability-based, aspiration-driven phase (1997 - 2010)

The economic developments in Asia in the late 1980s and the impact of globalisation highlighted the need for Singapore to reshape its education system in response to the key developments in the economy. The shift in strategic paradigm was encapsulated in the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision announced by the former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, in 1997. The Singapore education system entered a new era with the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision statement. The primary intent of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision was to motivate Singaporeans to continually acquire new knowledge, learn new skills; gain higher levels of technological literacy; and embrace innovation, enterprise and risk-taking without losing their bearings or commitment to the local community and the nation (Gopinathan, 1999). Existing practices were re-examined and reviewed with the purpose to meet the challenges of the future. The Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision is articulated in MOE’s (2016b) vision statement on its website as:

This vision describes a nation of thinking and committed citizens capable of meeting future challenges, and an education system geared to the needs of the 21st century.

Thinking schools will be learning organisations in every sense, constantly challenging assumptions, and seeking better ways of doing things through participation, creativity and innovation. Thinking Schools will be the cradle of thinking students as well as thinking adults and this spirit of learning should accompany our students even after they leave school.

A Learning Nation envisions a national culture and social environment that promotes lifelong learning in our people. The capacity of Singaporeans to continually learn, both for professional development and for personal enrichment, will determine our collective tolerance for change. (MOE, 2016b)

Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) provided the context for curriculum review that aimed to develop a broader range of skills such as
independent learning, critical thinking and creativity among students. The reviews also included the implementation of a masterplan for ICT in education to cope with the accelerating rate of technological change and development of strategies for national education. Systems and structures were also established to support these changes, by devolving more autonomy to schools to encourage innovation and cater to wider variety of interests and aptitudes in students. In his speech, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, called to attention the need for the Singapore education system to redefine curriculum and the role of teachers.

With the *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (Goh, 1997) vision as the blueprint for Singapore schools in the 21st century, the goals and purpose in education were re-examined. This led to the culmination of the Desired Outcomes of Education (MOE, 2016c), which was reviewed in 2009 to ensure it remained relevant. The policy articulates the end-objectives of formal education and describes the skills and values considered essential for the next generation in an increasingly globalised world. The desired policy outcomes are presented on the MOE website as thus:

The person who is schooled in the Singapore education system embodies the Desired Outcomes of Education. MOE (2016c) sums up the attributes that educators aspire for every Singaporean to have by the completion of his formal education:

- **a confident person** who has a strong sense of right and wrong, is adaptable and resilient, knows himself, is discerning in judgment, thinks independently and critically, and communicates effectively;

- **a self-directed learner** who takes responsibility for his own learning, who questions, reflects and perseveres in the pursuit of learning;

- **an active contributor** who is able to work effectively in teams, exercises initiative, takes calculated risks, is innovative and strives for excellence; and,

- **a concerned citizen** who is rooted to Singapore, has a strong civic consciousness, is informed, and takes an active role in bettering the lives of others around him (MOE, 2016c)
These outcomes set the direction for educators, drive MOE’s policies and programmes and determine how well the education system was performing.

The vision of *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (1997) continues to be the central guiding principle for educational transformation in Singapore. Following that, the *Teach Less, Learn More* (2005) initiative was introduced in the National Rally speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in 2004, highlighting the need to shift for Singapore education to shift from ‘quantity’ to ‘quality’. The initiative was officially launched by then Minister for Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam in 2005. The *Teach Less, Learn More* (2005) initiative catalysed the transformation of teaching and learning in schools, moving away from the traditional rote-learning and passive memorising of content to engaging students in building character through innovative and effective teaching approaches. Former Minister for Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam (2004) emphasized that *Teach Less, Learn More* (2005) requires teachers to reassess the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of teaching and learning (Tharman Shanmugaratnam, 2004) and to re-look at the way things are done so as to better realise the goals of an ability-driven education system. Two key areas of focus guided the initiatives: (i) *Nurturing Students* and (ii) *Enabling Teachers*. These remain as fundamental guiding principles in MOE’s pursuit for quality education and school excellence (MOE, 2016d)

One key concept under the focus area of *Nurturing Students* (2016e) was MOE’s objective to provide greater flexibility and diversity in education (MOE, 2016e). This allowed students to have a wider range of school types and curricular programmes to choose from, thus catering to the different needs of students. To enable this, schools were provided with further autonomy and resources to develop their own distinct strengths and set their own criteria that recognise different merits in the students that they admit (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008, p.32). With the purpose to enhance the development of 21st century competencies in students and help students thrive in a fast-changing world, MOE (2016f) launched the Framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes:
These competencies underpin the holistic education that schools provide to better prepare students for the future world. The framework guides the development of subject syllabi and instructional materials. It also strives to provide students with a holistic education that offers a broad range of experiences and opportunities to develop the skills and values in both academic and non-academic areas that they will need for life.

The other key focus area of the ability-based, aspiration-driven phase was the mission in *Enabling Teachers* (MOE, 2016a). Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, in his vision of *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* (Goh, 1997), set the climate for schools to be learning organisations and teaching as a learning profession. The vision called for a ‘total learning environment’ (Goh, 1997) that includes not just students but also teachers and other stakeholders. The *Teach Less, Learn More* (2005) movement built on this vision and centred on the quality of interaction between teacher and learner. It shall be recalled that during the survival-driven phase, the primary foci were to fulfil quantitative demands of trained teachers in schools and to retrain teachers to support a technically skilled workforce. The efficiency-driven phase saw a shift in focus to upgrade and provide quality education (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008, p.23). Approaching the turn of the century, recognising the need for an education that meets the
demands of the future, the Singapore government called for a re-orientation of the education system. Teacher quality was acknowledged as a key determinant of quality education as Singapore entered the ability-based, aspiration-driven phase (Goh & Lee, 2008, p.96). With the considerable number of transformations and initiatives in the educational landscape, MOE recognised that it was crucial for educators to make sense of the expectations and manage change. For a start, every teacher was given 100 hours of training entitlement each year (Goh & Lee, 2008, p. 101). Many other significant developments in the fields of teacher continuing professional development were documented during this period. These will be discussed in further details in the later section.

Systems and structures were also established to support these changes, by devolving more autonomy to schools to encourage innovation and cater to wider variety of interests and aptitudes in students. Schools had to also learn to take charge of organisational excellence, lead their staff, manage school system and produce the desired outcomes of education (Ng, 2003). The School Excellence Model (MOE, 2016g) was introduced in 1998 to provide a means for schools to objectively identify and measure the school’s strengths and areas for improvement. To realise the vision of Thinking Schools (Goh, 1997), schools had to chart their own directions (Goh, 1997). And to achieve that, teachers as well as school leaders have to continually develop themselves and gain fresh perspectives so as to prepare for their new roles. MOE began to place more emphasis on building the schools’ capacity to cope with new educational demands (Ng, 2008).

One of the fundamental changes includes the way schools are managed. Schools are grouped into clusters where a superintendent facilitates each cluster. The superintendents develop, guide and supervise the school leadership teams to ensure that schools are effectively run. Principals are given greater freedom over matters such as fund raising, staffing and school-based programmes (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002, p.155). This structure was also introduced to help foster collaboration among schools, principals and teachers. MOE believed that with greater decentralisation of authority and accountability, and a culture of collaboration, the management of schools in clusters would
open up new possibilities for principals and teachers to look for creative ways of delivering education to pupils. Former Minister for Education Teo Chee Hean, (1997) explained that the objective was to give schools greater autonomy and flexibility to introduce innovations and educational programmes to challenge their pupils. He highlighted the need for a management structure ‘where decision making is decentralised, where authority to make decisions on the allocation and use of resources, both human as well as financial resources, is associated with responsibility for the educational outcomes achieved’ (Teo, 1997). This was seen as an attempt for the Ministry of Education to do away with its top-down approach of leadership.

With devolution, a series of new strategies were introduced to help schools build the capacity to meet these challenges (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). Some of the key initiatives involve creating flatter and more trusting organizational structures, with more opportunities for teacher involvement. It shall be recalled that the impact of a top-down approach in the enforcement of educational changes in the earlier two phases of Singapore education had generated much concern in MOE. The ability-based, aspiration-driven phase saw MOE’s change in approach to support schools with its ‘Top-down support for bottom-up initiative’ (Shanmugaratnam, 2005). Former Minister for Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam (2005) announced at MOE Work Plan Seminar that ‘days for large fixes are over’. He explained that improvements in quality would need to be driven by teachers and school leaders. With this initiative, he stressed that ‘quality in education will flow from schools and teachers taking ownership of changes and experiments that they wish to implement, and from learners making their own choices’ (Shanmugaratnam, 2005). This meant that principals could no longer take sole responsibility and authority in schools (Harris, 2003a). This called for a more distributed form of leadership to be practised in schools.

The above discussion concentrates on macro changes brought about by the implementation of Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision statement and Teach Less, Learn More (2005) movement to Singapore education during the ability-based, aspiration-driven phase. On a more specific and direct basis, these policies had an immediate influence on teacher
professional growth, school organisation and leadership accountabilities. These provide the context which frame the research reported in this thesis that investigates the impact of high profile education policies on teacher continuing professional development and middle leaders perspectives and response to them within a fast-changing environment.

(iv) Student-centric, values-driven phase (2011 – present)
The current phase of Singapore education continued the impetus generated from the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision and Teach Less, Learn More (2005) movement. While recognising Singapore education system as a quality system built on sound fundamentals, the MOE acknowledges the need for changes and to remain relevant in order to make the system stronger and better. In his opening address for the MOE’s Work Plan Seminar in 2011, former Minister for Education Heng Swee Kiat (2011) articulated the three broad areas that would guide the MOE’s drive towards a student-centric, values-driven education which included:

a. student-centric education: enabling all students to succeed
b. school-based, teacher-led excellence: empowering schools and educators to do the best for each student
c. working with parents and the community: enhancing partnership

The new aims called for a holistic education system that provides each student with a broad and deep foundation for a lifelong learning journey characterised by depth, breadth and length (Heng, 2013). The measures that describe each area are articulated on the MOE’s official Facebook page (MOE, 2013):

a. Breadth:
   - remaining broad and inclusive in our approach of providing opportunities for every child
   - giving each child a broad and holistic education so as to allow them to explore and discover their interests and talents over a wide range of disciplines
b. Depth:
   - instilling in every child deep values and a deep connection to Singapore
   - developing in each child a strong foundation in literacy, numeracy and 21st century competencies
c. Length:
   - learning for life and developing values, skills and knowledge that matter for the long-haul, and not just those that matter for examinations
- lifelong opportunities for students must be provided for continuous learning.

Measures to build a broad, inclusive and holistic education include supporting students with special needs, greater flexibility in subject offerings in secondary schools and programmes at primary schools where students can learn to better appreciate non-academic subjects such as physical education, art and music (Heng, 2013). In building the depth, students are expected to cultivate values and commitment to Singapore and fellow Singaporeans through Values-in-Education; and Character and Citizenship programmes in school (Heng, 2013). The Applied Learning Programme and Learning for Life Programme have been introduced to provide the length of education where schools will ignite the joy of learning and encourage students to learn continuously throughout their life journey (MOE, 2018). Opportunities are given to students through these two programmes to connect academic knowledge with the real world and experience real-life situations to develop student character and values.

To empower schools, the MOE re-examined the way schools were recognised to focus on the sharing of best practices (Heng, 2011). Schools are resourced on a needs-based approach to help them cater better to students’ educational requirements. The MOE recognised that more leadership capacity and depth of expertise would be required for schools to undertake the complex task of customising their programmes for their students (Heng, 2011). The Ministry continues to support and empower teachers by recognising the needs for well-being and helping to develop teachers professionally to meet changing demands. The MOE organisational processes and structures were reviewed and re-organised in 2011 to deepen teacher professional expertise and better deliver a holistic and values-driven education (Heng, 2011). To better engage parents, the Parents in Education website was set up to provide resources for parents to engage their children at home (MOE, 2012). The quest towards a holistic education system redefined the roles of teachers, middle leaders and school leaders. This was a significant period of educational reform in Singapore.

The preceding section of the contextual policy review provides background information on Singapore's historical circumstances, general education trends
and recent developments that emphasised the need to empower schools and enable educators in a world of increasing complexity. The main purpose of discussing these elements is to position the study reported in this thesis within its relevant contextual environment and to justify its conduct. The next section gives the overview of the policy development of teacher continuing professional development in Singapore. The ensuing section analyses the impact of these key policies and developments on the role of middle leaders within the emerging context of education in Singapore as outlined above, in particular, the role of middle leaders in relation to the changes in education policies, teacher continuing professional development and school organisation excellence.

2.3 Overview of the development of Teacher Continuing Professional Development in Singapore

Prior to major educational reforms in the late 1990s, the provision of teacher development and in-service professional activities was mainly through two modes: formal training programmes leading to advanced professional qualifications and ad hoc ‘in-service’ trainings to meet specific professional needs. Since the launch of Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997), the Singapore Ministry of Education has introduced several key initiatives pertaining to its efforts in Enabling Teachers, one of which included a $250 million 3-year plan in 2006 to ensure that the teaching profession continued to attract, motivate and retain good educators (MOE, 2006). These initiatives largely centred around 3 strategic areas, namely recruitment, professional excellence and career development. The subsequent section details important aspects of the impact of educational reforms on teacher continuing professional development and initiatives introduced to support the policy on Enabling Teachers. As such, the following key issues have been selected for discussion:

i. changing role and expectations of 21st century teachers in Singapore
ii. increased recognition for teachers
iii. greater focus on and opportunities for CPD

(i) Changing role and expectations of 21st century teachers

In its quest for effective schools and quality education, the educational landscape in Singapore has been undergoing transformational changes. From the earlier phases which focused on fulfilling quantitative demands to the post-
1996 era which called for an education system that would achieve the goals of the new millennium. These policies and developments have an impact on the role of teachers and their continuing professional development. The Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision affirms teacher quality as a key determinant of quality education and redefines the role of teachers and teacher continuing professional development, specifically the notion of teaching as a learning profession. The MOE (2016h) recognises the crucial role played by teachers in the society and articulates its commitment in building and maintaining a high quality teaching force on its website:

The Education Service is committed to building up teachers as a quality professional force, exemplary in conduct and commitment, up-to-date in skills and knowledge. We will provide teachers with the resources and the environment to do their job well. We will look after their development and well-being so that they can concentrate on giving their best to their pupils. Good leadership and sound people-oriented management will help to develop a cohesive, committed and competent teaching service.

Teachers must keep up with professional developments in their fields, and judiciously apply new educational theories and practices to the classroom. They need drive and conviction to translate education policies into practical and effective programmes to meet the learning needs of their pupils.

Teachers are mentors and role models to their pupils. They influence young minds and inculcate sound social and moral values through word and deed, within and outside the classroom. They must impart to pupils learning skills, thinking skills and life skills to cope with the future; an attitude of continuous learning and improvement; and a sense of commitment and belonging to Singapore. (MOE, 2016h)

Enabling Teachers is one of the significant foci of the Singapore Ministry of Education in building a 21st century education system. This is in line with literature that cites teachers as key to the quality of an education system (Harris, 2011; MOE, 2010) and in improving student outcomes (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; King, 2014). A motto for teachers, ‘Lead. Care. Inspire’ and Ethos of the Teaching Profession were launched in 2009 and 2012 respectively. The ethos is expressed in Singapore Educators’ Philosophy of Education, the Teachers’ Vision, the Teachers’ Pledge, the Teachers’ Creed and the Desired Outcomes of education. In
particular, the Teachers’ Pledge represents an act of public undertaking that each teacher takes to uphold the highest standards of professional practice. The new vision reflects the changing role of teachers and encapsulates the beliefs and practices of educators:

*Teachers’ Pledge:*
We, the teachers of Singapore, pledge that:
- We will be true to our mission to bring out the best in our students.
- We will be exemplary in the discharge of our duties and responsibilities.
- We will guide our students to be good and useful citizens of Singapore.
- We will continue to learn and pass on the love of learning to our students.
- We will win the trust, support and co-operation of parents and the community so as to enable us to achieve our mission (MOE, 2016i)

(ii) Increased recognition for teachers
The quest for a student-centric education for the 21st century highlighted MOE’s (2016f) commitment to the importance of developing good teachers and engaging them professionally. A series of initiatives were rolled out indicating the ministry’s commitment in recognising teachers as a determinant factor to quality education. Besides providing teachers with a 100-hour annual training entitlement, the *Education Service Professional Development and Career Plan*, commonly known as *Edu-Pac*, was launched in 2001 to help teachers reach their full potential. Traditionally, the only route to advancement in teaching has been to leave the classroom for administrative leadership roles. Recognising that teachers have different aspirations, the *Edu-Pac* transforms the career advancement of teachers. The package revamped the career structure to provide more career opportunities and better advancement prospects for teachers with different aspirations (Teo, 2001). As illustrated in Figure 2, under the *Edu-pac* career structure, different career tracks were introduced to cater for teachers who want to pursue a career in teaching, school leadership or specialist areas. The three career tracks recognize the fact that teachers have different skills and aspirations, even as they are united in their desire to do the best for their pupils. The career opportunities of teachers on teaching track was further enhanced with a new top-level appointment for Principal Master Teacher and the creation of a new Lead Teacher position in 2009.
To provide better support, develop and retain quality educators, the Ministry of Education introduced the GROW package in 2006 to promote the professional and personal Growth of Education Officers through better Recognition, Opportunities and seeing to their Well-being (Tan, Low & Liu, 2017). This was part of the ministry’s $250 million 3-year plan to boost the teaching profession. In addition to enhancements made to existing schemes, the CONNECT Plan (CONtiNuity, Experience and Commitment in Teaching) was introduced to encourage educators to remain in service until retirement through financial incentives. The following year, the enhanced GROW 2.0 package was announced. Figure 3 provides a summary of the key initiatives under this package, which offered more attractive remuneration, better career opportunities and greater flexibility to balance the demands of work and family.

<table>
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<th>WELL-BEING</th>
<th>GROWTH</th>
<th>RECOGNITION</th>
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<td>• expansion of part-time teaching scheme</td>
<td>• Professional Development Packages</td>
<td>• New Education Scheme of Service (2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• greater Support for part-time teaching</td>
<td>• greater support for postgraduate studies</td>
<td>• Revised CONNECT Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>• enhancements to No-Pay Leaves</td>
<td>• more in-service upgrading opportunities for non-graduate teachers</td>
<td>• Additional Outstanding Contributions Awards</td>
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<td>OPPORTUNITIES</td>
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<td>• enhanced Senior Specialist Track</td>
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<td>• further re-employment opportunities</td>
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<td>• Future Leaders Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Summary of GROW 2.0 Package (MOE, 2007)</td>
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Recognising the complexity of teachers’ work, the TEACH Framework (MOE, 2016k) was introduced to further strengthen the professional culture of the teaching fraternity while supporting teachers’ aspirations and work-life needs. It puts in place measures to reward teachers’ in their commitment and dedication with greater options, professional development and more flexibility in managing their career and personal lives (MOE, 2016k). The key thrusts of the TEACH framework, shown in Figure 4, include supporting teacher-led professional development, academic upgrading through postgraduate scholarships and awards, enhancing work-life harmony through greater flexibility in work arrangement and expanding career advancement pathways for teachers.

![Figure 4: TEACH Framework (MOE, 2016m)](image)

(iii) Greater focus on and opportunities for CPD:

Inauguration of Teacher Growth Model

The Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision laid the cornerstone for teacher continuing professional development in the post-1997 era, moving away from the traditional view of teachers as instructors to the concept of teachers as designers and facilitators of learning. It is therefore fundamental to transform the way teacher professional development was carried out. To build a high-quality teacher force, it was necessary to:

a. build professional ethos and develop a culture of in the teaching fraternity;

b. drive pedagogical leadership;

c. facilitate professional development through networked communities, attachments, fellowship programmes and other professional development opportunities
Aiming at helping teachers develop holistically in the 21st century, the *Teacher Growth Model* was launched at the 6th Teachers’ Conference by former Minister for Education Heng Swee Keat in 2012. The *Teacher Growth Model* (2012a) encourages Singapore teachers to engage in continual learning and become student-centric professionals who take ownership of their professional growth and personal well-being. The model is organised according to the following five desired teacher outcomes that reflect the multi-faceted nature of Singapore teachers work:

a. the Ethical Teacher  
b. the Competent Professional  
c. the Collaborative Learner  
d. the Transformational Leader  
e. the Community Builder

Closely aligned to the knowledge and skills needed to nurture students in 21st century competencies, the *Teacher Growth Model* (MOE, 2012a) recognise that teachers need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills so that they are better able to develop students holistically. The model is viewed as a learning continuum that provides a road map of learning areas and opportunities for each of the five teacher outcomes (Heng, 2012b). Teachers have the flexibility and autonomy to plan learning relevant to their professional needs and interests. The model also acknowledges the diverse learning needs of 21st century teachers and promotes continuing professional development though multiple modes and platforms of learning. The launch of the *Teacher Growth Model* (MOE, 2012a) further demonstrated Singapore Ministry of Education’s emphasis on teacher continuing professional development in raising student outcomes.

**Appointment of School Staff Developer**

To provide better facilitation of continuing professional development in schools, the position of School Staff Developer (SSD) was introduced in 2006 as part of MOE’s plan to boost the teaching profession. The purpose of the new appointment is to drive continuing professional development more
systematically at the school level (Shanmugaratnam, 2006b). According to details posted on the MOE intranet, the job roles of School Staff Developers are articulated as such:

a. planner and designer for training  
b. champion for staff learning  
c. coach and mentor  
d. resource person  
e. staff well-being sponsor

Unlike middle leaders, SSDs do not normally perform the duties of reporting officers to teachers as their role is deemed to be developmental rather than evaluative. SSDs work in consultation with the school management team to align strategies for staff development with the school goals and vision. They drive and monitor professional development processes and identify training and developmental needs of the staff. In doing so, SSDs are to facilitate the closing of competency gaps in the school strategic plan to bring about educational improvement. As planner and designer for training, SSDs also work with senior teachers and heads of departments to help staff acquire new skills, knowledge and attitudes through customising, coordinating and delivering school-based professional development programmes. One key responsibility of the School Staff Developer is to ensure that professional growth becomes part of the school culture. It is of note that although the position of SSD was introduced more than a decade ago, not all schools have appointed School Staff Developer (SSD) until recent years. Most schools without SSDs usually have the Vice-Principal or appoint a more senior department head to take on the additional portfolio of overseeing teacher continuing professional development in schools.

Multiple modes and platforms of continuing professional development
Guided by the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a), the MOE continues to support teacher continuing professional development through multiple modes and platforms of learning. Teachers are entitled to 100 voluntary hours of professional development annually. These continuing professional development activities can either be formal courses and programmes offered by agencies outside school or school-based programmes led by School Staff Developers. The main sources of continuing professional development programmes outside
school are offered by the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST), together with six Centres of Excellence for Professional Development. Most continuing professional development activities for Singapore teachers are subject-specific and provide teachers with opportunities for network learning, collegial sharing and collaboration (Bautista, Wong & Gopinathan, 2015).

The National Institute of Education works closely with the MOE and schools to design continuing professional development programmes that meet the demands of the teaching fraternity. Besides offering pre-service teacher education programmes and short-term in-service courses that primarily focus on subject content, curriculum development, pedagogies, assessment and student learning, the institute also offers programmes that lead to the award of advanced professional qualifications such as Master of Education and PhD in Education. To increase the impact of research on teachers’ professional knowledge and classroom practice, the National Institute of Education produces its own research publications and shares research findings with the teaching fraternity.

In its review report, ‘A Teacher Education Model for the 21st Century’ (National Institute of Education, 2009), the National Institute of Education advocates an enhanced partnership model that provides an overarching framework for closer collaboration between the institution, the MOE and schools in the interest of teacher learning and education research. The model provides the collaborative framework of shared values and goals in the interest of teacher learning and education research, while recognising the need for mutual respect for each partner’s roles, beliefs, perspectives, experiences, expertise and knowledge. It also highlights the commitment from the three key stakeholders - National Institute of Education, Ministry of Education and schools, in transforming teacher education to produce 21st century teachers. The institute believes that a stronger tripartite partnership will strengthen the theory-practice nexus and enhance the continued learning and professional development pathways available to the teaching workforce.
Another key provider of teacher continuing professional development in Singapore is the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST), which was established in 2010. The academy continued the work of its predecessor, Teachers Network which was set up in 1998 to initiate a series of teacher-led, bottom-up professional development initiatives that were ‘for teachers, by teachers’ (MOE, 2005). In-service programmes offered by AST are designed to meet the needs of teachers at different competency levels and career stages. The purpose of the academy is to build teachers’ capacity in the subject-matter knowledge and content knowledge. The academy also provides counselling, staff well-being programmes and services and educational resources through the academy's library.

The Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) includes six Centres of Excellence and four Subject Chapters which allow teachers from different schools to come together to discuss and share innovative pedagogical practices in their specific subjects, thereby raising professional standards of disciplines and fostering a stronger teacher-led culture of professional exchange, collegial sharing, and collaboration. The academy also manages an online portal, ‘One Portal All Learners’ (OPAL) which serves as a repository for professional learning resources and enables teachers to track their own professional learning journey.

The literature on continuing professional development highlights collaborative learning as one of the critical attributes for effective teacher learning (Hill, McWalters, Paliokas, Seagren & Stumbo, 2010; Little, 1993). In 2005, former Minister for Education, Tharman Shanmugaratnam (2005) announced a series of initiatives at the school level to give teachers more space and support for continuing professional development and collaboration. Some of these included (i) freeing up an average of 2 hours per week for each teacher to engage in professional planning and development; (ii) setting up one Centre of Excellence for Professional Development at each of the four school zones and (iii) offloading experienced teachers, such as Senior Teachers and Heads of Department to mentor beginning teachers (Shanmugaratnam, 2005).
One significant initiative pertaining to school-based teacher continuing professional development is the launch of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Then Minister for Education Ng Eng Heng announced the plan at the 2009 Work Plan Seminar. The implementation of PLC in Singapore schools aims to bring teachers together to develop knowledge expertise and advance professional growth as a community (Lee, Tay & Hong, 2015). The Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) was tasked to launch PLC in 50 pilot schools in 2009. A review was conducted a year later to access its effectiveness. To date, PLC is practised in all Singapore schools with a standardised model conceptualised by Ministry of Education.

The Singapore PLC model perceives each school as a learning community comprising several professional learning teams of four to eight members individually who collaborate in areas such as refining lesson plans and materials as well as teaching strategies and assessment practices (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016a). As stated on the website of The Academy of Singapore Teachers, ‘by deprivatising practice around these areas, teachers collectively engage in an on-going cycle of reflection that promotes deep team learning through shared experience’. The Singapore PLC model took reference from Michael Fullan’s ‘Triangle of Success’ (as cited in Dimmock, 2011), highlighting the importance of school leadership in supporting PLC. While teachers in the professional learning teams impact on ‘deep pedagogy’, the coalition team that comprises the principal, school staff developer and heads of department impacts on ‘systemness’ (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016a). In this, it indicates the responsibility of school leaders and middle leaders in creating the right environment to build a strong learning culture among their staff by providing necessary resources and setting in place proper structure and processes where collaboration and continual professional learning can flourish.

Many of other school-based continuing professional development programmes are led by the School Staff Developer who works with the various Heads of Department at the beginning of each year to plan and draw up the Total Learning Plan for the staff. These programmes could include training conducted by Senior Teachers or Lead Teachers or customised programmes run by
external vendors. The Ministry of Education provides a number of different training funds and staff development grants to schools each year to support these programmes.

The section above details important aspects on the impact of educational reforms on teacher continuing professional development and initiatives introduced to support the policy on *Enabling Teachers* (MOE, 2016a). To position contextually the current study on middle leaders’ perspectives of teacher continuing professional development in Singapore, the ensuing section looks at the impact of these policies and developments on the role of middle leaders within the emerging context of education in Singapore as outlined earlier, in particular, the role of middle leaders in relation to the changes in education policies, teacher continuing professional development and school organisation excellence. It will be shown how these issues shape the context and consequently provide an argument for the significance of this study.

### 2.4 Role of middle leaders in championing teacher continuing professional development

The rapid changes in our education landscape requires school leaders to deal with many more responsibilities that require more complex skillsets, adaptive thinking abilities, deep learning, understanding and confidence to make a difference in the complex, unfamiliar and changing circumstances. With greater flexibility and autonomy given to principals, they could no longer take sole responsibility and authority in schools (Harris, 2003a). A more distributed form of leadership was required to support principals in leading and managing change in schools. This calls for more decision-making participation from the middle leaders in schools.

This section explains how the development of educational reforms impacts the role of middle leaders in Singapore schools in championing teacher continuing professional development. The first part describes the changing role and responsibilities of middle leaders in relation to the changes in education policies, and school organisation excellence. The second part details the MOE’s effort in developing and strengthening school leadership, in particular middle leadership.
The last part discusses challenges faced by middle leaders in leading learning in schools.

(i) Role and responsibilities of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools
The role of middle leaders in Singapore has evolved significantly over the past decades and has become more complex due to rapid changes in the education scene and increased accountability at leadership level in schools. In the Singapore school context, middle leaders refer to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools (Heng & Marsh, 2009, p.526).

Primary schools in Singapore are generally organised along department lines, with a head of department, subject head or level head at the helm (Koh, Gurr, Drydale & Ang, 2011). They are responsible for an academic or non-academic subject area such as Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). Their role is of a dual nature in such that it includes a managerial responsibilities and classroom teaching. In Singapore, middle leadership encompasses roles such as heads of department, year heads, subject and level heads. Middle leaders in Singapore schools are considered members of the school management team. In a typical primary school, at the apex of the school organisation structure is the senior management team comprising the school principal and vice-principals. Below these senior leaders are the middle leaders, followed by the classroom teachers. Middle leaders are typically recognised as change agents and co-leaders in their schools as they play administrative, curriculum and teaching roles.

The position of middle leader was introduced only in the early 1980s, with the position of head of department as the only middle-tier leadership position in the school structure. The roles and responsibilities of the middle leaders then were: to set the direction for the subject(s) under his charge; plan and implement, monitor and evaluate instructional programmes; develop teachers in his or her subject areas; and select, prepare and organise teaching-learning resources. Their roles were fundamentally to supervise the subject area of which they were in charge. Over the past two decades, their roles have become more complex in
nature. Middle leaders now have a key role in creating a climate that promotes effective teaching and learning not just for students but also for teachers. Not only are they expected to develop the department and its teachers, they are also to act as agents of school success in comparison with other schools at a national level (Chew, 2008). The philosophy for Educational Leaders in Singapore clearly articulates the core beliefs and guiding principles for educators in leadership track. As stated on the website of the Academy of Singapore Teachers (2016b):

With the primary focus on students, the leaders-in-education beliefs and purpose are manifested in his/her commitment for:

a. take the LEAD in providing children with a holistic educational experience to realise the Desired Outcomes of Education:
   b. LEARN to learn and sustain growth for self and for others in the fraternity
   c. INSPIRE, guide and shape educators’ thinking and beliefs of the child with a focus on student learning and development

The philosophy bears testament to the importance of school leadership supporting educational reforms and highlights the changing role and responsibilities of leaders in schools.

It shall be recalled that during the earlier years of nation building, the primary foci of the Ministry of Education were to fulfil quantitative demands of trained teachers in schools and to retrain teachers to support a technically skilled workforce. The urgency to realise the needs of a young nation in the earlier two phases saw a strictly top-down approach in planning, disseminating and enforcing of educational changes. This brought about a lack of autonomy and initiative, and a sense of detachment from policy makers among principals and teachers. Approaching the turn of the century, recognising the need for an education that meets the demands of the future, the Singapore government expressed concerns over the impact of a top-down approach. With the inauguration of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision statement and Teach Less, Learn More (2005) movement, greater autonomy was given to schools to encourage innovation and cater to wider variety of interests and aptitudes in students. Schools are now expected to translate educational policies, align them with the school vision to realise organisational
excellence and produce the desired outcomes of education. These changes have a direct impact on school leadership. Having to juggle more responsibilities, principals could no longer take sole authority in schools (Harris, 2003a). A more distributed form of leadership is therefore required in schools. This will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Departmental duties

Similar to their earlier counterparts, the core business of middle leaders remains essentially in teaching and learning. Departmental-level work involves formulating work plans, setting department targets, communicating departmental plans with teachers and ensuring that teachers meet set targets. Middle leaders are expected to be leaders of their field in terms of the subject area they are in charge of, so that they can provide guidance on related matters such as subject content, pedagogy and assessment to the teachers. Middle leaders of today are expected to extend their work further in terms of contributing to the shaping of the school vision at the school level and developing a departmental vision that aligns to the school vision (Koh et al., 2011, p.614).

Middle leaders have been described as the ‘human link’ between national education policy and the teaching staff (Chew, 2008, p. 135) and the key element of leadership and management in primary schools (Burrows, 2004). One crucial competency required of middle leaders in the 21st century is the ability to look beyond departmental interests and be able to act as a channel of communications to cascade information from MOE and school leaders to teachers. To achieve this, middle leaders must possess the capacity to make linkages and interpret nationwide educational policies so that they can explain the intent of these policies clearly to the teachers.

Developmental role

Besides departmental work, middle leaders also play a developmental leadership role to teachers. Under the Enhanced Performance Management System (Shanmugaratnam, 2006a), all middle leaders are assigned the role of Reporting Officers (RO). Reporting Officers are usually immediate superior whose responsibility is to monitor, review and assess the teacher’s performance
at the end of each academic year. The process, also know as work review, consists of 3 phases:

- Phase 1 – Performance planning
- Phase 2 – Performance Coaching
- Phase 3 – Performance Evaluation

Through the process, Reporting Officers are to help them identify, develop and improve key professional competencies. Book checks and lesson observations are also as part of staff appraisal process conducted by middle leaders. The process allows middle leaders to identify and assess learning needs of individual teachers therefore enabling them to work with the School Staff Developer to develop platforms for continuing professional development opportunities. Besides teachers under their charge, middle leaders also look into the training needs of their department and collaborate with the School Staff Developer to craft the Total Learning Plan at the beginning of each academic year.

In light of the above discussions, it is justifiable that the research problem that frames this study investigates the role of high-level teacher continuing professional development policies and middle leaders’ perspectives and responses to them within an environment of rapid changes. Middle leadership and decentralisation are conceptually linked to notions of distributed leadership in the literature. However, unique to Singapore is decentralisation in terms of ‘decentralised centralism’ (Tan & Ng, 2007). In a situation where many state-initiated policies and initiatives still rule, decentralisation requires middle leaders to understand their role in schools and be able to balance centralised support with decentralised adaptation within for educational change. This is a complex set of demands.

(ii) Building the leadership capacity of middle leaders
In order for middle leaders to deal with new demands and expectations, they require more complex skill sets and adaptive thinking abilities. To become highly competent practitioners, their knowledge, understanding and confidence in leading teaching and learning is crucial. Fundamentally in Singapore primary schools, senior leaders such as principals and vice-principals in the school
provide leadership development support for their middle leaders. These supports can include on the job training, coaching and mentoring by school leaders. Coaching and mentoring usually occur during formal discussions at work review sessions and during school management team meetings. Senior middle leaders are sometimes paired with newly appointed middle leaders to provide guidance for their less-experienced counterparts. Middle leaders are also expected to take ownership of their own continuing professional development by identifying and attending appropriate professional development programmes needed to carry out their roles effectively (Koh et al., 2011, p. 616).

The MOE recognises that quality school leadership is a strategic leverage point in the wake of the fast changing, diverse and complex environment. In a press release by the MOE (2007), it articulates the Philosophy for Educational Leadership as such:

a. educational leadership is anchored in values and purpose  
b. educational leadership inspires all towards a shared vision  
c. educational leadership is committed to growing people  
d. educational leadership leads and manages change

This educational leadership philosophy document was launched in 2007 with the intent to sharpen the focus of collective values for the fraternity of educational leaders. It also represents a unity in core beliefs among educational leaders about the objective of education in Singapore; that is to nurture the whole child to be the best that he/she can be, deeply anchored in values with a commitment to shaping the future of Singapore. Anchored on the philosophy for educational leadership, the Leader Growth Model (LGM) was introduced in 2014 to provide a professional development roadmap for all leaders-in-education, inclusive of middle leaders in schools. Accordingly to the MOE (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b), the Leader Growth Model (LGM) captures the most current research understanding about leadership along with priorities for leadership within the Singapore context.

On its website, the Academy of Singapore Teachers (2016b) describes the principles of leadership development under the Leader Growth Model (LGM) to be based on the premise that:
a. leadership can be learned  
b. the learner must take ownership of his/ her learning  
c. leadership development is on-going through a variety of modes and learning experiences  
d. it takes leaders to grow leaders

The Leader Growth Model (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b) is organised according to the six learning dimensions that describes educational leaders major domains of responsibilities and leadership aligned to the Philosophy for Educational Leadership in Singapore:

a. the ethical leader  
b. the educational leader  
c. the visionary leader  
d. the culture builder  
e. the change leader  
f. the network leader

Figure 5: The Leader Growth Model (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b)

The model expands and draws on the base of knowledge, experience and practice in teaching defined in the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a). According to the Academy of Singapore Teachers (2016b), the Leader Growth Model provides a common core of major leadership practices in its six learning dimensions. The Ethical Leader and Educational Leader form the foundation, directing the motivations and behaviours of the leaders in fulfilling the other four
domains of leadership practice. Mapped against each learning dimensions are the learning areas that represent the body of knowledge, skills, disposition, leadership actions and practices that allow the leader to understand how development in each learning area can be demonstrated and matched against their own performance and for personal growth and development (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b).

Figure 6: LGM learning areas (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b)

The MOE believes that leadership development is a process that requires a variety of developmental experiences. The Leader Growth Model (LGM) subscribes to developmental processes that include a combined range of learning strategies that are accessible, operational and within the work context of the learner. These contain elements of development assignments, relationships; and courses and training.

The Leader Growth Model (LGM) aims to provide coherence to the different domains of leadership characterised by beliefs, tasks, responsibilities and practice guided by the Philosophy for Educational Leadership in Singapore. It is highlighted that the model is not intended to be prescriptive in nature. It is to be
used to support and inform personal growth plans best determined by individual leaders who continues to aspire to excellence in practice. The MOE enunciates that in practice, educational leaders:

a. demonstrates responsibilities for his/ her personal growth
b. differentiates his/ her own growth needs according to the context in which he/ she leads
c. engages in personal inquiry and on-going self-assessment to build and strengthen leadership and learning
d. reflects on his/ her leadership practice and makes meanings from experiences
e. leads others to learn thereby ‘growing’ other leaders

The MOE accentuates that The Leader Growth Model (LGM) allows for flexible application of leadership development that accommodates leaders’ need relative to the contextual difference they are in. It is of note that the Leader Growth Model (LGM) recognises the multi-faceted nature of school leadership and provides an informed understanding of the overall shared goal of the Desired Outcomes of Education in every student in Singapore Education System. It also sets and sustains a shared purpose and goals that provide not only the school principals but also the middle leaders with the direction and meaning for their work.

To support capacity building for middle leaders, the MOE also provides a number of milestone programmes to augment their professional learning. One of such programmes is the Enhanced Leadership and Management Programme that equips newly-appointed middle leaders with ‘just-in-time’ skills to set directions for their department that is aligned to the MOE’s educational policy intent and curriculum objectives. The programme comprises two components: curriculum leadership and staff development. The first module aims to provide middle leaders with an overview of the MOE curriculum that prepares middle leaders for their role in overseeing the design and delivery of their department’s teaching and learning. The objective of the second module is to equip middle leaders with the skills to lead and develop others to accomplish organisational goals. The programme is in line with the principles of leadership development based on the premise that leadership can be learned.
Management and Leadership in Schools programme is another milestone programme for middle leaders. This 17-week in-service programme is designed for selected experienced middle leaders. The programme aims to develop innovative middle leaders in schools who can support their principals in school reform to expand beyond their departments and take on direct leadership for teaching and learning (Academy of Singapore Teachers, 2016b). The central focus of the programme encompasses building knowledge about educational policies, leadership, management, curriculum and assessment. To cater to varied learning needs of participants, a wide range of elective courses are made available for middle leaders to choose from. The programme also includes a one-week study visit to countries in the ASEAN and Asia–Pacific region to provide participants with alternative perspectives to challenge conventional mindsets in the current school system (National Institute of Education, 2016).

This section detailed how the MOE in Singapore prepares and supports middle leaders in dealing with new demands and expectations of their expanded role. It is of note that the expectations surrounding the role of middle leaders as a change agent and people developer is a significant theme in MOE’s leadership development policies and programmes.

2.5 Conclusion
This chapter has provided the background and context to the study. The chapter was organised in three parts. The first part presented the development of the education landscapes in Singapore and illustrated how it has evolved with changing national and global circumstances. The second part discussed the impact of Singapore educational reforms on teacher continuing professional development. This was followed by an examination of the impact of Singapore educational reforms on the role of middle leaders and their involvement in teacher continuing professional development in Singapore school contexts. Each part detailed areas of influence that have an impact on the progress of teacher continuing professional development and the role middle leaders play in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools.
While it is evident that the MOE has been working towards engaging teachers to continually develop throughout their careers, the essence of continuing professional development is not only how it happens in practice, but also how that practice is framed by people’s values and beliefs. As Ng Eng Hen, former Minister for Education, pointed out in his speech at the Teachers’ Conference 2008, ‘Ultimately, teachers themselves must believe in what they are doing’ (Ng, 2008). Teachers have to believe in the worth of their own continuing professional development for true development to take place. This adds value to the research problem that frames the study reported in this thesis, that is, to explore the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools hold in supporting teacher continuing professional development in the new paradigm.

The success of a ‘top-down support for bottom-up initiative’ approach demands changing mindsets of school leaders, middle leaders and teachers. This is especially true in cultures, like Singapore, where a highly-centralised education system is the norm and collaboration among teachers was almost non-existence. Professional development in the new paradigm entails teacher empowerment; teachers taking charge of their own learning. However, the culture of taking directives and initiatives from the top may diminish the desire and will for teachers to initiate change (Hairon, 2006, p.517). Similarly, school leaders might not be used to responding to teachers’ initiatives that affect school policies and practices. This culture could possibly explain why initiatives by the MOE could be cascaded down and translated to school policies and practices without much hindrance (Hairon, 2006, p.519). The concept of teacher continuing professional development requires not just understanding about continuing professional development but how it is manifested in the school culture and structure. This thus calls for a contextually grounded research aimed at understanding teacher continuing professional development in a local context. For true continuing professional development to materialise, the chasm that exists between theory and practice must be bridged.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam spoke of the need for continual learning and training at the official opening of the Lifelong Learning Institute in 2014, stressing the importance for Singaporeans to maximise their
potential from young and throughout their lives (Shanmugaratnam, 2014). He emphasised that:

We have to move beyond thinking there are simple divides between education and work, between pre-employment education and post-employment training, or between nurturing broad skills and developing specialist knowledge. These divides are too simple for the world that’s evolving before us. Too simple a divide because of the way technology is changing, jobs are changing and the way education must change if we are to prepare people well for life.

He brought to light challenges in changing mindsets and social culture about continual learning and skills upgrading; and for people to take ownership of their learning. The roles played by educational institutions to prepare students well for life and their future careers, before they start work; and for educational and training providers to take ownership in continual learning as part of their responsibility to prepare students for life and help them upgrade along the way are the key to preparing the future citizens of Singapore.

With these challenges, middle leaders face great challenges in effecting and promoting teacher continuing professional development in local school context. The issue of how middle leaders perceive their roles in this area is the main focus of this study.

The next chapter provides a conceptual framework to the study through a review of related literature over the past two decades on teacher continuing professional development.
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to conceptually frame and position the research focus of the study reported in this thesis. The research examines middle leaders’ perspectives on continuing professional development in practice and the influence of middle leadership in promoting teacher continuing professional development in local school contexts. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the study reported in this thesis will lead to new insights into the perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools as they manage their work and support teacher continuing professional development in an increasingly complex school environment.

Providing a conceptual framework is critical in view of the fact that over the past two decades an increasing volume of literature on teacher continuing professional development portrays the process as complex and challenging. To understand the concept of continuing professional development, it is essential to establish the key concepts that underpin continuing professional development. Within the literature, it is observed that many authors readily acknowledge the importance of teacher continuing professional development, describe its impact on educational changes and suggest models of effective continuing professional development. However, there continues to be a lack of a comprehensive definition on what teacher continuing professional development really is.

Numerous terminologies related to continuing professional development can be found in the research literature. Bolam and McMahon (2004) observed that some terms relating to continuing professional development include teacher development, in-service education and training (INSET), staff development, human resource development, professional development, continuing education and lifelong learning (p.33). These terms often have overlapping meanings and are defined very differently by a variety of authors (Bassett, 2016; Bolam & McMahon, 2004). Similar terms are sometimes used loosely and interchangeably (Craft, 2002). Most authors agree that their interpretations change over time (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Day & Sachs, 2004;
Hargreaves, 2000; Proudford, 1998; Whitty, 2006). However, the central concept in all is a desire to improve student outcomes and school effectiveness through teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Furlong, 2000; Goodson, 2000; Hoyle, 1995; Ozga, 1995; Parker, 2015; Pitt & Phelan, 2008; Sachs, 2016; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

With a view to bring greater clarity, this chapter provides an account of the development of concepts underpinning discourses of teacher professionalism and identity, definitions of teacher continuing professional development and middle leadership involvement in teacher continuing professional development in the last two decades. The review of literature will be presented in three parts:

3.2 concepts of teacher professionalism
3.3 concepts of teacher continuing professional development
3.4 role of middle leaders in continuing professional development

The first part examines the concept of teacher professionalism and identity; and explores the rationale for the importance of and sustained presence of teacher continuing professional development in the educational literature. The second part outlines the concepts of teacher continuing professional development and traces varying perspectives of what counts as effective continuing professional development from both international and local perspectives. The last section of this chapter looks at the role of middle leadership and other discrete challenges in effecting continuing professional development in schools. Each part will now be dealt with in turn as the conceptual frame that underpins this study is articulated.

**3.2 Concepts of teacher professionalism**

This first section of three discusses the concepts of teacher professionalism and identity, and outlines the importance of the rationale for teacher continuing professional development as it is reported in the current literature. In the past decade, Continuing Professional Development has been a key issue in government educational policy in countries worldwide. Explicit attempts have been made to improve teacher professionalism and identity through policies and teacher training (Furlong, 2000). Terms such as teacher professionals, teacher
professionalism and teacher identity are widely used in the literature of teacher education and development; however, the concept of teacher professionalism remains deeply contested (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Evans, 2008; Evetts, 2011; Furlong, 2000; Goodson, 2000; Hoyle, 1995; Ozga, 1995; Parker, 2015; Pitt & Phelan, 2008; Sachs, 2016; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). While it is not the aim of this study to provide an overview of debates concerning the nature of teachers’ professionalism and identity, major educational changes introduced in the 1990s have been concerned with the nature of professional knowledge, skills and values that teachers are expected to have and are given opportunities to develop. Teacher competencies in implementing effective curriculum is deemed as a key factor that can support students in achieving desired outcomes of their future success (OECD, 2018). Debates around the very nature of teacher professionalism and identity are therefore debates about the form and content of teacher continuing professional development itself. For the purpose of this study, it is important to look into literature pertaining to the area of teacher professionalism and its implications for continuing professional development.

The concept of teacher professionalism has long been contentious. Traditionally, notions of professionalism entail knowledge, autonomy and internal regulation exercised by members of an occupation in providing services to society (Evans, 2008; Hoyle, 1995). The origins can be traced in traditional professions such as law and medicine where the nature of these occupations typically demands the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge; education and training in skills involved certified by examination; and a code of professional conduct oriented towards the public good (Millerson, 1964, p.4). Debates within literature on the concept of teacher professionalism often pointed towards a lack of conceptual clarity and consensus relating to teaching as a profession. Earlier debates examined the locus of control (Hoyle, 1975; Ingersoll, 2009; Leiter, 1981), which positions teaching as a semi-professional occupation. This approach of comparison with traditional professions, such as medicine and law, has been criticised and seen as an artificial construct (Crook, 2008). The central issue in the concept of teacher professionalism remains the tension between teacher autonomy and conformity to an accountability structure that requires teachers to achieve organisational goals which act to undermine
the former (Bailey, 2015; Ben-Peretz, 2012; Robertson, 2013; Seddon, Ozga & Levin, 2013).

The rapidly changing educational landscape has had an effect on the way teacher professionalism and identity is conceptualised and generally understood (Gray & Whitty, 2010). Given the significant shifts in what it means to be an education professional of 21st century, a more recent sociological perspective portrays teacher professionalism as a socially constructed shifting phenomenon that is constantly being redefined to serve different interests (Evetts, 2011; Ingersoll, 2013; Parker, 2015; Robertson, 2013; Whitty, 2006). Instead of perceiving and defining teacher professionalism in comparison with the classical occupations, other literature has centred on the development of types of teacher professionalism that provide for transformation, activism and broader social and civic responsibilities (Hargreaves, 2000; Hoyle, 2001; Kennedy, 2005; Sachs, 2003, Sockett, 1996). The rapidly changing educational landscape has had an effect on the way teacher professionalism is conceptualised and generally understood (Gray & Whitty, 2010). Within the literature, there are several interpretations of teacher professionalism in the new paradigm but the broad consensus points to professionalism as externally imposed and set within the parameters of a profession’s collective remit and responsibilities. These will now be presented in turn.

Hargreaves (2000) describes teacher professionalism by exploring its development through four phases. The key characteristics of each phase is summarised as follows:

a) The pre-professional age: In the pre-professional age, teaching was managerially demanding but technically simple. Teachers were only expected to complete tasks assigned by their knowledgeable superiors. In this era of unquestioned common sense, much of professional learning was served observing one’s own teachers while being in their classes a student.

b) The age of autonomous professional: The autonomous age marked a phase where teachers gained pedagogical freedom to choose the method they deemed best for their students. Professional learning opportunities flourished with the growth of continuing professional development and in-service education.
c) The age of collegial professional: Creating professional cultures of collaboration in response to rapid changes was the main focus for the age of the collegial professional. Transition from individual to more collective forms of professionalism. Professional learning involves heightened emphasis on teamwork and collaborative decision making among school staff.

d) The post-professional age: The post-professional age in contrast marked an era characterized by polarised directions with some groups seeking to de-professionalised the work of teaching and other groups proposing to redefine teacher professionalism. Professional learning in this era is more positive, wide-ranging and flexible in nature (Hargreaves, 2000, pp. 153-168).

Hargreaves (2000) argues that contemporary education reforms at the turn of the new millennium signify the post-professional age (p.167). While this age sees a potential creation of positive new partnerships beyond schools that could enhance teacher professionalism, the intensified work demands and copious uncertainties could also lead to de-professionalization of teachers. Hargreaves (2000) argues strongly that whether or not the post-professional age will witness the de-professionalisation of teaching or re-definition of teacher professionalism, the outcome should not be left to fate. He believes that it should be shaped by the active intervention of all educators who aim to create better classroom learning for students (Hargreaves, 1994).

An alternative set of literature on teacher professionalism addresses the development of teacher professionalism that highlights transformation and a link between teachers’ work and their broader social and civic responsibilities (Robertson, 2013; Seddon, Ozga & Levin, 2013; Solbrekke & Englund, 2011). In describing professionalism, Sachs (2001) defines professional identity as a set of externally ascribed characteristics that is used to differentiate one group from another. She argues that educational policy and practice in recent times gives rise to two distinct forms of teacher identity, namely, managerial and democratic professionalism. According to Sachs (2001), with devolution at the core of reform agendas, the managerial discourse generates enforced professionalism through policies that emphasise accountability and effectiveness (Furlong, 2005; Sachs, 2001; Whitty, 2008). Sachs (2001) points out that the managerialist discourse tends to promote individualism, isolation and privacy to teachers’
work. In contrast, democratic professionalism emphasizes collaborative and cooperative actions between teachers and other education stakeholders. This discourse suggests a wider teacher responsibility that includes contribution to the school, system and community. Sachs (2001) believes that the democratic discourse that promotes an activist identity has clearer emancipatory aims as it promotes collaborative cultures that are central to teachers' work practices. In recent years, Sachs (2016) advocates recasting professional identity around practices that are informed and improved by and through teacher and classroom research. She acknowledges that different times call for different responses; the context of teacher professionalism therefore changes with societal needs. The key to transformative professionalism is the support from members of the profession as well as other interest groups and stakeholders. Sachs (2016) believes that the transition from the old to new paradigm allows for a transformative professionalism that can be revitalised in a rapidly changing work environment.

In a similar vein, Whitty (2008) advocates the construction of a different type of professionalism, one that is considered ‘more appropriate to contemporary needs’ (p.42). He suggests moving towards a democratic professionalism that calls for more active teacher engagement involving a wide range of stakeholders committed to fostering social justice. This is close to the Sachs’ (2001) notion of activist identity where activist professionals take responsibility for their own continuing professional learning and work within communities of practice that develop in larger contexts (p.181). In Whitty’s (2006) view, it is crucial to build alliances between teachers and other stakeholders, including parents and members of the wider community, in order to encourage the development of collaborative cultures. Teachers would then see that they have a responsibility that goes beyond their classrooms to a broader social agenda. He acknowledges the need for strong professional bodies that are open to support teachers by providing them with a position of greater strength and confidence as they confront the need to work with others. However, Whitty (2008) cautions that for this to work, teachers must first consider themselves as ‘agents of change’ and not ‘victims of change’ (p.45).
Further interpretations of teacher professionalism describe it as a way of improving teacher quality and enhancing teachers’ perceptions of their job status and efficacy (Boyt, Lusch & Naylor, 2001; Evans, 2008, 2011; Helsby, 1995; Hoyle & Wallace, 2007). Evans (2011) points out that many interpretations of teacher professionalism focus on the articulated perception of external agencies, such as the government, on what lies within the parameters of a professional’s collective remit and responsibilities. Evans (2011) puts forward that this notion of professionalism describes ‘something that is’ and not ‘something that ought to be’ (p.855) and it focuses on teachers’ behaviour rather than on their attitudes and intellect. This interpretation of prescribed professionalism may turn into a mere set of service-level requirements unless it is accepted and adopted by the practitioners at whom it is directed. In trying to describe what professionalism is, Evans (2008) defines the concept of professionalism as:

work practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession or occupation and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession’s or occupation’s purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the profession or occupation, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice (p.29)

To further illustrate this interpretation of the concept, Evans (2011) deconstructs the notion of professionalism into three main constituent parts:

a) The behavioural component: relates to what practitioners physically do at work. It comprises sub-components: the processual, procedural, productive and competential dimensions of professionalism. These relate to processes and procedures that practitioners apply to their work, as well as how much people ‘do’ in terms of output, productivity and what they achieve. It also takes into account practitioners’ skills and competences.

b) The attitudinal component: relates to attitudes held. This is presented in three sub-components, namely perceptual, evaluative and motivational dimensions of professionalism which relate to perceptions, beliefs and views held; practitioners’ values; and practitioners’ motivation, job satisfaction and morale.

c) The intellectual component: relates to practitioners’ knowledge and understanding of their knowledge structures. It includes the epistemological, rationalistic, comprehensive and analytical
dimensions of professionalism that relate to the bases of practitioners’ knowledge; the nature and degree of reasoning they apply to their practice; what they know and understand; and the nature and degree of their analyticism. (Evans, 2011, p.856)

Evans (2011) purports that professionalism is principally about people being practitioners. Consequently, professionalism needs to be considered on the basis of how real and authentic it is. She illustrates how teacher professionalism remains as a mere service-level agreement if it is improved from above, but not accepted and adopted by the practitioners at whom it is directed (Evans, 2011, p. 861). Evans identifies four states of professionalism summarized as follows:

a) Professionalism that is demanded or requested: reflecting specific professional service demands made of an occupational workforce.

b) Professionalism that is prescribed: reflecting professional service levels envisaged by analysts.

c) Professionalism that is enacted: professional practice as observed, perceived and interpreted.

d) Professionalism that is deduced or assumed: reasoned deduction and/or assumption or speculation about the nature of professionalism (Evans, 2011, pp. 861-862).

Evans stresses the importance of a meaningful conception of professionalism that is enacted in the reality of daily practices. She believes that practitioners mediate demanded professionalism to varying degrees with their own modification within differing contexts. Hence, enacted professionalism is constantly re-shaping itself through the dynamic agency of its practitioners (Evans, 2011, p.863). Evans draws attention to the fact that it has been a challenge defining teacher professionalism over the last decades because most research fails to depict the reality.

Professionalism refers not only to the influence of the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images of society about what teachers should know or do, but also what teachers themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal background (Evans, 2008; Tickle, 2000). It is argued that the concept of professionalism strongly determines the way teachers teach,
the way they develop as teachers and their attitudes toward educational changes (Beijaard et al., 2004; Wenger, 1998). Villegas-Reimers (2003) highlights the importance of the way teachers view their roles as central to professionalism. She maintains that ‘views on the roles of teachers are culturally and socially embedded, and teachers’ own perspectives of their roles and professional affect, and are affected by, the conception of teaching that is prevalent in their societies’ (p.31). The literature suggests that the notion of teacher professionalism is itself socially constructed and subjected to geographical and cultural differences in interpretation, which themselves may change over time (Helsby, 1995). It is also crucial to note that teachers themselves may assert or deny their own professionalism and positioning within the profession.

Understanding the notion of teacher professionalism is central to teacher continuing professional development as any attempt to shape or re-shape teacher professionalism has an effect on how teachers develop professionally (Evans, 2011; Guskey, 2002; Hargreaves, 2001). The strong relationship between teachers’ beliefs, their behaviours and attitudes (Evans, 1993) influences how they take to teacher continuing professional development. It is generally believed that if every teacher were to be considered a change agent (Fullan, 1993; Whitty, 2008), they must first believe that change is necessary and be willing to modify their practice. The concept of professionalism in a rapidly changing educational landscape calls for professional learning opportunities necessary for the development of transformative professionals. Continuing professional development is therefore often viewed as an essential component for successful school level change and development (Day, 1999b; Gray & Whitty, 2010; Hargreaves, 1994).

3.3 Concepts of Continuing Professional Development

Until the mid-1990s, teacher development was often taken up as a matter of voluntary commitment or something for those with career ambitions (Craft, 2002). Traditional notions of teacher development include in-service training that usually consists of workshops or short-term courses that offer teachers new information on a particular aspect of their work. It focused mainly on individual
teacher’s development in knowledge, skills and attitudes (Bolam, 1982). This notion of continuing professional development, however, has been criticised as irrelevant to teachers’ context and having little impact on student outcomes and school improvement (Darling-Hammond & Mclaughin, 1995; Guskey, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). To cope with the rapidly changing educational landscape, research on school development has called for a paradigm shift in the field of teacher development, placing teachers in the centre of the learning process. This is based on the belief that teachers are closest to the classroom and thus they can implement changes that will make a difference to learning and learners, and consequently enhanced student learning outcomes (Craft, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

The following section provides a comprehensive picture of the development in the last two decades of the concepts underpinning the discourse of teacher continuing profession development. As such, the following key topics have been selected for discussion:

(i) defining continuing professional development
(ii) attributes of an effective continuing professional development
(iii) issues, concerns and tensions in continuing professional development

(i) defining continuing professional development
Similar to challenges faced by researchers in defining the concept of teacher professionalism, within the teacher continuing professional development literature, the concept of continuing professional development is often described as ambiguous and ill defined (Coffield, 2000; Evans, 2008; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Goodall, Day, Lindsay, Muijs, & Harris, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Kennedy, 2014). Although numerous research studies and articles have been published over the past two decades, there continues be a paucity of literature on teacher continuing professional development (Coffield, 2000; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Kennedy, 2014; McCormick, 2010; Tatko, 2013). A review of the literature brings to light a variety of descriptions and interpretations on what researchers believe constitute continuing professional development. Most of these studies point to an assortment of suggestions, theories, models and interpretations for teacher continuing professional development from the view of policy makers and
educationalists. Others have attempted to define the concept by describing the nature of an effective continuing professional development; and highlighting different aspects of continuing professional development that they consider imperative. Over the past decades, many researchers have identified a large variety of interpretations of the concept continuing professional development, some of which are conflicting, and criticised the lack of a definitive description within the literature (Coffield, 2000; Evans, 2002; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Goodall et al., 2005; Hoban, 2002). Despite the differing and sometimes conflicting definitions and interpretations, there are a number of shared key characteristics on the concepts of teacher continuing professional development that can be elicited within the literature.

One key characteristic of teacher continuing professional development in the new paradigm is the acknowledgment of the fact that teachers learn over time. Cordingley (2015), as well as others (Earley, 2009; Veen, Zwart & Meirink, 2012) propose that teachers need time to develop, understand, discuss and practise new knowledge. Continuing professional development is therefore perceived as a long-term process rather than a one-off event (Fullan, 1982). Researchers highlight that teachers’ knowledge is socially constructed and it influences teachers’ personal and social interactions (Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Therefore effective continuing professional development should also recognise the interdependency of social, personal and professional development where a series of related opportunities and experiences should be provided regularly to allow teachers to relate prior knowledge to new experiences (Liberman, 1994).

The focus of contemporary continuing professional development has also shifted from the development of individual teachers to the development of schools as institutions. The shift calls on schools as learning organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together (Senge, 1990). Stoll and Kools (2017, p. 8) describe learning organisations as one that has a supportive culture, and invests time and other resources in quality, ongoing and active professional learning opportunities for all staff. As a
result, continuing professional development is also considered a process of culture building in support of school reform and a collaborative process where meaningful interactions take place (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughin, 1995; Halbert & Kaser, 2013; Hargraves & Fullan, 2012; Kools & Stoll, 2016; Guskey, 1995).

One example that is instructive is the systems of continuing professional development presented by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001). They describe three approaches of continuing professional development that ‘co-exist in the world of educational policy, research and practice’ that are ‘invoked by differently positioned people in order to explain and justify different ideas and approaches to improving teaching and learning’ (p. 47). The three approaches are:

a. knowledge-for-practice: assumes that university-based researchers generate formal knowledge and theory for teachers to use in order to improve practice

b. knowledge-in-practice: some of the most essential knowledge for teaching is perceived as ‘practical’ knowledge, or knowledge that is embedded in practice

c. knowledge-of-practice: knowledge that is not divided into formal and practical knowledge. Teachers gain knowledge for teaching when they have the opportunity to reflect on their practice and use a process of inquiry in their own environment to learn more about effective teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, pp. 47-49)

In contrast to traditional notion of continuing professional development, teachers are perceived to play a more active role in learning in the new professional development paradigm (Lieberman, 1995). For effective continuing professional development to take place, it is crucial for teachers to engage in continuing career long development that meet their personal and professional needs (Goodall, et al., 2005). Teachers are consequently deemed to be reflective practitioners who are empowered to take charge of their own learning by building new pedagogical theories and practices through continuing professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Czeriawshi, 2013; Darling-Hammond & McLaughin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995).
Although the concept of continuing professional development has been described as ambiguous and ill defined, in contrast to earlier literature that has employed it with concepts such as on-the-job training and staff development, it is evident that many researchers adopt a more holistic and broader description of the concept. Amongst the variety of definitions offered within the literature, Day’s (1999a) definition of continuing professional development is one of the most commonly adopted as it appears to draw on elements that many stakeholders increasingly value and which are significant to current issues. He defines professional development as:

> It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives’ (Day, 1999a, p. 4).

Such a definition encourages a transformational view of continuing professional development.

Despite a growing consensus on the characteristics of continuing professional development, many studies reveal that continuing professional development has failed to yield satisfactory outcomes (Borko, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Kennedy, 2014; Heystek & Terhoven, 2015; Schunk, Meece & Pintrich, 2012; Tatto, 2013). Some researchers blame the oversimplification of the concept while others blame the lack of literature that builds on the work of others. There are also a number of studies that reviewed earlier research on teacher continuing professional development in an attempt to conceptualise the complex process in ways that provide a foundation for future empirical work (Hoban, 2002; Kennedy, 2014; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 1997; Tatto, 2013), and yet clarity is still deemed questionable.

One such study is that of Kennedy (2014) who proposes a revised framework of continuing professional development models based on her original study in 2005. The framework aims to provide a more systematic and contextually appropriate analysis of continuing professional development policy and practice.
Drawing from a range of international research, Kennedy (2005, 2014) presents a spectrum of continuing professional development models:

a. Training Model - provides teachers with opportunity to update their skills in order to demonstrate their competence

b. Deficit Model - designed to specifically address a perceived deficit in teacher performance

c. Cascade Model - involves individual teachers attending training events and then disseminate the information to colleagues; as a means of sharing own successful learning with peers

d. Award-bearing Model - emphasises on completion of award-bearing programmes, usually validated by universities

e. Standards-based Model - focuses on the implementation of standards of teaching

f. Coaching/ Mentoring Model - learning within school context, enhanced by sharing dialogue with colleagues to support professional development, usually one-to-one

g. Community of practice Model - focus on problematising practice within a shared, local context

h. Collaborative professional inquiry Model - element of collaborative problem identification and subsequent activity that involves inquiring into one’s own practices and understanding more about other practice (Kennedy, 2014, pp. 691-693)

These models are classified under 3 different categories of purpose, namely Transmissive, Malleable and Transformative purpose. Kennedy (2005) explains that the analysis framework focuses on the perceived purpose of each model, identifying the issues of power in relation to central control, individual teacher autonomy and profession-wide autonomy (p.236). She suggests that the first three models fundamentally fulfil a Transmissive purpose that give teachers little opportunities to take control over their own learning; the following four models classified under the Malleable purpose acknowledge that one particular model of continuing professional development can be used to different ends depending on the intended or unintended purpose (Kennedy, 2014. p. 692). While the capacity of professional autonomy and teacher agency at the Transformative category is deemed to be greater than that at the Malleable and Transmissive
categories, Kennedy (2014) cautions that this autonomy is only considered transformative if it is enacted and translated by teachers into practice.

Drawing references from Sachs’ (2001) work on teacher professionalism, Kennedy (2014) illustrates how it helps to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the Transmissive and Transformative purpose in analysing continuing professional development policy. Similar to the notion of Transmissive purpose, teachers are seen as compliant, efficient workers under the managerial perspectives on professionalism. In contrast, the democratic perspectives on professionalism positions teachers as change agents and proactive advocates of social justice.

Kennedy (2014) highlights the importance of the context through which professional knowledge is acquired and used. She emphasises that no one individual model on its own can be seen to support a particular purpose of professional development. The categories are designed to help analyse patterns and trends in individual professional development experiences; and institution and system-wide approaches. It is recognised that key elements of other professional development models (Boreham, 2004; Day, 1999a; Hoban, 2002; Little, 2001; Smyth, 1991; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989) found in the literature, also reveal elements of effective professional development shown in the framework proposed by Kennedy (2005, 2014). The framework is clearly instructive in this case.

(ii) attributes of effective continuing professional development
Within the literature on teacher continuing professional development, there are also a number of studies that have explored the elements that constitute an effective professional development (Desimone, 2011; Guskey, 2000, 2002; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Desimone (2011) argues that it is challenging to distinguish the effects of professional learning on knowledge, instructions and student achievement; therefore it is crucial to focus on the features of professional development activities that lead to teacher learning. She suggests that measuring the common features, that research shows are related to the outcomes, helps to assess whether or not professional development
programmes are effective in achieving their intended objectives. An effective continuing professional development is defined as teacher learning which provides the conditions for change in practice and thereby results in improvement in student outcomes. It is recognised that change in practice requires not only increased knowledge and skill on the part of the teacher (Daring-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013; Miizell, 2010), but also a change in attitudes and beliefs (Corley, 2011; Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002).

In reviewing the research literature on teacher continuing professional development, Desimone (2009) noted a number of features that are widely endorsed by the field as key features for effective teacher continuing professional development. These features can be broadly classified into five attributes:

a. content-focus
b. coherence
c. active learning
d. collaborative
e. duration

**Content-focus**
Main and Pendergast (2015, p.5) define content focus as the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to carry out their day-to-day work in the classroom. These include subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as well as pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Studies show that continuing professional development activities that are embedded in everyday practice and focus on content-specific knowledge and pedagogic knowledge are deemed to have a more significant impact on practice (Adams, 2014; Cohen & Hill 2001; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman, 2002; Little, 2012; Yates, 2007).

**Coherence**
Effective continuing professional development must be coherent to teachers and, therefore, it is crucial to look into the needs of schools as well as individual teachers (Day, 1999a; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Many factors can influence the
professional belief systems of teachers. For continuing professional development to be meaningful to teachers, it is crucial to recognize that it needs to take into account individual teacher’s own biography, their responses to the new knowledge and how they use this knowledge (Craft, 2002, p.192). Opfer & Pedder (2011), as well as others (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Huberman, 1995), also confirm a significant relationship between continuing professional development and teachers’ prior knowledge and experiences, career stages (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hargreaves, 2000), professional learning attitudes (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Richardson, 1996) and value preferences (Guskey, 2002; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Richardson, 1996). These findings highlight factors that affect teachers in their enactment of new knowledge and skills learnt. Teachers are more likely to commit to the continuing professional development when the objectives are aligned with their personal goals and professional beliefs (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Huberman, 1995; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Richardson, 1996).

Active learning
An important body of literature emphasizes the concept of ‘teachers as adult learners’ (Terehoff, 2002) who are empowered to develop the necessary skills and take responsibility of their own growth and development (Bush, 1999; Cody & Guskey, 1997; Glatthorn & Fox, 1996; Knowles, 1980). Some key aspects to this concept include ‘evaluation and feedback’ (Cody & Guskey, 1997; Guskey, 2000), ‘realistic goals’ and ‘activities relevant to teachers’ professional needs’ (Glatthorn & Fox, 1996; Terehoff, 2002). Easton (2008) identified effective continuing professional development to be participant driven, where teachers become active learners. He envisages active learning as identifying staff expertise available in school to move learning from passive, being trained and developed, to active learning. Pintrich (2000) describes active learning as a self-regulatory process whereby learners set goals, plan and evaluate for their learning. Some authors (Guskey, 1989; Korthagen, 1999) identified reflection as the key to teacher learning and school change efforts. Reflection is referred to as a mental process of structuring or restructuring an experience, a problem or
existing knowledge and insights thereby allowing teachers to interpret their tasks in an active, conscious and exploratory manner (Korthagen, 1999).

Collaborative

The idea of a collaborative learning approach encompassing individual and collective responsibility, allows teachers to learn from, and with one another. This creates opportunities for teachers to co-construct ideas, challenge their own assumptions and experiment with classroom practices in the light of peer feedback and self-evaluation (Pedder, Storey & Opfer, 2008), and at the same time, build relationships that will support a learning community (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Little, 1993). They develop norms of collegiality (Adey, 2004; Guskey & Huberman, 1995); and contribute positively to building organisational culture (Fullan, 2002; Lieberman, 1995).

Duration

Lastly, effective and sustainable continuing professional development allows adequate time for teachers to reflect, grow and make changes to their practices (Adey, 2004; Lieberman, 1995; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Conclusions from several surveys and studies (McMahon, 1998; Wray & Medwell, 2000; Yates, 2007) reveal that the majority of teacher participants in training programmes perceived short courses as ineffective. To them, these courses merely raise awareness of new innovations. Teachers believe that the number of hours spent engaging with the content contribute more significantly to their professional renewal. Several authors also point to the fact that support from policy makers and school principals are equally vital to the success of continuing professional development (Bush, 1999; Moore, 2007).

Although there appears to be a number of shared key characteristics on the concepts of teacher continuing professional development within the literature, researchers have criticised the lack of one single concept that is widely accepted and capable of being understood in a range of contexts (Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Kennedy, 2014). While there has been an increasing emphasis on teacher continuing professional development as key to increasing teacher quality and improving quality of student learning, a growing number of
researchers are arguing that research in this area has yielded disappointing results with varied interpretations of continuing professional development practice and conflicting definitions and models (Borko, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Coffield, 2000; Colquhoun & Kelly, 2013; Timperley, 2011). The impact of context on continuing professional development also makes it difficult for successful models to be transferred from one context to another (Guskey, 2000). Kennedy argues that:

Broad agreement with the sentiment does not necessarily recognise the complexity of the situation and the multiple perspectives that position teacher professional learning as good, or indeed as fundamental (Kennedy, 2015, p.1).

The current research literature is increasingly reflecting the tension in relation to whom and what professional learning is for. Some important issues, concerns and tensions that the critics of teacher continuing professional development highlight are emerging and are discussed in the ensuing section. The purpose of such a discussion is to acknowledge the levels of tensions that are evident in the field of continuing professional development, particularly where the context by which continuing professional development is enacted. It is the aim of this study to uncover the perspectives of middle leaders on their conception of teacher continuing professional development and how it influences their practice in school. This is particularly crucial as middle leaders work closely with teachers and are deemed to have greater influence over how teachers develop professionally. The perspectives and influence of middle leaders is an important dimension of teacher continuing professional development that is often overlooked by critical theorists, but presented here as a core concern underpinning the study reported in this thesis.

(iii) issues, concerns and tensions in continuing professional development

In recent years, researchers have argued that studies on teacher continuing professional development have yielded disappointing results. Conflicting results among research findings are common and the outcomes of teacher learning remains unpredictable. Some researchers have criticised studies in the literature for oversimplifying the concept of teacher continuing professional development and failing to consider how learning is embedded in professional lives and
working conditions (Borko, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Other researchers call for a more widely accepted concept that is capable of being understood in a range of contexts (Earley & Porritt, 2014; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Kennedy, 2014; McCormick, 2010). Vast differences in professional contexts and multiple perspectives that position teacher professional learning also add to the complexity in implementation (Kennedy, 2015). At the core of many of these debates lies the fact that the concept of teacher continuing professional development fails to capture the multidimensional nature of teacher learning.

One key issue within the literature concerns the concept of continuing professional development as collective learning within the organisation. Better teaching practices are considered to be achieved with collaboration, linking collaborative activity and achievement of the shared purpose (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace, Greenwood, Hawkey, Ingram, Atkinson & Smith, 2005). Tension between individual teacher agency and organisational goals, however, remains unresolved in context and in the literature. On one hand, continuing professional development should ideally result from the personal initiative of motivated teachers (Adams, 2005), where teachers as adult learners are empowered to develop necessary skills and take responsibility of their own growth and development (Terehoff, 2002). On the other hand, the notion of training professionals to fulfil specific work roles and attempts to centralise policies promoting continuing professional development activities that are considered strategically beneficial for schools negate the notion of teacher autonomy in determining their own learning. Researchers such as Huberman (1995), Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002), Opfer and Pedder (2011) accentuate that teachers are more likely to commit to continuing professional development when the objectives are aligned with their personal goals and professional beliefs. Bolam (2000) highlighted the need to redress the balance between meeting the needs of individual professionals and those of the school and national policy so as to make improvements to the continuing professional development agenda.
To shed light on the extent to which teachers’ continuing professional development experiences addressed teachers’ professional needs and / or the professional needs of their institutions, Gerry Czerniawski (2013) reports on a small-scale longitudinal interview-based study with teachers in Norway, Germany and England. The study is a follow-up to a previous research project that examined participants’ professional socialisation into teaching. The current study involved 32 teachers from the original sample in exploring the variety and depth of experiences they have had of continuing professional development. Findings from the study revealed that participants across the three countries described their continuing professional development as neither systematic nor particularly successful. Gerry Czerniawski (2013) explains that teachers were dissatisfied with the sweeping one-size-fits-all European agenda for teacher continuing professional development. Tension involving the question ‘who decides’ is evident in this study. Attempts to centralise policies promoting continuing professional development activities considered strategically beneficial for schools not only counteracted the individual freedom of teachers to actively determine their own learning needs but also rendering teachers as mere tools for school improvement.

Conversely, tensions between teachers’ individual agency and organisational development can also work against either or both factors. In their study to uncover obstacles to teacher professional learning and organisational development, Hökkä and Eteläpelto (2014) applied qualitative meta-analysis to reanalyse the main findings of four previous primary empirical studies conducted in a Finnish teacher education department. Data collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews with eight teacher educators highlighted the correlation between strong individual agency and organisational development. Hökkä and Eteläpelto (2014) found that strong individual agency could work against organisational development. These individuals used their strong personal agency to protect individual ways of working and safeguard resources of their own subject matter, thus creating powerful obstacles to collaboration and shared knowledge construction within the organisation.
Another key issue within the literature is how teachers learn and change through continuing professional development. A teacher’s belief in teaching and learning is critical to teacher practice and change. However, the notion of teacher change is often oversimplified and conflicting in literature. One example is the model of teacher change that may result because of teacher continuing professional development. Some researchers consider teacher change as a linear process. Guskey (1989) explains that teachers change their beliefs as a result of a change in their practice that leads to a change in students’ learning. In contrast, Desimone (2009) argues that teachers have to first change their beliefs before they can change their practice to support change in students’ learning. Conceptualising the concept of teacher change as a linear process dismisses the importance of the continuous and sometimes conflicting interplay between an individual teacher’s practices, experiences and knowledge and his or her beliefs within his or her orientation towards learning (Cobb, Wood & Yackel, 1990). Building on Guskey’s model, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) presented teacher change as a cyclical process with multiple entry points. The model takes into account four domains: personal domain, external domain, domain of practice and domain of consequence. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) explain that these are the four distinct domains that encompass the teacher’s world. Unlike models that consider teacher change as a linear process, their model assumes that change occurs through the mediating processes of reflection and enactment.

A study reported by McDonough, Clarkson and Scott (2010) investigated change in teachers’ perspectives at the end of a two-year professional learning project. Teachers from eleven Catholic primary schools in and around Melbourne were involved in a project titled Contemporary Teaching and Learning of Mathematics. The aim of the project was to enhance pedagogical content knowledge of teachers that would in turn, lead to an improvement in student mathematics learning. These teachers participated in twelve sessions of full-day professional learning over the two years and undertook a range of teaching and assessment activities that involved working with educators outside their schools and collaborative activities within their own school community. A written survey was conducted to understand teachers’ perspectives about their change in beliefs and
practice in the teaching of mathematics. The research findings showed that most teachers in this study believed that they improved in their teaching as a result of the support given through the project. McDonough et al. (2010) argued that instead of determining which changes first, it is more crucial to support teachers to change their beliefs and practice in tandem.

Arguments about how teachers learn and change through continuing professional development also has a bearing on how schools evaluate the impact of continuing professional development. Despite widespread agreement about the importance of continuing professional development in realising student achievement, research shows that there is little evidence that continuing professional development has had an impact on teachers’ practices or on student achievements (Timperley, 2011). Some studies reveal that teachers fail to see the purpose of continuing professional development because schools face challenges in articulating and evaluating the impact of continuing professional development on student learning (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Earley & Porritt, 2014; Porritt, 2009; Timperley, 2011).

Within the literature, there are many theories, models and approaches that seek to evaluate impact on teacher continuing professional development. However, Porritt (2009) points out that the impact of teacher continuing professional development on student learning is either rarely evaluated by schools or rarely executed effectively. One of the challenges in impact evaluation is that schools often consider it as an after-thought or accountability measure and focus largely on teacher satisfaction and the continuing professional development activity itself (King, 2014). Earley and Porritt (2014) point out that there continues to be an underlying issue that the extensive literature on what contributes to an effective continuing professional development is still not sufficiently reflected in actual practice seen in and across schools. For schools to be able to evaluate impact effectively, they must first understand that the underlying principle of an effective continuing professional development is that it makes a tangible difference to the attitudes, thinking and practice of teachers and has the potential to make a difference for the organisation and for students (Earley & Porritt, 2014).
The link between teacher continuing professional development and student achievements is not automatic. Guskey (2002) points out that to achieve the desired impact of continuing professional development, follow-up actions that would lead to improved practice are more critical than the training itself. Adding to that, Earley and Porritt (2014) highlight the need for schools to understand that impact evaluation is not an end in itself but a way to improve the quality of the intended outcomes. Therefore, to be able to evaluate the impact of continuing professional development, it is critical that the anticipated outcomes are explicit from the beginning (Porritt, 2009). This notion is also reflected in Guskey’s (2002) and Bubb and Earley’s (2010) impact evaluation models that suggest schools should set out to establish how things were before the commencement of continuing professional development. Establishing such baselines will also enable participants to plan forward and chart their development and progress over time (King, 2014). Research shows that these baseline data are often absent, therefore meaningful comparisons cannot be made (Porritt, 2013). For schools to effectively evaluate the impact of continuing professional development on student learning, it is also crucial for school leaders to acknowledge that continuing professional development is a complex process that requires time to allow for improved practice to become embedded in everyday interactions with learners (Porritt, 2013). School leaders should therefore align the school’s intended impact within a specified timescale that support not only short-term and individual goals but also time to embed change and success at the school level.

Earley and Porritt (2014) also cited the lack of experience as one of the reasons why schools fail to see the link between continuing professional development activity and improvements. Within the literature, existing research is predominantly small-scale in nature and fails to provide an evidence base that can inform practice (Kennedy, 2014). Moreover, change is contextual and influenced by a myriad of factors that can result in change impacting in different ways (King, 2014). There is no single form of continuing professional development that can be implemented in all contexts due to the vast variability in educational contexts (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Educational institutions must
therefore evaluate their needs and decide on the form of continuing professional development that benefits them most. This highlights the need to develop the strategic leadership of continuing professional development.

Eraut (1994) points out that within the enactment of teaching, an easy relationship with application to practice is often assumed. More often than not, the way teachers use knowledge gained from continuing professional development has not been researched in depth. How teachers make their own meaning of professional learning is crucial in terms of how the knowledge influences and transforms their practices. While the above discussion serves to briefly highlight the multidimensional and complex nature of teacher learning, it recognises the critical role leaders play in ensuring impactful teacher continuing professional development in schools.

3.4 Role of middle leaders in continuing professional development

By way of reiteration, it is to be noted that over the past two decades, the roles of middle leaders have become more complex in nature. Besides supervising the teaching and learning of the subject area they were in charge of, they are also responsible for creating a climate that promotes sustainable quality teaching and enhanced learning practices in schools. Literature shows that the descriptions on the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders are fairly similar to that of a middle leader in Singapore, illustrated in the earlier chapter. The term ‘middle leaders’ commonly refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools. Their role is of a dual nature in such that it includes both managerial responsibilities and classroom teaching. In Singapore, middle leadership encompasses roles such as heads of department, year heads, subject and level heads. Although some authors noted that titles and job scope of middle leaders vary across educational levels, sites and countries, they are indicative of the roles that could be considered as middle leaders in school contexts.

Earlier empirical research into middle leadership roles in schools tended to focus largely on the identity, responsibilities and challenges of subject leaders and heads of departments (Bennett, 1995; Brown & Rutherford, 1996; Busher,
However, Harris and Jones (2017) noted that contemporary research is more extensive and offers empirically based accounts of the nature, practice and influence of middle leaders in schools (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2015; Harris, 2014; Ng, 2015). The idea of leading from the middle is a relatively new concept in the leadership literature, first identified by Hargreaves and Braun (2012) as a strategy for system reform where leadership in the middle tier is acknowledged as crucial to the success of contemporary schools. The structural idea about leading from the middle also reinforces the importance of distributed leadership in school contexts.

The following section provides a broad picture of the development in the last two decades of the concepts underpinning the discourse of middle leadership. As such, the following key topics have been selected for discussion:

(i) concept of distributed leadership
(ii) role of middle leaders

These topics will now be discussed in turn.

(i) concept of distributed leadership

Research on educational leadership has typically focussed on the roles played by principals in reforming schools. Leadership as a distributed concept gains attention in the past decade as rapid changes in the education landscape highlighted its potential in bringing about school improvement and positive impact on teaching and learning (Bierly, Doyle & Smith, 2016; Day & Sammons, 2013; Hairon & Goh, 2015; Harris, 2011; Lieberman and Miller, 2011; Muijs, 2011; Spillane & Healey, 2010; Timperley, 2005). The paradigm shift in the concept of leadership from hierarchical to distributed introduces the role of middle leaders in the administrative and management of schools (Crowther, 2011; Dinham, 2016; Spillane, 2006) and transformational leadership as central to leading change in schools (Bass & Bass, 2009; Fleming, 2014).

Within the leadership literature, however, the concept of distributed leadership remains diverse (Harris, 2004; Bolden, 2011) and elusive (Hairon & Goh, 2015) with few clear operational descriptions (Bennett, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003).
Some recent studies show that participants still held contradictory attitudes towards the practices of distributed leadership in schools (Hill, Grunt & Bragg, 2013; Miskolci, 2017). There are varying definitions of distributed leadership within the literature. At the core of the concept of distributed leadership is the notion that leadership is not preserved for an individual (Crawford, 2012), but is a fluid and emergent phenomenon (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006). Gronn (2000) and Spillane (2006) describe distributed leadership as organisational influence and decision making governed by the interaction of individuals in a school. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) explored the direction and practices enacted by people at all levels. Leithwood (2007) explains distributed leadership as a set of direction setting and influence practices. While Robinson (2008) argues that it is a way for school leadership to be more democratic, less managerial and less hierarchical. Within the literature, the idea of distributed leadership overlaps with shared, collaborative, parallel and participative leadership concepts (Bennett et al., 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Wallace, 2002). Some of these ideas are used interchangeably with similar concepts such as teacher leadership and democratic leadership (Lárusdóttir & O’Connor, 2017).

Although the concept of distributed leadership has been researched widely, many authors suggest that its theoretical and empirical foundation remains weak (Bolden, 2011; Hairon & Goh, 2015; Harris, 2008; Hartley, 2010; Lárusdóttir & O’Connor, 2017). Over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of studies that attempt to address the gap on the conceptualisation and application of distributed leadership, with some highlighting the pitfalls of the concept. A review of literature on distributed leadership reveals that most studies on the subject are inclined towards examining the effectiveness of distributed leadership from the organisational perspective, neglecting the scope of individuals in understanding and enacting the concept (Gunter, Hall & Bragg, 2013; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Lárusdóttir & O’Connor, 2017; Lumby, 2013; Woods, 2004). Some key concerns of distributed leadership involve contextual issues surrounding distributed leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2004; Goh, 2009; Hairon & Goh, 2015; Leithwood, Mascall & Strauss, 2009) and power relations (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2014).
Leithwood et al. (2009) stressed that purposeful and planned leadership distribution can impact schools positively. Harris (2011b) points out that purposeful and planned leadership distribution cannot take place without the involvement and direction of the principal as it implies shifts on power, authority and control. The challenge concerns the extent to which power and control are distributed. School leaders will therefore have to take greater responsibility in restructuring their schools to maximise the capacity to lead improvement. She cautions that distributed leadership can undermine formal authority and negate the influence of leaders if power, influence and authority are misused or abused (Harris, 2011b). Hargreaves and Fink (2009), as well as others (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2013; Hartley, 2010; Lumby, 2013) however, question the motive behind distributed leadership in practice and warn of the possibility of distributed leadership becoming another mechanism for delivering top down policies, instead of being more democratic. Likewise, Hall, Gunter and Bragg (2012) and Miskolci (2017) argue that distributed leadership can be seen as ‘a more seductive and elegant version of the more longstanding notion of delegation’ (p. 187) as the emphasis remains leader centric. Ultimately, school principals are the ones who decide how and to whom they distribute power and authority.

Robinson (2008) points out that distributed leadership can be seen to involve the distribution of tasks and influencing how people think and act. Hairon and Goh (2015) conducted research to investigate the perspectives of school principals on their own distributed leadership practices and the perspectives of their vice-principals and middle leaders on the principals’ distributed leadership practices. Survey data from a total of 1232 participants from 224 schools in Singapore were collected. The instrument consists of 25 statements relating to distributed leadership practices based on three dimensions: (1) empowerment; (2) interaction of shared decision; and (3) development of leadership. The data collected reveal that Singapore school leaders were generally perceived to develop leadership competencies and promote shared decisions among staff members, but empowerment is bounded. Initiatives by staff must always be situated within the ambit of school goals and outcomes. It was evident from their findings that societal cultural values play a huge part in shaping distributed leadership practices in Singapore schools. Hairon and Goh (2015) explain that
the interplay between Asian cultural values for hierarchy, collectivism and pragmatic efficiency and the control of Singapore society alters the way school leaders understood and enact distributed leadership actions. This is consistent with Bush and Glover's (2012) argument that school leaders still retain the central role in accounting for the performance of the school even with distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership should not be viewed as the sole factor influencing school outcomes, however, research evidence suggests that it is one significant factor in promoting positive change and improvements in schools (Bierly et al., 2016; Day & Sammons, 2013; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Fullan, 2006; Spillane, 2006). Harris (2013) and others (Day, Sammons, Leithwood, Hopkins, Gu, Brown & Athtaridou, 2011; Wan, Law & Chan, 2018) assert that successful distribution of leadership depends upon the firm establishment of mutual trust and culture of the organisation. In relation to middle leadership, a clear conceptualisation of the notion of distributed leadership within the structures of schools is crucial. Timperley (2005) puts forward that a possible challenge associated with distributed leadership is a lack of cohesion within the school community. While school leaders recognise the possibility of distributed leadership undermining formal authority and negate the influence of leaders if it is misused (Harris, 2013), middle leaders may similarly worry about increased pressure to meet the demands and expectations of their leadership roles within the complexity of school organisations. Klar, Huggins, Hammonds and Buskey (2015) suggest perceiving distributed leadership as a developmental process instead of assuming that all leaders are able to take on greater leadership roles.

The above discussion indicates that to understand how middle leadership is operationalized, it is crucial to be cognizant of how the concept of distributed leadership is understood and practiced in school contexts. The next section examines the influence of middle leaders in leading learning.

(ii) role of middle leaders

In a paradigm of distributed leadership, middle leaders are acknowledged as the change agents and co-leaders of their schools (Harris, 2011; Spillane, 2006).
Research literature underlines the vital role played by middle leaders in having a direct and positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves & Rönnerman, 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Halliger, 2011; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Margolis, 2012; Robinson, 2008; Walters, 2012). However, researchers noted that there are limited in-depth studies in the field of middle leadership and most research tended to be small scale in nature (Bennett et al., 2007; Margolis, 2012; Walters, 2012). There is also paucity of research around primary school middle leadership (Bennett et al., 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007; Harris & Jones, 2012). More recently, De Nobile (2018) and Dinham (2016) noted that despite increasing research into middle leadership, the field of middle leadership is still under-researched and under-theorised as compared to studies on senior leadership.

The concept of middle leadership is a relatively new one. Within the literature, two types of definitions relating to middle leadership can be identified. The first describes the concept in relation to the identity of individuals known as ‘middle leaders’ - who they are. The second definition concerns the functions middle leaders serve - what they do. Within earlier leadership literature, the term ‘middle leaders’ is often referred to as occupying the ill-defined role of ‘experienced teacher’ and ‘junior administrator’ (Bush, Hammersley-Fletcher & Turner, 2007; Chew, 2008; Estyn, 2004; Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough & Johnson, 1999; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). Busher and Harris (1999) point out that the definition of what constitutes a middle leader is largely related to the hierarchical organisational structures of schools. For example, Busher et al. (2007) and others (Dinham, 2016; Fleming, 2014; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) describe middle leaders as those who sit in the middle of the school hierarchy, below the senior leaders, and above the teachers and support staff; and Grootenboer et al. (2015) define middle leaders as those who have an acknowledged position of leadership in their educational institutions and at the same time, have significant teaching role. Hammond (2000), as well as others (Fullan, 2010; Harris & Jones, 2017), explains that the range of expectations and demands on the middle leaders gave rise to a perceived tensions and conflict of roles because unlike senior school leaders, middle leaders are leader, as well as class teachers.
The second set of definition, within the literature, concerns the functions middle leaders serve - what they do. Brown and Rutherford (1996) classify the leadership functions of contemporary middle leaders into five key roles: servant leader, organisational architect, moral educator, social architect and professional leader. Likewise, Hammersley-Fletcher (2002) identified four main task areas of middle leaders in charge of subject departments in primary schools: strategic direction and development of subject; teaching and learning; leading and managing staff; and efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources. These are roles and responsibilities are typically used to describe school principalship.

Drawing upon the work of Glover, Gleeson, Gough and Johnson (1998) and Busher and Harris (1999), Harris (2000) classifies the work of middle leaders into four dimensions. The first dimension relates to the bridging roles of middle leaders between senior school leaders and colleagues. The second dimension depicts the role of middle leaders in creating shared vision and collegial culture. Other dimensions include middle leaders’ role in mentoring and improving staff and student performance, creating professional networks and acting as representatives of programme areas within whole-school context. Subsequently, other authors also presented similar leadership functions (Adey, 2000; Dinham, 2007; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007; Turner, 2003; Turner & Bolam, 1998). Some authors build on earlier works of others and highlight further areas in addition to those already mentioned in the literature. Among other roles and responsibilities, Busher (2005) identifies mediating contexts as one important area in the work of middle leaders. According to Busher (2005), an effective middle leader must also possess the ability to negotiate in varying contexts with others, such as school leaders, other middle leaders and teachers. Dinham (2007), on the other hand, stresses the need for middle leaders to set high professional expectations for themselves so that they can model best practices for their colleagues. The more recent studies view middle leadership as the actions that lead to the creation of teams and improving the quality of work (Ashmore and Clay, 2016; De Nobile, 2018). These studies not only indicate that contemporary middle leaders have a
plethora of roles and responsibilities, but also highlight the intensified expectations of middle leaders and the tensions they face. Authors such as Fluckiger, Lovett, Dempster and Brown (2015), Fleming (2014) and De Nobile (2018) observed that within the literature, ambiguity still exists in relation to what middle leaders are expected to do because most studies do not take into account conceptually coherent domain of practice. Likewise, De Nobile (2018) emphasised the importance of recognising the fact that, unlike the senior leaders, middle leaders’ reach of authority is limited.

Research shows that although middle leaders are deemed crucial in contributing to whole school planning for improvement, many see themselves solely as departmental advocates or subject administrators and not part of the management echelon of the school (Bennett et al., 2003; Busher, 2005; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). While effective leadership is an essential component of successful schools, a teaching background does not in itself lead to skills required to deal with the wider role of leadership (OECD, 2008). As mentioned in the preceding section, the two key responsibilities of middle leaders are leading learning and leading people. However, Bennett et al. (2007), after an extensive review of empirical literature on middle leadership, found that most middle leaders regarded themselves as leaders of the curriculum but not leaders of their colleagues. This result is consistent with a recent research conducted by Irvine and Brundrett (2016) involving 25 middle leaders in an independent school in England. Data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews revealed that most participants continued to emphasise their professional relationships with pupils rather than exploring their role as a leader of colleagues. This shows that the primary concern of middle leaders remains to be teaching (Crowther, 2011). A sense of role tension could arise due to conflict of expectations involving the dual function of middle leaders (Harris & Jones, 2017).

Their roles in leading people could also pose as a challenge to middle leaders who are expected to engage in difficult conversations with colleagues who are resistant to change whilst establishing effective relationships (Busher, 2005; Crowther, 2011; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Liljenberg, 2016). Marshall (2012) and
others (Cosenza, 2015; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016) assert that middle leaders are often the ‘sandwiched’ lot in relationship management within the school, not only do they have to strive to maintain a strong sense of collegiality within their department by acting as the leader of the department and spokesperson to the senior leaders, they are also called upon to be the bridge between senior school leaders and colleagues (Bennett et al., 2003; Bush, 2003; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016).

Accountability is a consistent theme in leadership literature. Middle leaders are often considered as less influential and given few opportunities to exercise their leadership as school principals are the ones ultimately accountable for school performance (Busher et al., 2007; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016). Some authors question the scope for middle leaders to chart their own agenda for change and development (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). A study carried out by Hammersley-Fletcher and Strain (2011), investigated a series of their past research on middle leadership in English primary schools, found that middle leaders who were deemed to be effective were those who demonstrated compliance to the agenda of the organisation. They warned of the possibility of middle leaders positions being created as a device to encourage compliance to externally driven agendas for change. In another research led by Weller (2001), involving 200 secondary school middle leaders, survey data found that although most of the participants believed that they should play a bigger role in making school-wide decisions, there were tensions within schools around the extent to which power and authority was distributed in order for them to carry out their leadership roles effectively. Hammersley-Fletcher and Kirkham (2007) argue that for middle leaders to be able to make informed decision and gain confidence about their leadership roles, leadership structures must create time and opportunities for learning and leadership practices. Similarly, Dinham (2007) and others (Carter, 2016; Edward-Groves, Grootenboer, Hardy & Ronnerman, 2018; Engle, Lopez, Gormley, Chan, Charns & Lukas, 2017; Leithwood, 2016) advocate that with increasing responsibilities, the challenge is for schools to fully recognise the importance and potential of middle leaders and help to prioritise middle leaders’
responsibilities. Lárusdóttir and O’Connor (2017) draw attention to the need for a supportive school culture to assist middle leaders in negotiating their leadership role because consequently, middle leaders’ perceptions and understanding of their role and how they function in the middle informs their practice.

This section began with a broad picture of the articulation of the key concepts framing the discourses of teacher continuing professional development and middle leadership over the last two decades. The review also examined the contentious nature of teacher continuing professional development and ambiguity in the role of middle leaders in leading learning. The literature indicates that educational landscape has shifted considerably over the past decades. This shift has also influenced the notion of teacher continuing professional development and structural relationships within schools particularly the job demands of middle leaders. Despite the bulk of literature on teacher continuing professional development and middle leadership in schools, there is paucity within the literature on how middle leaders locate themselves in educational reforms on continuing professional development, especially those in primary schools. It is, therefore, the aim of this proposed study to investigate the perspectives of middle leaders and examine how they view their roles in continuing professional development and as agents in translating policies into practice.

The above discussion serves to highlight the contentious nature of teacher continuing professional development and ambiguity in the role of middle leaders in leading learning. It indicates the need for further research into the contested notions involved and for clearer enunciation of how middle leaders can better support effective continuing professional development within their school contexts.

3.5 Conclusion
This chapter set out to present the conceptual framework within which the study reported in this thesis is framed. This was done by reviewing the literature surrounding the key element of the research problem. A concurrent aim of this
chapter was to identify areas where there is a gap in literature that can be filled with the findings of the study reported in this thesis. The chapter began with a broad picture articulating the key concepts framing the discourse of teacher professionalism, continuing professional development and middle leadership in the past two decades. The first section examined the concept of teacher professionalism and explored the rationale for teacher continuing professional development. The second section outlined the concept of teacher continuing professional development and traced varying perspectives of what counts as an effective continuing professional development. The last section looked at the role of middle leadership and challenges in leading learning in schools. From this analysis, the key research question that shapes this study has been arrived at namely: What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

The following chapter will present in detail the method of data collection and data analysis carried out to derive theoretical propositions on the perspectives that middle leaders have of their roles in supporting continuing professional development within their school contexts.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The study reported in this thesis aimed to formulate a set of propositions regarding the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have concerning the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development (CPD) in their schools. This study is positioned in terms of middle leaders’ ‘perspectives’, a notion that represents what middle leaders think, believe and conceptualise with regard to their leadership roles in teacher continuing professional development, and the resulting actions, orientations, dispositions and attitudes they adopt when promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools.

A perspective is an angle which individual takes as he or she looks at reality and tries to understand it (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.27). Perspectives make it possible for us to make sense of the world we lived in. Though individuals in the society may be limited by their perspectives, these perspectives are actually very crucial in that they make it possible for us to make sense of the world (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.27). The key research problem of this study was formulated and positioned to reflect this definition of ‘perspectives’.

In the interest of clarity, the following structure is adopted for the chapter. First, an outline of the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology is presented. This is an interpretivist study, embedded within a methodological framework based on the key principles of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969). The rationale behind this choice of methodology is presented. The key research question and the guiding questions are spelt out. Next, the study population and sampling procedures are explained. After that, the methods of data collection and data analysis are outlined. Trustworthiness of the findings is considered next. Finally, ethical issues associated with the study are addressed.
4.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework ensures consistency amongst the research problem, and the research questions and the methods adopted to address the research problem (Crotty, 1998). The guiding principles of this research are derived from the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998). Due to the lack of empirical research in the field of study and in the local context, this research was designed to gather a richness of data from the context of Singapore primary schools. The intent of this study were:

1. to examine the implications of perspectives held by middle leaders in one specific context with regard to the notion of CPD in practice based on the belief that their perspectives play an integral role in the promoting teacher CPD in schools

2. to contribute empirically-derived theoretical propositions about middle leaders’ perspectives on teacher CPD in the context of Singapore

Interpretivist Research Paradigm

This study was conceptualised within the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998) which assumes that reality is a human construct. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define a paradigm as ‘a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research’ (p. 24). At the core of the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998) is the importance placed on the perspectives of people as individuals. Interpretivists assert that in order to understand social reality, it is crucial to study how individuals interpret the world around them. This is because the interpretivists portray the social world as being subjective and social reality as being constructed and negotiated by individuals acting according to the perspectives they confer on the phenomena in their environment (Reid, 1986). There are, therefore, many social realities, each constructed by the individuals involved. This study is designed to capture this diverse range of perspectives, in relation to teacher continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools.

Underpinning these claims are certain assumptions held by interpretivists. According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985), there are five such assumptions. The first is that the study of social reality should be grounded in a study of the everyday activities of people. The reason for this is that ‘ultimately, every
aspect of society can be traced back to the way people act in everyday life’ (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985, p.234). The second assumption held by interpretivists is that although people are not entirely free of social forces, they have a large degree of freedom and autonomy over their own daily actions. Therefore, everyday life is the consequence of people acting together and producing their own roles and patterns of action. The third assumption is that everyday activities involve interaction. In other words, people not only have perspectives on their own actions but also interpret the actions of people with whom they come into contact. The fourth assumption is that the perspectives held by individuals are likely to change or be modified by those around them. In time, through the process of negotiation, people come to have common understandings and interpretations. And lastly, in order to understand the perspectives held by individuals, one has to try to get inside the heads of these individuals to see how they define, interpret, and explain various situations. These assumptions have been instrumental in shaping the methodological framing of this study.

An important concept that is central to this research is that of perspectives. Woods (1983) defines perspectives as ‘frameworks through which people make sense of the world’ (p.7). According to Charon, the issue with perspectives is that they act as ‘filers’ that prevent us from knowing things ‘completely or in any perfectly accurate way’ (Charon, 2001, p.6). Likewise, O’Donoghue also points out that perspectives are often ‘situational’ and they ‘can change many times throughout our lives’ and ‘from situation to situation’ (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.28). O’Donoghue (2007) describes the concept of perspectives as comprising the notions of aims and intentions, allowing one to ask what an individual aims to do in a particular situation. Another property of ‘perspectives’ is that people can state the ‘strategies’ they use to achieve their aims. It also includes the idea of significance, where one can ask what the individual sees as significant in the situation. Lastly, the notion of reasons is included and that allows one to ask what reasons the individuals give for the aims, strategies and significance they have with regard to the particular situation (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.31). This means that ‘while people are limited by their perspectives in that they cannot see outside of them, these perspectives are also vital in that they make it possible for us to make sense of the world’ (O’Donoghue, 2007, p.27). So for
this study, the focus will be on middle leaders’ aims and intentions about how their roles help to promote teacher continuing professional development in their schools. The strategies and the significance of and reasoning underpinning their actions will be revealed as the study unfolds.

Crucial to the aim of this study, interpretivists believe that an understanding of the context in any research is vital to the interpretation of data gathered (Willis, 2007). Interpretivists take on multiple perspectives of different contexts. Myers and Klein (2011) stress that through the acceptance of multiple perspectives, interpretivism leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. They believe that this is crucial as it facilitates the gathering of ‘in-depth’ data from the study population - in this case, middle leaders employed in Singapore primary schools.

It was decided that the basic principles of qualitative epistemology and methodology were particularly suited to investigate the key research problem of this study regarding middle leaders’ perspectives on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. Adopting a fundamentally interpretivist orientation for the conduct of this study allowed the focus to be positioned on the ‘personal face to professional life’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995) of middle leaders. Data were collected based on individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 13 middle leaders who worked in Singapore primary schools. The interviews were aimed at eliciting their perspectives on the notion of teacher continuing professional development in practice across different primary school contexts. Such insights are silent in the context of Singapore.

In qualitative enquiry, ‘the researcher’s goal is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study’ (Punch, 1998, p.149). Qualitative enquirers seek what Geertz (1973) calls a ‘thick description’, where they aim beneath manifest behaviour to discover the meaning events have for those who experience them (Eisner, 1991). This study seeks to reveal the ‘voices’ of middle leaders and to ‘illuminate’ meanings and interpretations (Eisner, 1991) of the concept of continuing professional development.
To understand the multiple, socially constructed realities in any given context, qualitative researchers interact directly with participants - in this case, a group of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. A qualitative approach, combining an inductive model of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) using data collected through semi-structured interviews of middle leaders from different primary schools provided a lens for exploring research questions framing this study. This approach generated knowledge through gathering and interpreting of empirical evidence with a view to contributing to conceptual understandings that inform policy and practice in specific contexts.

This study aims to contribute to the discipline of continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools by developing substantive theory which explains how middle leaders deal with the notion of teacher continuing professional development and how they manage their beliefs and perspectives as middle leaders. Positioning the research undertaken in terms of how middle leaders deal with the concept of teacher continuing professional development is consistent with the social theory of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic Interactionism
This study anchored its theoretical perspective in a particular stream of qualitative research known as symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is entrenched in interpretive assumptions that view the world as socially constructed and subject to multiple interpretations. By way of providing some background to the theoretical perspective adopted in this study, the term ‘Symbolic Interactionism’, coined by Herbert Blumer (1969), had a profound impact on social theory and methodology. Blumer (1969, p.47) described symbolic interactionism as ‘a down-to earth approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct’. He believed that ‘its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. It lodges its problems in the natural world, conducts its studies in it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies’ (Blumer, 1969, p.47). Blumer’s (1969) work was heavily influenced by John Dewey (1909) and George Herbert Mead (1934).
Dewey (1909) rejected the theoretical premise of the idea that knowledge is based on the representation of existing realities. He insisted that human beings are best understood in relation to their environment. It is of note that this idea is of chief importance in understanding Dewey’s influence on the work of Blumer (1969). Drawing on Dewey (1909) and Charles Cooley (1902), George Herbert Mead (1934) stressed that individuals develop a ‘sense of self’ through interaction with others. This sense of self is shaped during childhood as the child makes judgements about the way he or she is perceived by others. The process continues through adulthood with each individual creating an image of how he or she believes others view them through the social interactions they experience. These theoretical perspectives were further developed by Blumer (1969).

Blumer highlights three core principles in symbolic interactionism that deal with meaning, language and thought (Blumer, 1969, p.2). The three principles are that: firstly, people act towards things based on the meanings that the things hold for them; secondly, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products arising from the process of social interaction; and thirdly, these meanings are modified during interaction through interpretive processes (Blumer, 1969, p.5). Fundamentally, Blumer illustrates the notion that individuals experience and construct meaning of concrete and abstract experiences through social interactions with other members of the society which they belong. This is a significant premise that underpins this study.

These considerations explain the decision to adopt symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework underpinning the investigation of the central research problem framing the study in this thesis. The middle leaders in this study give *meaning* to the concept of continuing professional development; they give their *thought* to their responses to continuing professional development. They use *language* to articulate the thoughts they have and eventually *act* upon these thoughts accordingly.

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) was found to be the best fit for this study as it is grounded in the ideas, feelings, processes and actions resulting from human interactions with one another. It provides a theoretical framework to
explore the ‘perspectives’ middle leaders hold about the concept of continuing professional development. In the case of the context in this study, the concept of continuing professional development originated as an initiative from the Singapore Ministry of Education but its actual effects are the ‘results of the millions of micro-decisions made by individual[s]’ (Windham, 1993, p.25), namely the middle leaders in primary schools. Ensuing this assumption allows the researcher to explore the manner in which participants arrive at an understanding about the phenomenon of interest and act towards it in relation to their own interpretations and experiences. The researcher can achieve this by viewing herself as a social object and take on the role of others and adopt their standpoint (Crotty, 1998). The focus of this theoretical approach in placing oneself in the position of the other and seeing events from the perspectives of others corresponds neatly with the aim of this study in exploring how middle leaders perceive the concept of teacher continuing professional development in practice.

4.3 Qualitative Research Methodology

Due to the lack of empirical research in the field of study and in the local context, a qualitative case study design (Myers & Klein, 2011; Yin, 2009) was selected so as to gain a deeper understanding of teacher continuing professional development at the operational level as it occurs in its natural setting. The adoption of qualitative methods within a case study research enabled the researcher to study the issues in depth and in detail, providing deep insights into the phenomenon under study. The perspectives of middle leaders in primary schools are likely to have been influenced by the context in which they were formed. It was therefore the aim of this research to contribute to, and close an important gap in the existing literature in this field by examining relationships between policy and practice, and to position middle leadership as a potential mediating factor in these relationships in local school context.

Case study as a research strategy

Case study research was selected as the most appropriate strategy for this study because of the nature of the research problem and key research question the study seeks to address. The strategy has been described as the best plan
for exploring ill-defined concepts in depth (Myers & Klein, 2011) as it deliberately covers contextual situations (Yin, 2009). Case studies allow the researcher to become familiar with the data in its natural setting and fully appreciate the context (Punch, 2005). The adoption of qualitative methods within a case study research enables the researcher to conceptualise how the notion of continuing professional development is constructed differently from multiple perspectives within the group of middle leaders. This will provide a rich and deeper understanding of the middle leaders’ perspectives on continuing professional development. For these reasons, and for the assumptions inherent in the interpretivist framework adopted in the study, the case study was the most appropriate research strategy to answer the research questions.

Yin (1984, p.84) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident as in the case with continuing professional development. Merriam (2001) describes a case study as ‘an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomena, or social unit’ (Merriam, 2001, p. 21). Stake explains that a case study is ‘a study of a bounded system, emphasizing the unity and wholeness of that system, but confining the attention to those aspects that are relevant to the research problem at that time’ (Stake, 1988, p.258). Creswell (2008) views it as ‘an approach to inquiry that begins with assumptions, worldviews, possibly a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem’ (p.50). It is of note that although case study has become a common research strategy, a great variation of definitions is found within the literature. Case studies are often criticised for lacking academic rigour and one of the reasons concerns diversity in describing case study as a research strategy. There seems to be a lack of a standard definition of what a case study is within the literature and yet this is necessarily a good thing as it does not constrain the researcher from being imaginative in designing the shape and process of the research in a context-specific manner.
Punch (2005, p.145) agrees that any attempts to define what a case study is, is difficult as almost anything can serve as a case. In trying to describe what a case study is, Punch highlights four main characteristics of a case study:

(i) the case is a ‘bounded system’;
(ii) the case is a case of something;
(iii) there is an explicit attempt to preserve the wholeness, unity and integrity of the case;
(iv) multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods are likely to be used, typically in a naturalistic setting. Case studies can either be quantitative or qualitative.

The case study is, therefore, more a method than a methodology. It aims to understand the case in depth, and its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context. Case studies offer a means for investigating complex social situations and human interactions consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. This is aligned closely with the purpose of this study.

The strength of case study lies in its potential to communicate the richness of human interactions. It offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding a phenomenon. As it is anchored in real-life situations, case study therefore has the potential to result in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2009). Insights presented in a case study such as the one that is central to this study, can help to illuminate meanings that expand its readers’ experiences and shed light on emerging theoretical perspectives that can contribute to further inquiry (Merriam, 2001).

In case study research, the specification of the unit of analysis is fundamental in defining what the case is (Yin, 1994). Punch (2005) highlights that in case study research, qualitative sampling involves ‘identifying the case and setting the boundaries, where we indicate the aspects to be studied, and constructing a sample frame, where we focus selection further’ (p.188). As we cannot study
everything within the case, purposive sampling (Merriam, 2001; Punch, 2005; Yin, 2009) will be used to select the sample. Purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illuminates some feature or process in which we are interested (Silverman, 2006). In this study, the sampling is limited to middle leaders in Singapore primary schools and their perspectives on continuing professional development.

Consistent with the characteristics of a case study highlighted to this point, Punch (2005), the boundaries of the case reported in this thesis were defined as middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. The case was about the perspectives of these middle leaders on the influence of their leadership role on teacher continuing professional development within primary school contexts. In regard to this study, middle leaders do not operate as an isolated group in schools; teachers as well as senior management teams influence and act on each other’s perspectives. These perspectives were likely to have been influenced by the context in which they were formed. Therefore, to understand how continuing professional development fits within the context of Singapore, it is necessary to recognize perspectives held by middle leaders from different primary schools. In order to preserve the unity of the case, data from each middle leader participant was analysed within the roles they play in school and the unique context of the schools in mind.

4.4 Research Design
Defining the research questions represents one of the most important steps to be taken in any empirical research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of the key criteria for the appropriate use of case study strategy remains in the type of research questions posed. Yin (1994) explains that case study research is most likely to be appropriate for studies seeking to address the how and why questions, within the contexts of a study based on the perspectives of participants.

To recall, the key research question of this case study is: What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional
development in their schools? Based on interviews with middle leaders, the study aimed to capture the reality of the influence of middle leadership in promoting teacher continuing professional development.

In pursuit of the key research question, a set of guiding questions was developed. These guiding questions were proposed at the inception of the study as they represented the interesting facets and foci of attention (Miles & Huberman, 1994) pertinent to the research focus and were viewed as being productive pointers to generate richness of data important to the central research question. The data gathering process was, therefore, guided by the following questions:

Guiding research questions

1. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools understand by the term ‘continuing professional development’?

2. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think continuing professional development entails?

3. What are the intentions of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools towards continuing professional development?

4. What strategies do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools say they used to realise these intentions? What are the reasons they give for the strategies they used?

5. What is the importance of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What are the reasons they give for the significance which they attributed with these intentions and strategies?

6. What are the outcomes of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What reasons do they give for these expected outcomes?

7. What are the conditions that promote or impede continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools?

8. In what ways do the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think are factors that will help them to promote continuing professional development in their schools?
These questions were not designed to be answered specifically, but as a means to generate data. A number of further questions based on the above-mentioned guiding questions served as *aide memoirs* at the interview stage of the conduct of this study. The next section elaborates on the selection and characteristics of the study population.

**Study Population**

As is consistent with qualitative case study research, “purposive sampling” (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 1990; Punch, 2005; Yin, 2009) was employed to select the participants in this study. Merriam highlights that purposive sampling means that ‘one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most’ (1988, p.48). Purposive sampling was considered to be the most appropriate given the central and guiding research questions formulated, the time frame available and access to participants. In view of the above-mentioned issues, the identification of the study population proceeded as follows.

Participants for the study were chosen to reflect their middle leadership positions in school. Data were collected from participants representing middle leaders in their schools. They were recruited through personal contact by the researcher as building the interviewing relationship begins the moment the potential participant hears of the study (Seidman, 1991). They were invited to participate in in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews but were under no pressure to accept.

Inclusion criteria for the interviews were that the study participant:

- is currently working as a middle leader (Head of Department, Subject Head or Level Head) in a Singapore primary school;
- has worked as a middle leader (Head of Department, Subject Head or Level Head) in a Singapore primary school for at least three years;
- is willing to participate in interviews over the period of 12 to 18 months.
The first criterion was attended to as it enabled the researcher to find out the perspectives of middle leaders working in different Singapore primary schools. The second criteria was included as an attempt to find participants who had some informed knowledge and views of the background and development of teacher continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools. This criteria is important in that experienced middle leaders could then better provide insights into how continuing professional development is practised in schools. After the researcher identified the participants who met the criteria listed above, the researcher then purposefully sampled the participants who differed in their leadership and teaching experiences in Singapore primary schools.

To ensure diversity within the samples, 13 middle leaders from different Singapore primary schools were selected for this study. In total, 26 interviews were conducted over a period of 12 to 18 months. The issues of practicality and manageability limited participation selection. Where it was possible, the sample would aim to be as diverse as possible. Personal contact was used where possible, and where it was not possible, contact was made by email or telephone.

As mentioned above, participants in this study comprised of 13 middle leaders who have worked as Heads of Department, Subject Heads or Level Heads in Singapore primary schools for at least three years. Four of the participants are male. All 13 participants are permanent teachers employed by Singapore Ministry of Education. Six participants were between 30 to 39 years old, five participants were between 40 to 49 years old and two participants were above 50 years old. Of the 13 participants, seven were Heads of department and the remaining six were either Subject Heads or Level Heads. Table A below provides a brief description of the 13 participants this study.
One key characteristic of qualitative research is to ‘present multiple perspectives of individuals to represent our world’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). This is a significant premise that underpins this study which aimed to reveal the ‘voices’ of middle leaders, to ‘illuminate’ meanings and interpretations (Eisner, 1991) and interpret the activity of others with regard to their shared meaning, systems and goals (Punch, 1998) on the concept of continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools. Maximal variation sampling is used in this study as the participants provided a range of backgrounds, ages and perspectives, and came from a variety of contexts, by way of the schools in which they were employed. It is of note that the ratio of male and female participants is not representative of Singapore as gendered perspectives were not a consideration in this study.

### 4.5 Data Gathering

**Semi-structured Interviews**
For the purpose of the study reported in this thesis, in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection strategy to develop a better understanding of perspectives of the middle leaders on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. Interview as a data collection tool is a good way of accessing people’s perspectives, meanings, definitions of situation and constructions of reality (Punch, 2005). They have been described as an essential source of case study evidence (Yin, 2009) because case studies are about human affairs or behavioural events. Participants can provide insights into phenomenon and shortcuts to prior history of such situations, thus helping the researcher to identify other relevant sources of evidence.

In-depth interviews, over a period of 12 to 18 months, aimed to elicit participants’ views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories, so as to gain access to their experiences, feelings and social worlds (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). The interviews also enable the interviewer to elicit reasons behind participants’ reactions, without the drawbacks of group dynamics. The researcher, therefore, is able to probe into the participants’ thought processes to obtain a better understanding of what participants mean by their answers. In this study, this meant getting the participant to share personal motivations on their continuing professional development experiences.

Fontana and Frey (1994) develop a three-way classification of structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing. The main dimensions of these variations are the degree of structure in the interview. For the purpose of this study, in-depth semi-structured individual interview was employed. This method of interviewing aims at establishing a core of issues to be covered but at the same time, leaving the sequence and the relevance of the participant free to vary around and out from that core (Freebody, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews begin with a predetermined set of questions but allow some latitude in the breadth of relevance. This approach aims at establishing a core of issues to be covered but at the same time, leaving the sequence and the relevance of the participant free to vary around and out from
that core (Freebody, 2003). This strategy was employed in the study as it not only provided exploration of participants’ reasoning regarding continuing professional development, but also offered insights into how participants think and why they think that way. Another advantage associated with in-depth interviews is that they allow the participants to bring up new issues that may prove relevant to the researcher. It also presents grounds for the researcher to clarify doubts or any uncertainties that arise in the interview or at the level of analysis for further follow-up.

Researcher-as-instrument

The researcher of this study acted as the interviewer during the data collection process. In a case study, data is collected in a communicative interaction between the researcher and the research participant. Ball (1990) points out that the data cannot be situated in a research context that exists independently of the researcher; they result from the social construction of the research process itself. Case studies are often limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and also the one who constructs the final report (Merriam, 2001). Case study researchers are especially prone to substantiate a preconceived position, as they must understand the issues beforehand.

Patton (2002) promotes reflectivity as a necessary tool for qualitative researchers who act as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. According to Patton (2002, p. 64), being reflective requires the researcher to ‘undertake an on-going examination of what I know and how I know it’. To achieve a level of controlled and explicit subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988), the researcher of this study was mindful of possible threats to authenticity arising from personal bias towards the participants since the researcher was also a teacher in a primary school in Singapore. Throughout this study, the researcher was cognizant of her role, political and cultural consciousness, and ownership of perspectives.

Yin (2009) proposes that a good case study researcher should be unbiased by preconceived notions, able to ask good questions and interpret the answers, be
a good listener, be adaptive and flexible, and also have a firm grasp of the issues being studied. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) consider the researcher’s familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study as assets. The fact that the researcher taught in a Singapore primary school allowed her to engage the participants in a setting where the ‘interviewer [researcher] and interviewees [participants], in concert, generate plausible accounts of the world’ (Silverman, 2005, p.154). During this study, the researcher was sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence. The researcher’s ‘own pool of personal knowledge and experience’ (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.303) turned into an advantage during the process of interpreting data and formulating theoretical propositions.

**Data collection procedures**

As mentioned previously, in-depth semi-structured individual interviews were chosen as the primary data collection strategy to develop a better understanding of perspectives of the middle leaders on the influence of their leadership roles in promoting teacher concept of continuing professional development in their schools. The researcher in this study guided participants to describe their perspectives, strategies, actions and intentions of the phenomenon in their schools.

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) accentuate that the process of establishing rapport with research participants is a fundamental element of a data-gathering interview. Developing a positive relationship helps to build trust and allows participants to share their personal experiences and attitudes in a safe and relaxed environment. The researcher established personal contact with individual participants through an introductory letter (Appendix A) and an information sheet with the form of informed consent (Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the study. Participants were also informed that interviews would be conducted individually with the researcher acting as the interviewer.

Two weeks before the interview, participants were contacted individually by phone and informed of the meeting time for the interviews. This was followed by a personalised email invitation and a phone call a week prior to the interview.
Participants were given the opportunity to clarify any doubts regarding the interview.

O’Donoghue (2007) stresses that semi-structured interviewing requires the researcher to engage in conversations with participants through a series of down-to-earth questions that will yield a quantity and quality of data which allows the researcher to develop an understanding of the participants’ perspectives. To allow for richer data to be gathered, a basic schedule was supplied to allow participants time to consider their responses before the interview. Participants were informed that the schedule served only as a guide for the interview. The following table shows a set of prompts formulated to develop an understanding of the participants’ perspectives on their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Background Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>• How long have you been teaching?</td>
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<td>• What is your role in the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• When did you take on this leadership position?</td>
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<td>• How many teachers do you supervise in your current role?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. **What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools understand by the term ‘continuing professional development’?**
   • In your opinion, what is ‘continuing professional development’?
   • What does continuing professional development mean to you?
   • Are there differences in the way teachers are developed nowadays as compared to when you first joined the profession?

2. **What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think continuing professional development entails?**
   • In your opinion, what do you think continuing professional development entails?
   • What are the characteristics of an effective professional development?

3. **What are the intentions of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools towards continuing professional development?**
   • Why is continuing professional development important?
   • What do you think are the essential skills teachers need?
   • Why are these elements important?
4. **What strategies do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools say they used to realise these intentions? What are the reasons they give for the strategies they used?**

5. **What is the importance of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What are the reasons they give for the significance which they attributed with these intentions and strategies?**
   - How does your school foster a culture of learning among teachers?
   - What are some strategies that are used to promote continuing professional development in your school?
   - Which strategies do you feel work well in promoting continuing professional development in your school?

6. **What are the outcomes of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What reasons do they give for these expected outcomes?**
   - In your opinion, what motivates teachers to participate in professional development activities?
   - What do you think influences teachers to use what they have acquired in their classrooms?

7. **What are the conditions that promote or impede continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools?**
   - In your capacity as a middle leader, how do you encourage colleagues to participate in professional development programmes?
   - What are some barriers you encountered in trying to create a culture of learning in your school?

8. **In what ways do the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think are factors that will help them to promote continuing professional development in their schools?**
   - In your opinion, what do you believe are factors that will encourage or discourage you from promoting continuing professional development in your school?
   - In what ways do you think the Ministry or the school can support you in promoting continuing professional development in your school?

**Others**
- Describe a professional development activity that you found meaningful or had a great impact on your growth as a teacher.

---

Table B: List of interview prompts
This series of prompts were developed with the aim to ‘engage participants in conversations across as wide a range of areas as possible to yield data that would facilitate the development of theory regarding their perspectives’ (O’Donoghue, 2007). Each participant was asked the same set of questions, but there were instances where the sequence and form were altered to allow participants to provide more in-depth responses to the situations cited. Participants’ comprehension of these questions was monitored so that the researcher could simplify or incorporate appropriate explanations in subsequent interviews.

To encourage discussion, interviews were conducted in private and a safe and relaxed atmosphere was ensured. At the start of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and after which the participant proceeded to sign the form of informed consent (Appendix B); informing him or her that participation in this study was entirely voluntary and confidentiality would be ensured. Participants were given the option to withdraw at any stage during or after the interview if they so wished. Permission was sought from participants to record the interview using a digital recorder placed visibly in front of them. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours and was transcribed following each meeting. The ethics framework approved by the university was implemented throughout the duration of study.

Each interview script was transcribed verbatim in its entirety by the researcher personally so that no third party had access to the interview recordings. The names of all participants involved in the study remained anonymous. Individual interview transcript was given to each participant for verification. Participants were invited to make any changes they deemed necessary. Participants were also informed of follow-up interviews should the researcher need more information or further clarification. Follow-up interviews were conducted within a period of 12 to 18 months.

The preceding section described the processes involved in collecting data consistent with interpretivist, qualitative research method. The data analysis that
was undertaken in order to formulate theoretical propositions related to middle leaders’ perspectives on the influence of their leadership roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development is explained in detail in the following section.

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of examining and recognising the value of the evidence collected to address the key research question of a study. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress that data analysis is directed at tracing out lawful and stable relationships among social phenomenon, based on the regularities and sequences that link these phenomena. To ensure that data collected are treated thoroughly and the conclusions drawn can be authenticated, analysis of data needs to be systematic, disciplined and able to be seen and described (Punch, 2005).

The design and plan for a particular data analysis depends largely on the approach taken and the purpose of the study. The purpose of data analysis for this study was to develop themes regarding the perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development. In order to explore and explain perspectives of middle leaders in this study, it was essential to collect and analyse data using a proven conceptual vehicle. The interactive model of qualitative data analysis outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) was adopted for this study as the approach allows for constant refinement and development of emergent theory.

Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) define data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity:

(a) data reduction
(b) data display
(c) drawing and verifying conclusions

Data reduction refers to the ‘process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data’ in the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). This process occurs continually throughout the analysis until the
final report is completed. In the case of the study reported in this thesis, data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After each interview transcript had been transcribed, the researcher read through the transcript thoroughly. Key words and phrases that were considered by the researcher to make meaning were colour-coded and grouped into categories during subsequent reading. These categories were constantly compared and contrasted to find connections, patterns and prominent ideas. Table C below provides an example of data reduction from interview transcripts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview transcripts</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Of course we [middle leaders] have to help to promote professional development in school. It is in the EMPS (Enhanced Performance Management System) form, isn't it? So as a reporting officer, I better say I look into that as well.</td>
<td>responsibility of middle leaders, individual teacher PD, lack personal belief? Sceptical?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>I spent a lot of time doing PD [professional development] with my department members. It is my job as a department head to help identify gaps and move all the members towards our department goals.</td>
<td>PD as investment, responsibility of department head, department goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>As middle leaders, we are expected to look into this area of training for teachers. And it is not just the department under our charge, our job holders too. In fact everyone in our school. That's why we need more hands such as SSD [School Staff Developer] to help coordinate.</td>
<td>responsibility of middle leaders, department &amp; individual teacher PD, SSD shared responsibility, whole-school approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table C: An example of data reduction

The second flow of analysis activity is data display. Data display involves the organising, compressing and assembling of information in a visual format that presents information systematically so that valid conclusions can be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 91). Punch (2005, p.198) points out that data display is used at all stages and since they enable data to be organised and summarised, they also show what stage the analysis has reached and they form the basis for further analysis. The reasons for reducing and displaying data are
to assist in drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch, 2005). As the data were constantly being refined, it was possible for conclusions to be noted early in the analysis but these conclusions could only be verified and finalised when all data was analysed. A stronger and more meaningful analysis emerges when data are continually re-displayed. The table below illustrates an example of data display.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes</th>
<th>continual process</th>
<th>meaningful to teachers</th>
<th>value add teaching and learning in classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>life-long process</td>
<td>P1, P8, P10 related to student learning relevant to what we do in class</td>
<td>P1, P10 help teacher teach better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>learning together with next generation of children</td>
<td>P2 broaden teachers’ perspectives and experience</td>
<td>P6 must ultimately help improve instructions and delivery in class maintain good teaching standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>continue learning and attend as many as possible so as to hit the right ones</td>
<td>P3 something teachers can connect with</td>
<td>P8 what helps pupils do better deepen professional expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>a journey that you take with your students</td>
<td>P4, P11, P12 related to teaching useful to teachers</td>
<td>P9 help teachers in terms of lesson delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8, P13</td>
<td>must be on going to keep up with times</td>
<td>relevant to teachers be aligned with school plans and goals</td>
<td>P11, 13 help teachers teach better for pupils to learn better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>must keep up to date with the world</td>
<td>P13 teachers must see own meaning to what they learn</td>
<td>P5 benefit students plan better lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>stay current and relevant always</td>
<td></td>
<td>P7 must value add teaching and benefit pupils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D: An example of data display

The stage of conclusion drawing and verifying aims to integrate what has been done into a meaningful and coherent picture of the data (Punch, 2005). These conclusions were verified by looking back at earlier stages of the data analysis.
In the conduct of this study, both descriptive codes and inferential codes were used to induce and formulate themes from the data on which the theoretical propositions were subsequently formulated. This level of coding emphasises on more abstract issues and concerns generic sub-theoretical propositions that encapsulated the inferential codes therefore making new connections between the categories that arose from the two stages of coding. These sub-theoretical propositions were then embedded into a conjunction of two main interrelated theoretical propositions that captures the key perspective of middle leaders of their leadership influence on continuing professional development. The table below illustrates an example of the data analysis process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Transcript</th>
<th>Information bytes</th>
<th>Descriptive coding</th>
<th>Inferential coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be effective teachers, we must be able to command the respect of others. Times have changed and so have the learning needs of our pupils. Teachers are expected to keep up too and continue learning. We cannot say we do not know. Singapore is so small, so to stay relevant on the world stage, MOE must invest in teachers.</td>
<td>Times have changed and so have the learning needs of our pupils Teachers are expected to keep up continue learning stay relevant on the world stage invest in teachers</td>
<td>need to cope with change teacher continual learning, an expectation teachers as key to country’s survival</td>
<td>Middle leaders identify rationale for teacher continuing professional development policy in Singapore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development must not only benefit teachers. The one main reason we want teachers to learn is for pupils to learn better. It must go back to the classroom where it will help teachers teach better and the pupils will then learn better.</td>
<td>must not only benefit teachers pupils to learn better help teachers teach better and then pupils will then learn better</td>
<td>intention of professional development benefit students intention of professional development</td>
<td>Middle leaders identity intention for teacher continuing professional development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table E: An example of data analysis
Upon completion of coding for each transcript, recurring themes were grouped into smaller sets to form overarching themes through pattern coding. The process of pattern coding enabled the clustering of recurring themes related to middle leaders’ perspectives on their leadership influence in promoting continuing professional development in their schools. This led to the formulation of sub-theoretical propositions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theoretical Proposition</th>
<th>Overarching themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #1</strong></td>
<td>Policy characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard</td>
<td>- high profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- timely implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- high level of commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #2</strong></td>
<td>Purpose of CPD:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders believe there is value in the concept of CPD</td>
<td>- impact teacher quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- impact student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- support 21st century learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characteristics of effective CPD:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- continual process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- meaningful to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- value add classroom learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #3</strong></td>
<td>Divided views on CPD:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders hold diverse views on what counts as CPD</td>
<td>- definition and types of CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- effective CPD model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #4</strong></td>
<td>Uncertainties about teacher impact:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders are uncertain about the tangible impact of CPD on teacher change</td>
<td>- attitude and motivations of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- lengthy commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #5</strong></td>
<td>Factor of influence:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders believe in their influence in leading change from the middle</td>
<td>- relationship with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- relationship with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #6</strong></td>
<td>Constraints in middle leadership roles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders are ambiguous about the roles they play in promoting teacher CPD</td>
<td>- ambiguity in CPD leadership roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- constraints leading from the middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- coping with fast changing pace of CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theoretical Proposition #7</strong></td>
<td>Constraints in developing a culture of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle leaders have reservations about being the advocates for colleagues</td>
<td>- leading experienced teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- leadership accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- support for middle leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle leaders are sceptical about the sustainability of CPD in current situation in schools

Factors that impede CPD:
- support from school leaders
- concerns from parents

Table F: Formulation of sub-theoretical propositions

These sub-theoretical propositions were merged to formulate a conjunction of two main interrelated theoretical propositions that encapsulates the key perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools regarding Continuing Professional Development of teachers:

(1) In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development (CPD) from the perspectives of middle leaders

(2) In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspectives of middle leaders

The next section discusses matters of trustworthiness and ethics considerations related to the conduct of this study.

4.7 Trustworthiness
As the study was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, it is appropriate to evaluate the study in terms of trustworthiness, as opposed to the more positivist terms of validity and reliability.

Various safeguards were maintained to ensure that the research was authentic, trustworthy and credible. Throughout the study, participants were involved in checking; verifying the data and the emerging theoretical propositions. In particular, the transcribed interviews were checked back against each other until they were accepted as representative of their positions and opinions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher continued to check with the participants as the propositions emerged.
To ensure credibility, the study reported in this thesis presented detailed and rich descriptions of the participants, data collection, analysis strategies and findings. This provided a framework for comparison to anyone who might be keen to work on themes or events that might be exhibit similar phenomenon under different contexts. It is argued that the credibility of the study is enhanced by the fact that the researcher is a middle leader in charge of teacher continuing professional development in a Singapore primary school. In the case of this study, the researcher has had 25 years expertise and experience in a range of educational settings and has a sound understanding of the issues faced by middle leaders in a primary school context.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The study was submitted to the Human Research and Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at the University of Western Australia. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study in an information sheet (Appendix B).

Participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without prejudice at any time. All data were treated in a way that protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants involved in the study. Participants were identified on the interview transcript by a numerical code. The informed consent of all the participants involved in this study was obtained prior the commencement of the study, and signed by both the researcher and participant; a copy was kept by both researcher and participant.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodology used in the study on middle leaders’ perspectives on continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools. It outlined the theoretical underpinnings, aims and research questions that guided the study. It also provided an overview of the data gathering and analysis processes and strategies. That was followed by a brief discussion on the methods used to maintain trustworthiness in the study. Finally, steps taken to meet ethical standards set by the university was discussed.
The next chapter articulates the key findings of the study, two key propositions, each of which will be addressed in chapters 5 and 6 respectively.
CHAPTER 5: Theoretical Proposition One

5.1 Introduction

It shall be recalled that the aim of this study was to offer greater understanding of continuing professional development (CPD) in practice by examining the perspectives held by middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. Such an investigation has revealed the complexity of middle leadership and the challenges faced by middle leaders in promoting continuing professional development in the context of primary schools in Singapore. The study also aimed to contribute to, and close an important gap in the existing literature in this field by examining relationships between policy and practice, and to assess middle leadership as a potential mediating factor in these relationships.

In the context of this study, the Singapore government’s quest for effective schools has created an impact on the roles and development of teachers in Singapore. With the policy Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) as the blueprint for Singapore schools in the 21st century, several major educational initiatives concerning school management and teacher development were introduced. Many opportunities have been and continue to be provided for school leaders and teachers to continually develop themselves and gain fresh perspectives so as to prepare for their new roles. Some of these initiatives include creating different structured pathways for serving teachers to obtain professional certification through in-service courses; introducing a new leave scheme that encourages teachers to pursue academic studies and to take time off to engage in learning; providing teachers with opportunities to understand the policy issues surrounding school reforms by exposing them to corporate management outside the educational field (MOE, 2006), and setting up professional learning centres to promote sharing of best practices and learning among teachers (MOE, 2006; Ng, 2009).

Middle leadership in Singapore primary schools

The term ‘middle leaders’ in Singapore schools refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools (Heng & Marsh, 2009). Middle leadership encompasses roles such as
heads of department, subject and level heads. In a typical primary school, at the apex of the school organisation structure is the senior management team comprising the school principal and vice-principals. Below the senior leaders are the middle leaders, a grouping that includes heads of department, followed by subject and level heads; with classroom teachers occupying the base tier.

Since the inauguration of the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) philosophy, new strategies have been introduced to help schools build leadership capacity to meet new challenges. Some of the key initiatives involve changes to the school organizational structures. When the heads of department were first introduced in the early eighties, they were the only middle leaders in the school structure. According to the 1993 Principal's Handbook (as cited in Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002), their roles and responsibilities were: to set the direction for the subject(s) under his or her charge; plan and implement, monitor and evaluate instructional programmes; develop teachers in his or her subject areas; and select, prepare and organise teaching-learning resources.

With the move to create flatter organisational structures and to encourage school-based development and innovation, middle leaders were positioned at the forefront of leading learning and improving student outcomes in schools. In 2002, the middle management posts of subject head and level head were created to assist heads of department (Teo, 2001). The positions of Communication Liaison Officer and Head of Innovation and Enterprise were created in 2005 and 2007 respectively. All middle leaders are required to have teachers reporting to them. During the past decade, the roles of middle leaders have become more complex in nature. They now have a key role in creating a climate that promotes effective teaching and learning not just for students but also for teachers. Not only are they expected to develop the department and its teachers, they are also to act as agents of school success in comparison with other schools at a national level (Chew, 2008). The middle leaders in Singapore schools have been described as the ‘human link’ between national education policy and the teaching staff (Chew, 2008).
This chapter reports on the perspectives of middle leaders regarding the leading of continuing professional development for teachers (CPD) in their schools and explores how they view it in the current era of accountability. Based on the participants’ perspectives, excerpts are woven together to depict an authentic account of the varied experiences of the participants as they respond to demands to balance academic achievements with deepening teacher continuing professional development within the context of their schools.

The findings reported in this chapter are relevant to the key research question:
What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

These are the guiding questions that stimulated the data for analysis:

1. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools understand by the term ‘continuing professional development’?

2. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think continuing professional development entails?

3. What are the intentions of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools towards continuing professional development?

4. What strategies do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools say they used to realise these intentions? What are the reasons they give for the strategies they used?

5. What is the importance of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What are the reasons they give for the significance which they attributed with these intentions and strategies?

6. What are the outcomes of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What reasons do they give for these expected outcomes?

7. What are the conditions that promote or impede continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools?

8. In what ways do the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think are factors that will help them to promote continuing professional development in their schools?
As a result of these questions and the complex data analysis completed, two key propositions about continuing professional development emerged from the data. Each proposition is based on a set of themes that capture the key concepts underlying the data analysis. The themes have been elicited from the raw data, using the methodological processes described in Chapter 5.

In addressing the key research question: What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools, two key propositions have been generated. These are:

(1) In regard to CPD in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of CPD from the perspectives of middle leaders

(2) In regard to CPD in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspectives of middle leaders

Each proposition and its themes and sub-themes will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

**Proposition 1**

In regard to CPD in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of CPD from the perspectives of middle leaders

This proposition is the first set of two arrived at through the analysis of the verbatim interview transcripts of 13 middle leaders from Singapore primary schools discussing the perspectives they hold about the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools.

This section will discuss the first proposition and the relevant themes implicit within the proposition,

1. Middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard
2. Middle leaders believe there is value in the concept of CPD
3. Middle leaders hold diverse views on what counts as CPD
4. Middle leaders are uncertain about the tangible impact of CPD on teacher change
Each of these themes is examined separately in the proceeding sections.

5.2 Middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard

It is clear to most participants that there have been many major changes in the educational scene in Singapore in the past decades. They are aware of the MOE’s commitment to nurture a teacher-driven culture of professional excellence and dedication to strengthen career opportunities for educators to deepen their expertise in teaching.

All middle leader participants seem convinced of the purposes and rationale for these changes. Most participants are able to articulate policies introduced by the MOE and have informed knowledge of continuing professional development policies and frameworks introduced in recent years such as the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a), Leader Growth Model and the new Enhanced Performance Management System (Heng, 2014). Most middle leader participants expressed trust in directives from the MOE and stressed that the success of the Singapore education system lies very much in the government’s strategic planning. This high level of confidence is shown by most middle leaders who attributed the success of the Singapore education system to the series of educational reform initiatives introduced to meet the needs of 21st century. Although most participants are unfamiliar with the term ‘Continuing Professional Development’ or ‘CPD’ in short, they are aware of the MOE’s efforts and commitment in supporting teacher continuing professional development and promoting lifelong learning. Trust in the government’s policies is a core concept central to the findings of this research.

This high level of conviction in the government’s policies is demonstrated by a senior middle leader participant (P4) who shared that, although he might not always know the rationale behind the changes in educational policies, ‘you just have to place your trust in them [MOE]’. Many middle leaders also mentioned the fact that Singapore’s education systems has remained consistently among the top of most major world education ranking system confirmed their belief that the MOE’s clear vision and directives have helped schools to maintain their high standards in education. One middle leader illustrated this by citing examples of
Singapore schools receiving numerous groups of foreign educational delegates each year:

_These delegates who flew from all over the world to Singapore have only have one thing in mind – learn from our success in education._ (P9)

This conviction is also exhibited by other middle leaders (P5, 6, and 7) who highlighted the MOE’s ability to ‘always move ahead with times’ and ‘provide schools with the directives to move towards a common goal’. It is evident that middle leaders exhibit a high degree of pride and trust in MOE’s policies especially in comparison with its foreign counterparts.

Middle leaders continue to show their support for MOE policies although some acknowledged that there were times where they may not ‘be totally convinced’ (P10) or ‘do not fully understand’ (P2) the rationale behind these policies. A newly-appointed middle leader (P3) shared that ‘it is not always easy for everyone to see the big picture, especially when one is on the ground’. On one hand, middle leaders demonstrated high level of conviction in government policies, and yet on the other hand, some exhibited a lack of clarity in construing the rationale behind these policies. Such a lack of clarity did not stifle the implementation of the policy.

Middle leaders highlighted that sometimes it is a challenge getting buy-in from fellow colleagues. One middle leader shared her ‘struggle’ in getting teachers in her department to sign up for continuing professional development activities:

_I know the rationale but I was not able to convince them why they need [to fulfil] 100 hours of professional development. Personally, I think 50 hours is already a lot._ (P12)

Another middle leader highlighted the challenges he faced in explaining MOE directives in the earlier years.

_[MOE] used to only talk to the principals in the past. Principals know why certain policies were introduced but if they may not tell us, we never know… But we were expected to convince teachers and that’s when we found that we could not as we were not very sure ourselves._ (P10)
Middle leaders compared this to how major policies are cascaded into schools and upon teachers’ professional work nowadays. Communication packages are prepared by the MOE and sent to schools for principals to engage teachers in professional conversations and dialogues. These sessions are facilitated by school leaders and often with the help of middle leaders. The dissemination of each policy normally includes a set of slides, planned activities and a list of Frequently Asked Questions which school leaders and middle leaders can use to inform teachers of changes and what to expect. Middle leaders generally agreed that this has helped them significantly in their understanding of policies as they get to learn about the rationales in advance and clarify doubts with school leaders. One middle leader (P7) shared that ‘as facilitators, we had to prepare for the sessions to communicate change with teachers. This requires us to read and comprehend the materials beforehand and understand the rationales better’.

Middle leaders highlighted that while they trust the value in MOE directives, they felt that it is crucial for them, as change agents, to fully comprehend the rationales behind these policies. As shared by Middle Leader P13, ‘knowing that we are moving forward is not enough; we need to lead and tell teachers how we are moving towards that goal in our school’. Comparing how major educational policies were disseminated in the past, middle leaders noted that their involvement has increased over the years. One middle leader (P11) shared that ‘besides school leaders, nowadays middle leaders also get to participate at zonal sharing’, a platform where they can discuss, exchange thoughts and ask questions about policy change. She stressed that asking questions is not to doubt the government’s policies but to clarify her uncertainty and understand her contribution as a middle leader. This is a significant finding in the context of Singapore: middle leaders are now called upon to lead change in school settings.

Other middle leaders (P3, P9, P10 and P13) were more concerned about their roles in communicating the rationale under policy changes to teachers. One middle leader (P3) shared that ‘to understand the rationales means to be able to answer questions’. According to these middle leaders, they welcome the use of
different avenues of communicating change by the MOE which include communications in the form of pop-up messages in the official mail portal and corporate email updates. Press releases are also sent to teachers to increase teacher awareness of new policies. Middle leaders see these platforms as an effective way of supporting their roles in helping to communicate MOE policies. One middle leader disclosed his unease in communicating change to teachers:

… If any teacher asks me why they must do this, I just ask them to go and read up [MOE email updates]. Then I don't have to crack my head to think of how to answer. (P10)

It is evident that the middle leaders involved in the study held directives from the MOE in high regard. However, while they claim to be convinced of the rationales for policy change, they displayed a lack of confidence in getting the buy-in from teachers. According to the middle leaders, channels for the MOE to communicate change seem to have improved, but there is no evidence to suggest that middle leaders are keen to persuade themselves or teachers to gain greater insights into the rationales and objectives of these policies. This ongoing contradiction remains central to the work of middle leaders who are engaged in leading continuing professional development, and yet at the same time sometimes uncertain about the rationale underpinning the change.

Another theme that emerged in this study is the value of continuing professional development held by middle leaders. The next segment examines middle leaders’ perspectives of continuing professional development and its impact on teaching and learning, from a values perspective.

5.3 Middle leaders believe there is value in the concept of CPD

By way of iteration, the idea of leading from the middle as a strategy for system reform where leadership in the middle tier is acknowledged as crucial to the success of contemporary schools is a relatively new concept in the leadership literature (Hargreaves & Braun, 2012). Research shows that although middle leaders are deemed crucial in contributing to whole school planning for improvement, many still see themselves solely as departmental advocates or subject administrators and not part of the management echelon of the school (Bennett et al., 2003; Busher, 2005; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Middle leaders
are also often considered as less influential and given few opportunities to exercise their leadership as school principals are the ones ultimately accountable for school performance (Bush et al., 2007; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016). Some authors actively question the scope for middle leaders to chart their own agenda for change and development (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). So if middle leaders are to be regarded as leaders of learning in schools, it is important to understand how they interpret the concept of continuing professional development (CPD) and how it applies to their daily work, school and education system for them to genuinely believe that they can effect change. To understand the perspectives held by middle leaders, participants in the study were asked to describe what the term ‘CPD’ meant to them and discuss its significance in achieving learning and teaching outcomes.

The data emerged from the interviews showed that there is consensus amongst middle leaders in their belief of the purpose and outcomes for continuing professional development. However, two factors repeatedly arise in the middle leaders’ support for the concept of continuing professional development in Singapore. Middle leaders readily endorse the concept of continuing professional development based on the belief that:

i. CPD has a significant influence on teacher quality and student outcomes
ii. CPD equips teachers with the skills and expertise for their roles as 21st century educators

Each of the above is detailed further in the following sections.

(i) CPD has a significant influence on teacher quality and student outcomes
Data from the interviews highlighted middle leaders’ perspectives of continuing professional development as a means in raising teacher quality that is deemed to have a significant influence on student outcomes. According to the middle leaders, continuing professional development facilitates teacher quality which influence positively on student outcomes; and student outcomes in turn guide and reinforce on-going implementation of continuing professional development which further facilitates the quality of teachers to achieve the desired student
outcomes. This idea is in line with the MOE’s efforts to ‘grow Singapore teachers by providing opportunities at every stage and in every way to deepen their skills and expertise’ in order ‘to bring out the best in every child’ (Heng, 2014). As one middle leader pointed out:

Our pupils are our top priority. Whatever we do as teachers, it must in the end benefit the students. (P8)

By way of commentary, it is noted that middle leaders seem to have highly sophisticated knowledge of the correlation between teacher development and student achievement. To highlight the crucial role teachers play, one middle leader (P9) quoted the McKinsey Report (2007):

The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

All middle leader participants stressed the important roles teachers play in educating the next generation. Several middle leaders described teachers as the ‘pillars’ and ‘foundation stones’ that help schools achieve their missions in educating the young. One middle leader spoke of the significant roles teachers play in enhancing student outcomes:

…the two main things that make up a school are teachers and students. If we say that the achievement of our students is the goal then teachers are the ones who support this goal and make it happen. (P5)

Other participants echoed similar views. Participants 1, 4, 5, 11 and 13 stressed that because teachers work ‘at the frontline’ and are ‘closest in contact with students’ they ‘naturally have considerable influence over their students’. Other participants (P2, 3, 7, 8 and 10) reasoned that the impact of teacher quality was especially important in primary schools where teachers spend more time with their class students1.

Middle leaders unanimously expressed beliefs in the concept of continuing professional development in accomplishing the enhancement of teacher quality. They emphasized that it is necessary to ensure that teachers are well prepared to fulfil the mission of educating the next generation because ‘teachers are the

1 Primary school teachers in Singapore do not usually specialise in subject teaching. They generally teach a few subjects within the same class.
crucial factors in determining the success of education’ (P9). To the middle leaders, the capacity of teachers to be well prepared and trained so that they can teach and better prepare their students for the future is of utmost importance.

A number of middle leaders (P2, P3, P4, P6, P8 and P13) believe that teacher development is ‘not just pedagogical knowledge and skills’ (P2). They asserted that equally essential is strengthening of teacher professional identity through teacher development. According to them, teachers must be committed to enhancing their professional expertise and have a good grasp of content knowledge to be respected as a ‘professional’. One middle leader (P11) shared that ‘a professional has to be an expert’ and to be called an expert in education, ‘teachers must prove that they do a better job than any other parents who are home schooling their children’.

Effective teachers, according to the middle leaders, must not only have the ‘professional expertise in education’ (P9), they must also be able to ‘uphold the values of education’ (P6) and ‘command [the] respect’ of others (P13). Teacher development is, therefore, deemed crucial in maintaining high standards of teaching, and by implication, the importance of continuing professional development is acknowledged.

The theme of quality and competency was prevalent in different interviews when middle leaders discussed the issue of teacher effectiveness in the classrooms. All participants concurred with the idea of teachers as important agents in achieving students’ outcomes. They highlighted that teacher quality is crucial in creating a significant impact on student achievement. In attempting to discuss how they address teacher competencies through continuing professional development in schools, middle leaders shared their perceived definition of teacher quality.

Based on the data collected, one factor that defines teacher quality is the academic qualifications of teachers. A few middle leaders (P2, 3, 6 and 8) agreed that the MOE’s decision to engage only university graduates as
teachers\textsuperscript{2} is ‘a good start to ensure teacher quality’ in Singapore primary schools:

... if I’m not wrong, schools in Finland only employ teachers who are at least Masters degree graduates. They are doing very well... so it must have been proven that it works. (P6)

Well, at least the content knowledge part is settled. We only need to focus on training them the ‘teaching’ part... (P2)

Other middle leaders acknowledged that academic qualifications are important but they also stressed that ‘teacher quality does not just refer to the teacher's academic achievements’ (P9) as ‘some of the best teachers’ in their schools are ‘in fact, non-graduates’ (P13). This view was highlighted by another middle leader (P4) who articulated that teacher quality in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century meant more than just having content knowledge for teaching subjects:

Teachers nowadays are expected to do more than transferring knowledge to the pupils. They must have the skills to get that across to the pupils in order for learning to take place. (P4)

Most middle leaders believed that while subject content knowledge of teachers is fundamental, it is imperative that teachers are able to relate to their students and engage them in learning. The skill to engage pupils in learning was cited as another crucial factor that defines teacher quality. While middle leaders were aware of the fundamentals of teaching and acknowledged that content knowledge of teachers is important, a few pointed to the fact that it is only ‘assumed that high academic qualifications equate high content knowledge’ (P10). Middle leader P3 whose child studied in the same school illustrated her point through her own experience:

This teacher [who taught her son] was an honours graduate in science. Yes, a smart one... he taught English, math and science but I think I did most of the teaching and re-teaching my son that year...yes, damage control... he [my son] wasted a year learning nothing from this teacher! (P3)

Sharing the same view is middle leader P2 who spoke of her experiences working with beginning teachers. According to her, there is a difference between being ‘a high-flyer student’ and ‘being a good [effective] teacher’. She reasoned

\textsuperscript{2} Under the recommendations of Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI), MOE will consider recruiting only graduates as new teachers by 2015. (25 Sept 2008)
that this is especially true in primary school teaching where the skills involved are ‘more complicated’; teachers need to know ‘how to simplify that knowledge to make the children understand the concept she is trying to teach’. Another middle leader (P4) made a clear distinction between teacher quality and teaching quality. She maintained that teacher quality refers to ‘one’s ability to learn well’ while teaching quality is a level higher - it refers to ‘one’s ability to make others learn from you’.

While most middle leaders cited teachers’ aptitude in engaging students in learning as a vital indicator of teacher quality, they also pointed out that equally important, is the attitude and motivation of teachers towards teaching and learning. As middle leader P7 explained that ‘… to teach the next generation and provide them with opportunities to learn, we need teachers who are not only abled but also have the passion for teaching so that they can inspire our pupils.’ This notion was also captured in the sentiment of middle leader P12 who said that ‘teachers who are passionate about teaching … want to share and are [more] willing to learn [from others].’ Middle leaders acknowledged that for effective continuing professional development to take effect in the classrooms, teachers are the key. They must be effective in translating the knowledge learnt to realise the outcomes of education.

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\text{The best learning can only be [considered] the best when it is transferred to the students. (P6)}
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To most middle leaders, teacher quality might not necessarily equate to teaching quality. continuing professional development serves to facilitate teacher quality which influence positively on student outcomes; and student outcomes in turn guide and reinforce on-going implementation of continuing professional development which further facilitates the quality of teachers to achieve the desired student outcomes.

(ii) CPD equips teachers with the skills and expertise for their roles as a 21st century educators
Middle leaders identified the need to cater for learning in a rapidly changing context as another key factor for endorsing the concept of continuing professional development. Middle leaders pointed out that the concept of
continuing professional development is ‘not entirely new’ (P1). They accentuated that in the past besides the initial teacher training programme, teachers identified for career advancement were also required to undergo training to prepare for their new roles. However, ‘times have changed’ (P13) and this has inevitably resulted in a shift in the learning needs of students and change in expectations of teachers. This belief is demonstrated in one middle leader’s words:

_The world is changing so fast and our students are developing in ways that we wouldn’t have imagined years back. They are asking questions that we may not know how to answer at all. Teachers need to move alongside to catch up._ (P1)

Other middle leaders also echoed similar views that continuing professional development must be provided to facilitate the up-skilling of teacher capacity to cater to changing context of education:

_…we cannot anticipate what the future will be like and therefore we can’t teach them [the students] what we do not know. But we can prepare them for it... we cannot teach the way we have taught a decade ago._ (P12);

_and yet another:

_It is not just what we teach, but how we teach too. We have to change if we want the next generation to remain competitive._ (P6)

The emergence of new and fast-evolving technology and the shift in global economic focus are among changes listed by middle leaders that impact teaching. According to them, these changes have created a sense of uncertainty for the future and resulted in the call for a new generation of teachers who can facilitate student learning which prepares them for the new challenges ahead. The notion of acknowledging the need to address the demands of the future - a future of uncertainty is in line with the MOE’s aim for every student to acquire a broad and deep foundation for his lifelong journey in learning (Heng, 2013). One middle leader pointed out that as a small island with no natural resources to rely on, Singapore needs to place a significant emphasis on the education of its people so as to ensure that it ‘stays relevant on the world stage’ (P13). In this sense, middle leaders identified educators as a major resource for developing the nation.
According to one middle leader, it is essential for teachers to always remember their strategic roles and responsibilities as educators and always consider student learning as the number one priority:

No matter how the world has changed, you cannot go wrong if your focus is clear. The needs of your pupils must always come first. (P4)

Sharing similar views are other middle leaders who highlighted the imperative for schools and teachers to be aware of their roles in catering to the changing needs and demands of students and their learning requirements:

…the needs have changed and so the way we teach must also change. (P12)

Don’t expect the children to sit in the classroom and listen to your chalk and talk like we used to. It’s a different generation. (P8)

If you teach the same way you did, are you sure they [the students] are learning? We need to relook at our curriculum and see how to better engage them in learning. (P2)

Middle leaders concurred that to address demands of the future, teachers’ roles must change. According to the participants, 21st century teachers are now expected to:

i. prepare students for the unknown future
ii. engage digital-age students meaningfully
iii. be a role-model of 21st century learning

The idea of teacher professional learning designed to expand the knowledge and skills of teachers to cope with multiple roles to prepare teachers for the future is prevalent in different interviews. Middle leaders reiterated the exigent need for teachers to acquire new pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills in the current world of rapid change. They strongly believed that one way for teachers to stay relevant is the capacity to keep abreast of the latest changes in the world and continue to acquire new knowledge and skills through learning so that they can prepare students for the unknown future.

The concerns relating to the rise of technology and social media was also discussed extensively by some middle leaders in the interviews to illustrate their perspectives on teacher learning and student engagement. Middle leaders
acknowledged that the capacity of teachers to continue to learn and acquire new knowledge and skills is important in engaging students of 21st century. Participant 2 stated:

*We have to admit that when it comes to technology, they [students] are the experts. To get them to our sides, we have to first go over and learn from them. (P2)*

Another middle leader identified the change in student learning with these words:

*They [students] don’t have the patience to listen to your lengthy explanations. They are used to getting answers with just one hit on the ‘enter’ button... so we use their method to achieve our goals... combine YouTube with teaching of plants in science. (P6)*

And yet another called for the need to:

*...adopt and adapt. [And] explore the pedagogical use of social media to our advantage... (P11)*

All middle leaders acknowledged the importance for continuing professional development in Singapore to develop teachers and support them in their delivery of the 21st century competencies stipulated by MOE. A middle leader talked explicitly about the expectations for teachers to be exemplars to their students:

*If we aim to nurture our students to be 21st century competent, our teachers must not only teach. [We] must keep up with new knowledge and innovative pedagogies and be models of self-directed, lifelong learning. We must walk the talk. (P4)*

The concept of teacher role-modelling life-long learning is also mentioned by middle leaders as ways of demonstrating attributes of a 21st century educator. A few middle leaders (P3, 6 and 10) identified ‘setting an example to the younger generation’ as a 21st century teacher competency. Overall, middle leaders believed that the commitment to learning and a focus on catering to the learning needs of students is essential in maintaining teachers’ roles as professionals.

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3 The three domains of the emerging 21st century competencies include: (1) civic literacy, global awareness, cross-cultural skills; (2) critical and incentive thinking and (3) information, collaboration and communications skills
One aspect of teacher learning that emerged in the interviews is the process whereby teachers enhance their existing level of competencies in specific areas. Middle leaders acknowledged the value of teachers’ experiences and existing competencies.

*Our experience is our knowledge and skill, we can’t throw them away.* (P10)

Another middle leader described teacher learning as fine-tuning existing pedagogies to adapt to 21st century needs:

*…these are precious practices that teachers have accumulated through years of experience. So we only need to build on what teachers already know. It’s a matter of sharpening our tools.* (P7)

According to the middle leaders, the process in which teachers learn to *refine existing teaching skills* is crucial. Middle leaders (P1, 4, 7, 9 and 11) reported that *what works in the past may not work as well as it did in the current world of rapid changes* but the *capacity to utilize what we already have is vital*. One common example shared by many middle leaders is lesson planning. Middle leaders are unified in their conviction that teachers *should not overhaul the entire curriculum* and replace it with a completely new one:

*… we don’t really have to panic and throw away all our old lesson plans. Look carefully and all you need is to polish and do some add-ons.* (P4)

Another middle leader (P10) reckoned that the call for teacher learning and teacher change might be *‘a good thing after all’* as students benefit and can now get *‘the best of both worlds’*; referring to deploying new teaching strategies in the *‘already well-designed’* old lesson plans. He further elaborated by suggesting ways that could better engage the new generation of learners:

*…plug in YouTube… set up class blogs… start an online forum. Look, you still teach what you need to teach but may be in a different way, using different strategies.* (P10)

The notion of teachers learning to merge the new with the old as a way of fine-tuning is a key theme underpinning this research, and is also reflected in one of the examples provided by another middle leader to illustrate how experienced teachers and beginning teachers can learn from each other:
Beginning teachers are bursting with new teaching ideas but may be clueless about how to go about maximizing these ideas in class. Some experienced teachers may be somewhat 'jaded' when it comes to new ideas but know perfectly what works in class. If they share their knowledge and skills, viola! They learnt new things and also perfected when they already know! (P9)

This concept of collaboration in teacher development is also common in the literature on continuing professional development. It is to be noted here that most middle leaders seemed to have informed views of the rationale for continuing professional development. Their understandings for the purpose of continuing professional development were very much in line with the MOE’s visions which focused on the need to develop teachers who will be able to deliver 21st century competencies through the provision of pedagogical exemplars, training and professional sharing. Middle leaders hold the perspectives that the MOE’s on-going implementation of continuing professional development will raise teacher quality that will in turn have a significant impact on student outcomes. This observation could be the result of the MOE’s initiative in creating dialogues among senior and middle leaders on new education policies. It was argued that school personnel used to only learn about these through the media when information was officially released to the public. Now, the participants argued, principals and vice-principals are expected to conduct sharing and dialogue sessions with middle leaders first and then with the rest of the staff. It was the consensus of the participants that this could have resulted a heightened awareness of educational policies and the rationale behind them among middle leaders. So school leadership at all levels is deemed to be an important factor in shaping on-going continuing professional development.

Overall, middle leaders were unanimous in their views on the rationale and value of continuing professional development. It shall be recalled that middle leaders spoke of a correlation between continuing professional development, teacher quality and student achievements. They believed that effective continuing professional development facilitates teacher quality that in turn enhances student outcomes. Middle leaders were eager to share their perspectives on how an effective continuing professional development can be portrayed. Most middle leaders defined the term ‘effective continuing
professional development’ as teacher professional development that is perceived to have a positive impact on teacher quality. Based on perspectives collected from interviews with middle leaders, three key recurring characteristics of effective continuing professional development (CPD) were identified:

a. effective CPD is a continual process
b. effective CPD is one that teachers find meaningful
c. effective CPD must value add teaching & learning in the classroom

Each of these key concepts will be more fully reviewed below and their centrality to the key propositions made evident.

(a) Effective CPD is a continual process

Common to definitions of effective continuing professional development in the literature, middle leaders stressed the importance for teacher development as an on-going process. They used terms such as ‘continual’, ‘process’ and ‘journey’ to describe teachers learning. One middle leader stated:

... learning must be on-going so as to keep up with times. Technology has made it possible for faster exchange of information and thus we must keep pace... There’s no such thing as ‘I’ve already mastered everything!’ New knowledge keeps popping up every second. (P8)

Yet another emphasised the importance of continuity:

We all know from TGM (Teacher Growth Model, 2012) that teacher learning is a continuum. It goes on and on... a journey of learning that you take together with your students. (P5)

Middle leaders highlighted that if teachers were to be ‘lifelong learners’, teacher learning must similarly be a ‘continual process’. They stressed that teacher development process must be ‘current’, ‘up-to-date’ and ‘sustainable’ so that teachers can ‘stay relevant’. It is to be noted that while all middle leader participants were able to highlight ‘on-going’ processes as one of the characteristics of an effective continuing professional development, one of them attempted to clarify as to why effective continuing professional development needs to be an on-going process. She (P3) pointed out that continuing professional development needs to be ‘on-going’ because ‘not all PD [professional development] activities are relevant and useful’. In order to ‘hit the
right ones, teachers need to attend as many as possible'. Clearly, this continuing and on-going process of continuing professional development is perceived to be essential to ensuring teacher quality according to the perspectives of middle leaders in this study. While their individual views varied, the point of consensus was around sustainability and continuity.

(b) Effective CPD is one that teachers find meaningful
Middle leaders believed that continuing professional development which is deemed meaningful by teachers has a greater impact on student outcomes. According to the middle leaders, teachers ‘act as middlemen [sic]’, they must be able to see meaning in continuing professional development in order for them to apply what they have learnt in the classroom. ‘Meaningful continuing professional development’ was defined by most as ‘relevant’ and ‘related to student learning’. One of the middle leaders (P6) went on to qualify what counts as relevant by stating that continuing professional development is relevant ‘when it is aligned with school plans and goals’.

Middle leaders also emphasised the key roles played by teachers in transferring newly acquired knowledge to the context of the classroom. They acknowledged that success of continuing professional development often relies on the attitude of teachers and their willingness to change. They also expressed concerns and uncertainty regarding the impact of continuing professional development on teacher change and development:

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\text{Sometimes, what is relevant to you may not be relevant to them [the teachers]} \text{ (P13).}
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Middle leaders perspectives on the impact of continuing professional development on teacher change will be discussed in the section later.

(c) Effective CPD must value add teaching and leaning in the classroom
In trying to explain what counts as effective continuing professional development to teachers, middle leaders cited examples on what they perceived as ‘applicability’. Most participants described effective continuing professional
development as teacher learning that focuses on enhancing student growth and development:

*The one main reason we want teachers to learn is for pupils to learn better.* (P13)

*Only one kind of PD is considered effective – one that benefits students.* (P5)

Another participant (P7) stressed that ‘in the end, it [CPD] must value add teaching and benefit pupils’. Other participants (P1, 6, 8 and 9) echoed similar views. They believed that when teachers deepen their professional expertise, their instructional practices and lesson plans will also improve and all these in turn will benefit the students. Most of the middle leaders interviewed highlighted that the essence of continuing professional development lies not on the types of activities but on the commitment of teachers in maintaining the standards of teaching through continuing professional development and viewing it as a life-long learning process. Thus, it is evident that middle leaders in this study believed that teachers play a key role in determining the impact of continuing professional development on student outcomes.

Another theme that emerged in this study is the diverse views on what counts as continuing professional development held by middle leaders. The next segment examines middle leaders’ perspective on what continuing professional development is and the roles they play in promoting teaching and learning in schools. By way of commentary, it is noted that middle leaders support the concept of continuing professional development and consider it irrefutably relevant in Singapore context. They seemed well informed of the purpose and value of continuing professional development and spoke with conviction about the significant impact of continuing professional development on teacher quality and student outcomes. However, there were concerns about the multiple perspectives held by middle leaders on what counts as continuing professional development. The first set of issues related to the middle leaders’ uncertainties about the definitions and types of continuing professional development. The second set of issues related to middle leaders’ diverse views on what an
effective continuing professional development model should look like. Each of these will be dealt with in turn below.

5.4 Middle leaders hold diverse views on what counts as CPD

Until the mid-1990s, teacher continuing professional development was often seen as a matter of voluntary commitment or something for those with career ambitions (Craft, 2002). They mainly focused on the development of individual teacher’s knowledge, skills and attitudes (Bolam, 1982). Many of the middle leaders (P4, 6, 9 and 10) spoke of in-service trainings and workshops that were already in place even before the MOE’s call for teacher development and growth in the last decade. Among common continuing professional development activities cited by middle leaders in relation to the past were in-service professional development workshops, courses, seminars and conferences organised and conducted either out of school by education institutions such as National Institute of Education or in school by senior teachers and heads of department.

Two middle leaders specifically stressed that teacher development ‘need not always be in the forms of workshops and courses’. According to one of them (P4), ‘sharing of teaching experiences and good practices in school are also a form of CPD’. This idea was echoed by another middle leader (P12) who listed learning journeys organised for teachers and the MOE’s Teachers Work Attachment programme amongst continuing professional development activities which help to broaden teachers’ perspectives and experience. In describing what kind of continuing professional development activities can facilitate teacher change, middle leaders provided ambiguous responses. One middle leader cited ‘courses and workshops that make teachers grow’ (P2) while another pointed to ‘any activity that provides teachers opportunity to learn more about something’ (P4). A more specific condition on what teachers learn was drawn by a senior middle leader (P9). She argued that continuing professional development must ‘help teachers in terms of the lessons delivery’.

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4 The Teachers’ Work Attachment programme provides opportunities for teachers to take part in short-term attachments at external organisations to gain new perspectives and exposure.
Uncertainties about the definitions and types of CPD

Overall, middle leaders upheld different definitions of the kinds of activities that can be considered ‘professional development’. Implicit in these perspectives, there seemed to be contestations on personal interests and professional pursuits. Several participants commented that for development activities to be qualified as ‘professional’ they have to be ‘relevant to teaching’. Alternatively, the idea of professional activities to be transferable into classroom practices was highlighted by other middle leaders.

Participants revealed a broad range of perspectives which illustrated that they have contested conceptions of what counts as ‘professional’. Some saw continuing professional development only in the context of job-related learning. They made a clear distinction of what was considered personal and professional development. Most participants agreed that ‘school needs come before departmental needs and that is followed by personal needs’ (P8). However, it proved to be a challenge for some middle leaders to draw a clear boundary as to what was considered personal and professional. An example of uncertainty was illustrated through one middle leader who in turn asked the researcher to confirm what counts as professional training:

Taking up a course in singing does not qualify as professional development if the teacher does not teach music. But if it [the course] trains the teacher on how to use his voice and project his voice better in class, that means he will not get sore throat that often and that will result in fewer MC [medical leave]. Although there is no direct impact on student learning music, I think the students have also benefited... So is this still considered professional training? I am actually not very sure. (P3)

Another indication of the middle leaders’ diverse views on continuing professional development was evidence of differing perspectives on whether graduate and postgraduate degrees are considered continuing professional development. Most participants believed that a basic Bachelor degree is necessary for teachers ‘these days’ as it ‘provides the basis for content knowledge’. However, there were diverse views on the value of postgraduate programmes and higher degrees in relation to continuing professional development, such as a Master’s degree. One participant said that only
postgraduate courses that are ‘content related’ should be considered continuing professional development:

If they [teachers] take a Masters course in educational policy, does that help the students? The degree cannot be considered as professional development as what they learnt will not be transferred to the students in class. (P5)

This middle leader continued to explain that it has to be ‘at least education-related’. Another middle leader gave the example of two teachers undertaking postgraduate studies to illustrate how she made a clear distinction between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’ continuing professional development:

... if you teach Chinese and your [postgraduate] studies is on Chinese language and culture, fine. But if you are doing postgraduate research work on teacher education than it is just for self-improvement. It cannot be counted as professional development as what you learnt cannot be transferred to the children in class. (P2)

According to her, the term ‘professional development’ denotes transferability of knowledge to students, activities that do not qualify is deemed as ‘self-development’. This is an important finding in the context of this study.

It will be recalled that based on perspectives collected, three key recurring characteristics of effective continuing professional development were identified by the middle leaders: (1) continual process (2) meaningful to teachers and (3) value add teaching and learning in the classrooms. In trying to define continuing professional development, some middle leaders grouped continuing professional development into two categories, the ‘must-have’ and the ‘good-to-have’. The first category referred to activities that were initiated from ‘the top’. These include directives from MOE or school-initiated programmes that required all or a particular group of teachers to be equipped to perform specific policies and procedures. The ‘good-to-have’ continuing professional development activities were those that were deemed to have little impact on teaching and learning, but significant in personal growth.

Some middle leaders (P2, 5, 8 and 10) reasoned that ‘non-mandatory activities’ should not be considered as continuing professional development because
these activities ‘rarely match school needs’. To these middle leaders, continuing professional development is considered effective when it is aligned to their school’s strategic purpose. Other middle leaders (P4, 11 and 12), however, believed that continuing professional development is achieved ‘as long as learning has taken place’. Ambiguity on what counts as continuing professional development is prevalent through the profession, based on the perspectives of these middle leaders. While some participants seemed somewhat convinced of what counts as continuing professional development, many were uncertain when they were asked to provide examples of continuing professional development in their schools. Middle leader P7 revealed her doubt when she asked:

*My principal encourages our teachers to have peer observations where teachers visit each other’s classes… is this counted?*

This sense of uncertainty was also echoed by Middle leader P3:

*I know those one-off workshops are counted as professional development, not CPD. I think it does not fit into the ‘continuing’ category. Right?*

One middle leader shared that the confusion could arise from different interpretations by some school leaders on what counts as continuing professional development.

*My principal allowed a colleague to learn yoga and another to pick up German language during their PDL [Professional Development Leave]. But I heard that this is not allowed in some schools… they can only do education-related courses. (P11)*

The notion of differences in interpretations or misinterpretations of policies surfaced a number of times during the interviews. One middle leader (P1) said that the MOE’s original intent may sometimes be misinterpreted ‘when it is brought down to school level, the primary objective may have changed’. She cited an example of how a policy on teacher development ‘went wrong’ in the earlier years when the MOE was promoting teacher development:

*… the idea of hitting 100 hours for training. Everyone was just charging ahead to fulfil that hundred hours. Who came up with that [idea]? You asked but nobody knows… years later, they [MOE] told you that it was never mentioned on paper that you must hit that 100 hours.*
She believed with every good intention from the MOE, school leaders must be equally clear about the policies and how to get them ‘implemented with the original intent’. She explained that policies sometimes ‘backfired due to misinterpretations’ or lack of full understanding. It is at the implementation stage that policies are put to test. One crucial factor that determines success is the perceived quality of continuing professional development in action, in schools.

From the data collected, middle leaders seemed well-informed of the purpose and value of continuing professional development and spoke with conviction about the significant impact of continuing professional development on teacher quality and student outcomes. However, they appeared to struggle with any consensus relating to what can be defined as continuing professional development. They seemed to have created a broad range of perspectives by delineating the meanings of ‘professional’ and ‘continuing’.

As such, there was no evidence of one clear definition of continuing professional development, from the perspectives of middle leaders in this study. The implications of such confusion could have system wide impact if it remains unaddressed by authorities.

(ii) Divided views on an effective CPD model
Most middle leaders agreed that the growth model of continuing professional development is ‘the way to go’. This view is particularly evident after the introduction of the Teacher Growth Model\(^5\) (TGM) in 2012. Middle leaders acknowledged that the intention of the MOE is to prepare teachers with the relevant knowledge, skills and disposition so that they are better equipped to develop students holistically for the 21st century. The TGM learning continuum helps teachers plan their road map of learning in consideration of their professional needs, interests and aspirations. However, some of the middle leaders were outright in confessing that when it comes to individual teacher’s

\(^5\) The TGM is a professional development model introduced by the MOE in 2012. It encourages Singapore teachers to engage in continual learning and become student-centric professionals who take ownership of their growth.
training plans, they tended to focus on their professional needs and deficiencies. The following two statements exemplify these sentiments:

*I will definitely want my teachers to pay more attention to what they are lacking instead of their interests and aspirations unless of course they are already doing very well as a classroom teacher.* (P13)

*The message has to be clear. You do what you are expected to do well first before you venture into your interests and aspirations.* (P9)

A few of the middle leaders attributed blame to the Singapore-centric performance management system where teachers are ranked based on their performances. Teachers are expected to address their perceived deficient areas through continuing professional development. Middle leaders raised concerns about this group of teachers, highlighting that expectations must be managed first before they discuss ‘interests and aspirations’. Some participants were concerned that if these teachers were to focus on ‘other’ areas of continuing professional development, they would fail in their roles as classroom teachers. One participant in particular stated:

*If they have problems managing their class, they jolly well work on that part. I won’t let them tell me that they want to be a Head of Department in five years… that could wait.* (P6)

These middle leaders also shared that it is sometimes difficult to balance the needs and the wants of continuing professional development. They acknowledged that although they knew ‘where the Ministry was coming from’, they felt a need to address the most imperative issues first. It was agreed that training priority is therefore often given to these teachers to address their needs, or as one middle leader referred to as ‘areas for improvement’. She reported:

*The situation in school is very real. Parents’ complaints will come straight away when they [teachers] are not doing their jobs well in class so trainings to become a better badminton competition referee can wait.* (P13)

According to these middle leaders, training activities for teachers with aspirations are usually given only after they have proven that they are competent in teaching and can move on to the ‘next stage of training’. This developmental conception of development was evident across the interviews.
Another group of middle leaders, however, believed that ‘teachers do best in what they are passionate about’ and, therefore, it is important to discover their strengths and work on how their interests and aspirations can contribute to the school. One middle leader (P12) chose to focus on teachers’ interests as she believed that ‘teachers can’t be that bad in the classroom if they have passed the teacher training course [provided by National Institute of Education]’. The idea of ‘growing together as a fraternity’ was brought up by another middle leader (P11) who highlighted that the notion of growth could possibly be more effective by learning with one and other. Clearly, this orientation advocated for a more collaborative approach to continuing professional development.

By way of commentary, it is of note that while all middle leader participants are convinced of the benefits and positive impact of continuing professional development, they raised concerns about the perceived implementation of the concept in schools. One middle leader (P10) described their ‘predicament’ as ‘knowing what’s good for the teachers but having to decide what’s best for them now’. This notion is also prevalent in a number of other interviews where middle leaders highlighted their dilemma in ‘wanting all teachers to improve’ and yet having to focus on those ‘who are not making the mark yet’. Middle leaders who support the growth model of continuing professional development also shared that resources are often given to the ‘more urgent cases’ so that teachers who are lacking can ‘catch up with the rest’. One middle leader (P4) described this situation as ‘reality from the ground level’. This approach advocates for an interventionist mode of continuing professional development.

As way of summary, it is apparent that while middle leaders showed strong conviction in the concept of continuing professional development in theory, they seemed somewhat uncertain about its success in implementation in schools. There was contestation over what counts as continuing professional development and there were also divided view on an effective continuing professional development model. Middle leaders also raised some concerns on the actual impact of continuing professional development on teacher change, in view of a lack of evidence to measure impact on student learning.
The next segment discusses two further sets of concerns raised by middle leaders. The first set of concerns relate to the actual impact of continuing professional development on teacher change. And the second set of concerns relate to the perceived time frame necessary to realise change.

5.5 Middle leaders are uncertain about the tangible impact of CPD on teacher change

Most middle leaders believed that the fundamental intent of continuing professional development is to help teachers become competent and effective in their teaching. In considering the concept of an effective teacher, middle leaders spoke of ‘the heart for the children’ (P1, 8 and 10), ‘wanting to inspire others’ (P5 and 13) and ‘willing[ness] to accept new ideas’ (P1, 2, 4, 9 and 11) as crucial characteristics of an effective teacher. One senior middle leader captured the essence in describing an effective teacher:

…must be able to accept change. To be effective, it is our job to be humble and be ready to learn and re-learn… no matter how many years we have been in this line… and be generous in sharing our experiences… All these while, keeping our goal in mind - which is our pupils’ learning. (P9)

Her view on change was reflected in the comments of other middle leaders concerning the way teachers learn to teach. The concept of teachers ‘having an open mind’ emerged in different interviews. Middle leaders highlighted that teachers’ willingness to accept new ideas is a crucial step towards change in practice. They believed that teachers who are curious about new methods of teaching must also be open and willing to try them out. If teachers are unwilling to take the first step, they would be unlikely to change the way they teach. One middle leader illustrated an example of how teachers’ attitudes can impede school improvements:

I remember when we first introduced the interactive whiteboard many years ago, we got all our teachers to learn how to operate it. It was supposed to help teachers in their delivery of lessons as we believe it will greatly reduce [lesson] preparation time… some teachers took well to it and were seen trying it straight after. But a group of teachers complained that it achieved the same results as the conventional use of the visualizer and whiteboard. You see,
for this group, the new technology becomes a white elephant sitting in their classrooms. (P2)

Other middle leaders shared similar experiences with teachers who are unwilling to initiate the first step to change. One middle leader pointed out that she could fully understand why some teachers are reluctant to learn new things:

To be honest, I have also attended courses and workshops where I sat wondering why I was wasting my time listening to things that sounded totally unachievable in my class... it’s the mind-set. You tell yourself it is rubbish and it became rubbish... it took me years to realise that there is a thing called ‘adapt’. I may not be able to use the idea in total but I am free to adopt and adapt and cater it to my pupils. (P2)

According to middle leaders, attitudes of teachers determine the way they perceive the value of learning. They believed that the real essence of learning is not about what was taught but how that knowledge was applied in practice. As one middle leader stated:

Trust me, intelligent teachers can get something worth out of a seemingly useless seminar any time. I had a teacher who once came to thank me for sending her to a useless seminar. She said she learnt nothing from the lecturer but managed to network with teachers in other schools. (P6)

And yet another:

I don’t think there are any courses that are a waste of time attending. You see, there are always some takeaways. It all depends on how we fit it into our learning. For example, if the delivery is not ideal, the interactions with other participants may be fruitful! (P4)

It is evident from the data collected that middle leaders recognized that to enhance student learning, teacher quality is a key factor. They agreed that one way of enhancing teacher quality is through continuing professional development. A few middle leaders (P1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11 and 13) acceded to the fact that it is not always easy to prove the positive impact of teacher quality on student outcomes. However, they were certain that poor teacher quality would ‘almost definitely’ have an adverse effect on student learning:

... most times our best teachers produce good results. But sometimes there are other factors that come into play. Like family problems and class synergy. That’s beyond our control. But those
[teachers] who are not performing, it’s obvious. No results…all the time. (P8)

Unfortunately, the bad ones always stand out. (P6)

Two middle leaders who had just returned from their Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) programme\textsuperscript{6} believed that ‘it is always good to learn something new, whether it applies to the job or not’. According to one middle leader (P11), a crucial aspect of an effective continuing professional development lies with the attitudes of the teachers. She stressed that the real essence of learning is not about what was taught, but how that knowledge was applied in practice and cited an example to illustrate her point:

>A research on educational leadership may not have a direct impact in the classroom but it helps the teacher become a better leader and contributes to the knowledge in the field. We have two teachers, who studied accountancy and architecture at graduate levels, who are contributing very much to the department. One of them is in [the] art department and the other is helping with the managing of funds in the math department. So if you think what they did at their university is irrelevant, you are wrong. Content knowledge is one thing, it’s knowing how to handle projects that is important. Knowledge you gain as a person on the whole.

According to middle leaders, teachers must first reflect on the way they learn and teach in order to deal with change. They believed that continuing professional development is the first step to teacher change. For some participants, change meant not just learning but also re-learning. One senior middle leader addressed change specifically as re-learning:

>Beginning teachers … know how to manipulate technology to suit their needs [in teaching]… I may know some technology but I need to learn from them… especially the ‘application’ part… (P4)

The majority of the middle leaders pointed out that in the current world of rapid changes, it is difficult for teachers to claim expertise unless they ‘stay current’ and ‘remain relevant’. One middle leader pointed out the expectations of parents today:

\textsuperscript{6} Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) is a programme conducted by the National Institute of Education. It aims to develop middle level leaders to expand their roles beyond departments and take on direct leadership for teaching and learning for the innovative school.
Parents are more educated and expect more from schools…. Students are also not the same today. They have exposure to practically the whole world [with a touch of button]! They may know more things than you [teachers] do. If teachers are still teaching the same old way they used to, who are they to call themselves teachers? What can they teach? (P5)

Teachers who constantly work to improve their knowledge and skills are deemed as teachers who are better at coping with changes and more willing to change their teaching practices to enhance student learning outcomes. Middle leaders reasoned that if teachers are ‘exposed to new ideas’ and ‘are always in contact with new pedagogies’, they will tend to be more ‘open’ and ‘willing to try out new things’. This is believed to have an impact on enhancing student outcomes as middle leaders reasoned that ‘as long as teachers are learning, students will also learn something’:

Middle leaders believed that the concept of continuing professional development rests on the premise of improving student learning by improving teaching practice. The key is to have a clear and persistent focus on student learning. One middle leader (P13) emphasized the importance of focusing on student learning through learning structures set up in schools such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC):

*PLC provides teachers with a good platform to research and reflect on their teaching. Because it is data-driven and student-focused, teacher[s] can easily identify with the purpose of learning.*

The same sentiment was shared by another middle leader (P4) who believed that change can only happen when ‘*teachers own their learning … [and] have a clear sense of purpose for teaching and learning*. The notion of teacher ownership was also mentioned by other middle leaders (P9 and 11) who stressed that teachers play an important role in organisational change: ‘*… taking charge of their own learning is a big step towards building an effective school*’ (P9). One middle leader (P11) highlighted the crucial step to organisational change: ‘*once we have the moral buy-in from the teachers, everything will fall into place neatly*’. Most middle leaders concurred that it is not always easy to
observe the tangible impact of continuing professional development on teacher change.

To the middle leader participants, it seems apparent that while education policies in Singapore have progressed over the years, not all teachers might have progressed at the same speed. Literature on continuing professional development (Evans, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Tickle, 2000; Whitty, 2006) reveals a significant correlation between effective continuing professional development and teachers as individuals. As pointed out by Bradley (1991), when schools change, teachers do not necessarily change with them. The notion of teachers as ‘lifelong learners’ demands that teachers take ownership of their own growth and development, however, how teachers make meaning out of their learning is crucial. According to the middle leaders, the complex part about continuing professional development is measuring its success.

*I can only trust them [teachers] when they tell me they have learnt. How they apply it in the classroom, I will not know unless I conduct lesson observations all the time.* (P6)

Most of the participants quoted ‘trust’ and ‘belief in teachers’ as important elements to the success of continuing professional development. They believed that it is the teachers’ responsibility to translate learning into their classroom. One of the participants shared that the impact of continuing professional development on teacher change is a ‘lengthy commitment of time and energy’ (P8) and, therefore, the impact is unlikely to emerge within a short time frame. Most middle leaders agreed that building a learning culture in schools needs time.

One middle leader (P4) shared that it will be ‘…totally unrealistic to expect change to take place overnight’. He cited an example of a Head of Department who insisted that teachers change the way they teach writing after attending a two-hour workshop:

*The reality is that not all [teachers] are ready to move along at the same time… some are more ready but we must remember those who need more time to adjust [to the changes].*
He also pointed out that it is imperative for schools to know their teachers well so that they can allow ‘change to take place at a comfortable pace for every one’. Middle leader P1 stressed the danger of seeing teachers as a collective whole: ‘Just like having students with differing learning needs, teachers would also have different pace of learning and different reasons why they fear change’. This sentiment was shared by another middle leader (P1) who expressed that teachers’ roles and responsibilities have inevitably expanded with an increase in expectations over the years and it takes time to allow teachers to ‘work on what to change and how to change’. This is an important finding in the context of this study. It shows that there was ambivalence in the perspectives of middle leaders towards the impact of continuing professional development on teacher change.

Another middle leader (P6) shared that for change to effectively take place in schools, teacher ownership and a shared moral purpose is important:

You can plan [organizational change] all you want but if teachers are just cruising along with you without a shared purpose, you’ll end up nowhere.

He also pointed out that it is challenging to identify teachers who ‘claimed to be ready’:

They follow your vision not because they believe in it but because they want to move ahead of their peers.

This sentiment was also shared by middle leader P1 who said that ‘being able to articulate what the school leaders want to hear’ may not necessarily denotes a ‘shared purpose’. Middle leaders also listed other reasons that could impede change in schools. Among them are the conditions in schools. Middle leaders identified time and space among essential elements for building a culture of learning in schools. Middle leader P3 reasoned that:

Teachers face many constraints… we have no time; we can’t find the space in school… so we must set up the structures consciously to facilitate learning or it will never happen.

Some structures mentioned include setting time-tabled time for teachers to engage in learning, granting study leaves and creating physical learning areas in schools for teachers to meet. All middle leaders agreed that changes in practice take time and that they do not happen in a vacuum. Providing the necessary
infrastructures acts only as a support for change, but for real change to happen, constant review and fine-tuning is needed. Middle leader P2 cited an example to illustrate the point:

_We had to fine-tune some structures … when we first set up time for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other, we allowed them to choose their topic of discussions but we found that without a proper set of agenda and guidance on what to do, they will just end up focusing on other things (P2)._ 

Middle leaders also acknowledged that it takes time to build trust and collaborative relationships with each other and recognised that building a learning culture requires a continual process of review and fine-tuning.

Most middle leaders cited teachers’ attitude, commitment of time and energy for continuing professional development to realise its impact and for teacher change to take place. However, all middle leaders were unable to articulate how they can measure the impact and when they can see the actual impact of continuing professional development taking place in their schools. Some middle leaders claimed that *‘it will eventually come’* (P4) while others adopted a wait-and-see attitude:

_To be frank, I am not sure. We’ll just have to wait for it to happen (P10)._ 

By way of summary, concerning the first proposition: In regard to continuing professional development in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development from the perspectives of middle leaders, it can be noted that middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard and they believe strongly that there is value of in the concept of continuing professional development. They do so based on the perspective that (a) continuing professional development has a significant impact on teacher quality and student outcomes and (b) continuing professional development equips teachers with the skills and expertise for their roles as 21st century educators. However, there are some contestations among middle leaders on what counts as continuing professional development. They were also unsure of the tangible impact of continuing professional development on teacher change. This no doubt will be the subject of further research for the government in the future.
It will be recalled that the first proposition discussed the number of issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development from the perspectives of middle leaders. The second proposition discusses the perspectives held by middle leaders on issues concerning their roles as leaders in learning and teaching and as change agents. This forms the basis of analysis and discussion in the next chapter, Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6: Theoretical Proposition Two

6.1 Introduction

Proposition 2
In regard to CPD in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspectives of middle leaders

The above proposition is the second of a set of two arrived at through analysis of the verbatim interview transcripts of 13 middle leaders discussing the perspectives they hold about their leadership roles in leading learning and the concept of schools as learning organisations.

The first proposition, elaborated upon in the previous chapter, provided an understanding of the issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore primary schools held by middle leaders. It indicates that middle leaders showed conviction in the government's policy and readily articulated the rationale for continuing professional development and its significant impact on student outcomes. However, it also highlighted uncertainties middle leaders face with regards to what counts as continuing professional development. They were also unsure of the tangible impact of continuing professional development on teacher change. The second proposition, with which this chapter deals, relates to the second part of the research question with regards to middle leaders’ perspectives and beliefs in their capacity to influence and promote a learning culture in their schools.

The following elaboration encapsulates relevant themes implicit within the second proposition:

1. Middle leaders believe in the impact of leading change from the middle
2. Middle leaders are ambiguous about their roles in promoting school-wide CPD
3. Middle leaders have reservations about being the advocates for colleagues
4. Middle leaders are sceptical about the sustainability of CPD in current situations in schools

Each of these themes is discussed individually forthwith.
6.2 Middle leaders believe in the impact of leading change from the middle

It shall be recalled that the term ‘middle leaders’ in Singapore schools refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools. Middle leadership encompasses roles such as heads of department, subject and level heads. In a typical primary school, at the apex of the school organisation structure is the senior management team comprising the school principal and vice-principals. The next level of leadership position beneath these senior school leaders is that of the middle leaders, with classroom teachers occupying the base tier. Over the past decade, new strategies have been introduced to help schools build the capacity of teachers to meet new demands of a rapidly changing world. Some of these key initiatives involve changes to the school organizational structures and responsibilities of leaders.

All participants in this study concurred that the roles middle leaders play in schools have evolved significantly as a result of major changes in the education scene in Singapore over the past decades. By way of explanation, it has to be noted that descriptions of earlier middle leadership roles presented by participants in this study might not represent what the middle leaders themselves have experienced. Most participants in this study were appointed as middle leaders after the launch of the *Teach Less, Learn More* vision (2005) which initiated educational reforms covering areas from curriculum and assessment to school evaluation and staff appraisal. Descriptions of earlier middle leadership roles articulated by participants are based on their beliefs and perspectives of what they ‘heard from [their] predecessors’, ‘shared by senior middle leaders’ or ‘gathered from books and articles’. A few middle leaders claimed that they learnt about the earlier works of middle leaders through their school principals when the principals communicated their role expectations.

One middle leader (P2) shared that when she was first appointed eight years ago, her school principal explicitly reminded her that ‘the school needs leaders, not workers’. She explained that unlike managers who are deemed to ‘work solely by following instructions, leaders see the big picture… they build vision
and chart directions’. Echoing similar view were middle leaders P4 and P5 who highlighted that in the past, middle leaders ‘managed tasks’ but now they are expected to ‘lead people’. The concept of ‘leading’ in contrast to ‘managing’ was discussed extensively by some middle leaders in separate interviews. While some participants (P1, P6, P7, P8 and P11) viewed their roles in leading people as ‘an expansion’ of their responsibility as middle leaders, others (P3, P5, P10, P12 and P13) considered it ‘a change’ in the role and responsibilities of middle leaders.

One participant (P4) shared that middle leaders used to be known as ‘middle managers’ but they are now more commonly known as ‘KP (Key Personnel)’ and ‘EXCO (Executive Committee) or SMC (School Management Committee) members’. By way of commentary, it is of note that to most middle leaders, the term ‘managing’ seems to bear a negative connotation in contrast to the term ‘leading’. Within the leadership literature, middle leaders are often considered less influential and given few opportunities to exercise their leadership as school principals (Busher et al., 2007; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Heng & Marsh, 2009; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016). Hence, as explained by participant P4, the change in name title bears significance to them because the ‘middle management team’ typically comprised only the middle-tier leaders who are essentially classroom teachers with administrative responsibilities while the ‘EXCO team’ includes the school leaders - principal and vice-principals. One participant (P5) questioned the inconsistency in the use of name title term. He pointed out that if heads of departments were now expected to share the responsibilities of decision making, like the school leaders, they should be duly acknowledged as ‘leaders’ and not ‘managers’. To the middle leaders, the change in name title is significant as it implies recognition of their roles as leaders. Middle leaders highlighted that they now see themselves as ‘part of the team with the school leaders’ (P10), ‘shaping the school vision’ (P7) and ‘more involved in setting strategic directions for the school’ (P11).

Middle leaders P2 and 11 explained that to meet the needs of 21st century education, the roles of teachers, middle leaders and school leaders alike, must also change. Another middle leader (P8) reasoned that change is necessary as
school principals are now given more autonomy to make significant decisions in schools and, therefore, it is crucial for middle leaders to support their principals by ‘sharing some responsibilities in decision making’. Sharing similar views was middle leader P5 who opined that besides the need to meet demands of the future, these changes also prepare middle leaders for higher level of responsibility. He believed that it is important to ‘stretch leadership potential’ because ‘leadership is no longer about seniority but how ready you are to take on more’. Data from the interviews highlighted middle leaders’ perspectives and beliefs in their capacity and impact in promoting a learning culture in their schools. Participants in this study were unanimous in highlighting the unique position they hold in school as ‘the link’ between education policies and student outcomes.

The notion of middle leaders acting as ‘the link’ is a key theme underpinning this research. Middle leaders emphasized their impact and influence on student outcomes by making comparison with the roles played by school leaders. They believed it is the unique position they hold in school that gives them ‘an edge’ in reaching out to students and teachers and thus bearing a greater influence on teaching and learning. Middle leaders readily endorsed the concept based on the belief that:

i. As compared to the school leaders, middle leaders know the students better
ii. As compared to the school leaders, middle leaders know the teachers better

Each of the above is detailed further in the following sections.

(i) As compared to the school leaders, middle leaders know the students better
It shall be recalled that the term ‘middle leaders’ in Singapore schools refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools. These middle leaders continue to teach in the classroom with a reduced teaching load as compared to their teacher counterparts.
In comparison with school leaders, middle leaders perceived that they have a greater influence on students. One key condition identified by middle leaders is the proximity they have with their students which facilitates teacher-student relationship. According to middle leaders, such relationships provided them with insightful knowledge about students’ behaviour, interests and needs:

As teachers, we definitely know our pupils better... We spend more time with them. (P1)

Teachers talk with parents, have regular conferences with them and so we have a better idea of the pupils’ home background and why they behave in a certain way in school. (P5)

One middle leader (P2) shared that while most principals and vice-principals started their career as teachers and might have excelled in teaching, their present roles as school leaders are ‘fundamentally administrative’ and ‘organisational’. The roles school leaders play therefore restricted them to knowing only small pockets of students well:

Generally, the principal knows only two groups of pupils, the extremely naughty ones that are sent to him for punishment and the extremely good ones who have won in major competitions and done the school proud. (P5)

Middle leaders acknowledged that school leaders play a crucial role in charting school directions and designing policies that help to cultivate a conducive learning environment for students. However, they asserted that it is the teachers who ‘actualise these plans and policies’ in their classrooms. Middle leaders P3 and P8 felt that as school leaders do not teach in the classrooms, they might ‘sometimes set unrealistic goals’. In the same vein, others shared that as middle leaders, they were in the best position to provide feedback to school leaders on ‘what works and what don’t for the students [sic]’. The notion of middle leaders knowing their pupils better was also reflected in one of the examples provided by Participant P3:

Our principal insisted on continuing with this reading programme which has turned into a competition between schools to see which school read the most number of books. This programme has initially helped to encourage our pupils to read but as teachers, we know that it has become a number game and it is no longer benefiting the pupils. They are just borrowing books for the sake of hitting the number. (P3)
Middle leaders believed that they could provide a more ‘balanced view’ on school plans and policies because their roles as classroom teachers and middle leaders enable them to see how policies and initiatives are transformed into actions and practice. It is clear that middle leaders felt that in comparison with school leaders, their middle leadership role allows them to know their students better and thus enable them to impact change from the middle.

(ii) As compared to the school leaders, middle leaders know the teachers better. Another key factor that made middle leaders confident of their roles in leading change from the middle is the belief that they know the teachers better as compared to the school leaders. It shall be recalled that besides setting direction for the subject under his or her charge; plan and implement, monitor and evaluate instructional programmes, the roles and responsibilities of a middle leader in Singapore primary schools also include acting as a reporting officer to a group of teachers under his charge. Reporting officers function as supervisors of these teachers, managing performance appraisal and development plans. They are expected to meet regularly to discuss and provide timely feedback and review. It is to be noted that school leaders only act as reporting officers to middle leaders.

Most middle leaders in this study described their roles as reporting officers as ‘a way of reaching out’ and ‘knowing teachers better’. Most of them highlighted that their role as middle leaders helped them to assist the teachers in realising their strengths and work on areas for improvements. They hold the perspectives that having middle leaders as reporting officers is crucial to teachers because middle leaders act as the ‘buffer’ between teachers and school leaders. One middle leader explained that most teachers are unwilling to approach the principal directly, ‘fearing’ that they will be ‘marked within the first few minutes of the discussion’. According to the middle leaders, such a stance is common in schools where the principal rarely meets teachers individually. Teachers often have to ‘prepare their script’ or ‘consult middle leaders’ prior to meeting their principal as ‘principals do not have time for long stories’ and teachers worried that they are unable to communicate their ideas across clearly within that short meeting.
To the middle leaders, they could recognise challenges faced by teachers because they are ‘also classroom teachers’ themselves. They believed that the nature of their middle leadership roles enables them to provide practical advice for teachers and help set more realistic targets in school. One middle leader shared how she ‘negotiated’ for more realistic examination targets with her principal in school:

_The principal’s exam targets are hard to achieve with the class Miss Liu was teaching. Half of her pupils are dyslexic! I know her difficulties because I also have many such pupils in my class. I had to highlight our concern to the principal and make her see that she was adding stress to the teacher who is already struggling. In the end, we decided to set a separate and more realistic target for this class._ (P11)

The notion of middle leaders knowing the teachers better is also reflected in one example provided by another middle leader who illustrated how important good rapport with teachers can help middle leaders ensure that plans are successfully carried out in schools:

_We all know that teacher K was the best candidate to lead this project but our principal failed to convince her to take it up. In the end, it was her reporting officer who managed to convince her. Only her reporting officer knew well what motivates this teacher._ (P12)

As described by Chew (2008), middle leaders in Singapore are often perceived as the ‘human link’ between national education policy and the teaching staff. This concept was also highlighted by middle leaders in separate interviews in this study. Middle leaders shared that school leaders are essentially the ones communicating the ‘broad ideas’ of major policies to teachers. As reporting officers, middle leaders are often expected to provide guidance and explain policies to teachers under their charge. It is evident in the earlier chapter that middle leaders exhibit a high level of conviction in the MOE’s directives and were appreciative of the different platforms introduced to support them in communicating MOE policies to teachers. While some middle leaders displayed a lack of self-confidence in getting the buy-in from teachers, all of them recognised it as their responsibility to communicate rationales and objectives of policies to teachers. According to the middle leaders, it is clear that the unique
roles they hold in school are perceived to be crucial to ensuring success in leading change from the middle.

By way of summary, it can be noted that middle leaders acknowledged the MOE’s rationale behind the expansion of their role to support the school leaders. They recognise the unique position they hold in school and are confident of the impact of their roles in leading change from the middle. In this sense, middle leaders identified themselves as a crucial factor that can impact change in their schools. As discussed in earlier sections, middle leaders were unanimous in their views on the rationale and value of continuing professional development and seemed confident of their roles in effecting change from the middle. However, they also raised concerns about their roles in promoting school-wide continuing professional development.

The next segment examines middle leaders’ perspectives on the role they play specifically in promoting continuing professional development in their schools.

6.3 Middle leaders are ambiguous about their role in promoting school-wide CPD
Most middle leaders agreed that over the years their roles have become more complex in nature and acknowledged that this change is inevitable. If middle leaders are to lead learning in schools, it is important to understand the perspectives they held about their leadership roles specifically in leading learning and the concept of schools as learning organisations.

To understand these perspectives, middle leaders were asked to describe teacher continuing professional development in their schools and their roles in promoting continuing professional development. Overall, three broad themes of continuing professional development were identified by the participants:

i. individual teacher professional development
ii. departmental teacher professional development
iii. school-wide teacher professional development

Each of these will now be dealt with in turn.
(i) Individual teacher professional development

Middle leaders appeared confident of their roles in supporting individual and departmental teacher professional development. They were unanimous in pointing out that these two areas of teacher continuing professional development ‘naturally’ fall under the purview of middle leaders by reason of the fact that middle leaders also act as Reporting Officers (RO) and Department Heads.

Middle leaders spoke of performance management as an integral part of teacher continuing professional development. To them, teacher appraisal helps to inform follow-up actions on areas which teachers ‘have done well’ or ‘are lacking’. According to data collected, middle leaders highlighted the crucial responsibility of reporting officers in identifying two categories of teachers:

a. those who are proficient and ready to discuss career development plans; and
b. those who need help further training or coaching and mentoring

By way of reiteration, all middle leaders are assigned the role of reporting officer to a group of teachers by their school leaders. Each Reporting Officer is expected to work closely with the teachers throughout the school year on a one-on-one basis using the Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS) which involves performance planning, performance coaching and performance appraisal. The EPMS serves to support teachers’ professional and career development. The final performance grade, which is made in consultation with school leaders and other middle leaders, affects the annual performance bonus received for the year’s work as well as promotions to the next level of the career pathway. The EMPS work review form records a teacher’s achievements for the targets set at the beginning of the year, training and development plans for the next assessment year and discussion comments of both the teacher and the reporting officer. Most middle leaders accentuated that the management system process provides reporting officers a valuable platform to get buy-in from teachers as it acts as a communication channel not only to discuss expectations and development plans but also to explain the rationale behind school policies.

One middle leader stated:
Middle leaders also shared that reporting officers are usually assigned teachers who are also members of the department they are in charge of. This arrangement, according to the middle leaders, provided them with a ‘clearer idea’ of individual teacher’s job scope, capacity and contributions to the school. Middle leaders believed that it also offered a ‘fairer approach’ to teacher appraisal and development opportunities since reporting officers are required to conduct lesson observations and provide professional guidance to these teachers.

It is of note that two of the more experienced middle leaders (P6 and P10) in this study confessed that they ‘did not follow closely’ the EPMS process recommended by MOE:

*After doing this [performance management] for so many years, you will definitely know what to expect of a teacher by now. (P10)*

*The teachers should already know the expectations. (P6)*

To these middle leaders, the EPMS form is ‘only a must-do yearly report’ to be submitted at the end of each school year. Both middle leaders claimed that it is the quality of their relationships with the teachers that allow them to observe the ‘real performance’ of these teachers. One middle leader (P10) explained that some teachers are ‘just better than others in telling [us] what they have done’ but it ‘does not mean that they have worked harder than the rest’. Nevertheless, a majority of middle leaders agreed that they play a key role in supporting individual teacher continuing professional development through the performance management process.

*(ii) Departmental teacher professional development*

Data that emerged from the interviews showed that middle leaders were most confident in supporting departmental teacher continuing professional development. Most middle leaders asserted that this is the area they ‘are best in’ because it is their ‘core business’ as department heads. According to one middle leader (P3), it is ‘easier to address’ departmental professional development
needs as there is no need to consider ‘intricate issues’ such as individual teacher’s personal preference, individual strengths and constraints:

*Being a department means seeing all members as a whole… a team. All members that made up the team move together as one.*

(P3)

The notion of seeing each ‘department as one’ is also reflected in separate interviews. Middle leaders explained that unlike the role of reporting officers, their role as Department heads requires them to harness the inputs of the team and build consensus to achieve the department’s desired goals. Hence, they support the department’s professional development by helping to identify the gap within the department and help to source for relevant professional development activities for the members.

In trying to explain how they support continuing professional development, middle leaders illustrated how departmental teacher continuing professional development activities are enacted in schools. According to middle leaders, there are generally two major types of continuing professional development activities within a department, one that typically involves every one and the other which comprises selected teachers who are deemed deficient in a particular area of work. Middle leaders explained that the first type of continuing professional development activity is normally recommended before the launch of a new programme or teaching strategy where every one is considered to be ‘at the same staring point’. The latter type of continuing professional development activity usually applies to beginning teachers or teachers new to the department.

(iii) School-wide teacher professional development

Most middle leaders defined school-wide teacher continuing professional development as ‘activities that involve all teaching staff in school’ and the ‘overall learning direction of the school’. One recurring theme that emerged from the interviews concerns middle leaders’ uncertainty in articulating the role they play in promoting school-wide continuing professional development. If middle leaders were to lead learning in schools, it is important to understand the perspectives they held about their leadership roles specifically in leading learning and the concept of schools as learning organisations. A few middle leaders (P3, P10 and
P13) were quick to point out that this area of development ‘should come under the purview of school leaders’ who have an overview of the school learning direction.

It shall be recalled that to understand how middle leaders perceived their roles in promoting continuing professional development, participants in the study were asked to describe how teacher continuing professional development is conceptualised in their schools and their roles in supporting continuing professional development. From the data gathered, it is clear that middle leaders appeared confident of their roles in supporting individual and departmental teacher continuing professional development. However, they raised some issues about their roles in promoting school-wide continuing professional development. Three key recurring issues identified were:

a. ambiguity in CPD leadership roles
b. constraints of middle leadership
c. difficulty in coping with fast changing developments in CPD

Each of these will now be dealt with in turn.

(a) Ambiguity in CPD leadership roles
In an earlier section, middle leaders highlighted that one of their responsibilities as reporting officers is to identify teachers who are proficient and those who are deemed lacking. When they were asked to describe the follow-up actions on these two groups of teachers, some middle leaders shared that they ‘continue to monitor these teachers’ until the next cycle of work review while other middle leaders reported that they ‘pass the list’ containing names of these two groups of teachers to the School Staff Developer (SSD) ‘to act on it’. The latter group of middle leaders clarified that they made a deliberate effort to delineate their role as performance manager and that of a staff developer as they identified a conflict in these roles. It shall be recalled that all reporting officers in MOE are required to be involved in performance appraisal for teachers.

By way of explanation, the position of School Staff Developer (SSD) was first introduced in 2006. According to MOE, the responsibility of SSD is to ensure that the training and professional programmes in schools are customised to teachers’
needs, while supporting the school’s goals. They are expected to work with Senior Teachers and Heads of Departments to mentor and coach teachers in the areas of teaching and career development. Unlike middle leaders, SSDs do not normally act as reporting officers to teachers as their role is deemed to be developmental rather than evaluative.

It is of note that, although the position of SSD was first introduced a decade ago, not all schools have appointed a School Staff Developer (SSD) until recent years. To most of the middle leaders in this study, it is considered a relatively new position in their schools. Most schools without SSDs usually appoint a more senior department head to take on the additional portfolio of overseeing continuing professional development in schools.

Most middle leaders in this study defined the role of SSD loosely as ‘one who takes care of all staff development’. A few other middle leaders described the responsibility of SSD as one who ‘provides teachers with information about opportunities to develop themselves’. One senior middle leader (P10) who covered the role of SSD when it was first introduced shared that ‘SSD is just like one of us [middle leaders]’, he claimed that the ‘only difference is that SSDs do not have a department to look after’. Most middle leaders seemed to be more proficient in describing individual and departmental teacher continuing professional development under their charge, but struggled to provide a clear definition of the role and responsibilities of a School Staff Developer (SSD). They appeared to have some vague ideas of the role of SSD, but failed to articulate clearly a picture of what SSDs actually do in schools. Only three middle leaders (P6, P8 and P9) mentioned that SSDs help in ‘aligning teacher training with school goals’, ‘collaborate with other department heads’ and ‘mentor teachers’. This signifies further ambiguity in terms of roles relating to continuing professional development.

While there appeared to be uncertainties amongst middle leaders in defining the role and responsibilities of a SSD, most of them agreed that SSD is ‘the one’ in charge of school-wide continuing professional development. Participant P4 shared that middle leaders in his school used to only look into trainings of their
own departments. That resulted in ‘overtaxing teachers’ because primary school teachers do not usually specialise in subject teaching, they normally teach more than one subject in school, so they ended up being ‘sent to various courses and workshops by different department heads’. According to him, the SSD facilitated the coordination of training programmes in his school. Middle leader P7 also shared similar experiences in her school. She explained that having a large number of teachers teaching many subjects means that department heads have ‘to fight for teachers’ whenever there are clashes in continuing professional development programmes. The SSD’s role in coordinating continuing professional development activities across departments helped to reduce such conflicts.

A few other middle leaders (P4, P5, P8 and P9) also shared similar views on the coordinating role of the SSD. They pointed out that before the appointment of SSDs, middle leaders used to have to take turns to develop the school’s total learning plan by collating training plans from different departments. According to them, it was ‘an onerous task’ as most of them were and continue to be only familiar with their own department work. The notion of SSDs managing cross-departmental training plans and helping to provide a clear school strategic learning direction was also discussed by these middle leaders. One middle leader (P5) reckoned that as the roles of middle leaders expand, it is critical that someone looks into the area of teacher development so that they ‘can focus more on department matters’ and ‘leave the HR [human resource] and professional development matters to the SSD’. It is of note that this idea is somewhat contrary to what middle leaders deliberated earlier about ‘leading people’ and ‘managing tasks’. This contradiction may need to be addressed in the future.

Some middle leaders (P2 and P13), however, observed that there continues to be an overlap in the role and responsibilities of middle leaders with that of SSD’s. One middle leader (P2) viewed the introduction of the role of the SSD ‘an additional red tape’. She lamented that besides the school leaders, she now had to seek approval about development programmes from ‘another person’. In the same vein, Participant P13 alleged that ‘nothing has changed’, middle
leaders are still ‘the ones doing the job’. To her, the introduction of the SSD was ‘just MOE’s way of signalling to educators that teacher development is important’. She cited an example to illustrate her point:

*Whatever our SSD needs to get his job done, he has to get the information from us… He does the TLP [Total Learning Plan] but we are the ones who gave him the input. (P13)*

It was apparent from the preceding discussions that there seemed to be some disparities in the role expectations of SSDs amongst middle leaders from different schools. Some middle leaders believed that ambiguities are unavoidable whenever new leadership roles are introduced. Middle leader P4 shared that when the position of SSD was first introduced in his school three years ago, middle leaders also ‘took a while to get use to the role of SSD’ and ‘iron things out’. He stressed that the work of nurturing a learning culture in school should not depend solely on the SSD.

It is of note that while the introduction of the post of School Staff Developer (SSD) is to provide further support for training and continuing professional development programmes in schools, the position has unwittingly created some ambiguities and tension amongst middle leaders about their roles in promoting continuing professional development in schools.

(b) Constraints of Middle Leadership

All middle leaders acknowledged that continuing professional development has a significant impact on teacher quality and student outcomes. However, they were also quick to identify challenges they faced with an increased job scope and voice the constraints they face in promoting continuing professional development in schools. Middle leaders were unanimous in pointing out that their fundamental responsibility in school is to look into the management and pedagogical areas in their respective departments.

Middle leaders cited time constraint and challenges in coping with an increased job scope as factors that impede their attempt in promoting continuing professional development in schools. Explaining her predicament, one middle leader (P7) shared that while she knew that continuing professional development
is ‘crucial’, it is ‘not the most urgent’. She explained that her duty as a HOD requires her to ensure that her department runs well and that ‘pupils are not short changed’. She suggested that with limited resources and time, ‘something has to go sometimes’. This middle leader rationalised that ‘when teachers do not receive their professional training, no one notices it but if things were to go wrong in an exam, every parent will know about it.’ The same sentiment was shared by another middle leader (P2) who confessed that she ‘knew that teacher development is crucial’ and ‘needed more attention and efforts on her part’ but she had always been ‘too busy focusing on other tasks at hand’. Illustrating why she had to ‘put aside’ her belief in continuing professional development with an example, she said:

\[
\text{When you have your principal breathing down your neck, you know that you just have to complete that report for her first although it might not be on your priority list. (P2)}
\]

The idea of continuing professional development being ‘crucial but not urgent’ was also mentioned by another middle leader who highlighted the complexity of their roles as middle leaders in primary schools:

\[
\text{Unlike secondary schools, we teach younger children… and on top of that, we have to deal with their anxious parents… day on day. (P5)}
\]

Not all middle leaders shared the same view. One middle leader (P11) pointed out that being more cognizant of the changes in education policies is not enough. She maintained that ‘there will never be a best time to start’. According to her, to reap the benefits of continuing professional development, school leaders and middle leaders must make a conscious effort to ‘make it happen’ in schools. Sharing similar view is middle leader P8 who acknowledged that ‘it takes more than just talking about it’. Middle leader P9 called the situation ‘a vicious cycle where schools claimed their belief in continuing professional development but are not convinced to ‘move ahead’.

It is clear that although middle leaders expressed strong conviction in the concept of continuing professional development in theory and seemed confident in leading change from the middle, they remained ambiguous of their role in
leading learning, particularly the actual execution in promoting continuing professional development in schools.

(c) Difficulty in coping with fast changing developments in CPD

Within the last decade, many initiatives involving teacher continuing professional development have been introduced by the MOE. Most middle leaders claimed that they make a concerted effort to keep up to date with new developments in teacher professional learning. However, data emerged from interviews revealed that they appeared to have difficulties grappling with the fast changing development in this area.

During separate interviews, middle leaders named the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a) as one of the initiatives they are most familiar with in their context. Significantly, not a single one of the middle leaders interviewed for this study was able to state all five desired teacher outcomes in the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a) although all of them claimed that they used the model during work review to discuss developmental plans with teachers. By way of explanation, the TGM, which was introduced in 2012, is a professional development model aimed at encouraging teachers to engage in continual learning and take ownership of their professional growth and personal well-being. The TGM learning continuum recommends seven learning dimensions and 24 learning areas that facilitate teachers’ professional growth in the five desired teacher outcomes.

By their own admission, middle leaders are ‘unsure of the finer details’ to the Teacher Growth Model (MOE, 2012a) although they maintained that they ‘have a rough idea of the big picture’. Middle leaders shared that ‘it is impossible to remember everything’ especially with the number of initiatives introduced by MOE each year. Some middle leaders were ambivalent about the information, which they described as ‘massive’ and ‘enormous’, they have to handle whenever a new policy is initiated. To highlight the ‘trickiness’ in dealing with developments in the area of teacher training, one middle leader shared:

Just in the area of professional learning alone, we have TGM, LGM, TWA, PLC, TTT, LDS, PDL, PCDM and counting... I can’t
Besides the introduction of new training frameworks and continuing professional development schemes, middle leaders also reported that they faced other challenges derived from having to manage various groups of teachers for different development programmes. This was illustrated by one middle leader who shared the different teacher development events and programmes within her school:

   STEM programme is for beginning teachers with senior teachers as mentors... TTT is for every teacher... the contract-untrained teachers have in-house coaching with experienced teachers... Cooperating teachers look after the trainee teachers... PLC is for all staff... TLC-FA is for lower primary teacher...  

By way of summary, it is apparent that middle leaders appeared ambiguous about the roles they play in promoting continuing professional development. The three key recurring issues raised by middle leaders were (a) ambiguity in continuing professional development leadership roles; (b) constraints of middle leadership; and, (c) difficulty in coping with fast changing developments in continuing professional development. To most middle leaders, while the MOE has introduced many initiatives and new frameworks to guide and support leadership and learning in schools, these have also given rise to uncertainties about middle leaders’ area of responsibilities in the aspect of continuing professional development.

### 6.4 Middle leaders have reservations about being the advocates for colleagues

Based on the data collected, another challenge highlighted by some middle leaders as a possible impediment for promoting a culture for learning in school is to do with the experienced teachers who have been in the education service for a long time. Middle leaders believed that for a school to move forward to become a learning organisation, a shared vision is crucial. However, they felt that it was easier to communicate this belief to beginning teachers as compared to experienced teachers. To them, experienced teachers are deemed to be less willing to change the way they teach.
This seems to be more evident with newly appointed middle leaders who shared that it is harder to command the respect of experienced teachers who are many years more senior than they are:

*They always tell me that my ideas won’t work… and that they have been in the service long enough to be able to tell me that.*

(P12)

Middle leaders believed that experienced teachers ‘can either make or break’ a programme even at its most initial stage. Middle leader (P12) described these experienced teachers as ‘the influential lot’ who can ‘easily sway others to change camps’. An example she used to illustrate her point was when her school first introduced Professional Learning Time where teachers gathered to exchange teaching ideas and strategies:

*Two of the more experienced teachers thought it was a waste of their time … they felt that there’s nothing the other teachers have to offer that they don’t already know… they showed up late for the sessions and soon others followed suit too.*

(P12)

This middle leader (P12) shared that she felt rather helpless then, but was too embarrassed to ask for help from the school leaders or other middle leaders. Two other middle leaders (P3 and P5) shared similar experiences and acknowledged that it takes time for these teachers to change their mental models. The theme on the success of continuing professional development resulting from personal beliefs and motivation of teachers was discussed extensively by middle leaders in the interviews. Some middle leaders felt that these ‘non-believers’ exist in every school and they need not always be the experienced teachers. According to these middle leaders, for a school to move forward, the focus should be on the majority of teachers who are willing to change and learn; they should not channel all their energy to convince those who ‘do not share the same vision’. This is a significant challenge for middle leaders trying to implement excellent continuing professional development for teachers.

Another indication of middle leaders’ reservations in being the advocates for their colleagues in promoting continuing professional development in schools was the presence of issues arising from leadership accountability. To the middle
leaders, their leadership capacity is often measured by ‘how much buy-in’ they can get from the teachers as the success of their programmes relies heavily on the support of teachers. Some middle leaders felt that they are ‘sometimes at the mercy of teachers’. This was exhibited by a middle leader (P12) who earlier shared about her predicament with experienced teachers and her decision not to approach for help from the school leaders or other middle leaders.

Some newly appointed middle leaders also felt the extra pressure in the interim period between a classroom teacher and becoming a middle leader. They lamented that school leaders often have ‘unrealistic expectations’ for them and expect them to rise to the occasion upon immediate appointment as middle leaders. They felt that there was ‘no wait time’ for newly appointed middle leaders to grow into their roles. Middle leader P3 shared that her principal often reminded reporting officers to give teachers time to grow and be aware of teachers’ differing strengths and pace of learning. However, she claimed that school leaders often disregard the fact that middle leaders also need time to develop and grow. It seemed apparent that middle leaders have reservations about being the advocates for their colleagues due to inexperience. This is especially evident among the newly appointed middle leaders in this study.

It shall be recalled that in the earlier section, middle leaders acknowledged that the success of continuing professional development relies on the attitude of teachers and their willingness to change. To ascertain middle leaders’ honest conviction in continuing professional development, they were requested to cite personal examples and share the impact of continuing professional development on the change they had experienced in their own capacity as a classroom teacher. It is interesting to note that more than half of the middle leader participants expressed difficulty in providing explicit personal examples on how continuing professional development had impacted their growth as a teacher although a few remembered milestone development programmes such as those that prepared them for their leadership roles. While some middle leaders (P2, P4, P6 and P10) justified that they have ‘not attended anything impactful lately’ or that they have forgotten as ‘it was too long ago’, a few middle leaders (P1, P3, P8, P12 and P13) confessed that continuing professional
development is ‘something that we [they] do only if we [they] have to’ (P2). Some reasons cited by these participants include the ‘lack of time’ and ‘too much administrative work’ to handle. According to the perspectives of middle leaders in this study, one of the challenges they faced was learning how to balance teaching with the increasing amount of administrative work. This is an important finding in the context of this study. In short, it is clear from the above perspectives that this host of factors have an increasingly disempowering effect on middle leaders.

Middle leaders offered other conditions in schools that impede the effort of actualising continuing professional development in practice. One of these issues is discussed next.

6.5 Middle leaders are sceptical about the sustainability of CPD in current situation in schools

Overall, middle leaders recognised that it takes time to build trust and collaborative relationships for a learning culture to thrive in schools. Besides their earlier discussions about creating the time and space for continuing professional development, middle leaders also believed that to realise the benefits of continuing professional development, they need more than ‘just to convince teachers’. According to them, school leaders and parents constitute two other crucial factors to enable the success of continuing professional development in schools.

There was general agreement among middle leaders that support from school leaders is of paramount importance especially in building a learning culture in schools. From the perspectives of some middle leaders (P1, P3, P5 and P8), however, they considered support from school leaders as ‘half-hearted’ and ‘unconvincing’. To these middle leaders, support from school leaders were seen as only paying lip service to continuing professional development:

My principal is always telling us that professional development is important … [but] when training programmes clash with school events, she will remind us that school events are more crucial and take top priority… with a full calendar of events, where can we fit in the best time for training? (P3)
Sharing similar views were middle leaders who illustrated how their school leaders ‘often failed to walk the talk’. One middle leader shared that continuing professional development events in her school are mostly ‘top-down’:

*Department training plans get thrown out if they are not aligned with the principal’s goals. First she said we [middle leaders] must look at what [training] teachers really need, the next moment you find her telling SSD not to spend money on these, go for those on her list instead!! (P1)*

Middle leader P8 also related that although her school has a training roadmap, they are ‘rather fluid’. She explained that the school leaders seemed to ‘have their own plans’ and rarely follows it. To her, they appeared to be more concern about channelling energy to the next big initiative from MOE. This middle leader who has just transferred to a brand new school questioned the significance of teacher continuing professional development to the school leaders:

*If professional development for teachers is so important to a school, why didn’t the school leaders get an SSD first? Instead, they were busy filling the posts of other HOD? (P8)*

Another middle leader P5 was convinced that when ‘school leaders say it takes time to change teachers, they [are] actually buying time for themselves’ because they ‘would rather teachers focus on [students’] academic achievements than CPD’. He elaborated his stand by citing his personal experience with his former school principal who told him, upon his return from Professional Development Leave (PCL), that it was ‘a waste of resources investing on teacher professional development’ only to ‘lose [these] good and well-trained teachers’ when they are given higher appointments or transfer out of the school. This interesting phenomenon could possibly shed light on the trade-offs some schools have to deal with between continuing professional development and staff retention.

To the middle leaders, it is equally important for schools to get the endorsement from parents to support teacher continuing professional development. A majority of the participants believed that to reap the benefits of continuing professional development, it is sometimes essential for teachers to spend time away from the classrooms so that they can better reflect on their professional learning. However, from the perspectives of parents of these students, this may have an impact on students’ learning. The crucial link, according to the middle leaders, is
to convince parents that teacher continuing professional development is critical to student learning. Middle leaders attributed blame to a culture that over-emphasised on academic achievements. Most of them felt that high-stakes examinations such as the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) are the root of these issues. To counter these problems, they suggested that more must be done by MOE to change societal mind-sets.

A few middle leaders shared that sometimes teachers are also unwilling to leave the classrooms for continuing professional development as it means that they have to ‘catch up the lost time’ with their students. By way of clarification, in most schools, substitute teachers are deployed when teachers are away from schools. However, middle leaders observed that it is always ‘the more responsible’ teachers who will ‘feel the guilt’ of not being in class to teach. This implies that there is always a degree of reticence for teachers to leave their classes, albeit that they recognise the value of continuing professional development.

One middle leader (P9) shared that teachers in her school are only allowed to attend continuing professional development activities during the school holidays so as ‘not to cause disruptions’ to students’ learning. The ‘flip side’, she explained, is that teachers do not get to rest during the school holidays and subsequently the school observed a drop in the number of teacher continuing professional development activities. To the middle leaders, it is ‘unfair’ to ask teachers to use their school holidays for continuing professional development as this implies that teachers had to spend time away from their families. Middle leaders stressed that teachers also need to have a ‘work-life balance’. All of them concurred that there is ‘no best time’ for continuing professional development, however, they believed that students’ learning and teacher development are interrelated – for teachers to teach well, they need continuing professional development; for students to learn better, teachers need to be in the classrooms.
6.5 Conclusion
By way of summary, it is noted that middle leaders were passionate about the concept of continuing professional development and believed in its value in theory and at the level of policy. Although there were some contestations and uncertainties with regard to what really counts as continuing professional development and the tangible impact on teacher change, middle leaders were generally optimistic about the positive impact continuing professional development could bring to enhancing quality teaching. However, they seemed sceptical about the sustainability of continuing professional development in the current situation in schools. Besides the current constraints that they faced in schools, middle leaders also lack the confidence to lead learning.

It shall be recalled that the main aim of the study reported in this thesis was to formulate theoretical propositions with regards to the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools hold on their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. To this end, the study formulated the following set of two interrelated theoretical propositions by analysing the data on the theoretical basis of interpretivist inductive qualitative research and symbolic interactionism:

i. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of CPD from the perspective of middle leaders

ii. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspective of middle leaders

This conjunction of two theoretical propositions forms the basis on which recommendations are made for policy, practice and research. In the following chapter, recommendations that this set of theoretical propositions have for policy, practice and research will be presented in turn.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction
The emergence of the information era and the establishment of a knowledge-based society have led to a major transformation in the role of education worldwide. The need for a knowledge society with life-long learners, capable of transforming and revitalising organisations, is recognised in the literature (Aspin et al., 2012; Coffied, 1996; Hake, 1999; Jarvis, 2007; Senge, 1997). These global shifts have led to a series of educational reforms in various aspects of education, particularly in Singapore, the context of this study. Among them is teacher continuing professional development. The literature argues strongly for continuing support for the concept of and practice in continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers (Duke, 1990; Guskey, 1991; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Extensive research over the years suggests that teacher quality is one of the key factors in student achievement (Putnam & Borko, 1997; Lockwood, 1998; Flecknoe, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Hattie, 2003; King, 2014). Besides benefits realised by students, the literature also identified continuing professional development of teachers as a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of educational reforms and school improvement (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Darling- Hammond, 1999; Little, 2001).

To cope with educational change, research on school development has called for a paradigm shift in the field of teacher development, placing teachers in the centre of the learning process, with a view to fostering professional growth and development over the full career of any teacher. The focus has also shifted from the development of individual teachers to include the development of schools as institutions. The central concept points to schools as learning organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire through systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision and team learning (Senge, 1990). To highlight the contrast between traditional and new notions of continuing professional development, the literature offers several descriptions on what an effective continuing professional development programme looks like. Most of these studies reflect an assortment of definitions, theories, models and interpretations for teacher continuing
professional development from the view of policy makers and educationalists. However, there continues to be a lack of a comprehensive definition on what teacher continuing professional development really is as the myriad of interpretations changes over time (Bolam & McMahon, 2004; Craft, 2000).

Although there is an increasing range of literature and studies that focuses on different aspects of continuing professional development including suggestions on how effective teacher continuing professional development is enacted, there is a lack of one singular successful continuing professional development model in the literature. Furthermore, the impact of context on continuing professional development makes it difficult for successful models to be transferred from one setting to another (Guskey, 2000). Success largely depends on the contexts wherein teachers teach and continuing professional development occurs. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that continuing professional development initiatives that are not embedded in some form of major reform to structures, policies and organisations are not likely to be successful because changing teachers’ continuing professional development without changing the contexts, beliefs and structures creates no significant change in behaviour.

The study reported in this thesis has gained greater insights into the understanding of continuing professional development in practice by examining the perspectives held by middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. Such an investigation has uncovered the influence of middle leadership and the challenges faced by middle leaders in helping to promote continuing professional development in local school contexts. The study makes a strong contribution to, and partially closes a gap in the existing literature in this field by examining the relationship between policy and practice, and identifying middle leadership as a strong mediating factor in these relationships.

Internationally, this study bears a slight resemblance to the one conducted by Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves and Rönnerman in 2015. Both studies investigated the practices and conditions influencing middle leaders’ work. Grootenboer et al. (2015) identified three characteristics of middle leading: (a) In terms of leadership position, middle leaders are structurally and relationally
situated between the school senior management and the teaching staff; they are not in a peculiar space of their own, but rather act as practising members in both groups; (b) Philosophically, middle leaders practise their leading from the centre or alongside their peers; they are not leading from the front but are in collaboration with their colleagues; and, (c) In practice, middle leading is understood and developed as a practice. The focus is on the 'saying, doing and relating of leading' rather than the characteristics and qualities of middle leadership (Grootenboer et al., 2015). The research findings of this study suggest similar concerns for the Singapore education system with regard to the potential of middle leaders in bridging the work of institutional leadership and the development of classroom teachers.

This final chapter consists of five sections. The first is a summary of the study reported in this thesis. This section identifies key features of the study and provides justification for conducting it. The second section provides details on the mode in which the participants were identified, how data were collected from them, and how these data were analysed and interpreted to formulate two major propositions. The third section provides a summary of the theoretical propositions that were formulated as a result of data analysis and interpretation. A summary of the critical commentary that accompanied the disclosure of each of these theoretical propositions in Chapters 5 and 6 is included here. The final section makes recommendations for policy, practice and research based on the findings of this study.

Each of these sections will be examined individually forthwith, beginning with the summary of the study.

**7.2 Summary of study**

It will be recalled that the central aim of the study reported in this thesis was to develop theoretical propositions related to the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary school hold about the influence of their leadership roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools and as agents translating continuing professional development policies into practice. The decision to select this particular area for empirical research was influenced
by the fact that the late 1990s marked a critical phase for teacher development and school organisation in Singapore. The economic developments in Asia in the late 1980s and the impact of globalisation highlighted the need for Singapore to reshape its education system in response to the key developments in the economy. The shift in strategic paradigm was encapsulated in the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision announced by the former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, in 1997. At this point, Singapore education system entered a new era with this new vision statement. The primary intent of the vision was to motivate Singaporeans to continually acquire new knowledge, learn new skills; gain higher levels of technological literacy; and embrace innovation, enterprise and risk-taking without losing their bearings or commitment to the local community and the nation (Gopinathan, 1999). Existing practices were re-examined and reviewed with the purpose to meet the challenges of the future.

With the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (Goh, 1997) vision as the blueprint for Singapore schools in the 21st century, the goals and purpose in education were re-examined. This led to the culmination of the Desired Outcomes of Education policy, which was reviewed in 2009 to ensure it remained relevant. The Desired Outcomes of Education policy (2009) articulated the end-objectives of formal education and described the skills and values considered essential for the next generation in an increasingly globalised world. These outcomes set the direction for educators, shaping MOE’s policies and programmes and determining the criteria that would become the framework to assess how well the education system was performing. The Teach Less, Learn More policy launched in 2005 highlighted the shift in focus from ‘quantity’ to ‘quality’ in education. The paradigm shift catalyst was the transformation of teaching and learning in schools. This movement led to a call for teachers to reassess the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of teaching and learning and to re-examine how to better realise the goals of an ability-driven education system. Teacher quality was acknowledged by the MOE as a key determinant of quality education as Singapore entered the ability-based, aspiration-driven phase. This is in line with literature that similarly cites teachers as key to the quality of an education system (Harris, 2011a; McKinsey Report, 2007, Hattie, 2013) and in improving
student outcomes (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; King, 2014).

Systems and structures were also established to support these changes, by devolving more autonomy to schools and encouraging innovation to cater for a wider variety of interests and aptitudes in students. There was a change in the MOE’s approach to support schools with its ‘top-down support for bottom-up initiative’ (Ng, 2003). With this initiative, schools had to take charge of organisational excellence, lead their staff, manage school systems and produce the desired outcomes of education (Ng, 2003). This resulted in a series of new strategies introduced to help schools build organisational capacities to meet the new challenges (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). Some of the key initiatives demanded a flatter and more trusting organizational structures, with more opportunities for teacher involvement in decision-making and leadership. Principals could no longer take sole responsibilities and authority in schools (Harris, 2003). This called for a more distributed form of leadership to be practised in schools (Burton & Brundrett, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Crowther, 2011; Harris, 2003). Since then, more positions for middle leaders have been created over the years and the roles of middle leaders have also evolved. In light of these developments, pursuing empirical work to investigate middle leaders’ perspectives on continuing professional development in practice and the influence of middle leadership in helping to promote continuing professional development in reconstituting local school context is critical.

The role of middle leaders in Singapore has evolved significantly over the past decades and has become more complex due to rapid changes in the education scene and increased accountability at leadership levels in schools. The term ‘middle leaders’ or commonly known as ‘middle managers’ in Singapore school contexts refers to teachers who are formally appointed to undertake management and pedagogical responsibilities in schools (Heng & Marsh, 2009). Their role is of a dual nature in that it includes managerial responsibilities and classroom teaching. In Singapore, middle leadership encompasses roles such as heads of department, year heads, subject and level heads. Over the past two decades, their roles have become more complex in nature. Middle leaders now
have a key role in creating a climate that ensures effective teaching and learning not just for students, but also for teachers. Not only are middle leaders expected to develop the department and its teachers, they are also to act as agents of school success in comparison with other schools at a national level (Chew, 2008). This determines middle leaders as key leaders and central to ongoing organisational change in the educational sector in Singapore.

The available literature, as cited in Chapter 3, indicates an explicit lack of empirical work conducted on the perspectives of middle leaders on organisational leadership particularly in relation to teacher continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools. While it is evident that the MOE has been working towards engaging teachers to continually develop throughout their careers, the essence of continuing professional development is not only how it happens in practice, but also how that practice is framed by people’s values and beliefs. Teachers have to believe in the worth of their own continuing professional development for authentic professional learning to take place.

Also, the success of the MOE’s ‘top-down support for bottom-up initiative’ demands a change in the mindsets of leaders and teachers in Singapore. In a situation where many state-initiated policies and initiatives still dominate the education system, decentralisation in the educational sector requires middle leaders to understand their role in schools and be able to balance centralised support with decentralised adaptation within and for educational change. Also, continuing professional development in the new paradigm entails teacher empowerment. The culture of taking directives and initiatives from the top may diminish the desire and will for teachers to initiate change (Hairon, 2006). The implication here is that any comprehensive national policy is subjected to the multidimensional perspectives that the practitioners have of it. Consequently, their implementation of the policy is influenced by their perspectives - a key focus of this research.
In an attempt to empirically examine the situation in Singapore in light of the issues discussed in the preceding section, the key research question was formulated as thus:

What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

It was decided that the basic principles of qualitative epistemology and methodology were particularly suited to investigate the key research question of this study. In qualitative enquiry, ‘the researcher’s goal is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study’ (Punch, 1998, p.149) where they aim beneath manifest behaviour to discover the meaning events have for those who experience them (Eisner, 1991). This study seeks to reveal the ‘voices’ of middle leaders and to ‘illuminate’ meanings and interpretations (Eisner, 1991) of the concept of continuing professional development. A qualitative approach, combining an inductive model of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) using data collected through semi-structured interviews of middle leaders from different primary schools provided a lens for exploring research questions framing this study.

Due to the lack of empirical research in the field of study and in the local context, a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2009; Myers & Klein, 2011) was selected so as to gain a deeper understanding of teacher continuing professional development at the operational level as it occurs in its natural setting. The adoption of qualitative methods within a case study approach to research enabled the researcher to study the issues in depth and in detail, providing deep insights into the phenomenon under study. The perspectives of middle leaders in primary schools are likely to have been influenced by the context in which they were formed, emphasising the need to probe into the situational context in which this study is embedded.

Consistent with the characteristics of a case study, the boundaries of the case reported in this thesis were defined as middle leaders in Singapore primary schools. The case was about the perspectives of these middle leaders on the
influence of their leadership role on teacher continuing professional development within primary school contexts. In regard to this study, middle leaders do not operate as an isolated group in schools; teachers as well as senior management teams influence and act on each other’s perspectives. These perspectives were likely to have been influenced by the context in which they were formed. Therefore, to understand how continuing professional development fits within the context of Singapore, it is necessary to recognize perspectives held by middle leaders from different primary schools. In order to preserve the unity of the case, data from each middle leader participant was analysed within the roles they play in school and the unique context of the schools.

In pursuit of the key research question, a set of guiding questions was developed. These guiding questions were proposed at the inception of the study as they represented the interesting facets of attention (Miles & Huberman, 1994) pertinent to the research focus. These questions were viewed as being productive pointers to generate richness of data important to the central research question. The data gathering process was, therefore, guided by the following questions:

1. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools understand by the term ‘continuing professional development’?
2. What do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think continuing professional development entails?
3. What are the intentions of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools towards continuing professional development?
4. What strategies do middle leaders in Singapore primary schools say they used to realise these intentions? What are the reasons they give for the strategies they used?
5. What is the importance of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What are the reasons they give for the significance which they attributed with these intentions and strategies?
6. What are the outcomes of these intentions and strategies for these middle leaders in Singapore primary schools? What reasons do they give for these expected outcomes?
7. What are the conditions that promote or impede continuing professional development in Singapore primary schools?

8. In what ways do the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools think are factors that will help them to promote continuing professional development in their schools?

By way of summary, the study reported in this thesis aimed to formulate a set of propositions regarding the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have concerning the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. This study is positioned in terms of middle leaders’ ‘perspectives’, a notion that represents what middle leaders think, believe and conceptualise with regard to their leadership roles in teacher continuing professional development, and the resulting actions, orientations, dispositions and attitudes they adopt when promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. The key research problem of this study was formulated and positioned based on this notion of ‘perspectives’.

While the prior discussion focussed on the characteristics of the study in this closing chapter, the next section illuminates details about the participants, how data was collected and how it was analysed.

7.3 Participants, data collection and data analysis

Given the key and guiding research questions, the time frame available and access to participants, purposive sampling (Merriam, 2001; Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2006; Yin, 2009), rather than random sampling, was used in this study. In case study research, the specification of the unit of analysis is fundamental in defining what the case is (Yin, 1994). Punch (2005) highlights that in case study research, qualitative sampling involves ‘identifying the case and setting the boundaries, where we indicate the aspects to be studied, and constructing a sample frame, where we focus selection further’ (p.188). As we cannot study everything within the case, purposive sampling (Merriam, 2001; Punch, 2005; Silverman, 2006; Yin, 2009) allows us to choose a case because it illuminates some feature or process in which we are interested. In this study, the
sampling is limited to middle leaders in Singapore primary schools and their perspectives on continuing professional development. Participants for the study were chosen to reflect their leadership roles. Data were collected from participants representing middle leaders in their schools.

To ensure diversity within the samples, 13 middle leaders from different Singapore primary schools were selected for this study. In total, 26 interviews were conducted. The issues of practicality and manageability limited participation selection. Where it was possible, the sample was designed to be as diverse as possible. Personal contact was used where possible, and where it was not possible, contact was made by email or telephone.

The 13 participants in this study comprised of middle leaders who have worked and are still working as Heads of Department, Subject Heads or Level Heads in Singapore primary schools. Six participants were between 30 to 39 years old, five participants were between 40 to 49 years old and two participants were above 50 years old. Four of the participants are male. All participants are permanent teachers employed by Singapore Ministry of Education. Of the 13 participants, seven were Heads of department and the remaining six were either Subject Heads or Level Heads. Three participants were newly appointed to their middle leadership positions three years ago and the remaining ten participants had served as middle leaders between 6 to 23 years. One key characteristic of qualitative research is to ‘present multiple perspectives of individuals to represent our world’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). Maximal variation sampling was used in this study as the participants provided a range of backgrounds, ages and perspectives.

For the purpose of the study reported in this thesis, in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection strategy to develop a better understanding of perspectives of the middle leaders on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. Interview as a data collection tool is a good way of accessing people’s perspectives, meanings, definitions of situation and constructions of reality (Punch, 2005). They have been described as an
essential source of case study evidence (Yin, 2009) because case studies are about human affairs or behavioural events. Participants can provide insights into phenomenon and shortcuts to prior history of such situations, thus helping the researcher to identify other relevant sources of evidence. Semi-structured interviews also presented grounds for the researcher to clarify doubts or any uncertainties that arise in the interview or at the level of analysis for further follow-up. The researcher of this study acted as the interviewer during the data collection process.

The face-to-face interview mode of data collection was adopted in keeping with the fact that this study has been shaped by an interpretivist research paradigm. Within this paradigm, Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902; Crotty, 1998; Dewey, 1909; Griffin, 1997; Mead, 1934; Windham, 1993) was found to be the best framework for this study as it is grounded in the ideas, feelings, processes and actions resulting from human interactions with one another. It provided a theoretical framework to explore the ‘perspectives’ that middle leaders held about the concept of continuing professional development. In the case of the context in this study, the concept of continuing professional development originated as an initiative from the Singapore Ministry of Education, but its actual effects are the ‘results of the millions of micro-decisions made by individual[s]’ (Windham, 1980), namely the middle leaders in primary schools. Ensuing this assumption allowed the researcher to explore the manner in which participants arrived at an understanding about the phenomenon of interest and acted towards it in relation to their own interpretations and experiences. The questions used as aide memoirs for the interview aimed at eliciting the participants’ perspectives with regards to the main research problem. O’Donoghue (2007) accentuates that semi-structured interviewing requires the researcher to engage in conversations with participants through a series of down-to-earth questions that will yield a quantity and quality of data which allows for generating of theory regarding the participants’ perspectives.

Interviews were conducted in private; and a safe atmosphere was ensured. At the start of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and after which the participant proceeded to sign the form of informed consent.
Appendix B; informing him or her that participation in this study was entirely voluntary and confidentiality would be ensured. Participants were given the option to withdraw at any stage during or after the interview if they so wished. Permission was sought from participants to record the interview using a digital recorder placed visibly in front of them. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hour and was transcribed following each meeting. Each interview script was transcribed verbatim in its entirety. The names of all participants involved in the study remained anonymous. Individual interview transcript was given to each participant for verification. Participants were invited to make any changes they deemed necessary. Participants were also informed of follow-up interviews should the researcher need more information or further clarification. Follow-up interviews were conducted within a period of 12 to 18 months. The ethics framework approved by the university was implemented throughout the duration of study.

The preceding section describes the mode of data collection in consistent with interpretivist, qualitative research method. The next section explains how the set of data was analysed to develop the two key theoretical propositions that emerged from it.

7.4 Summary of findings
With regards to the analysis of the data collected for this study to formulate theoretical propositions of the perspectives of middle leaders on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools and as agents of change in schools, the maxim to use a mode of data analysis that is ‘systematic, disciplined and able to be seen and described’ (Punch, 2005) was sought. In the conduct of this study, data were collected not to support or refute hypotheses. The analysis of data in this study commenced after each interview transcripts had been transcribed. The main theoretical propositions emerged from the data, through coding and the generation of significant themes that captured the meanings generated throughout the study.

The design and plan for a particular data analysis depends largely on the approach taken and the purpose of the study. As consistent with a key tenet of
interpretivist qualitative research methodology, data were concurrently gathered and analysed for patterns and themes embedded in the words of the participants. The interactive model of qualitative data analysis outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) was adopted for this study as the approach allows for constant refinement and development of emergent theory. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) define data analysis as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: (i) data reduction, (ii) data display and (iii) drawing and verifying conclusions. A discussion of this approach was the focus of Chapter 4.

Upon completion of coding for each transcript, recurring themes were grouped into smaller sets to form overarching themes through pattern coding. The process of pattern coding enabled the clustering of recurring themes related to middle leaders’ perspectives on their leadership influence in promoting continuing professional development in their schools. This led to the formulation of eight sub-theoretical propositions:

1. Middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard
2. Middle leaders believe there is value in the concept of continuing professional development
3. Middle leaders hold diverse views on what counts as continuing professional development
4. Middle leaders are uncertain about the tangible impact of continuing professional development on teacher change
5. Middle leaders believe in their influence in leading change from the middle
6. Middle leaders are ambiguous about the roles they play in promoting continuing professional development
7. Middle leaders have reservations about being the advocates for colleagues
8. Middle leaders are sceptical about the sustainability of continuing professional development in current situation in schools

These sub-theoretical propositions were merged to formulate a conjunction of two main interrelated theoretical propositions that encapsulate the key perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of
their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. The two key theoretical propositions are:

1. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of continuing professional development (CPD) from the perspectives of middle leaders.

2. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspectives of middle leaders.

Each of these key perspectives was critically commented upon. A summary of these critical commentaries is provided in the next section. This will be followed by the presentation of recommendations that this set of theoretical propositions has for policy, practice and research.

7.5 Commentary on findings

Generally, middle leaders endorse government policies on teacher continuing professional development. They believe in the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) commitment to nurture a teacher-driven culture of professional excellence and dedication to strengthen career opportunities for educators to deepen their expertise in teaching. Middle leaders trust that these policies are carefully considered, conceptualised, designed and implemented. Most middle leaders attributed the success of the Singapore education system to the series of educational reform initiatives introduced to meet the needs of 21st century. They cited examples of evidence that exhibited the success of Singapore as one of the top education systems in the world. Consequently, they hold directives from MOE with high regard. Middle leaders demonstrate that they have infinite trust in the education authorities’ initiatives and policies.

Likewise, middle leaders believe strongly in the value of the concept of teacher continuing professional development. All middle leaders who participated in this study hold the perspective that teacher continuing professional development can help to enhance teacher quality. In describing the attributes of an effective continuing professional development, middle leaders seemed to have clear conceptualisations about the elements in which practitioners are able to
effectively learn and grow. The attributes cited by the middle leaders concur with those stated in the literature and that endorsed by MOE. These include continuing professional development as active learning, coherence and content-focus. Middle leaders stressed that effective continuing professional development must value add teaching and learning in the classrooms. Middle leaders contended that teacher quality in the 21st century meant more than just having content knowledge for teaching subjects. They argued that it is imperative that teachers are also able to relate to their students and engage them in learning. The skill to engage pupils in learning was cited as one crucial factor that defines teacher quality.

Middle leaders recognised that opportunities for continuing professional development and collaborative learning among teachers in schools have increased over the years. These include efforts in setting allocated time for teachers to engage in learning, granting study leave and creating physical learning areas in schools for teachers to meet. Middle leaders viewed these platforms as support for change. They acknowledged that changes in practice take time and does not happen in a vacuum. They believed that for significant change to happen, constant review and fine-tuning are required.

In the area concerning middle leaders' leadership influence, data emerged from the interviews showed that middle leaders were most confident in supporting departmental professional learning. Their roles and responsibilities as department heads allow them to harness the inputs of the team and build consensus to achieve the department’s desired goals. Middle leaders acknowledged the unique position they hold in school and are confident of the influence of their roles in leading change from the middle. In this sense, they identified themselves as a crucial factor that can facilitate change in their schools.

Based on the data collected, middle leaders generally believed that for a school to move forward to become a successful learning organisation, a shared vision from all stakeholders is fundamental. This includes convictions in the value of CPD and belief in its positive influence on student outcomes from the school
leaders, middle leaders, teachers, as well as parents. Middle leaders recognised the constraints in garnering the support from all stakeholders. They discussed extensively about the personal beliefs and motivation of teachers; and the support and trust from school leaders and parents. Middle leaders highlighted the importance of these elements in building a culture of learning in schools.

The first theoretical proposition that was determined by the study demonstrates that despite middle leaders being articulate about the MOE’s rationale behind CPD policies in terms of meeting the needs of 21st century, and genuine commitment to the benefits of continuing professional development in enhancing student outcomes, many of them were unsure of the definition on what teacher continuing professional development really is. There were also some contestations among middle leaders on what counts as quality continuing professional development. They deliberated at length on the differences between the notions of ‘professional growth’ and ‘personal upgrading’. Different perspectives adopted by various school leaders further added to the misunderstanding and misperception of these middle leaders. Middle leaders found it a challenge to cope with the various ‘fast-changing’ initiatives introduced over the past decade to promote teacher continuing professional development in schools. They were honest about not fully comprehending the intent and rationale behind the different continuing professional development initiatives. Middle leaders pointed out that this could hinder them in getting the ‘buy-in’ on these initiatives from teachers.

The paradox here is that while middle leaders appeared eloquent about the MOE’s continuing professional development policies, they were in fact confused about the content and intent of the very policies they approved. The implication here is that without in-depth knowledge of these initiatives and policies, middle leaders could only implement them in the way they perceived these policies or follow the strictly the directions provided by school leaders. Although middle leaders indicated that channels for the MOE to communicate change have improved over the past years, there is no evidence to suggest that middle leaders are keen to persuade themselves or teachers to gain greater clarification and insights into the rationales and objectives of these policies.
There are several channels by which they could have sought clarification, such as the MOE website or the MOE intranet portal. This indicates that communication of policies in print and through the Internet might be insufficient for middle leaders to grasp the full intent of these policies. It also seems to reflect a certain degree of lack of ownership and initiative on the part of the middle leaders who are deemed as change agents in schools.

While middle leaders were quick to identify the value they perceive in the enhancement of teacher quality through continuing professional development, many of them seemed uncertain about its success and sustainability at the level of implementation in schools. Some raised issues about the actual impact of continuing professional development on teacher change. Middle leaders implied that creating professional learning platforms such as professional learning communities (PLC) and study leave do not change behaviour; they simply facilitate conditions for change. It is of note that although middle leaders agreed that changes in practice take time, they concurred that teachers’ attitude and willingness to learn is the critical factor in the success of continuing professional development. Being aware of the MOE’s efforts in trying to encourage schools to focus on building teachers’ strengths through continuing professional development, middle leaders purported to facing a dilemma in choosing between a growth model and a deficient approach to continuing professional development for some teachers. Middle leaders maintained that they want to focus on the majority of teachers who are willing to change, but seemed to be constantly bothered by those who are not. This suggests that for middle leaders to enact the implementation of continuing professional development in schools effectively, it is necessary for them to be able to establish the level of impact on teacher change as a result of continuing professional development. Conflicting and oversimplified notions of how teachers learn and change through continuing professional development is also a key issue highlighted within the research literature (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 1986; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Therefore, the degree of impact of continuing professional development on teacher development is a project that could form the focus of further research.
The second theoretical proposition conveys that middle leaders are confident in leading change from the middle and identified themselves as a crucial factor that can facilitate change in their school. For a vast majority of the middle leaders, continuing professional development was restricted to giving professional development advice to the teachers they supervise and within the departments that they lead. Middle leaders demonstrated lower levels of confidence in leading school-wide continuing professional development. Many were quick to point out that this area of development ‘should come under the purview of school leaders’ who have an overview of the school learning direction. They perceived the expansion of their leadership role as a performance manager and a teacher professional developer as conflicting when dealing with individual teacher’s professional needs and development.

The creation of the position of School Staff Developer (SSD) by the MOE in all schools to support learning in whole-school context has unwittingly created ambiguities and tensions amongst middle leaders in their roles in leading learning. While middle leaders acknowledged that the post of SSD helps in the management of cross-departmental training plans and provides a clear school strategic learning direction, some observed an overlap in the role and responsibilities of middle leaders with that of SSDs. Others see the post as the MOE’s signal to emphasise the importance of teacher continuing professional development. It was apparent from the discussions that there seemed to be some disparities in the role expectations of SSDs amongst middle leaders from different schools. This is a clear focus for future research that could assist in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of an array of leaders in Singapore schools in relation to teacher development.

While middle leaders expressed confidence in leading change from the middle, they brought to light their reservations about being advocates for their colleagues in the area of continuing professional development. The positioning of experienced teachers who have been in the education service for a long time was highlighted as a possible impediment for promoting a culture for learning in schools. Middle leaders demonstrated that it was easier to engage in learning with beginning teachers but not the experienced ones. To them, experienced
teachers are deemed to be less motivated and less willing to learn and change. It is of note that this finding was unique to newly appointed middle leaders. This is a significant finding because this perspective seems to reflect a degree of lack of confidence on the part of the middle leaders who are deemed to be change agents in schools. It also highlights the need for further research focusing on experienced teachers and the level of commitment to on-going professional learning.

Middle leaders who participated in this study hold the perspective that the current situations in schools are difficult to sustain continuing professional development for teachers. There was general agreement among middle leaders that support from school leaders is of paramount importance especially in building a learning culture in schools. From the perspectives of some middle leaders, the support from school leaders is ‘half-hearted’ and insincere. They seemed to insinuate that school leaders were more concern about academic excellence in terms of exam results. They also faced challenges from parents who do not view students’ learning and teacher continuing professional development as interrelated and thus put stress on teachers who have to spend time away from the classrooms for professional learning. Middle leaders attributed blame to a culture that over-emphasised academic achievements and failed to acknowledge the importance of teacher quality. This interesting phenomenon raises concerns about issues of policy enactment faced by some schools.

By way of summary, the table below illustrates an examination of the ideal continuing professional development conditions and beliefs within the literature and MOE policies, against middle leaders perspectives on actual practices in schools. From the table, it is evident that many MOE initiatives on continuing professional development are informed and supported by relevant literature.
### MOE policy on teacher continuing professional development (CPD)

**Enabling Teachers through:**
- building professional ethos and developing teacher-led culture of professional excellence;
- driving pedagogical leadership and professional collaboration; and
- raising the level of professional practice and expertise (AST, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEAL</th>
<th>ACTUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Literature**
  - KEY literature on CPD |
  - Teachers as key to quality education & in improving student outcomes (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Borko, 2004; McKinsey Report, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Harris, 2011; King, 2013) |
  - Teacher as learners
    - lifelong learners
    - active learning
    - take ownership of own growth and development (Terehoff, 2002; Pintrich, 2000; Knowles, 1980; Glattthorn & Fox, 1996; Cody and Guskey, 1997; Bush, 1999) |
  - Schools as learning organisations
    - collaborative professional learning (Pedder, Storey & Opfer, 2008; Little, 1993; Rosemary et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Lieberman, 1994; Guskey & Huberman, 1995a; Adey, 2004) |
| **Policy**
  - MOE’s key initiatives in Enabling Teachers |
  - Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN) 1997:
    - from quantity to quality education
    - Teaching as a learning profession |
| **Practice**
  - Middle leaders’ perspectives on CPD in practice |
  - Middle leaders hold directives from MOE with high regard
    - they have informed knowledge of the correlation between teacher development and student achievement
    - they may not fully comprehend the rationale behind all CPD initiatives
    - lacked ownership and initiative to seek clarification and gain greater insights |
  - Middle leaders believe there is value in the concept of CPD
    - they believed in the enhancement of teacher quality through CPD |
  - Middle leaders hold diverse views on what counts as CPD
    - they were confused over what counts as ‘professional growth’ and ‘personal upgrading’
    - they found it a challenge to cope with fast-changing CPD initiatives |
  - Middle leaders are uncertain about the tangible impact of CPD on teacher change
    - they faced dilemma in choosing between growth model and deficient approach to CPD
    - they believed that CPD platforms in school acts only as a support for change
    - they found it difficult to observe tangible impact of CPD on teacher change |
| **Attributes of effective CPD**
  - content-focus
  - coherence
  - active learning
  - collaborative
  - sustainable (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Day, |
| **Attributes of effective CPD endorsed by MOE**
  - coherence
  - content-focus
  - active Learning
  - collaborative learning
  - sustained learning |
| **Middle leaders believe that effective CPD should be:**
  - a continual process
  - meaningful to teachers
  - value add teaching and learning in the classroom |

• Middle leaders considered teachers’ attitude and willingness to learn as a critical factor in the success of CPD

**Distributed Leadership in CPD**
- collective in nature
- support school leaders in leading and managing change
- have access to leaders and students
- in collaboration with colleagues
- bridge institutional leadership and development of teachers
(Burton & Brundrett, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Crowther, 2011; Harris, 2003)

**Support for middle leaders in leading learning**
- creation of more middle leadership positions in school to support change
- expansion of middle leaders role as a department head and a teacher developer
- appointment of School Staff Developer (SSD) to better facilitate PD in schools
- Leader Growth Model (LGM) to develop middle leaders in their roles

- Middle leaders believe in their influence in leading change from the middle
- they believed their position in the middle makes it easier for them to effect change in schools

- Middle leaders are ambiguous about their roles in promoting school-wide CPD
- they faced conflict in their roles both as performance manager and teacher professional developer
- position of SSD to support PD has unwittingly created ambiguities and tension amongst middle leaders about their roles in promoting CPD

- Middle leaders have reservations about being advocates for colleagues
- they were not confident in leading teacher who are more senior and experienced

- Middle leaders are sceptical about the sustainability of CPD in current situation in schools
- lack of time and focus on CPD in school
- they considered support from school leaders as paying lip service
- they faced pressure from parents who do not see students learning and teacher CPD as interrelated
- they attributed blame to a culture that over-emphasised on academic achievement

Table G: An examination of aspects of CPD literature and policies against perspectives of middle leaders on CPD practice

The above section served as a critical commentary based on the two main theoretical propositions formulated from data analysis. These main points will be taken up in the recommendations for policy, practice and research in the section that follows.
7.6 Recommendations – Policy, Practice and Research

It shall be recalled that the main aim of the study reported in this thesis was to formulate theoretical propositions with regards to the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools hold on their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools. To this end, the study formulated the following set of two interrelated theoretical propositions by analysing the data on the theoretical basis of interpretivist inductive qualitative research and symbolic interactionism:

iii. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the concept of CPD from the perspective of middle leaders

iv. In regard to continuing professional development (CPD) in Singapore, there are a number of issues and concerns about the leadership roles of middle leaders from the perspective of middle leaders

This conjunction of two theoretical propositions forms the basis on which recommendations are made for policy, practice and research. In the following part of the chapter, recommendations that this set of theoretical propositions have for policy, practice and research will be presented in turn.

(i) Recommendations for policy

Recommendation #1: Cycles of feedback between middle leaders and school leaders with policy makers on policy implementations

The data in this study reveal that while middle leaders appeared eloquent about MOE's continuing professional development initiatives and policies, they were in fact confused about the content and intent of the very policies they approved. Middle leaders were aware of the various efforts by MOE to communicate change and disseminate information about educational policies through several means. However, there is no evidence to suggest that middle leaders take the initiative to seek clarification or to gain greater insights into the rationales and objectives of these policies.

One active approach that policy makers must adopt is to provide opportunities for middle leaders to be engaged in quality conversations with school leaders
and / or policy makers so as to help them realise the alignment between initiatives and practice, and not merely perceive them as shifts in policies. Policy makers should also provide a series of channels for middle leaders to give feedback on policies including the professional and personal issues related to the implementation of policy. These could take place before, during and throughout the period of policy implementation with practitioners at multiple levels: principals, middle leaders, continuing professional development providers and instructors and teachers. This will not only help to generate timely adjustments to better support schools in promoting teacher continuing professional development at school levels but also foster a culture where middle leaders can critically evaluate and confidently express their views to policy makers and the MOE. This two-way interaction will enhance the quality of policy implementation.

**Recommendation #2: Investigations on the impact of teacher change as a result of CPD**

A concern of middle leaders that has a great impact on the effective implementation of continuing professional development is their perspective on the tangible impact of continuing professional development on teacher change and the uncertainty about its success and sustainability at the level of implementation in schools. This suggests that for middle leaders to enact the implementation of continuing professional development in schools effectively, it is necessary for them to be able to measure or ascertain the level of impact on teacher change as a result of continuing professional development.

Studies on the impact of continuing professional development policy on teacher change can be undertaken at the various levels of the education sector. Principals, School Staff Developers (SSD), senior teachers and continuing professional development designers and instructors at the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) and National Institute for Education (NIE) could be invited to participate in similar studies and the results use to improve the school implementation of continuing professional development policy. Different schools may also have different practices in the way they enact continuing professional development policies. Schools share and exchange implementation experiences
and effective practices that have worked well. These cases should be integral to on going evaluation of the policies over time.

Opportunities that involve middle leaders in professional sharing platforms through interactions with their counterparts in other schools and policies implementers from the MOE will also allow middle leaders to explore possibilities to discuss and investigate impact of continuing professional development on teacher change. Existing middle leadership milestone programmes such as the Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) programme is an example of how middle leaders can interact and discuss issues with their counterparts in other schools and policies implementers from Ministry of Education and National Institute of Education (NIE) at the national level. This would enhance the quality of the change process and potentially enhance the quality of teaching through a systems approach to continuing professional development.

**Recommendation #3:** Build confidence of middle leaders to become advocates for policy change

In a situation where many state-initiated policies and initiatives dominate the educational context in Singapore, decentralisation requires middle leaders to understand their role in schools and be able to balance centralised support with decentralised adaptation within for educational change. The mindsets of middle leaders with regard to their leadership role have a great influence on the implementation of teacher continuing professional development. Middle leaders generally were ambiguous about their roles in leading teacher learning in schools. They also lacked the confidence in being advocates for their colleagues in the area of continuing professional development. The MOE or the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) are required to make a more proactive contribution to assist middle leaders to grow in their confidence by sharing success stories of how continuing professional development is effectively implemented in some schools. This will provide middle leaders with the basic knowledge of how an effective teacher continuing professional development is enacted in local schools, adopt and adapt from these successful models and customise it to their schools’ needs. Schools could also arrange for more experienced middle
leaders to coach and mentor newly appointed middle leaders. This collaborative approach to leading change from the middle in consultation ‘from above’ is a proven model of successful change or reform.

Recommendation #4: Provide a more operationalized definition of continuing professional development

With regards to confusion concerning the definition of continuing professional development, one of the first things that the MOE must do is to provide schools with a more operationalized definition of continuing professional development. Middle leaders were generally confused by the assortment of continuing professional development activities that could be categorised under professional progression, continuing professional development and personal growth. Different perspectives adopted by various school leaders further added to the misunderstanding and misperception of continuing professional development by these middle leaders. A more operationalized definition of continuing professional development would help middle leaders to have a clear notion of their roles in developing teachers as professionals. Such clarity would enhance the quality of teaching through appropriate investment of government funding.

(ii) Recommendations for practice

Recommendation #1: Culture of collaboration

The concept of collaboration is an essential aspect of teacher continuing professional development. It will take time for schools to cultivate a culture of collaboration before they experience the value of collaborative learning. For a start, schools could create a non-judgemental environment where teachers can share spontaneously within the notion of learning for all, instead of an esteemed expert leader leading learning and providing solutions all the time. The collaborative model of learning enables sustainable learning for all.

Recommendation #2: Genuine support from school leaders

Middle leaders were generally sceptical about the sustainability of continuing professional development in the current situations in schools. The lack of time and focus on teacher continuing professional development in schools is an
obstacle that middle leaders felt constrains them in the course of their leadership duties. Middle leaders also considered the support from school leaders as paying lip service. With superficial low-level outcomes, they attributed blame to a culture that over-emphasised academic achievements in favour of teacher development. School leaders need to demonstrate a better balance to achieve the goals of education. For a start, school leaders could create conversations with middle leaders on (i) how the school can create more time and opportunities for continuing professional development by, (ii) reviewing the school’s strategic plan and, (iii) focus on what is deemed most crucial for the school and the future. This will help middle leaders see possibilities of a more sustainable continuing professional development environment in schools.

(iii) Recommendations for research
This study focuses on a group of educational leaders in Singapore primary school who hold a leadership position with a dual nature. They are part of the school leadership team and at the same time classroom teachers. The findings of this study suggest that more investigations can be carried out along similar lines locally and internationally. Since the study reported in this thesis centres around middle leaders in Singapore primary schools, a cross sector study could be conducted. Impact study on the result of continuing professional development on teaching and investigations on the impact of continuing professional development and teacher change on student learning can also be considered for further research.

The preceding part outlined the recommendations for policy, practice and research. The next section brings this concluding chapter and the dissertation to an end.

7.7 Conclusion
(i) Limitations of study
This study was aimed at formulating theoretical propositions regarding perspectives that middle leaders of Singapore primary schools have about their leadership roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development in
their schools. In an attempt to capture this aim, the central research problem in this study was formulated as thus:

What are the perspectives amongst the middle leaders in Singapore primary schools on the influence of their leadership role in promoting teacher continuing professional development in their schools?

It is obvious that this study is a limited one. It only involves a particular group of teachers who take up leadership appointments offered by Ministry of Education. Furthermore, even though the Enabling Teachers initiative involved the continuing professional development of all MOE-employed educators, only the perspectives of middle leaders from primary schools were selected for investigation.

An attribute of interpretivist inductive qualitative research methodology is that there is no guarantee that the theoretical propositions are generalizable beyond the parameters defined for this study. Such a research epistemology concedes to multiple interpretations of the data and ultimately the particular situation under study. As such, this set of interrelated theoretical propositions in keeping with the main aim of this study, reveals the perspectives of a single group of middle leaders to a nation-wide policy on teacher continuing professional development. The theoretical propositions presented here describe the perspectives of one group of primary school middle leaders have regarding a particular government policy on teacher continuing professional development that was enacted in their schools. These theoretical propositions go on to elaborate how the middle leaders’ perspectives affect their beliefs and practices. The theoretical propositions reveal that middle leaders trust the rationale behind government policies on continuing professional development but were sceptical about enacting them in schools. The theoretical propositions also reveal middle leaders’ diverse views on what counts as teacher continuing professional development. Fulfilling the main aim of the study cannot be sacrificed for ensuring generalisability of the study. While the above section outlines some of the limitations of this study, the subsequent section discusses its value despite these limitations.
(ii) Value of study
The theoretical propositions generally provide an empirically sound means by which to discuss matters related to the perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore of government policies on teacher continuing professional development. In this way, it makes a contribution to the field of practitioner perspectives of national policy and the impact of these perspectives on their practice. More specifically, these theoretical propositions provide an insight into the way policy implementation is affected by the perspectives of practitioners such as the middle leaders, whose roles are of a dual nature.

Another contribution these theoretical propositions can provide is in the area of context-based policy evaluation. In the case of Singapore, very few middle leaders are involved in conceptualising and designing major policies such as those concerning teacher continuing professional development. It is often the politicians who do so in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. At the school level, it is the school leaders and School Staff Developer (SSD) who set the learning directions for the planning and implementation of teacher continuing professional development. Most middle leaders are only involved at the implementation stage when they are required to coordinate continuing professional development programmes specific to the department they are in charge of. The theoretical propositions that have emerged from the study have the potential to alert high-level education authorities to how a particular policy is being implemented at school-wide level. Some measures can be put into place to ensure that a policy is implemented with a higher degree of support and realisation of intent.

This set of theoretical propositions may also reflect parallel or disparate responses to a particular macro policy within an education system in any part of the world. The efforts towards promoting teacher continuing professional development by educational authorities around the world are evident. The theoretical propositions of this study should prove to be invaluable feedback for policy makers that the responses by practitioners to their policies may be less than desired. Policy makers may have to work out a comprehensive and more effective way of disseminating the intent and to better support and prepare the
practitioners to ensure higher degree of implementation. This would reduce the extent of misperception and uncertainties by practitioners at the school level. More students would then be able to gain from the effective implementation of policies.

A set of two interrelated theoretical propositions has emerged as the central finding of this study. The main problem explored in this study is the perspectives that middle leaders in Singapore primary schools have about their leadership roles in promoting teacher continuing professional development in schools. This chapter provided a summary of the focus of the study, how it was conducted and why it was conducted. A summary of the findings was given. This chapter also disclosed the limitations of this study and outlined the contribution it has made to the field of practitioner perspectives about major policies and the impact of these perspectives on the implementation of these policies. It concluded with the recommendations of how this study can make contributions in the field of policy, practice and research locally and internationally.

In conclusion, it is acknowledged that while educational policies such as those under investigation here offer great opportunities to enhance teacher continuing professional development in Singapore, middle leaders in this study raised a number of critical issues and concerns with regard to the success and future enhancement of teacher continuing professional development programmes in Singapore schools. It is anticipated that this comprehensive analysis of middle leaders perspectives on teacher continuing professional development will offer new insights to policy makers, educators and professional practitioners in Singapore with a view to generating on-going support and continuing professional development in creating a holistic education system that provides each student with a broad and deep foundation for a lifelong learning journey.
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Dear ________________,

RESEARCH TITLE: Influence of middle leadership in promoting teacher Continuing Professional Development: perspectives from middle leaders in Singapore primary schools

You are invited to participate in a Doctoral degree research named above. The research aims to study the perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools regarding the concept of leadership for continuing professional development. Being a member of the middle leadership team in primary school, it is believed that your contribution to this study is of great value to other educational leaders. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions before consenting to take part in this project.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in a series of interviews. Interviews will be audio-recorded and you will be invited to review a transcript of each interview to ensure that your comments accurately reflect your opinions. Your contribution will be entirely confidential and you will not be personally identified in any way. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time without reason and without prejudice if you should desire to do so.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or alternatively to: The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 or contact them at +61 8 64883703. All study participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.

Please sign the attached form to indicate your consent to participate in this research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Tania Aspland
Supervisor
Tel: (61) 411815071

Goh Sock Pio
Doctoral Student
Tel: (65) 92326237
Information Sheet and Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: Influence of middle leadership in promoting teacher Continuing Professional Development: perspectives from middle leaders in Singapore primary schools

RESEARCHER: GOH SOCK PIO

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR:
Professor Tania Aspland
The Graduate School of Education
The University of Western Australia

AIMS OF STUDY:
The research aims to study the perspectives of middle leaders in Singapore primary schools regarding the concept of continuing professional development.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE:
The project involves participation in a series of interviews over 12 months which will be audio-recorded for revisiting purposes. Responses will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times. No adverse consequences to any participants are anticipated from the project’s methodology.

TIME COMMITMENT:
Each interview will be conducted at the participant’s work place. It will last approximately one hour.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT
I (the participant) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice. I understand all information is treated as strictly confidential. I have been advised as to what the data is being collected, what the purpose is, and how the data will be used. I agree that the research data gathered from the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

_______________________  _______________________
Participant               Date

_______________________  _______________________
Researcher                Date

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or alternatively to: The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 or contact them at +61 8 64883703. All study participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.