Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

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Abstract
The Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) Certification process introduced in Australia in 2012 was designed to recognise expert teachers, to encourage them to continue to influence and impact their students and colleagues through their exemplary classroom practice. Expert teachers prepare evidence of their impactful practices, and have this evidence evaluated through a National Certifying Authority. HALTs are a relatively new role in Australian education, and little is known about their impact in schools, or the potential for their ongoing role as middle leaders in schools. This paper analyses the experiences of HALT teachers who had been certified by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) in 2018, and what impact they recognised they were having in the schools who supported them through their certification process. Impact is theorised as a temporal, reflexive narrative. Data were gathered in a cascading evaluative process through portfolio analysis, interviews with nationally certified teachers, school-based mentors and school leaders and a survey about their teacher and middle leader efficacy. The process of applying for HALT Certification had significant positive personal impact for the teachers, their students, their colleagues in their school and for some, beyond their school. The recognition of impact as a temporal narrative with distinct genres, and the concept of HALT teachers as middle leaders may point to new avenues of supporting applicants and to potential benefits for schools to encourage teachers to consider national certification.

Keywords Highley accomplished teachers · Lead teachers · Professional standards · Middle leaders · Impact

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Introduction

Nationally certified Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs) are new in Australia, and little is known about their impact in schools. In 2012 four career stages for teachers were proposed: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead teachers [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2012]. By 2019, 477 teachers were certified as Highly Accomplished and 232 teachers certified as Lead teachers (AITSL, 2020). These certified HALTs were only a tiny 0.24% of the 288,294 teachers in Australia in 2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Low numbers of certified HALTs may reflect the time taken in industrial negotiations, and in establishing the National Certifying Authorities. Evidence portfolios are a valid, although demanding way of representing the complexity of teacher achievements (Shepherd, & Hannafin, 2013). The rigorous certification process may seem daunting without support. Certifying high-performing Australian teachers is still new and the potential impact that HALT certification might have for personal and whole school learning has not been fully recognised (Invargson, 2018). This article does not explore why more teachers in Australia have not been certified, although that would be an important study. Instead, it investigates the experiences of some of the pioneering HALTs. This article recognises the impacts that the HALTs highlighted, and the potential for the certification process to enable personal and whole school professional learning. Through recognition of their impact, not only can teachers be acknowledged and supported, but their contributions to a whole school learning cycle can be strategically amplified.

The potential of HALT certification to be contextualised as professional learning—Independent Schools Queensland four Stage HALT certification process

National certification of expert teachers was intended to encourage experienced teachers to remain in the classroom, and to influence peers. Around the world, similar advanced teacher certification policies have served administrative purposes to manage pay scales (Hanushek, 2011; Hiebert & Stigler, 2017), or to fulfil neoliberal regulatory purposes that can stifle professionalism (Bourke et al., 2016). This research was commissioned by one of the certifying authorities, Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), as they had contextualised the national application process to focus on collaborative professional learning, a focus over and above National Certification requirements.

ISQ is an association of 240 schools across Queensland separate to the Catholic or State Government schooling systems. ISQ has 100% membership of independent schools in Queensland, including, but not restricted to, faith based, Montessori, Steiner, Distance Education, and specialist schools run by organisations like YMCA, Salvation Army and Autism Queensland. Member schools requested that ISQ addresses the national policy context of The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) and the Australian Teacher Performance and Development
Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

Framework (AITSL, 2012) within their ongoing focus on strategic improvement. In response ISQ created a strategic framework linking school improvement and professional learning from the work of Timperley (2011) and Timperley & Alton-Lee (2008), which informed their National Certification process. ISQ was acknowledged by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) as a National Certifying Authority in 2017. By 2020 as more have since been certified. 56 teachers have been certified as HALTs from 45 ISQ schools, some of the highest completion rates nationally. The HALT teachers in this study were all from schools belonging to ISQ.

National Certification involves four stages, and Queensland independent schools’ HALTS engaged in additional professional learning at each stage of certification, so the process was part of a wider professional learning framing:

1. **Application**: Nominations are supported by a Principal recommendation and an ISQ-trained school-based mentor to support and guide applicants.
2. **Written portfolio of evidence (Stage 1)**: Applicants and their mentors attend ISQ training workshops and have 12 months to develop their portfolios of evidence. External reviewers provide feedback on the evidence and a formal report is provided to the applicant and school leader.
3. **Site visit assessment (Stage 2)**: Successful stage 1 applicants are visited by a nationally accredited ISQ assessor who conducts a classroom observation and speaks to the applicant, colleagues, and school leaders to validate the submitted portfolio.
4. **Certification**: A nationally accredited ISQ assessor considers the collated evidence and determines achievement of either Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher status. The applicant and principal are notified, and Certificates awarded by AITSL and ISQ. HALTs are invited to ongoing networking events.

ISQ provides HALTs with professional learning support through online modules, face-to-face training, and mentoring, aimed at fine-tuning applicants’ evaluative thinking and understanding of impact beyond student academic outcomes as they prepare their portfolios of evidence. Drawing on Timperley et al. (2014) ‘Spirals of Inquiry’, HALT candidates are encouraged to critically reflect on these questions: What was the need that informed the action? What was the change you wanted to see? How did you measure this change? What is your reflection on the outcome of this change? Representing their impact was a supported process of reflexive inquiry.

**Conceptualising impact as reflexivity over time**

The National Guide for Certification (AITSL, 2017) highlights that applicants can “demonstrate the impact of their practice on student outcomes and the practice of colleagues against the Standards/Descriptors” of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017, p. 12). Demonstration of impact is central to the HALT certification process yet impact is challenging to define (Kertesz & Brett, 2019). In the policy documents, impact is “broadly defined and include[s] student
learning, engagement in learning and wellbeing” (AITSL, 2017, p. 13). To make the connection between professional standards and student learning, multiple interacting variables and contexts need to be acknowledged and made visible (Loughran, 2016). For example, presenting evidence of influencing a colleague’s practice also requires providing credible links between the applicant’s own actions, the colleague’s outcome, and how value was added in the context. Applicants need to engage in reflexive evaluations, or “bending back” (Archer, 2003, p. 255) to present a coherent story connecting the intentional activity to the claimed outcomes. Outcomes also can be wide ranging, including “positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended” (OECD, 2010, p. 24). In schools, sometimes impact can be emergent rather than predictable as small catalysts can trigger unexpected ripple effects (Ell, et al., 2019). What is valued as meaningful impact is also dependent on the context. As Ryan et al. (2020, p. 12) conclude “impact is not a singular or simple construct that is easily measurable. It is highly dependent on interpretations, material conditions and different ways of talking and acting within contexts”. Diversity is to be expected.

Given the challenge of definition, in this study impact was conceptualised as follows:

A temporal narrative, where applicant teachers make connections between their actions and the actions of others over time to highlight practices that have meaning and value in their specific contexts.

This definition of impact was developed in the process of data analysis, and from Archer’s theories of reflexivity (2003, 2012). The applicants present coherent, and well-substantiated stories of their professional impact that make the temporal connections between the ‘before’ and ‘after’ explicit to the reader, as well as clearly identifying how meaningful impact is valued within their context. To meet the full range of professional standards, each portfolio has multiple stories of impact mapping professional practices over time. Making clear reflexive connections to evidence to support the effectiveness and influential nature of the work is challenging in practice, and in representation. Archer (2012) identifies this ability for humans to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts in reflexive deliberation as an imperative for competent performance in modern society where expectations are often are in conflict with one another and where there are unscripted and unexpected contingencies. Teachers consider their actions in a context, looking back from time 2 (T2) to time 1 (T1) to identify what has changed. This bending back is supported by mentoring and professional learning conversations. Yet as teachers adapt their actions to the social and cultural contexts, they also create ongoing change in those contexts. Drawing on Archer’s theories, we could represent the impact of HALT certification as a temporal process involving four time points. (see Fig. 1).

At time 1 (T1) HALT teachers reflexively consider what actions are possible within the structural and cultural reality of their context and create projects to realise and improve what matters to them over time (T2–T3). The HALT application process invites them to represent evidence of their daily ongoing projects, looking back from T3, to T2–T1 to tell coherent stories of practice. Through projects with peers, HALTs potentially bring about change in their schools—T4. Phase one of this
Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

The potential for whole school learning—HALTS as middle leaders

HALT certification is a recognition of an individual teacher’s accomplishments, however, when HALTs work with their peers, they are being middle leaders. Middle leaders in schools are classroom teachers who are not in official management positions (De Nobile, 2018). They advocate for pedagogical innovation (Boylan, 2016) and sustain collaborative professional learning networks that enhance practice and outcomes across the school (Johnston, 2015). Middle leaders work collaboratively with colleagues (Hammersley-Fletcher & Strain, 2011) by drawing on their expertise and interpersonal skills to build credibility and trust with peers (Jorgensen, 2016). It is clear that HALTs are expected to demonstrate evidence of middle leadership, yet when the HALT role is not recognised or associated with middle leadership, the potential for whole school learning, and support for HALTs in this role, can be overlooked. When supported, middle leaders can lead teams and translate the ‘big picture’ plan developed by the senior leaders (Larusdottir & O’Connor, 2017). The middle leaders’ cultural capital can help to span the boundaries between classroom teaching and whole school leadership priorities (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016) maintaining positive social contracts and relational trust between school leaders and the wider teacher body (Kertesz & Brett, 2019). However, such work does not happen just by delegating projects to a teacher. Teachers who are middle leaders need support with release time and professional development along with new ways of managing relationships, communicating, managing time and themselves with new competing demands (De Nobile, 2018). The ISQ certification process was designed to support HALTs with professional learning, and to promote their potential to
contribute to whole school development. Whether these potentialities were being realised through HALT certification was explored.

**Research design**

This study evaluated the ISQ program intention to support HALTs to represent their impact through certification as part of a holistic professional learning strategy. Unlike classical program evaluations that identify the strengths and weaknesses of a process to achieve desired outcomes (DePoy & Gilson, 2008), this evaluation focussed on the evidence prioritised as having high impact by participants (Ryan et al., 2020). The study focussed on identifying the impact of HALTs by investigating:

- How do HALTs represent their impact on teaching and learning?

An exploratory, three-phased evaluation approach was used, with each phase informing the next (Stoll & Kools, 2017). The first phase focussed on the evidence generated by the HALTs in their portfolios. Phase two was built on this evidence through interviews with the HALTs and also some HALT mentors and leaders. The Phase three survey of HALTs reflected insights from phase one and two, alongside more standardised measures for teacher and middle leader efficacy. Ethics was granted by the university Human Research Ethics Committee (1900000949) and by ISQ, with individual HALTs providing informed consent at each stage. All data were de-identified, and no student data were collected.

**Phase one**

Recently certified HALTs were invited via email to share their portfolios and be interviewed, and 9 HALTs from a possible group of 20 granted permission. As two electronic portfolios could not be accessed by the research team due to the hosting schools’ electronic security settings, seven portfolios were analysed by the research team. The HALTs came from a variety of schools and roles, but this information is not reported to prevent the re-identification of the teachers, given there was only a small number of certified HALTs at the time. Portfolios included a statement of philosophy illustrating unique professional values and beliefs that were then aligned to submitted ‘sets’ of evidence. Each set of evidence included a map of the APST descriptors and annotated evidence. The research team collected field notes to identify what examples of impact were evident across the portfolios and the evidence associated with each example. For instance, impact such as influencing peers through initiating new feedback strategies with students using video exemplars was associated with evidence such as colleagues adopting practice, student surveys showing satisfaction and improved student results. The research team identified similar practices with high impact across the seven sampled portfolios and coded the examples using verb stems associated with the APSTs, and the activities represented. The most frequently cited activities that were offered as evidence of
Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

Impact included evaluating student learning programs (15%), initiating and leading programs (11%), increasing professional knowledge (11%), supporting colleagues (11%), contributing to wider school culture (6%), and modelling exemplary teaching to peers (6%), with the percentages representing the proportion from the overall coding sample. The way that evidence was commonly organised was also noted. These observations then informed the interview questions for phase two and the survey design for phase three.

Phase two

Phase two comprised 40-min interviews with the nine certified HALT teachers to understand how the certification process impacted their own practice and capacity to influence school-based programs. Structured interview questions included “What has been the impact of your certification as a HALT for you? For your students, and for school?” Additionally 40-min phone interviews were conducted with four HALT mentors and two school principals who had supported some of these HALT applicants successfully through an application process. ISQ emailed the invitation and ethics forms from the research team to potential participants, and the consenting respondents were contacted for interviews. Data are reported using codes for Tch (teacher), Mnt (mentor), and Pcp (School Principal). Questions included “What do you see has been the impact of HALT certification for the HALT teachers?” and “What has been the impact of HALT certification in schools?” These data were analysed in a process of data reduction (Huberman & Miles, 1983), with researchers coding the interviews for content themes, comparing them to types of impacts identified in phase one.

Phase three

Phase three was an online survey distributed to all 75 candidates who were undergoing certification or who had completed certification with ISQ in 2018. The survey sought to establish if the findings from the portfolio analysis and interviews were similar for the broader group of HALT applicants, and how confident they felt in rating themselves on three scales. The measures included the following:

1. **HALT Practices of Influence**—The authors developed a 10-item measure of leadership practices based on the core themes generated in Phases one and two. Participants responded on a scale of 1 (not at all)–5 (a great deal) to each item with higher scores representing higher levels of leadership practices.

2. **Teacher Efficacy**—The Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) developed by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) was used to assess a teacher’s belief in their own ability to have a positive impact on student learning. The 12-item scale consists of three factors; (1) sense of self-efficacy towards student participation (4 items), (2) sense of self-efficacy towards employing teaching strategies (4 items), and (3) sense of self-efficacy towards classroom management (4 items). Participants
responded on a scale of 1 (none at all)–9 (a great deal) with higher scores representing higher levels of efficacy. In the current research, TSES scale showed high internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.89 which is in alignment with the previous research (e.g. Fives & Buehl, 2010).

3. **Leadership Efficacy**—A scan of the relevant literature failed to reveal a measure of Teacher Leadership Efficacy. Instead, the *Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale*—PSES developed by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) was adapted for the present study so that it was meaningful to teacher leaders. The 18-item scale focusses on three areas of teacher leadership efficacy: Efficacy for Management (dealing with time management, handling paperwork, setting policies, and prioritising the demands of the job), Efficacy for Instructional Leadership (facilitating learning, creating and sustaining a shared vision, raising student achievement, and motivating teachers), and Efficacy for Moral Leadership (increasing school spirit, promoting the values of the school). All items commence with the stem “To what extent can you …?” Participants responded on a scale of from 1 (none at all) to 9 (a great deal) with higher scores indicating higher levels of leadership efficacy.

Survey data were analysed using SPSS Version 25. Demographic data were examined using descriptive analysis. The survey had a 44% response rate, with 33 teachers responding. (see Table 1).

Survey participants indicated teaching experience ranging between 6 and 40 years, with 17 years of experience being the average. Twenty-two respondents were teaching in secondary contexts and 11 respondents in primary contexts. A total of 18 respondents had successfully completed certification (seven at HAT status and

| Variable                      | n  | %   |
|-------------------------------|----|-----|
| Gender                        |    |     |
| Male                          | 8  | 25  |
| Female                        | 24 | 75  |
| Years of teaching experience  |    |     |
| 6–10 years                    | 13 | 39.4|
| 10–20 years                   | 9  | 27.3|
| 20–30 years                   | 8  | 24.2|
| 30 years +                    | 3  | 9.1 |
| School sector                 |    |     |
| Primary                       | 11 | 33.3|
| Secondary                     | 22 | 66.7|
| Formal leadership role        |    |     |
| Yes                           | 18 | 54.5|
| No                            | 15 | 45.5|
| Classroom teacher             |    |     |
| Yes                           | 28 | 84.8|
| No                            | 5  | 15.2|
Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

11 at LT status), and 15 respondents were still working towards certification (seven towards HAT status and eight towards LT status). Of the 33 teachers who responded to the survey, around 85% indicated ongoing classroom teaching responsibilities with 54.5% indicating they had formal leadership responsibilities.

**Common threads in diverse stories of impact**

Within the diversity of the impact stories, there were three shared dimensions. Firstly, the temporal aspect of impact was clear, with effective portfolios showing connections to learning stories of students, peers or self ‘before’ and ‘after’ their activities. Secondly, the teachers provided evidence of the relational aspect of impact, highlighting the influence their practice had on relationships with self, students, colleagues, and systems. Thirdly, the potential for system impact of HALTs as effective middle leaders within schools was recognisable through the survey and interviews with leaders.

**Representing the temporal dimension of impact**

HALTs organised their evidence, often drawing on four dominant ‘genres’ of evidence stories. Stories “simultaneously function as explanation, justification and instruction” in complex and non-linear contexts (van Wessel, 2018, p. 406), and are a type of evidence where teacher tacit knowledge and expertise can be represented (Brown et al., 2017). While other genres may have been identified had a greater number of portfolios been analysed, these represent frequent ways of organising temporal stories of practice. There were often a number of genres within each portfolio.

**Action research narratives**

Action research narratives reports were most often associated with leading an innovation. Impact was evident through cycles of action connecting philosophy, planned innovation, professional development, peer collaboration, and evaluation to inform future iterations. Feedback from colleagues and evidence of student learning featured heavily in the evaluative phase and future refinements of these narratives. Examples included initiating a formative assessment program and developing a teacher peer support program.

**Project management narratives**

Project management narratives reported on a project that had been formally delegated to the applicant to lead. These narratives were usually structured in line
with the temporal aspects of the project phases, such as evidence of project planning, coordination of others, ongoing data collection and monitoring, problem solving and reporting. Effective stories of impact included evidence from each phase of the project. Examples included leading whole school initiatives in literacy or numeracy improvement.

**Personal growth narratives**

Personal growth narratives featured reflective statements, usually discussing areas of professional strengths and weaknesses and often indicating areas for future development and career aspirations. In these narratives, the applicant often highlighted their growth in a professional issue or practice. Effective evidence of impact included a clear philosophy statement, goals, as well as aspects of vulnerability, challenges, and critical realisations that contributed to their current understandings and practice.

**Advocacy narratives**

Advocacy narratives referenced stories of impact and influence in educational contexts beyond the classroom or specific school. Secondary school discipline specialists, and teachers with social justice commitments created impact though professional networks and community groups. HALTs were able to provide evidence of creating and evaluating the impact of policies within their school, and contributing to policy change at state and national associations, or students leading partnerships with community groups.

These broad narrative structures framed accounts of professional practice in ways that were recognisable to a reader that enabled the development of complex work over time to be represented. The evidence was most powerful when there were clear, reflexive connections between the past to the present and to future possibilities. These narratives of impact connected events over time through accounts about why these practices were influential. When the story of impact highlighted innovative practice, the action research narrative was often evident. When the narrative depicted the HALT’s impact as a middle leader, the project management genre was more often evident. Personal and advocacy narratives were more evident where the HALTs were the only person in their discipline or grade level.

**Impact on others through multiple connections and relationships**

HALTs provided evidence of their relational impact, with self, students, peers, families, community, disciplinary communities, schools, and systems. Contextual differences included the schooling stage and disciplinary focus. For example, a Year one teacher discussed impact on student wellbeing through play practices, where a secondary Design teacher discussed the impact on students through digital feedback practices.
Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

Impact with students

HALTs represented diverse impacts with students including positive academic learning outcomes, engagement in pastoral, academic, civic, sporting and creative domains, social skills, and behaviour. Examples included “enabling my students to have a better understanding of others from different backgrounds” (Tch9), and “I’m talking about in everything from behaviour, attitude, to learning gain, to interaction, cooperation, taking responsibility for their learning” (Tch7). Differentiation was a frequently mentioned practice with learning considered from student perspectives: “[I asked myself] How can I be of value to my students? Do I want to be a student in my class? Am I a boring teacher?” (Tch8). They sought feedback and included evidence from students including work samples, surveys, before and after assessment, and “quotes from them [students] talking about their thoughts about how they’d improved” (Tch2). Student feedback informed teacher self-reflection.

Impact for self

The process of developing a portfolio led to personal improvement: “You’re able to look at your practice as a whole, and … find areas which you do need improve” (Tch4), and the process “helped me maybe let go of some of the things I had always done, and adopt new ways” (Tch7). For others it validated and affirmed their work: “you can see all of the different things that you’re doing in the school beyond the classroom” (Tch3). They reported a growth in professional identity “a lot more confidence in my ideas, my way of working” (Tch5). Mentors confirmed a participant’s growth in self-awareness, “she’s now more aware … more metacognitive about her practice” (Mnt3). It made their leadership more visible as the process “just validated the fact that I could be a lead teacher without having a leadership position” (Tch8).

Impact through relationships with colleagues and wider systems

Supportive professional relationships with colleagues were critical: “I’m seen as someone who’s willing to share their knowledge, to support staff, to support the students” (Tch1). Teachers supported their colleagues through “one-on-one conversations, modelling teaching, sitting with people doing programs, weekly conversations”, (Tch4). Being an early adopter to advocate for new ideas had high impact: “taking people along with you … they’ve got to be able to hear a very convincing story about an idea, or a new program” (Tch5). They supported experienced and new teachers, “you sort of have a bit of a ripple effect” (Tch4). Ideas were often adopted as school wide practices; “we initially had a few people who volunteered … and then the principal came on board, and he decided to make it a compulsory part of the school” (Tch9). Mentors confirmed HALTs’ impact on the whole school by “providing the school with lots of opportunities … to move the school forward” (Mnt4). HALTs were “looking horizontally … becoming linked with the other middle leaders within the school” (Mnt3).
Leading whole school initiatives often meant extra work: “teaching every year level, as well, even though that means extra work sometimes, just so that I could have a handle on what was going on in every year level, because I was accountable” (Tch1). Through the process of reflection, HALTs developed their understanding of leadership:

Initially…I thought that if I lead by example, if I control everything, … and work really, really hard, everyone would be on board, and everyone would, you know, change, improve, wish to transform their practice, and I learned the hard way… you really have to inspire more… you start with a coalition of the willing. (Tch7).

In articulating their work, HALTs better understood their part in school wide change: “You actually become mindful of the whole journey of the school and how the whole college comes together, and that it’s not actually just your year level”, (Tch4) and “it forces you to look beyond, you know, your immediate environment perhaps, look at the wider setting of what the possibilities are” (Tch5). Discipline experts found themselves representing the school with community groups, leading associations, sharing resources through international networks, and supporting teachers in other schools, for example, “I’m leading this project throughout the state… people are ringing me to find out about, you know, their approaches to implementation of the new syllabus” (Tch2).

Temporal connections were identified by school leaders from ‘before’ and ‘after’ HALT certification. Having a “group of teachers who … have gone through the process” has positive impacts that “ripples out across the entire staff” (Pcp1). Teachers undertaking the HALT certification process “start to talk about their practice” more regularly which leads to “conversations about doing things differently, and trying new things, and taking risks, and seeing what happens” (Pcp1). Pragmatically, school leaders recognise “you’re going to keep some of your really high-quality

| Item No. | Item                                                                 | M    | SD  |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----|
| 1       | Leading and managing independent projects                             | 3.70 | 1.13|
| 2       | Enhancing professional knowledge                                      | **4.36** | 0.74|
| 3       | Encouraging and modelling how to use data and research to support teaching | 3.25 | 1.22|
| 4       | Identifying areas of improvement (e.g. curriculum, policy, administration) | 4.03 | 0.95|
| 5       | Supporting teaching colleagues’ professional learning and development | **4.23** | 0.67|
| 6       | Supporting student welfare and wellbeing                              | 3.85 | 1.12|
| 7       | Supporting the learning experiences of students                       | **4.47** | 0.88|
| 8       | Leading wider cultural school activities or initiatives                | 3.12 | 1.27|
| 9       | Influencing change and new practices                                  | 3.75 | 1.05|
| 10      | Evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives/projects you have implemented | 3.72 | 1.15|

Scale Range: 1(Not at all) to 5 (A Great Deal)

Data in bold points to important information highlighted in the summary of findings below each table
teachers in classrooms, doing what they love and are great at doing” (Pcp1). There was evidence of mutual personal, school, and system benefit.

**Confirming impact as effective teachers and middle leaders**

The survey was designed to gauge the participants’ sense of confidence enacting high impact teaching and learning practices using established measures of teaching efficacy and efficacy in leadership practices (see Table 2).

Survey participants demonstrated their influence in schools mainly by supporting the learning experiences of students ($M = 4.47$), by enhancing their professional knowledge ($M = 4.36$) and supporting their teaching colleagues’ professional learning and development ($M = 4.23$). The area in which participants had the least influence was leading wider cultural school activities or initiatives ($M = 3.12$) (see Table 3).

Participants reported very high levels of teacher efficacy. Their sense of efficacy is attributed to their confidence in their ability to manage the classroom ($M = 8.05$) and deliver appropriate instructional practices ($M = 8.00$). Their highest levels of efficacy included getting students to follow classroom rules ($M = 8.30$), establishing classroom management systems with a group of students ($M = 8.30$), and providing alternative explanations of examples when students are confused ($M = 8.22$). Participants reported moderate efficacy for motivating students who showed low interest in school ($M = 6.94$) and assisting families in helping their children to do well in school ($M = 6.97$) (see Table 4).

The survey participants reported moderately high levels of leadership efficacy. In particular, respondents conveyed strong efficacy for moral leadership through promoting ethical behaviour ($M = 8.06$), promoting a positive image in their school ($M = 7.91$), and promoting acceptable behaviour among students ($M = 7.70$). Interestingly, participants showed moderately low levels of leadership efficacy for shaping the operational and procedures in their school ($M = 4.73$), pointing to new areas for potential impact or development.

**Discussion**

The certification process required applicants to pioneer the mapping of educational impact of specific practices within their unique school contexts. The definition of impact as a temporal narrative about practices that have meaning and value in a context drawn from Archer’s theory of reflexivity provided analytical clarity, and may be useful in other theory and practice contexts where impact is a term that is often not defined. The idea of genres of impact narratives such as action research, project management professional growth, or advocacy stories may support more teachers to apply, while also preserving diversity of evidence stories. The type of evidence and impact narrative was influenced by the context through the potential opportunities available to applicants and what evidence was valued. For example, some schools prioritised teacher-led professional learning communities, while others supported...
Table 3  Teachers’ sense of efficacy

| Item No. | Item                                                                 | M   | SD  |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| CM      | How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?    | 7.69| 1.13|
|         | How much can you do to control disruptive behaviour in the classroom? | 8.12| 1.02|
|         | How much can you do to get students to follow classroom rules?        | **8.30** | 0.81|
|         | How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students? | **8.30** | 0.85|
| SE      | How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork? | 7.88 | 0.93|
|         | How much can you assist families in helping their children to do well in school? | 6.97 | 1.63|
|         | How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school well? | 6.94 | 1.34|
|         | How much can you do to help your students value learning?             | 7.55 | 1.17|
| IP      | How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?              | 8.00 | 1.25|
|         | To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? | **8.22** | 0.87|
|         | How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?  | 7.90 | 1.10|
|         | To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?        | 7.94 | 1.06|
| Total CM|                                                                     | **8.05** | 3.32|
| Total SE|                                                                     | 7.33 | 4.19|
| Total IP|                                                                     | **8.00** | 3.31|
| Total TE|                                                                     | 7.82 | 9.08|

*CM Classroom Management, SE Student Engagement, IP Instructional Practices*  
*Scale Range from 1 (Nothing) to 9 (A Great Deal)*  
*Data in bold points to important information highlighted in the summary of findings below each table*
Table 4  Sense of leadership efficacy

| Item No. | Item                                                                 | M   | SD  |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
|          | **Efficacy for management**                                          |     |     |
|          | 1 Handle the time demands of the job                                 | 6.88| 1.37|
|          | 2 Handle the paperwork required of the job                           | 6.67| 1.38|
|          | 3 Maintain control of your own daily schedule                        | 7.00| 1.86|
|          | 4 Prioritise among competing demands                                 | 7.13| 1.45|
|          | 5 Cope with the stress of the job                                    | 6.72| 1.14|
|          | 6 Shape the operational and procedures of your school                | 4.73| 2.32|
|          | **Efficacy for instructional leadership**                            |     |     |
|          | 7 Motivate and/or influence your teaching colleagues                 | 6.72| 1.18|
|          | 8 Generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for the school             | 5.97| 1.28|
|          | 9 Manage change in your school                                       | 5.45| 2.09|
|          | 10 Create a positive learning environment in your school             | 7.21| 1.43|
|          | 11 Facilitate student learning in your school                        | 7.69| 1.31|
|          | 12 Raise student achievement on tests                                | 6.94| 1.14|
|          | **Efficacy for moral leadership**                                    |     |     |
|          | 13 Promote acceptable behaviour among students                       | 7.70| 1.45|
|          | 14 Promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population| 6.58| 1.65|
|          | 15 Handle effectively the discipline of students in your school      | 7.44| 1.52|
|          | 16 Promote a positive image in your school                           | 7.91| 1.15|
|          | 17 Promote the prevailing values of the community in your school     | 7.64| 1.65|
|          | 18 Promote ethical behaviour                                         | 8.06| 1.45|
|          | **Total efficacy for management**                                   | 39.10| 7.43|
|          | **Total efficacy for instructional leadership**                      | 39.90| 5.21|
|          | **Total efficacy for moral leadership**                              | 45.34| 7.01|
|          | **TOTAL LE**                                                        | 124.19| 16.22|

*LE Leadership Efficacy*

Scale Range from 1 (None at all) to 9 (A Great Deal)

Data in bold points to important information highlighted in the summary of findings below each table
social justice initiatives, or technology-based projects. The influence of context and opportunity is an important area for more research.

HALTs confirmed that the reflexive work in identifying and evidencing their impact was a powerful professional development process (Talbot, 2016). It also presented a potential transformative opportunity to each school community. Yet in the survey and interviews HALTs only reported moderate leadership efficacy. They had confidence in supporting their students’ learning, their colleagues, and their own professional practices which is the definition of middle leadership (Boylan, 2016). The discrepancy between their confidence and practices points to potential for schools to support HALTs to develop their middle leadership capabilities both during and after the certification process. The ISQ process requiring schools to allocate an experienced mentor with time to meet with the applicant is an example of how support during the application process for the preparation of a portfolio, may also support an applicant in managing the politics of middle leading. The national 2018 HALT census (AITSL, 2020) also identified that well-structured whole school approaches like explicit support and mentoring during the certification process, and clear professional pathways post-certification, would make the most of their expertise.

Professional development opportunities after certification to build collective expertise in middle leadership would also enable HALTs to have greater impact. As Invarson (2018) contemplates, for the impact of HALTs to have benefit for teachers, and the system of education, attention should also be given to how the system should operate. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers were envisioned as a foundation for a flexible system of certification that could enable recognition of typical, as well as peak performance by teachers, and for the teaching profession to feel a sense of ownership over the process. Invarson (2018, p. 61) argues that such a system also needs conditions like infrastructure for professional learning, incentives, and support for school leaders to build professional learning communities to enable the collective work. These project findings support such claims.

Conclusion

Certification as a Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher had positive personal impacts for the teachers, their students’ learning and wellbeing, their colleagues and their school community. The certification process designed by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) emphasised supported professional learning with workshops, principal, and mentor support. We suggest that more Australian teachers may be acknowledged as HALTs with similar levels of support. The idea of impact as a temporal narrative with common genres is a contribution towards this important goal, as it clarifies some effective communication processes for HALTs as they seek to represent their impact. An additional contribution is finding that certification was beneficial for schools. Instead of the achievements being hidden away in a certification portfolio, in some schools their work was recognised, and generated ongoing learning as part of a whole school ecosystem of professional learning. Recognising that
HALTs are also middle leaders points to new possibilities for supporting HALTs, and for establishing greater professional networking within and between schools for their continued impact in schools.

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**Declarations**

**Conflicts of interest** Jill Willis, Leanne Crosswell, Rebecca Spooner-Lane, and Peter Churchward received research funding from ISQ. Josephine Wise and Suzanne Jessen were employed by ISQ at the time the data were gathered.

**Ethics approval** This study was given ethics approval by Queensland University of Technology, and ISQ. All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

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Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers

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