Editorial

Learning from Diversified Practices

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The quest for improving education quality, which is an enduring endeavour of educational researchers, has been fuelled further by the evidence reported in international student achievement assessments such as PISA recently. Numerous educational reform initiatives have been introduced by various school systems to improve student outcomes, amongst which are school governance, teacher development, curriculum design, and parental involvement, to name a few. Despite the diversity found in the different initiatives, a common feature exists. That is, their successful implementation rests upon the capacity of effective school leaders to develop an environment conducive to changes with collaborative effort and commitment.

It is widely recognized in the literature that school leadership is the second only to classroom teaching in its impact on student learning, and evidences in support of this claim are drawn on both conceptual deliberations and empirical investigations. Although the literature supports the impact of school leadership to student outcomes in general, there is a lack of agreement on its conceptualization and

operationalization. Found in the literature are many alternative, if not competing, models of school leadership, such as instructional leadership advocated by Hallinger, transformational leadership by Leithwood and colleagues, and distributed leadership by Gronn and Spillane.

Considering that the ultimate objective of research is to suggest ways of improving practice that have been verified with many applications and by diverse types of people, the diversity found in various leadership models is an asset, instead of a liability, to the development of knowledge in the field of educational leadership and management. School leadership is both contextual and contingent. Leadership is practiced differently in various schools, contingent on both macro- and micro- factors; and as such, no one prescribed practice is applicable to all school contexts. The complexity and multiplicity of leadership practices lead to manifestations in research methodology and the level of analysis.

The development of a body of knowledge for understanding school leadership and management is a challenge to school systems in Asia. Although these school systems have been following the international policy trends in the past decades, they cannot capitalise on the conceptual and empirical base offered in the literature, which has been primarily built and validated in Anglo-American academic contexts, for knowledge and practice, given their unique societal and cultural contexts.

This special issue aims to provide readers with an update on the development in the field of educational leadership and management in five Asian countries/cities that have achieved high scores in PISA. We believe that seeing the differences between practices that are similar and the similarities of practices that are different can inform our knowledge base. It is our hope that the knowledge accumulated in this part of the world can supplement the ongoing discussions that are based on Anglo-American contexts in the international literature

for informing theory, policy and practice. There are five articles in this special issue.

Hairon's conceptual deliberation is situated in the Singaporean context in which a teaching track for teacher has been recently introduced. He offers both theoretical and practical implications on the enactment of this initiative to school leadership, they are bounded empowerment, developing leadership, shared decision and collection engagement. He further delineates the ways that schools can capitalise on this new system, that is through the practice of distributed leadership.

Wong addresses the issue of teacher professional development in Macao in which over 95% of teachers are working in private schools. Drawing on qualitative interviews, she maintains that the privatized system has undermined teacher professionalism in Macao schools in which see an imbalance of power between the principal and teachers, which in turn, has put teachers at a vulnerable position. She further argues for governmental intervention for improving the system.

Chow argues for a reconsideration of the purposes of administering stakeholder's survey, maintaining that surveys aimed to fulfil accountability purpose may not provide valid and relevant information for quality improvement purpose. He supports his argument by analysing an alumni survey data set and highlights the challenges in interpreting the aggregated data for decision-making at the programme level. Implications for theory and practice of educational data usage are discussed.

Kagawa, Aizawa and Kodama discuss the changes in upper secondary education in Japan along its economic development. They trace the historical development of the public-private school partnership in Japan, highlighting its contribution to Japan's industrialisation and economy in the past decades. The authors further discuss the current challenges that Japan policy makers must face in the post-industrialisation and globalisation era to reform the upper secondary education.

Zhang draws on a national data set to discuss the possibility of balancing two apparently divergent goals in education - advancing educational excellence and maintaining equality in China's compulsory education system. She argues that school-family cooperation appears to be an effective means to bridge the two, leading to multiple benefits to the schools, parents, and students. The implications for policy maker are also discussed.

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