

# ***A case study of educational change and leadership in Hong Kong primary schools***

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## **Abstract**

This study uses Dimmock and Walker's cross-cultural comparative framework to investigate the interface between societal cultures and leadership styles in two primary schools in Hong Kong. The analysis shows that educational development and curriculum reform at the schools was influenced by global culture and by the local Hong Kong subculture. This case study illustrates the effect of leadership styles and culture on the development of educational reform in Hong Kong in the past 15 years.

## **Keywords**

cross-cultural comparative framework, educational change, educational leadership, narrative inquiry

## **1. Background**

In education, visions of the future proliferate (Facer, 2011). In Hong Kong, a financial and commercial centre influenced by globalisation and nationalisation, education professionals face both challenges and opportunities. Successful educational reform requires a system based on professionalism rather than managerialism. According to Dewey (1938), every experience is both personal and social. This study uses the narrative inquiry method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clough, 2002; Trahar, 2013) as a qualitative strategy to understand the author's own experiences in two schools and then uses those

perceptions to make generalisations about educational reform. As a Primary School Mistress (Curriculum Development) (PSMCD) for four years and as a General Studies panel head for eight years, the author experienced growth, conflicts and challenges. This study is an attempt to interpret the process of educational reform in the schools in which the author served. The broader global culture, the local subculture of educational changes and the educational system in Hong Kong, together with changes in the schools influenced educational development and curriculum reform at these schools. A comparison of the two schools illustrates the effect of different leadership styles and broader cultural, social, national and global forces on the schools. Dimmock and Walker's (2005, p. 24) cross-cultural comparative framework, Fullan's (1999, 2009) three phases of organisation development and other theories are used to deeply examine the cases. Finally, a relatively more comprehensive approach to educational reform is presented.

## 2. Methodology

*"There is no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves."*

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 31)

*"When we see an event, we think of it not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something happening over time. Any event, or thing, has a past. A present as it appears to us, and an implied future."*

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29)

John Dewey is one of the most influential people in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 1). For him, every experience is both personal and social. An individual's perceptions of knowledge, values or pedagogy can reflect a person's attitude towards temporary and historical social influences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). This research adopts the methodology of narrative inquiry. The author served as a curriculum development leader in two related half-day primary schools sharing the same building for eleven years and witnessed their growth and separation. Historical and interpretive research methods are used to analyse this process. The book *"Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research"* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) provides theoretical support for this study. Understanding the process of educational reform in these two schools through the author's personal reflections and assumptions and her interpretation of relevant theories may reveal some insights into education professional development. Intensive and up-close participation are part of the author's strategy of qualitative research.

### 3. Framework for the case study

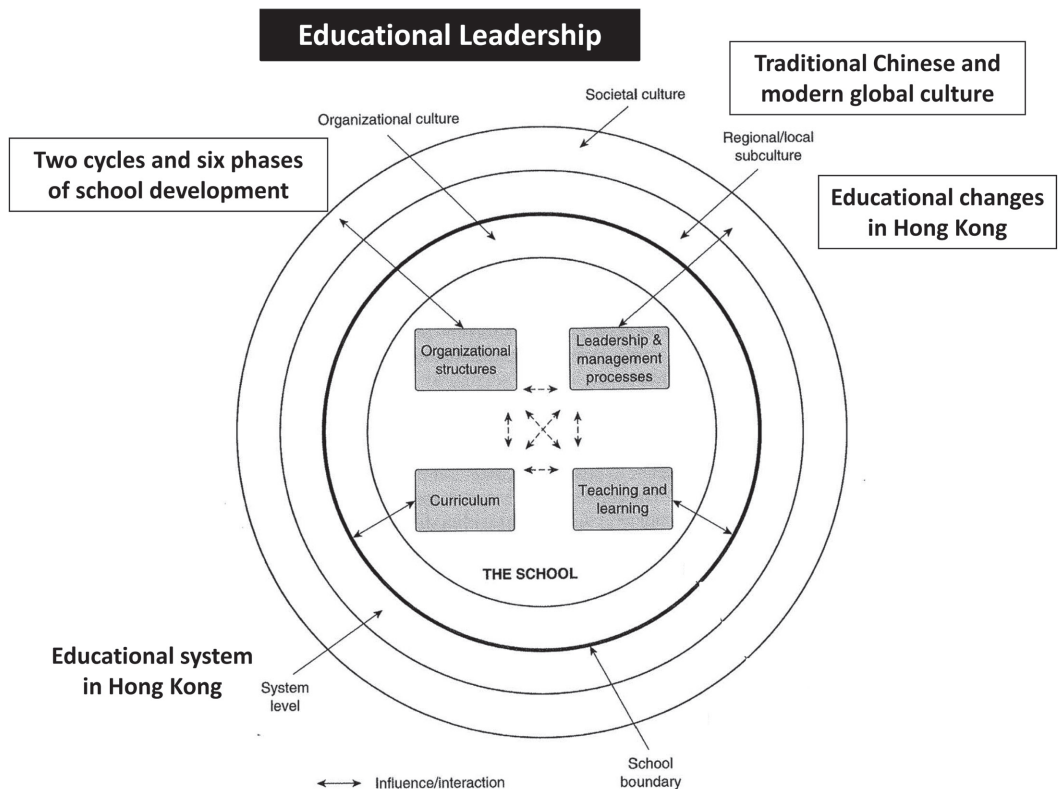
Hong Kong is an international financial city. It has an open system and changes in education follow global trends that are then modified by local commercial and Confucian cultural influences.

*“A key direction for educational leadership and management in the twenty-first century is to embrace an international, cultural and cross-cultural comparative perspective.”*

(Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 15)

Dimmock and Walker provide a detailed justification for their approach. According to their cross-cultural comparative framework, shown in Figure 1 (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 24), a school is influenced by the societal culture, which in this case study the author identifies as a mix of traditional Chinese and modern global cultural influences.

*Figure 1. A cross-cultural school-focused framework for the comparison of educational leadership*



The local community continues to be influenced by hybrid Chinese cultural traditions (Walker, 2004, p. 78), such as Chinese beliefs about relationships, organisation and leadership. However, economic globalisation requires that education in Hong Kong also follows the trends seen in most developed countries. This trend is related to the Third Way (Shirley, 2011), which uses a managerialist and market-oriented approach to enhance quality in education and subsequently economic growth (Tang, 2011). The education reforms spreading around the world are driven not only by market conditions, but also by concepts of managerialism and performance (Ball, 2003; Tang, 2011). This approach has ushered in a new orthodoxy of testing, accountability and data-driven decision making (Shirley, 2011). As a result, *“educators learned to game the system by cutting back on untested subjects and by concentrating on drilling students for exams”* (Harris, 2011, p. 165). Hong Kong as an open system is strongly influenced by the outside world (Cheng, 2009). These new educational theories, ideas, paradigm shifts and practices have been imported over the last two decades.

The regional subculture, which the author defines as Hong Kong educational reform, also deeply influences schools’ educational leadership styles. Due to the political transition in July 1997 and the fast-changing economic environment in the Asia-Pacific Region, Hong Kong has experienced great transformational change within the last two decades: *“In the last ten years, the Education and Manpower Bureau implemented numerous initiatives to change nearly every key aspect of the school system, from the administrative structure to the curriculum organization; from the school governance and management to the classroom teaching and learning; from the application of information technology to the examination system; and from the school external and internal evaluation to the accountability to the stakeholders”* (Cheng, 2009). Primary schools have been affected by curriculum reform, assessment reform and changes in the school places allocation mechanism. School-based management, school self-evaluation, external school reviews, performance indicators and so on restrict, construct and direct the way schools are run. The administrative process controls and assesses the performance of schools. Due to the city’s colonial past, many administrators are accustomed to following instructions and avoiding mistakes; this can make them short-sighted. At the same time, there is a global trend towards the development of pedagogy for knowledge-based societies rooted in life-long learning.

Since the change in sovereignty, the educational system in Hong Kong has changed rapidly. Nurturing quality citizenship is an essential component of this new system. New posts for educational leaders are increasing (Education Bureau, 2012). In addition to traditional positions such as “Senior Assistant Master/Mistress” and “Assistant Master/Mistress”, there are now posts for “Senior Primary School Master/Mistress” (SPSM), “Primary School Master/Mistress” (PSM) and “Assistant Primary School Master/

Mistress” (APSM). However, the authority for school development is still mainly in the hands of the principal and the SPSM, who generally emphasise managerial skills rather than professional educational development. Management development is shaped by performance pressures, which are dominated by a measurement paradigm, whereas educational development focuses on learning paradigms that emphasise the importance of learning construction in the classroom and the effectiveness of students’ authentic learning experiences. For instance, managers in Hong Kong support the “Territory-wide System Assessment” (TSA) and “Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test” (Pre-S1 Test) by providing more drilling exercises for children (Tang, 2011). In this paradigm, strong leadership directs educational development and both principals and teachers expect to be given clear directions for achieving short-term goals (Walker, Dimmock, & Pang, 2002). Schools are influenced by societal culture, regional subcultures and their position in the wider educational system with each school also having its own organisational culture. Organisational structures, leadership and management processes, curriculum, and teaching and learning are the four elements that interact to create schooling.

In the following section, the author makes use of the framework given in Figure 1 to interpret her own experience of curriculum reform and development in Hong Kong schools.

## **4. Case study outline and background**

A school is a complex system that undergoes multiple processes of development. A leader’s mental models or beliefs are part of the system and, along with the structure, determine the system’s behaviour. Therefore, analysing school leaders’ thought processes and their effect on changes in the school system can help us to understand the system more completely.

The two half-day primary schools discussed in this study (hereafter called “School A” and “School B”) were established in 1992 and were originally located in a public housing estate. They are run by the same school-sponsoring body and before 2005 they shared the same building, vision, mission, developmental plan and strategies, teaching and learning curriculum, teacher management and assessment papers and so on. Most of the students’ parents are grassroots workers without good educational backgrounds, so they rely on the schools to educate their children. The administrators and professional leaders of the schools before 2005 were eager to promote and integrate new ideas, thinking skills and creativity in the teaching and learning process collaboratively.

For the pre-2005 period, these two schools’ reporting lines showed that it can be treated as one system. For instance, the principal of School B was in charge of the General

Studies and English departments for both schools and the principal of School A was in charge of the Chinese and Mathematics departments in both schools. As a General Studies panel head, the author was at that time responsible to the principal of School B.

In 2005, the two half-day schools separated to turn into two individual whole-day schools and the well-developed cross-disciplinary curriculum could no longer exist. There was no further collaboration or professional development interaction between the two schools. The creation of effective and student-centred interdisciplinary project learning modes in the classroom stopped. In the post-2005 period, School A has focused on subject development and has de-emphasised interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

This study examines the following questions:

1. What problems arose from the interaction between the educational changes and leadership styles?
2. Why was the more than 10-year investment of time and resources into building and integrating the curriculum abandoned?
3. What can we learn from this case of leadership changes?

## **5. Analysis**

According to Fullan's notion (1999), the process of school improvement has three phases: "initiation", "implementation" and "institutionalisation or abandonment". These two schools underwent two cycles of school improvement; the first was from the establishment of the school until 2002 and the second was from 2002 until the present.

### **5.1 Analysis of the first change cycle**

The first 10 years of development are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the first cycle of change*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
1992-1994  Initiation	<p>Target focus – As School A and School B were newly established at that time and were run by a not very well-known school-sponsoring body, both schools needed to secure a stable intake of students. The keen competition and demand for accountability drove the adoption of private corporate management practices for running the school, in theory at least, more effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Relevance – The two schools collaborated successfully. They shared a professional vision, mission, goals, developmental strategies, educational planning system and assessment structure. Innovation was driven by hidden “market” needs and educational professionalism.</p> <p>Readiness – The schools established an employment system and psychologically prepared administrators for their roles.</p> <p>Resources – There were many opportunities for promotion, four core leaders were employed from an experienced school, the two schools were located in a new development area with a big pool of students and keen competition.</p> <p>School system – The two schools shared a building and other resources.</p>	<p>Effective management</p> <p>Long-term professional developmental strategies and plans</p> <p>Leaders believed in the use of an up-to-date pedagogy of learning</p> <p>High expectations and clear vision and mission</p> <p>Engaged many young and enthusiastic teachers</p> <p>Active co-operation</p> <p>Formal and concentrated management and leadership</p>

Table 1. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the first cycle of change (continued)*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
1994-1997 Implementation	<p>Change agent – The principals, vice-principals and assistant masters and mistresses of the two schools were the agents of change. The leadership styles of the two principals were different, and the co-operation made good use of their managerial and transformational leadership styles.</p> <p>Professional development – The schools followed Hong Kong's educational reform (Education Commission, 1990, 1992, 1997) trends. They adopted an effective and student-centred approach, promoted professional development, emphasised an activity approach, had regular planning meetings and lesson observations and shared teaching aids. Staff members were organised as one school. The same set of examination papers was used at both schools.</p> <p>Power-concentrated – They used a paternalistic approach, top-down, fight for survival among schools to push the managerial thinking mode, the acceptance of hierarchy and respect for senior teachers.</p> <p>Action plan – The action plan was for school-based management</p>	<p>School-based management</p> <p>Managerial and professional working teams</p> <p>Successful promotion and managerial system</p> <p>High demand and good results for student allocation to the better secondary schools</p> <p>Reinforcement of development strategies</p>



Table 1. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the first cycle of change (continued)*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
1997-2002  Institutional- isation	<p>The schools were characterised by successful teacher developmental strategies and an institutionalised school culture that meant teachers were eager to learn, to try and to share for the good of students.</p> <p>Because the schools had already experienced a paradigm shift and pedagogical reform, they successfully implemented the educational reforms in Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2001).</p> <p>The schools developed information technology where teachers started to learn how to both store materials in, and retrieving materials from, the school server.</p> <p>Action plan – The plan focused on school-based management and school-based curriculum development, well-planned integrated project learning twice a year. Teachers were eager to follow the lead of senior teachers. The principals started to delegate authority for school self-assessment among their senior staff.</p> <p>The schools creates a collaborative culture for quality learning and teaching. School-based curriculum developed. Both schools joined the “School Around the World” project (HKSAW Steering Committee, 2002), and created a framework for project learning for General Studies.</p>	<p>The schools adopted a modern and up-to-date teaching and learning mode: a student-centred activity approach that included out-door activities, other learning experiences, school-based curriculum reform, project learning, etc.</p> <p>Stakeholders experienced the positive values of the school culture.</p> <p>The schools were appreciated by parents.</p>

As new schools established in 1992, School A and School B followed the recommendations in the seven reports of the Education Commission’s policy recommendations from 1984 to 1997 (Education Commission, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1997), which reflected the paradigm shift from quantity to quality. Leaders developed a widely shared vision for the schools. They built a consensus on school goals and priorities, and maintained high performance expectations for staff and students. Modelling good professional behaviour, building school culture and collaborative structures, and providing intellectual stimulation through teacher-sharing were the dimensions of leadership practice (Bush, 2005) in the schools in this period. Gradually, the schools built collaborative structures and professional cultures. Although the leadership styles of the principals of the two schools were completely different, where one was perceived as more managerial in approach while the other was perceived as more transformational (Bush, 2005), they both respected each other and co-operated successfully to lead the schools. While managerial leadership may ensure the implementation of a school’s vision and strategy, it may be argued that transformational leadership engages with staff and other stakeholders to produce higher levels of commitment to achieve the goals of the organisation that are linked to such a vision (Bush, 2005). During the first change cycle, managerial leadership dominated the administration, and professional leaders executed the educational reforms smoothly and effectively. Gradually, the schools built their own cultures, analysed using the dimensions of societal culture as shown in Table 2 (Walker, Dimmock, & Pang, 2002, p. 40).

Table 2. *Comparison of leadership in the two schools with different cultural settings*

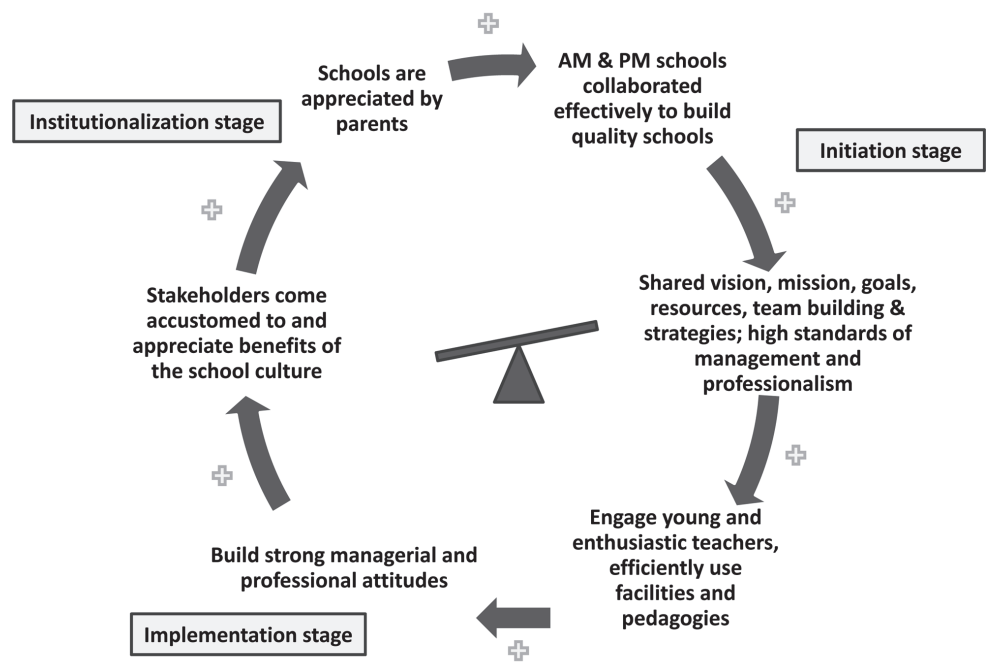
Dimension of societal culture	Leadership in culture	
	School A	School B
Power-distributed/ power-concentrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership from the top</li> <li>• Teamwork and empowerment</li> <li>• Respect for seniority of management more than for education</li> <li>• Goals mainly set by top administrators</li> <li>• Acceptance of wide power and status differentials between principal and teachers</li> <li>• Delegation/decentralisation with control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership from the top</li> <li>• Teamwork and empowerment</li> <li>• Respect for seniority of leadership</li> <li>• Goals set by top administrators</li> <li>• Acceptance of wide power and status differentials between principal and teachers</li> <li>• Power-concentrated</li> </ul>

Table 2. *Comparison of leadership in the two schools with different cultural settings (continued)*

Dimension of societal culture	Leadership in culture	
	School A	School B
Group-oriented/ self-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on the “group” as a collective to which the individual has to conform</li> <li>• Closed confrontation of differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on personal “goals”</li> <li>• Drive to secure commitment and high morals</li> <li>• Support for teachers seen as essential</li> <li>• Maintenance of social networks</li> </ul>
Consideration/ aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict resolved through edict</li> <li>• Teacher and students status based on effort and achievement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertiveness seen as a virtue</li> <li>• Decisiveness and emphasis on career are valued</li> <li>• Overt competition promoted</li> </ul>
Pro-activism/ fatalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief that we can do little but accept life’s eventualities</li> <li>• Low tolerance for ambiguity</li> <li>• Long-term view of evolving change</li> <li>• More on care and support and personal interest</li> <li>• Hierarchy, standardisation and conformity stressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in capacity to shape and influence the present and future</li> <li>• High tolerance for ambiguity</li> <li>• Sense of urgency</li> <li>• Adherence to mutual duties</li> <li>• Pro-activism</li> </ul>
Generative/ replicative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely to adopt innovations</li> <li>• Experimentation in classroom common and encouraged, while traditional approaches to teaching and learning endure</li> <li>• Problems solved mainly through referral to precedent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appear more predisposed toward innovation</li> <li>• Experimentation in classroom common and encouraged</li> <li>• New ideas and ways of working valued</li> <li>• Original policies and ways of operating</li> </ul>
Limited/holistic relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal rules and regulations applied equally to everyone</li> <li>• Tasks stressed as much or more than relationships</li> <li>• Care taken not to alienate people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater attention given to relationship obligations</li> <li>• Valued as much or more than tasks</li> <li>• Advancement based mostly on performance and competence</li> </ul>

Over their first 10 years (1992-2002), these two schools developed into well-known and high quality schools. Parents in the region wanted their children to study there. During this period, school improvements came from the schools’ own initiatives and the leaders were aware of the importance of school development. With strong leadership and the recruitment of young, energetic and enthusiastic teachers, the schools built up relatively ideal systems. The school professional development culture became institutionalised. As a result, educational reform at these schools occurred before the push from the government. The schools’ system for reinforcing development is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The first cycle of school development: Reinforcing loop for better development



## 5.2 Analysis of the second cycle of change

Responding to the changing world, the Hong Kong government initiated large scale and pedagogical changes in education at the end of the twentieth century. The Education Commission in 2000 claimed to adopt the principles of student-focused, “no-loser”, quality and life-long learning (Cheng, 2009). In 2002, the government provided each school with a temporary curriculum development officer, a post called the Primary School Masters/Mistresses (Curriculum Development) (PSMCD), for five years, to help principals carry out curriculum reform smoothly and deeply. Later, the post became permanent.

Eight key learning areas, generic skills, values and attitudes were emphasised (Education Commission, 2000). As an APSM and a panel head of General Studies with experience in project learning and curriculum design, the author was recommended for the post of PSMCD in School A. She was responsible for carrying out school-based curriculum development during this time. The processes of the second cycle of development and the outcome are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the second cycle of change*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
2002-2003 Initiation	<p>The new PSMCDs in the two schools collaborated closely to further and deepen the schools' education curriculum reform. Eight key learning areas, generic skills, values and attitudes were emphasised (Education Commission, 2000). The process encouraged teachers to experience a paradigm shift from traditional teaching and thinking modes to a student-centred and school-based curriculum.</p> <p>An interdisciplinary curriculum including project learning, other learning experiences, moral and civic education, thematic teaching, life-long learning, and application and learning by doing were widely promoted (Curriculum Development Council, 2001).</p> <p>School management encouraged more teacher autonomy for the daily implementation of change. A three-year curriculum development plan was proposed and agreed on.</p>	<p>Top-down demands for further and deeper educational reforms concentrated on quality learning and teaching were received from the Education and Manpower Bureau.</p> <p>Drafted and confirmed three-year school-based curriculum development plan</p>

Table 3. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the second cycle of change (continued)*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
2003-2006 Implementation	<p>Based on previous experience and teachers' abilities, the PSMCDs of the two schools collaborated on a three-year interdisciplinary project learning curriculum development plan (Figure 3). The principals of the two schools agreed and supported more teachers' participation in curriculum construction, lesson plan design and implementation. Starting from Primary 4 in 2003 until Primary 5 in 2005, two school teachers co-operated and shared the workload of teaching these levels. To build up long-term teaching resources, the schools proposed for and carried out a Quality Education Fund (QEF) in 2004. With the help of these extra resources, the schools constructed two websites for long-term learning. The three-year plan was carried out successfully.</p> <p>A cross-disciplinary curriculum that included project learning, other learning experiences, moral and civic education, thematic teaching, life-long learning and learning by doing was developed during this period.</p> <p>In this period, School A had three principals, one after another. The change in personnel did not change the school's management culture or the thinking mode. Management without vision is rightly criticised as "managerialist" but vision without effective implementation is bound to lead to frustration (Bush, 2005). In 2005, the two half-day schools separated to turn into two whole-day schools. The disagreements about the two schools' future co-operation and the diversified school development strategies reflected in the widening gap between the cultures of the schools.</p>	<p>The new principal of School A followed the school's tradition and the senior administrators' culture, which was more likely "managerialist". The principal of School B had a school vision that created new challenges. Teachers were required to support the vision and targets of the principal. Conflict between the two schools' administrative cultures became an explosive issue. Moreover, external changes in the market-driven system and business managerialism increased the conflict.</p> <p>In 2006, the two schools stopped curriculum collaboration.</p>

Table 3. *The characteristics of the school improvement process and the outcomes of the second cycle of change (continued)*

Years and phase	Characteristics	Outcomes
Post-2006  Modification & abandonment	<p>The culture and styles of the resultant two whole-day schools were very different.</p> <p>School A had an external school review in 2006. After the review, the school stopped integrating cross-disciplinary project learning and General Studies project learning into daily classroom learning. Project learning became part of a one to two weeks learning sessions after examinations. The school allocated more resources to the learning of languages, Mathematics, TSA and exam drilling exercises. The well-established cross-disciplinary project learning curriculum was abandoned. Life-long learning, multi-diversity learning experiences and integrated professional cultures were de-emphasised.</p> <p>School B tried many innovations based on a student-centred and caring vision. Teacher development and parental and community involvement created a good environment for students. Student-centred pedagogies were promoted. After eight years of development, the school became one of the best-known schools in the area. The principal won awards for leadership. The school engaged staff and other stakeholders to produce higher levels of commitment to achieve the goals.</p> <p>Both schools had shifted from an internal change agent to changes mandated by an external agent (Tang, 2011). The abandonment of the new paradigm in School A shows the power of the traditional culture. The school went through the first and second change cycle but did not undergo the third change cycle, which required leaders to make fundamental paradigm shifts to promoting the life-long learning abilities of children. However, with transformational leadership, the principal of School B successfully motivated senior and new teachers, parents and community followers and provided good services for students.</p>	<p>Due to a good foundation and good exam results, School A could attract enough students. It paid more attention to exam-oriented teaching and the learning of languages and Mathematics.</p> <p>Owing to the falling student population in the school area, School B struggled for survival. It continued to emphasise a student-centred approach with a vision. Transformational leadership was used to encourage teachers and stakeholders to help achieve the goals.</p>



Figure 3. A three-year interdisciplinary project learning curriculum development plan



In the initiation and implementation stages, the author experienced, at first hand, the perception of children who were learning happily and effectively. The students created project books with highly advanced ideas, such as they pretending to be reporters or Olympic ambassadors while practising English or Putonghua with each other. They used what they had learnt in Mathematics lessons to conduct surveys and then made presentations with PowerPoint or by using craft materials. The group work process in the classroom allowed them to communicate and disagree with each other. They learnt how to solve problems and give their ideas in tangible shape or form. Parents sometimes joined in and helped to guide their children's learning. At the beginning of the project, children set their own learning targets and co-operated with each other to learn. Their learning, therefore, became more meaningful and target-orientated. Throughout the two or more months of interdisciplinary preparation and learning, their learning outcomes were rich and substantive. These processes helped them to construct their learning and helped to enhance their learning outcomes (Figures 4 and 5) during lessons. Students used



different methods such as mind maps to visualise their thinking about the spirit of Hong Kong. Most of them were happy to creatively express their feelings. Their thinking skills, particularly their creative thinking skills, were thus aroused. The outcomes of the projects and the action research were, respectively, shared at the Hong Kong Education City and in the Fourth Thinking Qualities Initiative Seminar at Hong Kong Baptist University (Creative Teachers Association (CTA) Limited, 2013).

*Figure 4. Project structure and concept map of the Primary 4 “In search of Hong Kong spirit” project*

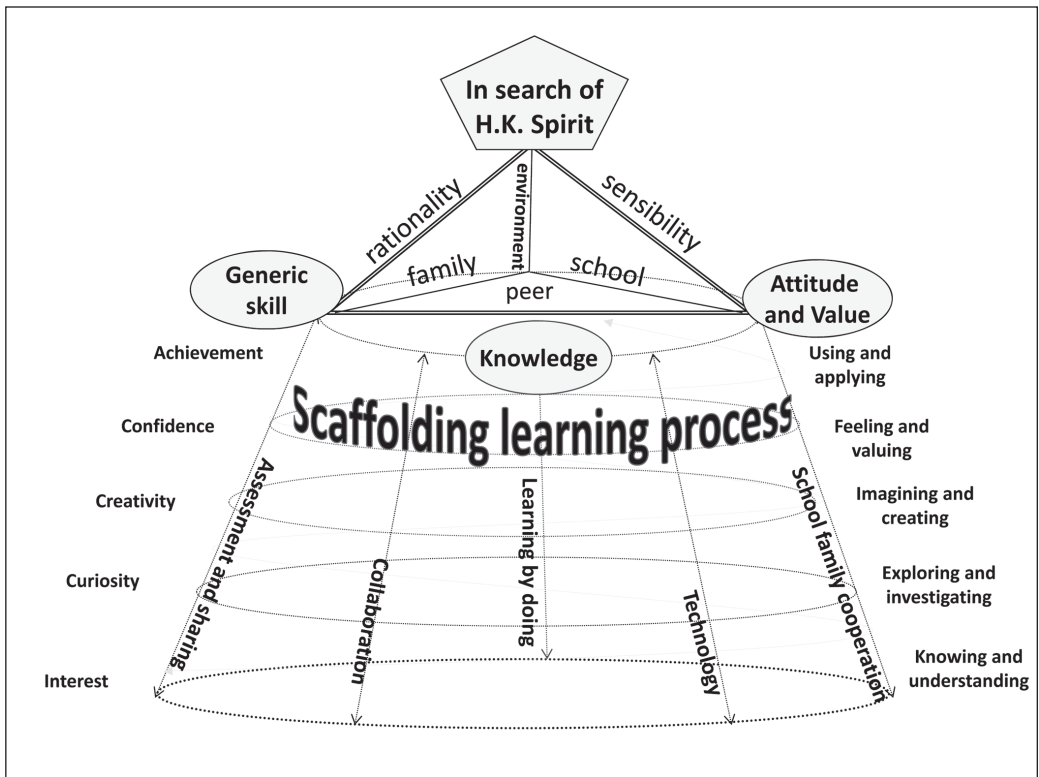
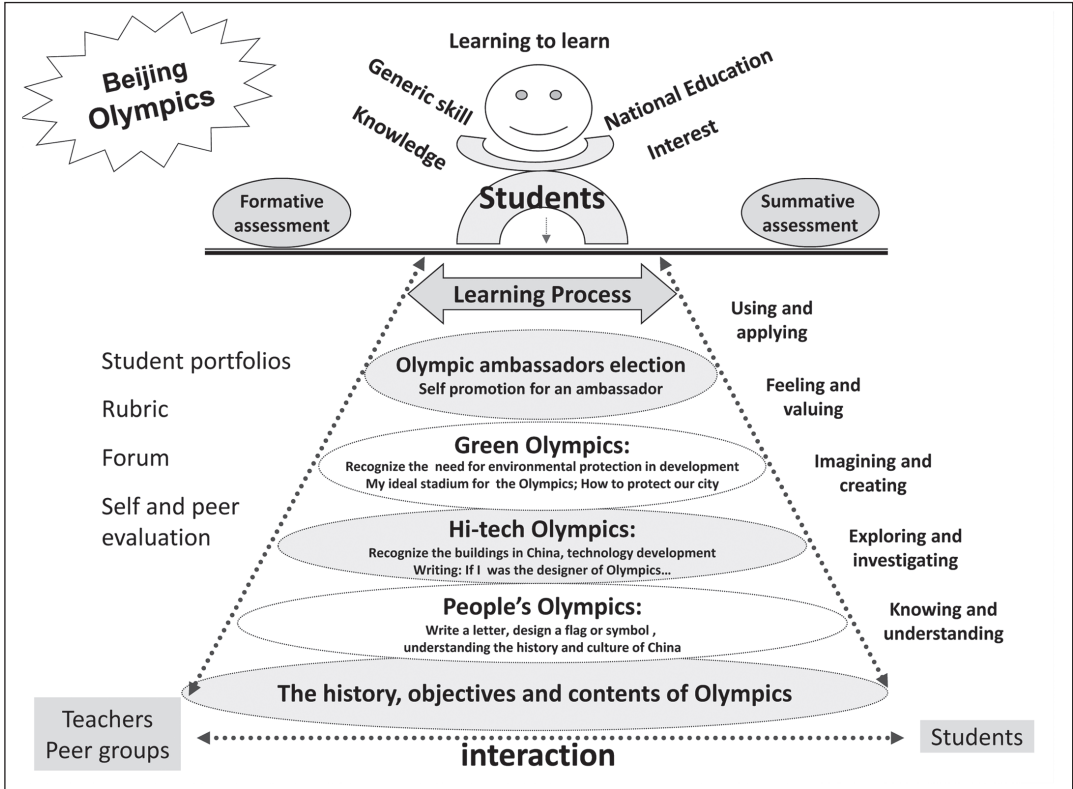


Figure 5. Project structure and concept map for assessment of the Primary 5 “Beijing Olympics” project



Six years after leaving the school, the author had a chance to meet five New Senior Secondary school graduates who had experienced the six-year project learning programme in School A. A questionnaire was designed to collect their views. With permission, the author recorded conversations with them, to analyse their thoughts about the effect of project learning in primary school. All of them still remembered the happy learning experiences in the Primary 5 “Beijing Olympics” Project (Figure 5). One of them remembered specific strategies for thinking and learning learnt. Many said that the generic skills and abilities they gained through project learning in primary school allowed them to become leaders of project learning groups in secondary school. They found that not many pupils from other schools had the same level of experience as they did. Their experience inspired them to actively participate in the Liberal Studies lessons. They thought they could integrate concepts and produce school-based reports that were more effective, interesting and thoughtful due to their primary school learning.

Ten years were spent building the rich materials and the well-developed project learning model and framework. Many examples remain on the website. The experiences and pedagogies have been shared and published on several occasions. However, the administrators of School A decided that the neo-liberal styles of performative culture that use test regimes as indicators of school performance were more important for school development. They could do little but accept life's eventualities. In 2006, after an external school review, School A abandoned the use of an interdisciplinary project as part of normal classroom learning. They restricted the pedagogy and methodology of project learning to a short period of one or two weeks in the academic year. The author believes that "drilling exercises" for the TSA and Pre-S1 Test took curriculum time away from any meaningful learning (Tang, 2011), something that is, unfortunately, common in schools in Hong Kong. Today, as a well-established system with good outcomes for students and experienced teachers, the new school system is welcomed by parents.

Due to School B's location being far away from residential areas and the declining student population, the new school struggled for survival during the second cycle. Without support from School A, School B continued to innovate with student-centred and happy learning pedagogy. With a transformational leadership style, the principal engaged with staff and other stakeholders to produce high levels of commitment to the school's goals (Bush, 2005). Today, the school has a record of success. It has received a Green School Award, a Love School Award and a Community, Family and School Collaborative Project Award.

### **5.3 Analysis of the change process**

According to Dimmock and Walker's framework, during the first cycle of change, the schools successfully collaborated in school development. They developed into two successful schools and had the chance to separate into two whole-day schools. In the second development cycle, the initiation and implementation stages of change were smooth and successful. Facing the demands of top-down educational reform, the two schools collaborated closely and adopted the same three-year development plan. With their traditional culture of collaboration, the two schools successfully applied to QEF to obtain more resources for curriculum development. With the two schools' shared resources, they built a shared interdisciplinary project model and website resources over four years. However, the different cultures of the two schools widened when they separated. Although the principal of School B wanted the two schools to continue to co-operate as before, the administrators of School A strongly rejected this idea.

Although in the first cycle, School A adopted a new mode of teaching and there was a paradigm shift from a traditional teaching method to the activity approach, the school leaders were influenced by traditional Chinese beliefs about relationships, organisation

and leadership. It was not a religious school and Catholic, Buddhist and Christian teachers worked there; diverse beliefs and cultures existed and they were all respected. However, traditional Chinese culture influenced the social order at the school. Every teacher had his or her occupational position and there was a clear hierarchical structure. Harmonious relationships among colleagues were based on respect for hierarchy, and a set of formalised codes of behaviour tied the whole school together. Teachers expected the principal to be strong (Walker, Dimmock, & Pang, 2002). During the transitional period when changing principals, the school senior administrators insisted on a culture of ‘managerialism’. By devoting more time to better exam performance results and free more time for teachers, they supported the school’s traditional values in deep structures. They did not support the interdisciplinary pedagogy that the principal of School B believed in. They did not really understand or believe in the spirit of an integrated learning strategy. The professional leaders had to replace their long-term development strategies with short-term development strategies. Standardisation and data-driven decision making dominated the development direction at that time. As the educational development strategies and ideologies of the two schools were different, then when School B moved out of the school campus, the co-operation between the two schools stopped. Each school continued to develop its own culture, thinking mode and system of development.

*“Since management is culture-bound, it would be unrealistic to expect top down structural reform will effectively introduce an attitudinal change in organizations. If reforms are to be successful, they require a strong commitment and a change of values and attitudes on the part of leaders and subordinates.”*

(Leung & Chan, 2001)

From its foundation, School A promoted a structure of hierarchical power relationships, where teachers were expected to respect management’s seniority in decision making. As a result, senior administrative decisions were to be seen as final and did not involve a process of consultation or transformational change. Individuals had to follow the “group” collective needs rather than their own personal “goals”. Conflicts were resolved through edict. Hierarchy, standardisation and conformity were stressed. Management had a tendency to mandate change from the top with active responses only welcomed from senior teachers. During the change process, the PSMCD concentrated on curriculum design, preparation of the teaching materials and instruction and not much on the participation of the senior teachers in the discussion. Most teachers did not have a feeling of ownership of the cross-disciplinary design and construction. Moreover, the second stage of the curriculum reform overwhelmed the teachers. It did not match the needs of their performance culture, which was shaped by increasingly popular external accountability measures. Public assessment made test results very high-stake goals. In their fight for survival, school administrators turned to extreme managerialism.

In addition to the local organisational culture that affected School A's u-turn, Hong Kong's regional culture also influenced the school's decisions. With the existence of the "bottle-neck" in school education (Cheng, 2009), curriculum reform had become a heavy burden to teachers. The Committee on Teachers' Work reported that teachers worked about 50 hours a week in 2006 (Tang, 2011). High mood disorders, suicidal tendencies and resignations were some of the negative effects of the syndrome in Hong Kong at that time. As a result, administrators at schools sought to ease the teaching burden, giving more time to training students in languages, Mathematics and examination preparation. The impact of this is that the focus on short-term results was methodologically and pedagogically different from the focus on life-long learning and professionalism.

During this period, the global educational culture was also changing, and these changes influenced educational management in Hong Kong greatly. Along with most modern cities and countries in the world, Hong Kong experienced the Second Way and the Third Way of educational reform. In the Second Way period, governments introduced standardisation to promote accountability and used marketplace models of reform to drive innovation (Harris, 2011, p. 164). The Third Way reforms were based on a new orthodoxy of testing, accountability and data-driven decision making (Shirley, 2011). The government provided funding based on accountability and markets to ensure high performance. Professionalism was emphasised and developed (Yu, 2002; Wan, 2011) and life-long learning was promoted through the teaching of generic skills and project learning. However, data-driven decision making and target-obsessed distractions were the characteristics of the market-driven model of reform.

As a result, the pressure for summative assessment increased in order to narrow any achievement gaps. Worst of all, the Third Way resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum in the form of teaching to the test and an over concentration on data rather than on student needs (Harris, 2011, p. 164). The fallacies of the Third Way educational reforms affected schools' control systems. The change reinforced the current examination-oriented assessment practices. The world-wide failure of the Third Way has been pointed out by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009). They propose a Fourth Way that focuses on the function of professionalism. They believe that change should be driven by a need for change itself rather than by the outcomes of the change. The focus is on changes in the classroom and in students' effective learning. The notion is similar to that promoted by the two case study schools in the first and the second phases. The schools promoted and implemented learning in the classroom through the lens of professionalism. Teachers were concerned with the effectiveness of student learning through activities. Constructivism and the promotion of rich experiences were the curriculum design pedagogies. However, the managerialism of the Third Way of educational reform caused arguments and conflicts, affecting both schools' development.

The global norm of managerialism and the trend towards data-driven decision making influenced the development of the schools. Moreover, with the separation of the two half-day schools into two whole-day schools and the replacement of principals in School A, the culture of the schools and the styles of school leadership played a crucial role in the schools' development. The main administrators of School A practiced managerial leadership, which helped to ensure the implementation of the school's vision and strategy. However, the "managerialist" approach also lacked the student-centred vision after the separation of the two schools. In contrast, the transformational leadership (Bush, 2005) of the principal of School B successfully engaged staff, parents and social human resources, who worked together to achieve the school vision.

## **6. Strengths and limitations of narrative inquiry**

The author made use of her own experiences at two schools to investigate educational changes and leadership in the last two decades. The case study helped to organise the author's analysis of the two schools' development processes. As a researcher, the author made use of materials from the websites, reports, student interviews, reflections and memory. With the help of a literature review and the framework of Dimmock and Walker (2005), this study investigated the changes in these schools at the macro-, meso- and site-levels. The organisational culture and wider societal cultural framework help us to understand the decision making of the leadership during the period of educational reform. Understanding how the processes of organisational development and cultural change are influenced by trends in global and regional cultures, societies and individuals helps us to understand the strengths and weaknesses, the successes and failures of educational reform in Hong Kong.

To a certain extent, the two schools reflect the complex interaction of global, local and individual school contexts during the process of educational reform. Yet, the interpretation of data, events, relationships and descriptions from only one angle may be biased. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of the author's findings and interpretations is itself a social phenomenon. Although the reliability and validity of the data collection and interpretation could be improved through more interviews from different stakeholders, the author's mind-set remains deeply influenced by particular temporary and historical social influences. Many experts believe that a person's way of thinking comes from their life experiences. First-hand experience is the most profound and influential. Under globalisation, second-hand information from developed countries is becoming common. It is only local people who understand their own culture who can ensure that this does not result in internal contradictions and struggles (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). The main findings of this study may not be generalisable to other schools, but it is valuable to interpret the whole from a particular angle. They are helpful for promoting further

investigation and discussion. More cases will help to reconstruct the broader process of educational reform. Different stakeholders may offer different interpretations and arguments. This study offers a case study for reflection and further discussion.

## **7. Conclusions**

The case study indicates that education in Hong Kong has undergone numerous changes in the last two decades, with a variety of school-based curriculum initiatives. Some of the schools are still management-oriented and school leaders strongly influence school development. Some transformational leaders have successfully motivated followers to adopt a paradigm shift from managerialism to professionalism. Managerial leadership is an essential component of successful leadership. Transformational leadership effectively improves student outcomes (Leithwood, 1994), but only with effective implementation. Many schools have carried out the first phase of the change process, but have not continued into the second and third phases. This case study shows that without essential systems and mental mode changes, educational reform will not be effective and consistent. Although curriculum development with project learning, interdisciplinary school-based teaching and learning has been implemented in schools with the creation of new posts such as PSMCD and APSM, without the support of the principals and the co-operation of senior administrators, the curriculum reforms will not be successful.

Further educational reform now needs to consider how to develop whole school professionalism, which will guide teachers to construct and carry out life-long learning for the next generation. Moreover, to promote Hong Kong as an education hub (Education Commission Working Group on the Development of Education Services in Hong Kong, 2011), the primary schools should prepare students to be young learners with a global view of active citizenship. Educational reforms that follow global changes too closely without considering our own context may hinder leadership development in the Pacific-Asia areas especially in Mainland China. Nowadays, the developed countries are looking at the Fourth Way of educational reform (Shirley, 2011). However, without foundations, logical thinking, practical investigation, educational research, contextual needs analysis and pedagogical support, we can only follow behind the modern world and cannot make good decisions that are appropriate to our own region and its place in the global world. As educators, we need to be concerned about the relationship between management and educational leadership at schools. Moreover, we should pay more attention to the relationship between the needs of our own city and educational reform. Preparing the next generation to face the complex and diverse world as potential leaders is our responsibility. There are still many things that educational leaders need to discuss about the best ways to nurture our students. The author hopes this case study will allow people to use the parts to see the whole. Then, our educational reform can match the needs of our stakeholders.



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## 香港小學教育變革與領導的個案研究

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### 摘要

本研究採用 Dimmock 和 Walker 兩位學者的跨文化比較的框架為香港兩所小學之教育變革和領導文化作探究。分析表明，香港學校課程變革受全球化社會教育大趨勢、本港教育變革次文化，以及學校自身過程的領導變化等因素影響。個案展示與比較不同領導風格處身宏觀文化社會、國家與全球化下對本港過去十五年教育改革的影響。

### 關鍵詞

跨文化比較框架，教育變革，教育領導，敘事探究