

Developing middle managers' leadership in Hong Kong schools

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Abstract

As the millennium unfolds itself public education in Hong Kong is facing both enormous changes and tremendous challenges. The Hong Kong Government has affirmed its strong commitment to build up a strong education system for its people. The school organization and its governance has to be restructured in the direction of a more democratic and collaborative professional community. The implementation of school-based management in Hong Kong has resulted in the devolution of more responsibilities and authority to schools. A shift from hierarchical leadership to distributed and transformative leadership is needed. There is no doubt about the significance of principal leadership in schools. However, without the assistance of effective middle managers, it will be difficult to meet the targets for quality school education. Much recent literature has revealed that middle managers play an important role in leading school reforms. However, a significant number of middle managers admitted experiencing difficulty in enacting their leadership role in their workplace. It is of paramount importance that a robust leadership team of middle managers is built in schools and that they are equipped with more leadership concepts and skills.

Since 2003, Yu has conducted research and developmental work on the leadership of middle managers. Focus groups have been regularly conducted to solicit the input of both school middle managers and school heads on needs assessment. The collected data have been used to design training projects. About 5 middle managers' leadership training projects (Yu et al., 2009; Yu, 2007; Yu et al., 2005; Yu et al., 2004; Yu, 2004) supported by the Quality Education Fund of the Hong Kong Government and school sponsoring bodies have been organized and reported. Before designing training programmes, focus groups of primary and secondary school middle managers were conducted to solicit their needs. Whereas focus groups of primary and secondary principals were conducted to explore their expectation of the training programmes. Surveys have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the respondents. Different modes of middle manager training or leadership development projects have been explored. Three modes identified are: short-term, long term and mixed. The short-term mode delivers theories and skills in management and leadership through talks and workshops in a few days. In the long-term mode, there are five stages: preparation, collective learning, shadowing and coaching, try-out and debriefing. The mixed mode includes key elements of the short-term mode and long-term mode. Studies on these leadership projects will be reviewed and

reported.

Besides, the concept of team leadership initiated by Adair has been adopted in the past few years by the author. A questionnaire of team leadership with 36 items has been designed and research has been conducted to evaluate middle managers' leadership in primary and secondary schools. About 400 middle managers from different schools have been invited to complete the questionnaires. Correlation, analysis of variance, t-test, etc. are utilized to analyze the data. Findings will be shared. Difficulties of middle managers will be explored. Outcomes of the research are expected to contribute to building knowledge of team leadership of middle managers.