

**School Principals' Contribution to Educational Inequity.
An Analysis of the Structure-Agency Relationship
in the Centrally Controlled Education System of Singapore**

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Singapore's educational success is perhaps synonymous with high average student achievement in many international studies such as PISA and TIMSS. However, the high levels of student achievement also sit uncomfortably with pronounced inequity in educational opportunities and outcomes among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The present paper investigates the roles Singapore school principals as key policy implementers play in contributing to the state of educational inequality among students. More specifically, the analysis examines how school principals exacerbate – rather than counteract - educational inequality in their enactment of education policy premised on the principle of meritocracy. The analysis also examines the challenges with which at least some principals are confronted as they endeavor to exercise their professional autonomy to mitigate the educational inequality in the centrally controlled education system in Singapore. The analysis epitomizes the tension between systemic structures – inherent in centrally determined policies - and individuals' agency – for school principals - in contributing to educational inequality and inequity in a meritocratic, high-performing Asian education system.



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