National College for
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Confident school leadership: an East Asian perspective

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Contents

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Summary

High-performing school education systems in East Asia have received increased attention as numerous countries attempt to match their success. Despite widespread knowledge of their high levels of performance, comparatively little is understood of the successful reforms that led to these improvements. This thinkpiece looks at the development of confident school leadership in these systems, highlighting numerous reforms that could be successfully employed around the world. At the heart of these reforms is a clear understanding that to improve schooling is a behavioural change process. To improve student learning is to change learning behaviours. To improve teaching is to change teaching behaviours. To improve school leadership therefore is to change school leaders' behaviours so they can lead behavioural change in schools. A number of policies are discussed that illustrate how the change process can be achieved.

1. Introduction

Confident school leaders can have an enormous positive impact on a system.[1] There is no doubting their importance to improving learning and teaching.[2] Empowering school principals with the autonomy to act on their abilities can bring considerable results, giving school autonomy a role in developing effective leadership in schools.[3]

Some school leaders in England lack confidence to use their increased autonomy and freedoms to improve their schools. This thinkpiece discusses if this is unexpected and what can be done about it.

While there is strong evidence that increasing school autonomy can empower and improve practices in specific schools, there is less evidence that school autonomy will lift performance across entire systems.[4] Moreover, the marginal improvement that autonomy can bring is more likely to arrive only if accompanied by commensurate school accountability.[5] Results from the 2009 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), show that in England there are positive but only marginal gains that can be made from further increases in autonomy.[6] We should therefore not be surprised if recent increases in autonomy in England have allowed only some school principals to flourish. Confident and effective school principals will take advantage of any autonomy they are given, lifting the performance of their (and hopefully other) schools. Some will do amazing things, extending the boundaries of how we had previously considered the role of the school principal.[7]

But other school leaders will not utilise their autonomy. They won't change their behaviours. Their leadership and their schools will remain largely unchanged. This is not surprising. If all school principals responded to autonomy with great leaps forward, the impact of autonomy on student learning would be greater. But that is not the case. PISA shows that autonomy has a positive impact. The literature shows that it is important for many schools. But the impact on entire systems is often not large. We must therefore expect large variation in how school leaders respond to autonomy. Having a section of school leaders that are lacking the confidence (or abilities) to utilise their newfound autonomy is not specific to England. It happens in most systems.

Why this occurs is somewhat unclear. Intuitively it makes sense that some school leaders will flourish while others will falter (or remain unchanged). Leadership in any industry varies in its effectiveness across organisations. The focus should therefore be on how to lift the performance of those who do not respond to their additional responsibilities and autonomy. This paper posits that a focus on behavioural change can provide a way forward in addressing these issues.

Behavioural change is key to turning around performance. Understanding the changes required in leadership and teaching has been fundamental to the success of several high-performing education systems, particularly in East Asia.[8] Behavioural change is not merely a key feature of education reform. In many cases, it is education reform. To improve student learning is to change learning behaviours. To improve teaching is to change teaching and work behaviours in schools. And to improve school leadership is to change leadership behaviours.

Improving school leadership requires changing the behaviours of those school principals not utilising their newfound autonomy to improve their schools. To achieve this requires a thorough understanding of the change process and how it operates in school education. It also requires an understanding of the context in which school leaders in England operate. Change requires a clear vision that is built and reinforced through multiple mechanisms. The current context can make this difficult for some school leaders.

1 See for example, Hopkins, 2007; Pont et al, 2008a.
2 Barber & Mourshed, 2007.
3 Caldwell, 2002.
4 Caldwell & Spinks, 1998; Pont et al, 2008b.
5 Barber & Mourshed, 2007
6 OECD, 2010.
7 Hargreaves, 2012.
8 Jensen et al, 2012.

This paper analyses how to create confident school leaders, drawing on lessons from high-performing systems in East Asia. The role of behavioural change in school leadership is a constant theme. Section 2 analyses school leadership in the English context of a school system that is undergoing significant reforms. Section 2.1 asks whether we should be surprised that some school leaders lack the confidence to utilise their autonomy.

Section 3 looks at effective leadership in high-performing systems in East Asia. It begins by placing leadership development within the overall strategy of many of these systems and what that means for prioritising aspects of leadership development. Specific examples of developing school leaders are then discussed in Section 3.3 (Hong Kong) and Section 3.4 (Singapore). Section 4 presents a variety of practices of spreading effective leadership across school systems, with examples drawn from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. Section 5 presents some concluding comments on a way forward for school leaders and the National College given what can be learnt from high-performing systems in East Asia.

2. School leadership in a reforming English school system

A number of reforms by the coalition government have increased autonomy and choice in school education in England. Reforms bring new providers into school education, increase autonomy for schools and choice for parents. At the same time, some government interventions are being reduced, particularly those from the 'middle tier' (local authorities). This increases school autonomy that allows schools to respond to their local context and needs. It empowers school leaders by giving them decision making power to properly lead their school and address their particular concerns.[9] Decision making rests with those with the greatest local information: school leaders. School autonomy advocates argue that it also reduces the negative impacts of bureaucracy and government-led systems.[10]

But other government interventions have increased. School accountability has risen alongside school autonomy. Minimum standards for schools have increased. A new Ofsted framework increases the focus on quality teaching and learning and puts around one-third of schools that were formerly considered 'satisfactory' into 'requires improvement' status. Schools that are failing are often taken over by academy sponsor chains. These reforms have changed the demands placed on school leaders.

It is important to understand how these changes affect school principals if they are to be developed into effective leaders.

2.1 Should we be surprised that many school leaders lack confidence to use their autonomy?

A number of studies have analysed the impact of school autonomy, the most notable being the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Of these, longitudinal studies are the most comprehensive. They show that autonomy will have different impacts on systems at different stages of development (particularly in developing economies) but that the impact in all systems is positive, if not overly large. Table 1 presents three measures of autonomy: academic content; personnel; and budget. It shows the estimated impact of changes in these levels of autonomy and the estimated learning gains for the UK.[11] Given the high levels of autonomy already present in the UK in 2009 (as reported by school principals sampled in PISA), large gains in student learning should not be expected from further increases in autonomy.

This finding is not proof that increasing autonomy is the wrong thing to do. Highlighting it here shows that we should not be surprised that increasing autonomy has not led to significant improvements in all schools. This is not something specific to England, but is common across most countries. Some school principals will flourish, others will not and the result is a relatively minor improvement in overall learning gains. We should expect a considerable number of school principals to need significant support and capacity building to make significant gains over a sustained period.

9 Caldwell, 2002.
10 Hoxby, 2003.
11 Data for England were not available as the PISA dataset provides only UK figures.

Table 1: Impact of performance from increase in autonomy: Estimates from PISA for the UK

	% of schools with autonomy in 2009	Estimated coefficient	PISA impact (of moving to 100% autonomy)	Equivalent increase in years of learning
Academic content autonomy	87	16.3	2.1 points	5% of one year
Personnel autonomy	72	38.8	10.9 points	30% of one year
Budget autonomy	95	25.1	1.4 points	3% of one year

Sources: Hanushek et al, 2011; OECD 2004, authors' calculations

Parental expectations and school leadership

Data from the PISA 2009 school principal questionnaire shows that school leaders in the UK perceive greater competitive pressures than school principals in most other PISA/OECD countries: 73 per cent of UK school principals report that they compete with two or more schools for students. This ranks the UK ninth highest of PISA countries for competitive intensity.

School leaders feel pressure to respond to parents' needs. The evidence shows that families are interested in many facets of school education. PISA data from a 2009 survey of parents in a small number of selected countries presents the main international evidence on what families look for in schools.

Table 2: What families look for when choosing a school

	% of parents
Safe environment	92
School climate	85
Reputation	85
Academic achievements	78
Course offerings	74
Distance from home	42
Financial aid available	40
Cost	37
Teaching approach	31
Religious philosophy	24
Family member attended school	22

Source: PISA 2009 Parent questionnaire. Countries included: Chile, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Korea, New Zealand, Poland, and Portugal.

Table 2 shows that families emphasise safety, climate and reputation when choosing a school. Academic achievements are also important. But these should not be confused with value-added measures of performance. Rather, they reflect the overall performance of the school that could be due to school performance and/or the socio-economic characteristics of the school (with associated peer effects).

In a climate of increased school autonomy, the accountability of school leaders to parents increases. School leaders must attract and answer to families through improvements in safety, school climate, reputation and overall academic achievement and various course offerings.

These accountability pressures are in addition to the existing – and probably larger – forms of school accountability that have increased in England. School leaders are accountable for student results and are held accountable for school performance through a variety of methods, with Ofsted perhaps the major driver of school accountability. This means that school leaders are held accountable by more than just market pressures and the accountability of government interventions such as Ofsted may remain stronger than market pressures and parents.

This may be increasingly difficult for less confident, and perhaps less able, school leaders to overcome. Potentially competing objectives and demands placed on school principals need to be clarified and aligned. Ofsted clearly plays a key role; it is an accountability tool itself and affects other accountability pressures. For example, parents can be guided by Ofsted reports of school effectiveness. Efforts to improve school leader development will therefore have to align the development focus with that of the Ofsted accountability focus.

3. What is effective leadership in high-performing systems in East Asia?

It is impossible to describe leadership development in high-performing systems in East Asia without discussing the strategic policy context in which it operates. This is precisely because leadership development is driven by the broader school education reform strategy.

Education strategy concentrates on student learning, ensuring policies remain focused on what is important. Strategy aims to take student learning from its current state to where policy makers and system leaders want it to be. As teaching is the most effective way to improve student learning, the strategy aims to take learning and teaching from where they are to where they should be at a specified time in the future.

Hong Kong provides an excellent example of effective education strategy. The strategy for reform is "very clearly focused on the 'core business of learning'".[12] The strategy began with a review of the entire education system in the context of the skills required to succeed in a knowledge economy. The strategy aimed to shift the long held understanding of learning as 'knowledge acquisition' to one where students are more deeply engaged with learning activities, interacting, creating and exploring new knowledge.[13] This shift allowed Hong Kong to map the difference between what student learning had been previously and what Hong Kong wanted it to become.

There are clear implications for school leadership. The strategic steps to improve school leadership taken in high-performing systems in East Asia are the same as those taken by effective schools throughout the world. For these systems it is imperative to paint a clear but detailed picture of what learning and teaching in systems and schools should be. This doesn't mean that schools don't have any autonomy over what learning and teaching is in their school, but that they must develop this understanding in their schools within system-wide parameters. In most cases, schools build on and adapt system-wide objectives and descriptions of effective learning and teaching to suit their own local needs.

The objectives for learning and teaching need to be sufficiently detailed to guide implementation of the strategy. It is here that many systems and schools often fall short. There is often a remarkable reluctance to provide clarity on what is and is not effective learning and teaching. And often even more reluctance to illustrate this in sufficient detail. This needs to be overcome. Sustained meaningful change is difficult to achieve without it.

As an example, consider the scenario where a Key Stage 3 science teacher walks into their classroom and has a group of students with literacy at such low levels that they cannot participate in the science lesson; they cannot read the science problem in a sufficiently meaningful manner to participate. Does the science teacher know what to do? The teacher should know how to provide an effective learning experience for these students **and** to address their poor literacy either within or outside of the class. If not, then we could argue that the education strategy (either at the system or school level) is either insufficiently detailed to provide the required information, or is failing the most important test of effective implementation.

The need for a detailed picture of what learning and teaching should be in schools and classrooms emphasises that education strategy is trying to achieve sustained behavioural, and often cultural, change. To change learning is to change the learning behaviours of students. To change teaching is to change the teaching and work behaviours of teachers. Strategy is effective if these are changing on a sustained basis to create self-improving schools and systems.

12 Jensen et al, 2012

13 Jensen et al, 2012.

3.1 Education strategy: behavioural change

There are four broad requirements to undertake sustained behavioural change. All must be utilised. Invariably, if one is missing then behavioural change is not sustained. The four key elements of behavioural change are: [14]

1. **A clear and convincing rationale for change**. Creating a vision for improved learning is the most convincing rationale for change. All teachers want to improve the level and manner in which their students learn. A clear and detailed vision for improved learning must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders. This is important at all levels of education. For systems, it forms the basis of improving learning and teaching. For lifting school effectiveness, it is often the primary step that school leaders must take in their school.[15] School leaders must set clear objectives for what is and is not effective teaching and learning in their school. Invariably, this raises expectations for not only student performance, but for teaching behaviours in classrooms.

2. **Role models are visible and act consistently.** Role modelling of behaviour is critical. All effective leaders know that they cannot ask teachers to do something that they do not do themselves. As an example, when a new system of teacher evaluation was rolled out across Singapore in 2002-05, it was applied to the ministry and school leaders before it was applied to teachers. The evaluative system had a strong 360 review component. This meant that teachers participated and became familiar with the evaluation system before it was applied to them. This increased acceptance and effectiveness of the system once it was introduced.

   For school leaders, this is critical. Teaching in high-performing systems in East Asia is a highly collaborative profession with strong mentoring and professional learning. School leaders must continuously be visibly role-modelling these behaviours in schools. They will observe classes and provide feedback to teachers, and include themselves in high level professional learning activities.

3. **Capacity building**. School leaders must have the skills and job requirement to continually build the skills and abilities of their teachers. They need the capabilities to create behavioural, and often cultural change, to implement new learning and teaching behaviours in their classrooms and across schools.

   Some modes of professional learning are more successful under a behavioural change approach. Development that continually reinforces specific teaching and leadership behaviours will have a greater impact than one-off courses and workshops.

4. **Reinforcement systems are consistent.** Teacher and school leader appraisal and feedback are the main reinforcement mechanisms in school education. School leaders must be able to develop and execute effective systems of teacher appraisal and feedback. In turn, the appraisal of school leaders has to focus on the degree to which they have successfully developed teacher appraisal and feedback systems in their school.

   The behaviours developed in schools must be continually reinforced if change is to be sustained. This emphasises collaborative appraisal and feedback mechanisms with extensive classroom observation and feedback. Providing feedback to teachers on what they do in the classroom is a highly effective form of professional learning that has been shown to have a strong positive impact on student learning.[16] It also reinforces predetermined behaviours in schools and classrooms. The nature of the process also increases collaboration. The greater the peer collaboration, the more opportunities for a new culture to be built within schools.

14 Lawson & Price, 2003.

15 This applies to schools in western and Asian settings. For example, Jensen & Reichl (2011) showed that the first step in improving teacher appraisal and feedback in many Australian schools was to create a vision for improved student learning in the school. This was followed by a detailed analysis of what effective teaching is in a school. School leaders that failed to take these initial steps invariably failed to implement effective teacher appraisal and feedback systems in their school.

16 Hattie, 2009.

Successful reform requires **all** of these elements to be present. All must be aligned and pushing toward the same objectives for learning and teaching. Cross-messages kill the change process. Teachers and school leaders must have clarity on what is expected of them in the change process. If they are unclear then change is very difficult to achieve. If they receive conflicting messages (for example professional learning that pushes behaviours one way but evaluation that pushes another way), then the change process dies. This is why the first step is crucial. It is the foundation on which change is built.

Alignment is critical when determining the focus and mode of developing school leaders. Development must be aligned to how school principals are evaluated and recognised. This requires strong communication and cooperation between leadership development institutes and evaluative bodies. Both must be developing and re-enforcing the same behavioural changes in school principals. In Hong Kong, this was achieved through an incredibly detailed strategic plan. In Singapore, continual feedback and communication between institutions remains a key mechanism for improving learning and teaching.[17]

In systems such as England with a greater emphasis on market mechanisms, we need to be cognisant of how these mechanisms reinforce behaviours. As discussed earlier, the school education market encourages and reinforces behaviours that are visible to parents. Other reinforcement mechanisms such as school evaluations and the appraisal of school principals must either complement these behaviours or encourage school principals to keep the focus on predetermined objectives for aligning policies and programmes to improve learning and teaching.

3.2 Less is more: prioritisation and behavioural change

Change requires clarity. People find it difficult to change their behaviour (in this case leadership behaviours) when there are not clearly defined objectives and their role in achieving those objectives is ambiguous or unclear. Clarity is therefore essential.

Clarity needs to be coupled with brevity. But not brevity in the sense that leadership roles are poorly defined with short but ambiguous and all-encompassing statements. Brevity in the number of leadership behaviours that are being emphasised in a system. Behavioural change is an incredibly difficult process. It is more effective to focus on a few crucial areas than to create a laundry list of leadership styles and practices. Long lists will never be implemented effectively.

An effective change strategy therefore has a small number of areas upon which change is focused, and provides clarity on people's roles in achieving that change. For effective reform, less is more. This needs to be recognised at all levels of the system. It is difficult and requires careful prioritisation.

Prioritisation is essential to effective reform for two main reasons. First, the behavioural change process puts an emphasis on a clear and convincing rationale. Mixed signals are not just unhelpful, they are detrimental. Behavioural change requires a focus on the critical change elements that improve learning and teaching. Second, behavioural change shifts the emphasis of education policy from design to implementation. Effective implementation separates high-performing systems from the rest of the world. It is difficult and very resource intensive. To communicate change, role model behaviour, build capacity, and reinforce new behaviours to create sustained change is expensive. It requires resources that significantly increase the costs of individual programmes.

Systems or leaders that do not focus on implementation will have less expensive programmes and policies. Costs will largely reflect policy design and the direct costs of running the policy or programme. An emphasis on implementation substantially raises the costs (but also effectiveness). Given budget constraints that are relatively fixed (and these days often reduced) effective implementation means that fewer policies and programmes can be chosen. Concentrating on fewer reforms is a difficult but necessary strategy. Saying no to policies and stakeholders is not easy. Doing what matters is easy. **Only** doing what matters is incredibly difficult.

Effective implementation for sustained behavioural change therefore requires prioritisation. The specific areas prioritised for reform depend on the needs of each system. But it needs to start with an education strategy that aims to take learning and teaching from its current state to where we want it to be.

17 Jensen et al, 2012.

For the development of school leaders prioritisation decisions should be made by policy makers. If such decisions are not clear, then leadership institutes like the National College need to prioritise the areas of school leadership that will be developed through an evidence-based approached. These should reflect the behavioural change that is either happening or should be happening in schools. It should then be reinforced by various evaluative mechanisms.

3.2.1 Prioritisation and innovation

If some school leaders are not performing fundamental tasks to improve learning and teaching in their school, then new ideas, requirements, and innovations are not only less likely to be taken up, they may be counter-productive. Prioritisation can sit uneasily next to the spread of innovation across schools, especially in an autonomous system with large disparities in the confidence and abilities of school leaders.

The evidence shows two things quite clearly:

1. TALIS and other studies have shown that innovation – at least around key aspects of schooling, is not automatically generated by autonomy, choice and competition.[18]

2. There is a growing literature with a wealth of case studies showing how innovative schools and, in some cases, networks can be. The power of reform and innovation in these schools is immense.[19]

This leaves us with a situation of innovation being very powerful in specific instances leading to a desire to harness and spread these innovations. But also a recognition that innovation does not occur, at least to a significant degree, across entire systems. In fact, on average, schools in many systems are still stuck in many of the practices reformers have been trying to tackle for decades.[20]

For example, if we consider two school leaders. One is confident and successful and runs a large secondary school that is increasing student performance at an above average rate. She is also an innovative leader. She has introduced new information technologies into her school that allow students to access the curriculum anywhere in the world. Since the introduction of this initiative, student engagement has risen considerably.

Now, consider the second school leader. He is lacking in confidence and his secondary school is underperforming. Professional collaboration in his school is low. Teacher appraisal and feedback is perfunctory rather than developmental.

There is little doubt that extensive capacity building for the second school principal is required to set his school on a meaningful school improvement trajectory. But where does this leave the first school leader? She has been innovative and the current trend in school education is to spread effective innovation.

What to do? Do we focus on the innovative school leader or engage in a gradual improvement process for the second leader? This needs to be addressed through explicit prioritisation that determines resource allocations. A behavioural change process prioritises school improvement over innovation. If all the high quality innovations of the first school leader were to be emphasised, the change process for the less confident school leader becomes even more difficult. The list of changes he must make becomes long, creating confusion and unclear resource prioritisation. As a school leader, he needs to be able to walk before being required to run.

Improvement is a behavioural and often cultural change process. It is incredibly difficult and is rarely, if ever, achieved across a system in the short-term. It requires clear consistent implementation over several years.

18 OECD, 2009.
19 For example, see Hargreaves, 2012.
20 OECD, 2009.

Does that mean you shouldn't encourage and promote innovation? No. But it says a lot about how you do it. If you cloud or change your message or actions you will reduce overall improvement. So the difficult thing is to encourage innovation while recognising the requirements of system-wide improvement and therefore the limitations that need to be placed on alternative programmes that require resources and/or attention. This is an important aspect. If you have too many messages, too many behaviours that need to be changed, too many alternatives, it simply won't work. Less is always more in a change process.

3.3 Behavioural change and leadership development in Hong Kong

Hong Kong provides a clear example of improving school leaders' capacity and confidence as part of broader reforms that succeeded in important behavioural change. Education strategy in Hong Kong described where learning is and where it should be to provide a clear and convincing rationale for change. This was completed through a detailed review of the education system that resulted in a long-term and detailed strategy and implementation plan. Hong Kong has stuck with the strategy for over 10 years, viewing much of the last decade as one of implementation.

Developing confident school leaders was central to success. Capacity building emphasised two key elements for behavioural change. First, school leaders received training in the new objectives of learning and teaching. School principals had to master the new practices, the rationale for their introduction, and other associated reforms such as curriculum reform. Second, confident school leaders had to be drivers of change in their schools. Development focused on implementation in schools and leading behavioural change.

To achieve this, a new leadership programme was developed for all principals including aspiring, newly appointed and serving principals.[21] Serving principals were given structured programmes that individually identified, planned, and facilitated professional development enabling them to implement reforms.[22]

Aspiring principals had to complete a 'Certification for Principalship' process that included a needs analysis, as well as a 'Preparation for Principalship' course. [23] Both the programmes for serving principals and those for aspiring principals focus on implementation of the reform agenda and leading behavioural change in schools.[24]

Six key areas of responsibility for principals were covered:

1. strategic direction and policy environment
2. learning, teaching and curriculum
3. teachers' professional growth and development
4. staff and resource management
5. quality assurance and accountability
6. external communication[25]

All of these included elements of behavioural change. This encompassed developing teachers for paradigm change in learning and teaching, cultural change, and what this means for teaching as a learning profession. Engaging stakeholders was also considered important. School leader development encompassed accountability systems and building connections with communities.

21 Hong Kong Education Bureau (undated-a)
22 Ibid.
23 New principals also complete an induction programme run by the Education Bureau and receive individualised structured support programs for these principals.
24 Jensen et al, 2012.
25 Hong Kong Education Bureau (undated-b)

Implementation leaders were also a key element of successful behavioural change in Hong Kong schools. This extends the notion of school leader past the school principal, highlighting distributive leadership in a change process. Curriculum leader posts were created in every primary school, and in secondary schools curriculum leaders were assigned to each key learning area.

Curriculum leaders led teams of teachers and had a direct influence on how reforms were implemented in their school. They were the school champions of effective implementation of new pedagogy. They were provided with extensive training, including 100 hours of training on curriculum and pedagogy reforms (some of which was with their school principal to ensure a consistent understanding of the reforms to be implemented). Follow up training was also conducted three and six months following the initial training.[26]

The Hong Kong Education Bureau undertook multiple steps to assure the **quality** of the training. They selected facilitators carefully and limited their numbers to ensure the quality and consistency of message. They briefed facilitators on a one-to-one basis to ensure they understood the purpose of the reform and the training. Furthermore, they carefully vetted training materials to ensure quality.

3.4 Capacity building: school leadership recruitment and training in Singapore

Developing confident and effective school leaders begins with the selection of school principals. The ministry nominates potential school leaders, based on comprehensive teacher appraisal and development. Observations of their work and discussions with senior staff and other colleagues are used to assess the quality of their contributions to the school, professional development, teaching and learning of their students, and collaboration with parents. This forms the basis of a judgement of the potential of teachers for leadership positions. Once identified through this process, potential leaders must then go through several interviews with senior administration and ministry officials, including the director of schools and then pass situational assessments of their potential as future leaders. Only then are they placed on a leadership track in the Singapore teacher career structure.

New teacher career structures and evaluation systems were introduced in Singapore following concerns in the 1990s and early 2000s of rising attrition, low status and a general belief that the careers and evaluation of teachers were ill-suited to the requirements of the job. A new career structure (depicted in Figure 1) established three tracks: a teaching track that promotes teachers up to the principal master teacher position; a leadership track that contains positions from subject and year level heads up to the director general of education; and senior specialist track that provides a career track for subject and pedagogical experts.

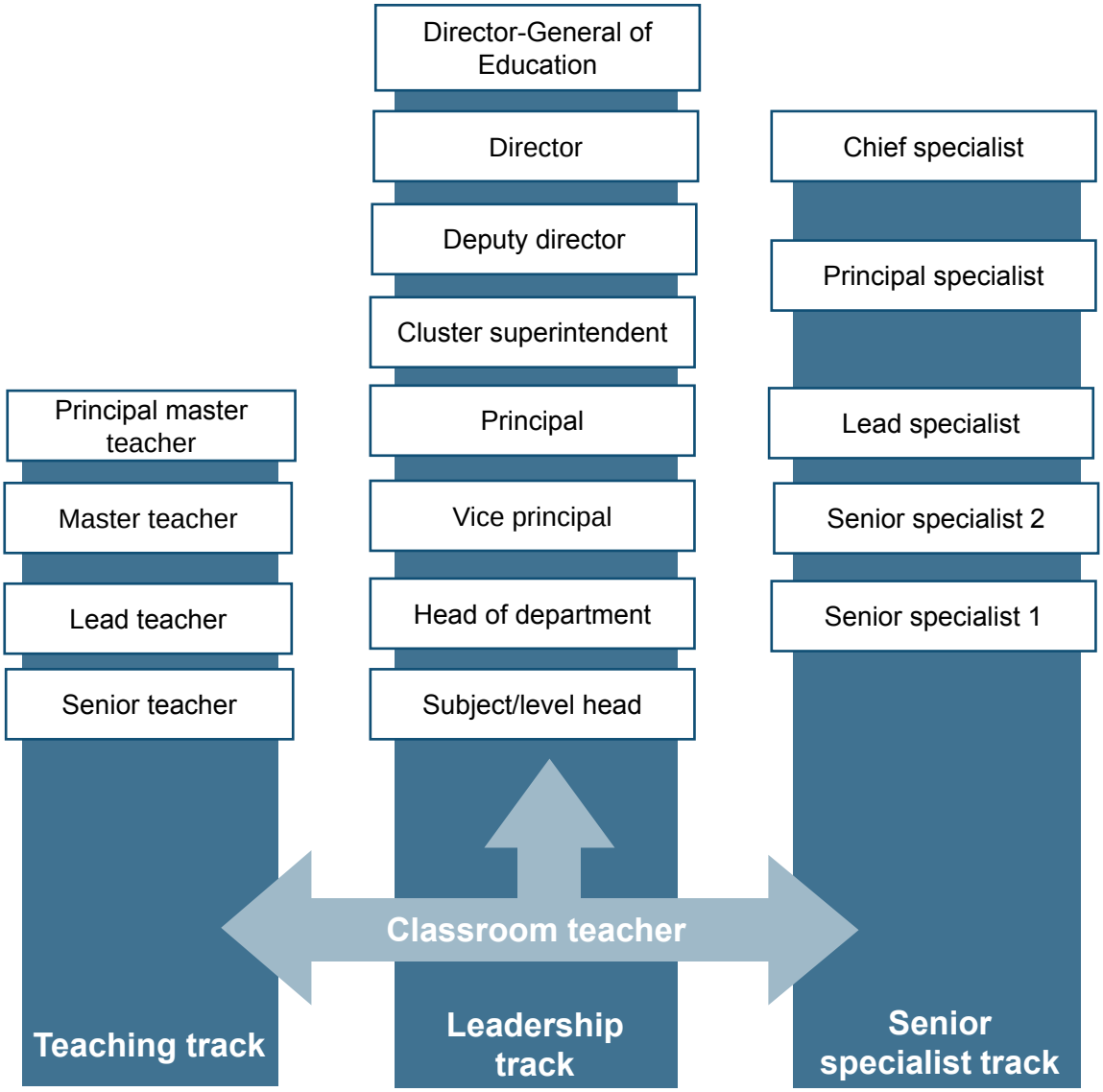
Teachers' leadership abilities are assessed through the evaluative programme **Current Estimated Potential** that collects information from teachers' peers, observes teachers in their work, and collects portfolio assessments and evidence. Combined with this is the evaluative information collected through the Enhanced Performance Management Scheme (EPMS).

The EPMS is a comprehensive developmental system of teacher appraisal and feedback. It provides:

- Ongoing constructive feedback and mid-year and end-of-year summative reviews.
- Opportunities for considerable self-evaluation and reflection that is linked to professional learning.
- A development plan that is established at the start of each year, and includes ongoing performance monitoring and constructive feedback.
- Extensive documentation of teachers' career progression and their strengths and weaknesses. This provides a platform to assess teachers' leadership potential.

26 Jensen et al, 2012.

Figure 1: Teacher career tracks in Singapore



After progressing through the initial steps on the leadership track, potential school leaders undertake a six month (full time) Leadership In Education programme provided by the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

The Leadership In Education programme is undertaken by selected vice principals and ministry officials.[27] It follows an executive education model with greater similarities to what one would see in a MBA programme than in a school education programme. For example, industry leaders provide interactive sessions in leadership and strategic management to guide decision-making and organisational reform. Participants also have an industrial visit to converse with senior executives at multi-national organisations in Singapore, and an international visit to a range of education and other organisations. Exposure to different types of leadership and strategic reform encourages critical self-reflection on individual leadership in schools.

Leadership skills are the focus, with the programme focusing on critical self-reflection, and building change in organisations. Successfully completing the programme is a requirement before reaching the level of school principal, but participants still receive full salary and do not have to pay tuition fees (they are covered by the ministry).

27 National Institute of Education, 2011.

Key aspects of the course include a focus on:

- **School leadership, vision and culture** – crafting a personal philosophy of leadership through critical self-reflection of individual's thinking, choices and actions. This includes the moral dimension of school leadership as well as their daily work activities.
- **Educational leadership through complexity** – understanding complexity and the rapid nature of change in organisations and how this affects people.
- **Strategic management** – management and business strategies that emphasise how to lead, develop and shape schools for competitive advantage.
- **Design thinking: innovation and values** – leading change in organisations that create new organisational values in which people can act. The emphasis is on using design thinking tools and technologies that accelerate innovation.
- **Evaluation and assessment** – reinforcing the critical self-reflection element of the Leadership In Education programme, a focus on student assessments (summative and formative) looks at best practice and leading reform of assessment structures in schools.
- **Collaborative and innovative learning** – groups of about six students complete a Creative Action Project that builds innovative models of schooling and learning. Each group is attached to a school where they are required to develop innovative solutions for the school 15 years in the future.
- **Mentoring** – the mentoring programme is an integral part of the programme. All participants have a mentor. It is envisaged that the mentor relationship will not cease with the completion of the programme, but continue throughout school leaders' careers. Career-long mentoring complements the development of networks through the course and ongoing professional learning. Networks have been referred to as a 'social safety net', where peers work together, ask questions and seek help to address issues in their school.

The programme is continually evaluated through surveys and focus groups, and feedback from the ministry and current participants.

Successful candidates are then matched to specific schools. This is an important process where the skills and abilities of school leaders are assessed against the specific needs of each school. Again, the change process is important. Transformational leaders are matched to different schools than leaders who are better suited to consolidate reforms.

Executive leadership development

Leadership development programmes in leading business schools such as INSEAD and IMD in Europe also emphasise the importance of reflective practice and learning to learn; an essential component of leading behavioural change in an organisation. In essence this means that the aim is to equip leaders with the capacity for continually learning from their experience (Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011).

These programmes revolve around a series of small group workshops over three to five days. Group membership is constant and consists of participants together with one or two staff who work as behavioural consultants. Groups work on a range of tasks and activities, indoor and outdoor, which effectively force the participants into relatively intense group discussion and decision-making. Each task is watched by the consultants, with time made for discussion and reflection. The purpose is to use this real and immediate experience as the raw material for learning about leadership and, crucially, learning to build in a reflective practice around ones experience to ensure that experience is turned into learning.

That is, understanding how groups work and why and how individuals think and behave in the way they do when in a group context. This is fundamental leadership learning and is necessary to understand the different types of behavioural change across individuals, groups and organisations.

4. Spreading best practice

It is doubtful that any education system has achieved effective school leadership in all schools. All systems have some failing schools and point to improved leadership as one mechanism to turn around performance.

High-performing school systems in East Asia have lower inequality than in England.[28] There has been no study showing that this is due to confident leadership but it is worth looking at how programmes in these systems are trying to reduce inequalities in leadership, teaching and learning between schools and areas. Key policies include:

— A school principal rotation policy in Singapore aims to build confident and effective school leadership and spreads it throughout the system. School principals are rotated through different schools every five to seven years. It is considered that this is the period in which school principals will have reached the maximum impact they can have on their school. Decades-long tenure at a school is rejected. Empire building is prevented. Instead, school principals are continuously given new challenges at new schools.

  When school principals are first appointed they are matched to schools that best suit their skills and abilities. For some this will reflect the period of reform that a school is going through, for others it will focus on context. Some school principals may be suited to leading behavioural change in schools in disadvantaged areas or with a larger degree of students with special educational needs.

  Effective leadership and skill development requires new challenging situations to be continually encountered (with sufficient support). Rotation builds skills in leading behavioural change and spreads them throughout the system.

— Master teachers have long been a part of Chinese school education but are now becoming more prominent in high-performing systems in East Asia. These teachers are the elite. For example, only 0.2 per cent of teachers in Shanghai have reached the position of master teachers. Their role has some similarities to specialist leaders of education in England but are generally more senior in the hierarchy. Master teachers are leaders of pedagogical development in the system, mentoring other teachers, providing demonstration lessons and leading teachers' professional learning. As such, they gain experience and develop expertise in changing learning and teaching behaviours in schools.

  In Shanghai, master teachers are excellent researchers. To even be considered for the position of master teacher, a teacher must have an excellent track record in school-based action research, with publication in district-level and municipal-level publications. Disseminating this research to develop other teachers distributes improvements in pedagogy throughout the system. For example, Hong Kong still pays for 50 master teachers to come from mainland China each year to work with teachers in Hong Kong to lift teacher effectiveness.

  In Singapore, master teachers are generally assigned to clusters of schools to improve teaching and pedagogical approaches. The role of principal master teacher was introduced in 2010 above the master teacher role in the hierarchy with a salary range equivalent to school principals. Principal master teachers are responsible for improving teaching across the system. They are considered the pedagogical experts in their subjects in the country and lead behavioural change in their area.

  As leaders of change, master teachers and principal master teachers teach demonstration classes in schools, lead teacher professional learning, and curricular and pedagogical improvements and innovation in schools.

28 Jensen et al, 2012.

— The empowered management programme is an important policy to reduce between-school inequality in Shanghai. It has some strong similarities with national leaders in education and national support schools in England. The programme contracts high-performing schools to lift the effectiveness of low-performing schools over a two year period (although this is sometimes extended to five years). School leaders move between schools building capacity for school improvement. This complements a system where schools have the autonomy to choose to work in clusters, building partnerships and sharing resources.[29]

Schools are generally 'matched' within districts by district officials. The high-performing school is contracted by the district or the municipality to improve the low-performing school. The contract details the performance targets for the low-performing school, requirements of the high-performing school in helping their matched school, and the support the district will provide.

Extensive monitoring and evaluation assesses whether the high-performing school has been successful in lifting the performance of the low-performing school. If the contract is deemed to be successfully completed, the high-performing school receives the agreed payment.

School principals of the high-performing school have the prime responsibility of lifting the performance of their matched school. They develop an improvement strategy that emphasises leadership development, and changing learning and teaching behaviours. Considerable cultural change is often required. They are also responsible for managing the relationship between the two matched schools.

The school principal must, with input from the district level, make a judgement about capacity in their own school. Do they have the necessary capabilities to improve performance of another school? What would be the impact on both schools? These are fundamental questions that need to be addressed by school principals in high-performing schools. While it does stop school principals entering into some contracts, some high-performing schools will have contracts to turnaround the performance of five or so other schools. This emphasises the capabilities present in the high-performing school and the importance of distributive leadership and succession planning. High-performing schools must have multiple highly effective leaders to ensure their performance is not compromised when key staff are off-site helping other schools.

But we should not consider the contracts as a zero-sum game. The resources used to help a low-performing school should not be viewed as equal to the resources lost in a high-performing school. The sharing of ideas, information, and resources builds effective practice across both schools. This occurs not only through school leaders and teachers moving to and from both schools, but because people's effectiveness increases when they lead behavioural change in different contexts, challenges, and when they are entrusted with improving learning and teaching behaviours across the system – not just in their school.

Evaluation of the work of the high-performing school focuses on six areas:

1. **Strategic planning and objectives:** The plan must have a well defined strategy for school improvement that changes learning and teaching behaviours and is suited to the context of the low-performing school. Objectives must be supported by evidence and be, in some way, measurable.

2. **School leadership and management:** The team from the high-performing school must manage change in a proactive manner. They must become involved at all levels of the school, responding to situations as they arise, providing feedback and advice to teachers and school leaders.

29 Center on International Education Benchmarking (accessed 2012).

3. **School culture and organisation:** The school culture must encourage learning. This is a key aspect of school performance around the world.[30] In Shanghai, this is emphasised and often measured through a focus on learning behaviours in schools that are supported through a strong and nurturing culture. Extra-curricular and social activities are also important components that are regular features of the change strategy.

4. **Teaching effectiveness:** A high-performing school must implement a plan for improving teaching and increasing professional learning in the low-performing school. With this, teaching resources are often transferred and shared between schools. School staff move between both schools, participating in professional learning activities, research and lesson groups and other forms of professional collaboration. These activities develop and continually reinforce new teaching behaviours.

5. **Student outcomes focusing on learning and personal and emotional development:** Student progress is strongly monitored and is an important aspect of the evaluation of the contract between schools. Student progress has a clear focus on academic outcomes but learning behaviours are closely monitored. They are considered a lead indicator for school improvement.

6. **The school's relationship with the community:** The school improvement strategy should include a co-operation plan with families and the local community. Families are part of the change process and strongly influence changes in learning behaviours.

These six areas increase equity across the system as low-performing schools head down a school improvement path. Confident and effective leadership is a strong focus of the programme. While it is difficult to measure, evaluators of contracts between schools try to assess the sustainability of improvements. This depends on whether leadership within the low-performing school has been sufficiently developed to a level that continually improves learning and teaching.

— Reform in Hong Kong emphasised collaboration within and between schools to bring about required behavioural change. Distributed leadership was an important component of this process. In addition to the development of school leaders discussed in Section 3.3, implementation leaders were installed in schools. Given the title of curriculum leaders, these new positions were installed in every primary school and in each key learning area in each secondary school. Curriculum leaders led teams of teachers, implementing behavioural change in their school.

The title curriculum leader is somewhat misleading. A feature of Hong Kong reform is that while curriculum development was an important headline reform, changes to learning and teaching behaviours were the main focus of reform and implementation. Hence, while curriculum leaders in schools were charged with implementing the new curriculum, their most important task was to change learning and teaching in their school and/or key learning area. For example, reform to the curriculum of Chinese reading literacy increased professional collaboration through increased observation and feedback. Curriculum leaders were charged with leading these changes in schools.

As with school principals, curriculum leaders undertook extensive capacity building. Over 100 hours of training was focused on curriculum and pedagogy reform. This included extensive initial training and follow-up sessions three and six months later.[31] Having leadership teams learn together also ensures a consistency of message in schools.

In addition, school leaders received specific training in co-operation and networking not only with other schools but a range of external organisations. This covered school partnership schemes, resource and information sharing, and cross-disciplinary professional support.

30 Fullan, 2002.

31 Hong Kong Education Bureau (Undated-C).

— Teachers must be researchers in Shanghai. It is an important component of a continuously improving system that emphasises professional collaboration. All teachers belong to research groups that meet regularly. In many schools about two hours per week is scheduled for research groups to meet. Groups work on specific projects (for example, introducing new teaching practices, specific curriculum and so on) that are agreed at the start of the year. As a rough guide, the first third of the year is spent analysing the research (for example, literature reviews) on the issue, the second is spent trialling the new approach in the classroom, and the final third of the year is spent analysing the impact of the new approach. Teachers work together in groups of about five or six, observe each other implementing the new approach in their classroom and help each other determine its impact on student learning.

  The research is taken seriously. Effective practices are spread throughout schools and then across districts and school networks. The local district plays an important role in disseminating effective practices by organising demonstration lessons and publishing research findings. For teachers, it is an important component for promotion and essential for becoming a school leader at some point in their career.

  The research role of teachers is growing in other high-performing systems in East Asia. In Singapore, professional learning communities develop research skills amongst teachers and increase school-based research across the system. Singapore does not have the history of teacher led research that is prevalent in Shanghai. Hence, they clearly defined the steps required for effective school-based research that would develop an effective evidence base. Capacity was built by training a research leader in each school that would then train other teachers in the school on effective school-based research. Now research in professional learning communities is more common. Positive findings and effective practices are spread throughout schools. At the same time, teachers' skills for assessing the impact of different teaching behaviours is continually developed.

4.1 The middle tier

In England they are local authorities, in the United States and China they are districts, in some countries they are regions but in all systems these are the bodies that operate between schools and the central administrative authority (be they federal or provincial). This 'middle tier' in England, like many systems, has undergone extensive change in a number of systems. In some systems, like the Netherlands, the role of the middle tier has been greatly reduced. In other systems, the role of the middle tier is considered vital for supporting and developing school leaders. [32]

In Shanghai, the role of the district is of the utmost importance. Districts play a large role that extends into the day-to-day activities of schools, setting guidelines, requirements and development plans for schools. District leaders are rewarded for effective practices that improve school performance. Hence, time and energy is invested in monitoring, developing and maintaining feedback loops between schools and the school district and, in turn, the municipality.

District leaders are expected to have intimate knowledge of their schools, and their strengths and weaknesses. Using this knowledge, the district plays a key role in fostering the spread of best practice across the district. For the empowered management programme, district leaders decide on the most appropriate high-performing school to 'turn around' the low-performing school. The district leaders are not only expected to know the performance levels in each school, but which schools have both the leadership capacity to take on the task of turning around the performance of another school, and the specific skills and leadership abilities that will best fit the problems that need to be addressed in each low-performing school.

Shanghai school districts also play a strong role in teacher research. Districts will publish teachers' research in district-level publications, organise teachers from schools to disseminate research across the district, and develop research networks to build capabilities. In this sense, districts play an important role raising the quality of research-oriented teaching across Shanghai.[33]

32 Barber et al, 2010.

33 Huang Pu District Teacher Training Institute, 2011.

In Singapore, the local superintendent is responsible for the master teachers in their cluster of schools. They deploy the master teachers to those schools they consider would benefit most from their expertise and development. The ‘middle tier’ also plays a key role in matching school leadership positions to the best candidates, identifying forthcoming vacancies and implementing plans for succession.

While the role of the local authority is changing in England, they still play an important role in supporting many schools. They are working alongside new initiatives to spread best practice across the system. Best practice is now also being spread through teaching schools, networks and a variety of other mechanisms. They are taking the lead in research, spreading best practice, and developing teachers and school leaders in multiple schools. It may be appropriate for the National College to monitor the impact of these new mechanisms. It can then be determined if the National College should have a role in helping these new mechanisms spread best practice and develop more confident leaders in schools.

5. Conclusion

Developing confident school leaders across all schools is an incredibly difficult process. This paper has highlighted strategies and practices in high-performing systems in East Asia. A number of key issues have been raised.

First, education reform is a behavioural change process. To improve the way children learn is to change their learning behaviours. To improve teaching is to change teaching and work behaviours in schools. To improve school leadership is to change leadership behaviours. This change process requires leadership skills to be developed so that school leaders can lead the change of learning and teaching behaviours in their schools.

Behavioural change requires a clear message that is consistent across all major institutions and provides a convincing rationale for change; role modelling of these change behaviours; capacity building to ensure school principals have the skills and abilities to enact the changes required; and, reinforcement mechanisms that continually strengthen and emphasise change behaviours. This process applies to both the development of leadership skills and how school leaders develop new learning and teaching behaviours in their schools.

Second, system alignment and behavioural change are emphasised in leadership development in high-performing systems in East Asia. Each component of the behavioural change process is evident in the development of school leaders in Singapore and in Hong Kong that were highlighted in this paper. Singapore's executive leadership programme places a strong emphasis on reflective practice that develops effective change leadership. Hong Kong is a prime example of how leadership development is an integral part of broader reform to improve learning and teaching. The key in Hong Kong was complete system alignment.

Third, alignment can be more complex in a system that is undergoing substantial change and is increasing autonomy, accountability, and, to some degree at least, choice and competition. Such reform (and its magnitude) can hamper the behavioural change process if it sends mixed messages to schools and may create additional pressures for less confident, and often less able, school leaders who are already struggling with existing school effectiveness initiatives. The impact on struggling school principals needs to be monitored. Once identified, they need to be addressed through development mechanisms such as those offered by the National College.

Ensuring that accountability from various sources is aligned will help alleviate these problems. School leaders in England are accountable (sometimes indirectly) to numerous groups: their teachers and students; parents and families (who are usually risk-averse and uncertain about effective education); other schools; Ofsted; the National College; and the government (with an extensive reform agenda). There are other stakeholders but these could be considered the most important. These sources of accountability and development need to be aligned for effectively developing confident leaders in every school.

Fourth, a number of specific programmes can help spread best practice across schools and teachers who are becoming school leaders. A number of initiatives in England (for example teaching schools, networks, chains) have been established that appear to be having some success. The challenge is to either expand these practices or introduce new practices that reach all school leaders.

Examples in this paper were given of high-performing leaders helping less-confident leaders in Shanghai, school principal placement and rotation in Singapore, and the important role of master teachers in many of the East Asian systems. These types of programmes can develop school leaders at different levels of the hierarchy across different schools. These programmes can help lift entire systems.

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