A Re-examination of Leadership Style for Hong Kong School-Based Management (SBM) Schools

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Leadership style has always been a controversial topic in educational administration and management. Following the recommendation of the Education Commission to introduce school-based management (SBM) into Hong Kong schools in the early 1990s, discussions about the kind of leadership style that is appropriate for SBM schools have never ceased. The government holds a continuing belief that SBM schools work better if they are managed by “better” principals, and emphasises the value of transformational leadership. However, this paper articulates the limitations of that leadership style and argues for complementing it with educational leadership, which purports that principals have an obligation to learn with others about ways of promoting student learning. Secondly, the staff should also be encouraged and helped to carry out certain leadership functions. These arguments are supported by references to the most relevant literature. The discussion is useful to school principals, leaders, and teachers by offering them a better understanding of how to facilitate the implementation of SBM.

Introduction

School-based management (SBM) is one of the major educational reforms introduced by the Hong Kong SAR government in the last decade. It is a policy measure adopted by the former Education Department, now known as the Education Manpower Bureau, to let schools themselves make decisions on matters such as personnel procedures, financial matters, and pedagogical issues. It is the product of the early School Management Initiative (SMI) introduced in 1991, which recommended that all schools implement SBM by 2000, so that quality school education could be developed with more flexible management and funding. Compared to the previous model of funding and organisation for schools, SBM is

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a significant breakthrough which gives individual schools the power and freedom to develop their own visions and values, and to set their own goals for quality school education.

Although a great deal of literature has been devoted to describing how SBM gives individual schools greater flexibility to cater for their students’ needs, little research has been conducted to identify how existing practices and contextual factors of schools can be incorporated into the SBM framework. For this reason, it has always been expected of the school principals to “know how to lead”, but the debate about what sort of leadership would be appropriate for SBM schools has been very animated. Leadership is an important issue to be reckoned with in any attempt to reform the education system in Hong Kong.

In this paper, we join in the discussion by critically examining the theoretical aspect of leadership in SBM schools. This analysis would be useful for school principals, leaders, and teachers in helping them to understand better which leadership style could best facilitate the implementation of SBM and the factors that could contribute to its success. We first examine the key features of SBM schools, and their relationship to student learning and the demand for appropriate leadership. Second, the dominant traditional style of training for principals which government bodies believed would support SBM, or transformational leadership, will be articulated. Third, we present arguments about the possibility of complementing transformational leadership with other leadership styles, especially educational leadership. Using this concept of educational leadership, schools are seen as learning organisations in which teachers also play the role of educational leaders. The influence of Chinese cultural practices on leadership styles will also be discussed in detail. Finally, we conclude this paper by referring to the concept of “leading as critical learning” as a way of helping school principals to learn to become educational leaders.

**Key Features of SBM Schools**

*What does SBM Mean to Individual Schools and Teachers?*

SBM gives individual schools more power. It aims to provide schools with greater autonomy to develop their own “style”, to enhance school effectiveness, to promote quality education, and ultimately to improve student learning. The decentralisation of decision making involves both vertical and horizontal aspects (Wong, 1993, 1995a). Vertical decentralisation refers to the power given to the school principals, who are responsible for the performance of the schools, to manage the practical running of the school. Horizontal decentralisation refers to the establishment of a committee structure, for example a School Management Committee and a Parent Teacher Association, to involve teachers and parents in the decision-making process. As stated in the consultation document issued by the Advisory Committee on School-Based Management (ACSBM) (2000):
School-based management should not be seen as “yet another change”. It is the best way to integrate a host of changes which are already in train and which are intended to raise the quality of education for every student. A uniform approach cannot adequately deal with the unique educational needs of different students. Each school needs the capacity to manage its own affairs. (Preamble, p. i)

Those affairs involve decision making about personnel procedures, pedagogical issues, and financial matters. For example, schools receive lump-sum funding from the government and are required to prepare a budget and an annual school plan to account for the use of resources. Each school is then assessed for the extent to which the stated objectives have been effectively met. It is clear that the impact of such procedures could be enormous for both schools and teachers.

For teachers, the extent to which they are prepared to cope with such changes, and whether they are willing to get involved in and contribute to decision making, remains questionable. Early studies by Wong (1993, 1995a, b) explored the impact of an SMI scheme on teachers’ involvement in school policy making. The results indicated that the majority of the teachers in these schools seldom take part in preparing programme plans, policy, or procedure manuals. Teachers who did not have administrative responsibilities were much less likely to participate in the decision-making process than those who did.

All the above studies highlight an important issue: the policy, even if it was based on the latest literature and reflected experience elsewhere, was insufficient to bring about changes in Hong Kong schools. Any central policy change must take into consideration local school factors (such as leadership style) and allow for more flexibility in implementation.

**SBM and Student Learning: In Quest of a Leadership Style**

Undoubtedly, all changes initiated by SBM must be judged by the benefits they bring to the students and whether they improve the learning outcomes of students, since the same consultation document noted that “[t]here is evidence of powerful links between the capacities that schools acquire with school-based management and learning outcomes of students” (ACSBM, 2000, section 1.9, p. 5). In fact, there is a huge debate about the relationship between SBM and student learning, as much of the ongoing research has produced differing findings. After reviewing 77 empirical and case studies on SBM (or in their term, site-based management) implementations between 1985 and 1995, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) found that there was no firm evidence that SBM had an effect on student learning. With regard to self-managing schools and improved learning outcomes, Caldwell (1998) concluded that “while factors underpinning the movement to self-managing schools are many and varied, there has always been an expectation that they will make a contribution to improved outcomes for students” (p. 38). Such an expectation may not always be met, however, since Caldwell further claimed that “few initiatives in self-management have been
linked in a systematic way to what occurs in classrooms in a manner that is likely to impact on learning” (p. 38).

If we take Biggs’s (1987) 3-P model as an analogy, it appears that it is mainly the implementation “process” of SBM that provides positive impact on student learning. For example, at the classroom level, things that may enhance student learning include “the critical innovations which teachers introduced”, “the feedback which teachers provided”, and “the specific and challenging goals which teachers set” (Hattie, 1999, pp. 9–11). The importance of the teachers’ inputs should not be ignored, and the effect on student learning outcomes seems to depend very much on the process at different levels. Scheerens and Bosker (1997) pointed out that schools would not be able to accomplish anything if the process at the classroom level was not linked to or in gear with the process at the school level. The essential elements at the school level included: “degree of achievement-oriented policy”, “educational leadership”, “consensus”, “cooperative planning of teachers”, “quality of school curricula in terms of content covered and formal structure”, “orderly atmosphere”, and “evaluative potential” (as cited in Caldwell, 1998, pp. 34–35).

Generally, successful self-management is necessary for student learning. Therefore, answers to the questions of “whether SBM works” and “whether SBM improves student learning” really depend on whether SBM gives enough flexibility and possibilities to promote and manoeuvre the process that enhances student learning, and on what leadership style best facilitates the utilisation of elements that are embedded within the process. The views of Caldwell and Spinks (1992) concerning leadership are thought provoking. Having critically reviewed the most relevant literature, they found that as far as self-management is concerned, leadership is like a gestalt phenomenon of such factors as “exercise of authority”, “task of directing”, “influencing the activities”, and “making activity meaningful”, with each factor having its own limits and rights. They adopted the view that “each [factor] reflects a facet of what different people called leaders do in different settings under different circumstances” (p. 48).

Leadership style is a central and important factor that affects how SBM schools are organised and function, and most importantly, how student learning can be improved. In the following sections, we examine the factors, settings, and circumstances that may articulate the appropriate leadership style for SBM schools.

Leading the SBM Schools

Transformational Leadership: Training Principals to make SBM Work?

Transformational leadership is the dominant traditional style for the training of principals. It places the principal at the top of the hierarchy. It is characterised by four Is, namely, idealised influence (also known as charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised cooperation. The transformational leader, “working from the top of the hierarchy, is expected to articulate a vision, redefine organisational problems, suggest solutions, transform or energize followers, and be an
example and a mentor to followers” (Evers, 2000, p. 244). Though it has been advocated as being productive under most circumstances and contributing to the development of better organisation and greater student engagement with the school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), research in the local school context in Hong Kong produces different findings.

Yu, Leithwood, and Jantzi (2002) found that, on the one hand, Hong Kong elementary teachers “moderately agreed that their principals were providing some elements of transformational leadership” (p. 382) and “most strongly agreed that principals had high expectations for teachers’ professional growth and students’ performance” (p. 382). On the other hand, they “disagreed that principals could provide appropriate models or set good examples for staff to follow” (p. 382). The effect of transformational leadership on the teachers’ commitment to change was significant but weak. This leadership style is indeed problematic since it presupposes the idea of “leadership without learning” and that the success of a leadership depends solely on the personal capacity of the individual. There is always the possibility that some of the principals may not possess such a strong capacity for leadership. For teachers, the problem becomes even more crucial. If their leaders are not “transformational” enough, they might lose belief in their school’s goals and values, and may not be willing to exert the necessary effort to help the school, or may even prefer not to remain in that school. Theoretically, this leadership approach faces inherent difficulties as it assumes that the leaders will possess extraordinary cognitive, affective, and moral skills in the first place. In practice, it provides little insight into how these skills might be acquired or developed by the leaders.

Though the criticisms of transformational leadership are neither trivial nor insignificant, the myth that it would be useful to try to shape school principals into a certain kind of leader to make SBM work persists. Take the Leadership Training Programme for Principals issued by the Task Group on Training and Development of School Heads (1999) as an example. Its stated objectives include the following:

The new leadership training programme is designed to equip and develop school principals with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude to become competent leaders to lead schools into the new millennium. Through the leadership training process, participants will reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and develop goals for improvement to become more effective in their professional role as principals. (Section 2.4, p. 5; original emphasis)

The rationale behind this programme was that, through training, school principals would be instilled with appropriate leadership skills to manage their schools and to face new changes and challenges, especially those that arose from the current educational reform (Education Commission, 2000). However, the specific knowledge, skills, and attitude were not well defined at all.

Moreover, Wong (2001a) found that a vicious circle developed as a result of this kind of training. First of all, the Education Department became accustomed to giving out instructions and setting basic requirements for potential principals, and the
principals grew accustomed to receiving those instructions and requirements and felt bound by them. Since the assumptions and objectives were set by the Education Department, principals who participated in these programmes frequently complained that the training contents and materials were of no use to them for handling everyday routines in their schools. There was also criticism that the government was wasting money on this kind of training programme. Overall, Wong argued that “the Education Department [should] be aware of its limitations, and that the Education Department should change their leadership role to one of providing support” (2001a, p. 11).

Some of the limitations of transformational leadership are that it makes assumptions about the role of leaders, gives a persistent illusion of school excellence among government bodies in principal training, and intends to constantly train school principals to follow and implement the government’s policies. Therefore, the leadership style required for Hong Kong SBM schools actually demands more vigorous theoretical and practical examination. We attempt to tackle the question, specifically what leadership style best facilitates the utilisation of elements that are embedded within the process of student learning, from a different angle, to analyse how sharing of leadership responsibilities among school practitioners could best be put into practice to improve student learning.

Educational Leadership: Learning for All

School principals and teachers can make a difference to the school environment and student learning. Compared to business organisations, the structure of schools or learning organisations is more transparent and definite. The role of school practitioners can be broadly categorised into four domains: teaching, administration, pastoral care, and professional development. These domains affect student learning at both the classroom and the school levels. School practitioners do share a common framework with each other, and are able to judge and anticipate the significance of any school policies on student learning. Therefore, when given a task to carry out, school practitioners should be able to raise questions, discuss, and agree (or disagree) with their colleagues on their interpretations of the task. Mutual understanding of this kind is possible when the human perception is framework dependent. Although it is not always possible to achieve an objective perception (in an ontological sense) of what others do and what others have in mind, if there is a clear formulation of school policies and goals and effective communication, it is easier to achieve mutual interpretation and understanding (in a procedural sense) about day-to-day operations. To build on this capacity and to improve the school and student learning, a clear articulation of the concept of learning for all is crucial.

Learning for all simply means that every school member should learn together from and for the school policies that aim to improve student learning. Different reforms are made to cope with the ever changing and challenging environment. For instance, both students and teachers must use informational technology in learning and teaching, and everyone should critically examine and explore the meaning and impact of the
policy at different levels of student learning, and act according to the decisions made. When everyone in school believes in the significance of learning for all, they are growing and improving as a whole and moving towards the same goals and directions. If some of the members are left behind while some move forward, mutual understanding may be difficult to reach. The conditions for learning for all include democratic politics, participatory decision making, and respect for others and the rights of the individual. Each individual should be aware of the factors that may lead to learning success, and therefore those leaders who are able to demonstrate in an open environment that those factors are being applied, and can develop a cooperative and supportive context for learning, are deemed to be right for the job.

As a result, rather than transformational leadership, Caldwell and Spinks (1992) and Evers (2000, 2001) believed in a different leadership style known as educational leadership or leadership with learning. Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) suggested that educational leadership is “seen as developing strategies so that a variety of management instruments can be used to achieve a school’s most important primary task” (p. 403) and an educational leader is “someone whose actions are intentionally geared to influencing the schools’ primary processes” (p. 403). For educational leadership, the primary task for a school leader is to work cooperatively with other school practitioners to determine and implement all school policies. Educational leaders are more able to facilitate the utilisation of elements embedded within the student learning process because, according to Murphy (1990), their roles can be classified into four broad types of activity: “mission and goals”, “processes of learning and teaching”, “climate for learning”, and “supportive environment” (Murphy, 1990, p. 169). Principals who apply educational leadership, therefore, are responsible for: (a) formulating and communicating the school mission and goals; (b) promoting, supervising, and evaluating quality teaching, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student learning; (c) promoting professional development, establishing positive expectations and standards, and providing incentives for teachers and students; and (d) creating a safe and orderly learning environment, providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement, developing staff collaboration and cohesion, as well as forging links between home and school. The principals will of course encounter difficulties in implementing these activities, and so they should focus on building networks both inside and outside the school to facilitate all aspects of decision making.

School principals who adopt the educational leadership style should take advantage of the idea of reflective practitioners, or teachers who possess the ability to constantly learn and reflect during each course of action (Carr, 1987; Schöns, 1983). Teachers are not simply “users” of the specialised knowledge and decisions of so-called “experts” and/or “leaders” who always claim that they know the educational settings better. On the contrary, teachers have to conduct action research of their own, to actively experiment with educational ideas and school policies in their own practice. Teachers are able and are in the right position to reflect on and improve their day-to-day educational practice because they always know about the practical implications of school policies more than the experts and/or leaders. It is important, therefore, for
principals to promote the practice of reflection-in-action by encouraging teachers to participate in school-based action research at both the classroom and the school levels. Mutual understanding and involvement of all school members in decision making are possible, if each single action taken in the school and the different possibilities are actively explored and thoroughly considered by its (reflective) practitioners. The opportunity for achieving success may be greater if all school practitioners are involved in active exploration and reflection, as well as the decision-making process. The decision-making power delegated to the school under SBM is thus “distributed” among the participants.

The ideas of having school members reflect on different experiences, and to encourage learning for all and staff collaboration and cohesion, match what Lakomski (2002) described as the practice of distributed leadership. It means that decision-making activities should be distributed among school members. This “distribution” implies not only the primary understanding that different people in different positions can be leaders at different times and for different purposes, but also the belief that social organisation is considered a form of cognitive architecture. Therefore, the resources that shape and enable any activity are distributed in configurations of people, environments, and situations. As elaborated by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001), leadership under this framework “involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and the use of social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning” (p. 24). Based on this model, everyone can be a leader since the formal position is irrelevant for cognition. What matter the most are the location of “leaders” and interrelationship (physical, material, and computational). Therefore, it is suggested here that educational leadership includes some of the strengths of distributed leadership.

In short, as elaborated in the above theoretical and practical examination, the educational leadership style is recommended as an alternative for leaders of self-managing schools, since this style includes the distribution of decision-making power and leadership practices and activities to all participants. Leaders will then have the capacity to work with others, a coherent personal “educational platform”, and a vision. Secondly, they will be able to better recognise the different facets of leadership (technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural), to keep abreast of trends and issues, threats, and opportunities in the school environment, and to empower others, especially in aspects of decision making.

Influences of Chinese Cultural Practice on Leadership Styles

Up to this point, analyses have been focused mainly on the common factors for leadership in SBM schools. However, there are other studies that investigate the differences between schools in different contexts. Greenfield (1986) emphasised that “schools are better understood in context, from a set of concrete events and personalities within them rather than from a set of abstractions or general laws” (p. 143). Chinese culture has a long history of valuing leadership and the moral
preparation of leaders. Wong (1996) found that many of the Chinese cultural values, such as education for all, a sense of righteousness, obligation, and goodness, and moral commitment, are consistent with the latest management thinking which calls for participation, collegiality, enablement and empowerment, and above all, building trusting relationships within an organisation. However, literature on social psychology suggests that these limit the scope for the full implementation of an educational leadership undertaking, mostly due to the teachers who would be expected to share the task of decision making with the principal.

The Chinese pattern of socialisation is famed for reinforcing a bureaucratic or even a patriarchal social structure (Bond, 1991; Ho, 1986). In the traditional Chinese society, an individual’s role is defined by the bond between father and son, the duty between ruler and subject, the distinction between husband and wife, the precedence of the old over the young, and the trust between friends. The virtues of being humble, obedient, submissive, and non-competitive are still stressed in most Chinese families, and are praised and deliberately taught by adults to children. To prevent children from behaving in an uncontrolled way, they will be punished if their behaviour becomes too aggressive. These virtues lay an emphasis on controlling the development of an internal locus of control, and cause individuals to perceive events as not being related to or dependent on their behaviour or effort (Lefcourt, 1982; Rotter, 1966). With this kind of socialisation, people in an inferior position within an organised structure are more likely to take on a subservient role in decision making since success does not seem to be associated with personal effort. Luck, chance, or powers beyond one’s personal control and understanding are emphasised instead. Consequently, the motivation for behaving in a disinterested way or making an effort only to favour the development of the organisation is anticipated as people in an inferior position will only devote limited effort to taking on leadership responsibilities. Therefore, the abovementioned need for distributing leadership practices among practitioners is not consciously consented to, but is instinctive for members of SBM schools.

Participation is often subordinated to a more dominant organisational objective (Hui & Cheung, 2004; Raftery, Csete, & Hui, 2001). Teachers may try hard to limit their contribution to the minimum required of them. The backwash is that, no matter how clear and explicit the call for teachers to share decision-making powers with the principal, they may just take no notice. Wong (2001b, c) found that the solution to this problem, which was prevalent in most Hong Kong schools, especially in small primary schools, was moral leadership. In Chinese culture, this leadership style is a more appropriate theoretical framework than the “professional rational-technical”, “psychological”, and “bureaucratic” modes of leadership. Wong (2001a, c) suggested that if the leaders had considerable moral standing among the followers, they would be more motivated to work. The personal capacity of the leaders is again stressed here, and this contains a difficulty similar to transformational leadership. In fact, this cultural barrier is even greater than the more general resistance of leaders to share leadership responsibilities. Therefore, if they are to promote quality educational leadership, principals should concentrate on removing these barriers and making it easier for all teachers to participate and contribute.
Facilitating participation by teachers entails more than just facilitative leadership, which is referred to as “the behaviors that enhance the collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance” (Conley & Goldman, 1994, p. 4). Facilitative leadership is useful in weakening the cultural barriers set by the Chinese perception of leadership. However, given the overemphasis on leaders’ personal capacity, extra effort should be put into giving school members confidence about their “collective ability”. This can make them understand that they too could have the ability to take part in decision-making and school activities. To help them improve their confidence and ability, we may refer to Bandura’s (1977, 1997) concept of self-efficacy. It refers to a person’s belief in his capacity to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. According to his social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions. This self-system provides reference mechanisms for perceiving, regulating, and evaluating behaviours, which result from the interplay between the system and the environmental sources of influence. It serves as a self-regulatory function by providing individuals with the capability to influence their own cognitive processes and actions, and thus alter their environments. As such, how individuals interpret the results of their own performance informs and alters to a great extent their environments and beliefs, and this will in turn inform and alter their subsequent performance.

Self-efficacy is a key construct in understanding how an individual performs because it influences not only the choices one makes, but also determines how much effort one will invest in an activity, how long one will persist when confronting obstacles, and how much stress and anxiety one will experience when engaging in a task. It is also a key attribute linking individual and organisational capacity to meet the challenges of the recent curriculum reform (Kennedy & Hui, 2004). The relationship between the teachers’ sense of efficacy and their teaching and research performances is well supported by a number of empirical studies. For example, research by Ashton (1985) and Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) found that performance parameters, such as the motivation to engage and persist in a task, risk taking, and the use of innovations, are related to efficacy. Also, research by Gelso, Mallinckrodt, and Judge (1996) and Hui (2004) found that highly efficacious teachers are more likely to take part in research, to value more the significance of research for professional and curriculum development, and to change their attitudes towards research. More importantly, self-efficacy is a task-specific or content-specific concept since it depends on the situation or context relative to the action or task to be performed. Accordingly, it is important to help teachers to empower themselves and deepen their sense of efficacy by “doing” and “experiencing” appropriate leadership tasks. Therefore, when distributing decision making, school principals should be conscious about choosing suitable leadership practices in order to give teachers the right experiences and opportunities to enrich their performance.

The notion that efficacy is reinforced by doing and experiencing coincides with the philosophy of experiential learning, which emphasises the concept of “learning through experiencing”. As argued by experiential learning theorists, for example Burnard
(1988), the most basic and primary form of knowledge is “experiential”. It is gained through a direct and personal encounter with a subject, person, or thing. This type of knowledge is important since every single individual builds up a store of experiences which grows and evolves. One way to provide experiential learning experiences is to give each member opportunities to take part in different areas of work, such as teaching, administration, pastoral care, and professional development. For example, teachers may be involved in team teaching, administrative work, colleague and student counselling, and undergo further academic and professional development. Through these, members will be able to realise their own strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, reflections and experiences can be passed on or shared among members. Kolb (1984) established a four-step model of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. By engaging in concrete leadership practices, together with reflection on the implications of the experience, teachers can recognise what changes and efforts should be emphasised.

The concepts of facilitative leadership, self-efficacy, and experiential learning help both principals and teachers to understand and perceive their own capabilities, elicit constructive performances, experience and learn from appropriately designated leadership practices, and remove the cultural barriers of limited participation and contribution.

**Conclusion: Leading As Critical Learning**

Overall, this paper is built around a major educational reform known as school-based management (SBM). Under this reform, it was assumed that the implementation of SBM would bring various advantages, such as giving individual schools more autonomy and flexibility in handling educational matters. It was also assumed that the standard leadership style known as transformational leadership would be suitable and sufficient for all schools that opted for SBM. However, this paper suggests that in reality, things might be more complicated. Some educators might believe that the introduction of SBM would provide solutions to all problems. In fact, it is to the process of implementing SBM that schools should give the greatest attention.

To ensure that every step in the implementation process is successful, relevant and flexible leadership styles should be adopted. Principals, as leaders of schools, should not only exercise in practice the specific role of an educational leader, but also realise its essence—the art of “leading as critical learning”. Leaders as critical learners have “to function as researchers or critical learners with the goal of developing their own most coherent account of how their organization works and what it should be doing” (Evers, 2001, p. 112). They also have to inspire teachers to work together and to be the anchor of the schools. Such critical learning carries dual implications. First, the leader’s attitude and ability should encourage others to have a similar desire for efficacy and a sense of responsibility for their actions and work. Second, a reciprocal empathy must be established between all members of the school in both decision-making and leadership activities at different times, in different circumstances, and for
different purposes. Neither the role nor the practice of “leading as critical learning” is demanding. Leadership theories are essential to competent SBM, but they are not sufficient in themselves to bring about excellence in SBM. School principals and leaders should therefore be receptive to any ideas that favour the adoption of a critical learning approach.

To summarise, the major argument of this paper is that transformational leadership, a leadership style that used to be relevant and effective for leading and managing schools, is considered problematic at present because it overestimates the inborn nature of leaders’ competence. Since the introduction of SBM, another leadership style known as educational leadership has been initiated. Unlike transformational leadership, educational leadership suggests that different aspects in schools can be improved through learning for all, and that leadership and the corresponding decision-making practices can be distributed and owned by anyone in the schools. This is truly one of the central themes of SBM, and the adoption of appropriate leadership styles could be key to the success of SBM. In short, the basic requirements for involvement and ownership by all are: to have school principals and teachers realise and have confidence in their self-efficacy, to escape from the traditional Chinese mindset of leadership, and to have leaders act as critical learners. Last but not least, unless a trusting, cooperative, and critical learning relationship is established between school principals, leaders, and teachers, the successful implementation of SBM will be difficult.

Notes

1. As stated in section 4.2 of the Education Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1997), SMI “provides participating aided schools with more funding flexibility in the form of a Block Grant [that]... helps schools achieve school-based goals and formulate long-term plans”. With other flexible measures in school management, the proposed flexible funding system “should be able to: (a) meet the basic needs of students to ensure fairness across the school sector; (b) provide schools with greater flexibility in the effective use of resources in order to achieve individuality; and (c) encourage schools to take initiatives and achieve better results, and to assist and take appropriate remedial action where necessary”.

2. Wong (1993, 1995a) wrote that in educational administration and management, effectiveness is not the same as efficiency. The latter means the ability to accomplish an objective without wasting effort or resources. Thus, a particular school could be effective but inefficient, meaning that it achieves its objective at too high a cost.

3. Scheerens and Bosker (1997) also identified elements at the classroom level that enhance student achievement. They are “time on task”, “structured teaching”, “opportunity to learn”, “high expectations of pupils’ progress”, “degree of evaluation”, and “reinforcement”.

4. According to Yu et al. (2002), variations in teachers’ commitment to change can be traced to four variables. These are: (a) personal goals (desired future states that teachers internalise and perceive to possess certain qualities that motivate them to act); (b) capacity beliefs (psychological states such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, academic self-concept, and aspects of self-esteem, that lead teachers to believe themselves capable of accomplishing their personal goals); (c) context beliefs (beliefs about whether the school environment will actually provide the resources that teachers require to successfully implement a change in their classroom practices);
and (d) emotional arousal process (a state of “action readiness” or a positive emotional climate that serves to stimulate immediate or vigorous action and to maintain patterns of action).

5. These changes and challenges focus mainly on the five “prior practices”, as suggested in the reform proposal (Education Commission, 2000). These require schools as well as the education system to “reform the admission system and public exam system”, “reform the curricula and improve teaching methods”, “improve the assessment mechanism to supplement learning and teaching”, “provide more diverse opportunities for life-long learning at senior secondary level and beyond”, and “adopt an effective resources strategy” (pp. 43–48).

6. This statement is based mainly on information drawn from observation and informal chats with school principals who participated in some of these programmes organised by various academic and government bodies. The last one the first author attended was the Secondary School Principals Training Programme organised by the Centre for Educational Leadership (http://www.hku.hk/educel, accessed October 2, 2005), Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, in the academic year 2001–2002.

7. Here, we are borrowing Eisner’s (1993) concepts of ontological objectivity and procedural objectivity to articulate the possibility of reaching an understanding among colleagues while carrying out a given task.

8. These two studies were conducted by the first author and other researchers. Raftery et al. (2001) examined how professionals in the construction and property industries take risks and make decisions in different economic situations, and Hui and Cheung (2004) explored how church members learn and behave after participating in an adventure team-building camp. Although neither of them focused on educational organisations, they both conclude with the same findings, namely that the risks taken, the decisions made, and the behaviour revealed by the subjects were subordinated to a more dominant organisational objective. In the Raftery et al. (2001) study, it is the company’s goal to “keep the business running” that shaped the professionals’ attitude to risk and the corresponding decisions made, while for the Hui and Cheung (2004) study, it was the church’s consensus that “some missions are good” that was at the centre of its members’ behaviour.

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