

## Leadership for Collective Learning: An Effective Distributed Perspective

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### KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Senior leaders' empowerment matters as it is the first initial step towards effective distribution of instructional leadership support for teaching and learning.
- Middle leaders' synergy with teacher leaders matters in the effective distribution of instructional leadership practices, which include the following types: autonomous, collaboration, and delegated.
- Teacher leadership practices directly impact teaching and learning matters in supporting the translation from teacher collective learning to classroom teaching.
- Collective learning matters as teachers integrate teaching practices they bring to their collective learning with the application of their collective learning to their teaching practices.
- Middle leaders' support to teacher leaders matters in the following ways: workload sharing, workload reduction, development, communication and psychological support.
- Addressing the challenges of teacher leaders' matters. They include the following: clarifying roles, developing competencies, de-conflicting identities, deepening commitment, increasing confidence, enhancing career progression, and providing conducive school and system contexts.

### BACKGROUND

The concept of distributed leadership situated in education contexts, which seek to improve teaching and learning in significant ways and are increasingly becoming more complex, has risen in importance. Contemporary school leaders use up more time and energy in managing increasingly complex relationships, and delegate leadership decisions on instruction to other staff members beyond the purview of senior and middle leaders. Although distributed leadership and teacher leadership have been claimed to have value-added effects on school effectiveness, more rigorous empirical studies are still needed.

### FOCUS OF STUDY

The study investigated the distribution of leadership—distributed leadership (DL), teacher leadership (TL) and collective learning (CL)—and its direct and indirect pathways of effects on teaching and learning.

### KEY FINDINGS

- a. **The DL dimension of *Empowerment by senior leaders (i.e., Principals and Vice-Principals)*** has been found to be significant in contributing to the TL dimension of *Change in Teachers' Teaching Practices*. The intermediary between this link is middle

leadership (i.e., Heads of Departments, Senior Heads and Year Heads). While senior leaders relinquish decision-making power on instruction to middle leaders, they in turn share this power to informal (i.e., Subject Representatives and Level Managers) and formal (Senior Teachers and Lead Teachers) teacher leaders. The distribution of instructional decision-making power to both formal and informal teacher leaders varies in the form of three typologies: (1) Delegated – directed tasks (2) Collaboration – co-constructing tasks (3) Autonomous – freedom of tasks. Crucially, the empowerment given by senior leaders on instruction must translate to teacher leaders' impacting teaching practices of their colleagues en route to student learning.

- b. **The TL dimension of *Change in Teachers' Teaching Practices*** has been found to be significant in contributing to the CL dimension of *Reflecting Knowledge*, and this in turn contributing to the CL dimension of *Applying Knowledge*. When teacher leaders enact practices that seek to impact on their fellow teachers' teaching practices, they do so through collective learning spaces (e.g., Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)). In such spaces, they lead teachers into learning that brings into these spaces their teaching practices, and apply this learning back to their colleagues' teaching practices, which is a pragmatic link.
- c. The following are **significant predictors of growth in students' mathematical problem-solving abilities**:
- DL dimensions of *Empowerment* (negative)
  - *Empowerment* by senior leaders is negative because 56% of teachers perceived senior leaders to still want to maintain control over all school matters.
  - *Developing Leadership, Collective Engagement* (negative)
  - *Collective Engagement* is negative because 55% of teachers perceived senior leaders are not able to ensure that teachers synergize their collective collaborations.
  - TL dimensions of *Teacher Learning and Development* (negative)
  - Although only 12% of teachers disagreed with all the items for *Teacher Learning and Development*, enhancing teacher learning and development without translation to impact to classroom teaching and learning may produce counterproductive experiences in teachers.
  - *Change in Teachers' Teaching Practices*; CL dimensions of *Reflecting Knowledge* (negative)

- Although 86% of teachers indicated they value learning from others and share ideas on teaching with others as *Reflecting Knowledge*, the sharing of ideas on teaching does not lead to translation of teaching practices to their own classroom teaching practices. Teachers who find themselves not being able to translate the collective learning to actual application may find the experience counterproductive.
- *Applying Knowledge, Innovating Knowledge* (negative)
- *Innovating Knowledge* is negative because 53% of teachers indicated that they feel it to be risky when applying untested teaching ideas by others.
- TC dimensions of Curriculum Content, Pedagogy.

The findings from the multilevel path analysis indicate that the DL dimension of Empowerment contributes to the TL dimension of Change in Teachers' Teaching Practices, which contributes to the CL dimension of Reflecting Knowledge. The CL dimension of Reflecting Knowledge then contributes to the CL dimension of Applying Knowledge, and finally to growth in students' mathematical problem-solving abilities.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

The study has provided strong support for distribution leadership to strengthen instructional leadership for curricular changes necessary to bring about a broadened set of learning outcomes for students. It highlighted the importance of teacher leaders at various school levels to support the work of senior and middle leaders in schools towards instructional improvements, and to lead their fellow professionals to collectively learn and work together to impact teaching and learning (Salleh, 2017). Further empirical studies would be helpful in understanding, validating, harnessing, and improving the work of teacher leaders in schools and education systems that seek to make substantive impact on teaching and learning.

## POPULATION

28 and 5 primary schools participated in the study - Part 1 and 2 correspondingly. Part 1 involved 58 school leaders, 93 Mathematics teachers and 1,888 Primary 5 students. Part 2 involved 12 school leaders, 45 KP, 4 formal teacher leaders, 15 informal teacher leaders and 138 teachers.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Part 1 of the study employs a survey analysing data using HLM and multilevel path analysis. Part 2 of the study employs qualitative FGDs, and uses thematic coding for data analysis.

## REFERENCES

Salleh, H. (2017). Teacher leadership in Singapore: The next wave of effective leadership. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 2(2), 170-194.

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