

LI04177

Expectations of Curriculum Leaders in Primary Schools: Issues and Implications

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Paper prepared for the Annual Conference of Australian Association for Research
in Education, Melbourne, 28 November – 2 December, 2004

To meet the challenges brought about by globalization, knowledge-based economy and cultural diversity, Hong Kong has been undergoing a series of reforms in education at the very start of the century. School curriculum needs to change to meet those needs. Hong Kong education system needs to produce workers and citizens who are creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and problem-solving (Kennedy and Hui, 2004). This is evident in the newly released document “Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education: Action for investing in the future” (Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), 2004). The new curriculum reform will ensure all students to study 3 years at the senior end of secondary school and offer greater diversity and choice in the curriculum appropriate to their own changing personal and social circumstances (EMB, 2004, p.3 & 53).

The success of the current curriculum reform does not only depend on changing the academic structure. It also requires changes well beyond the structural level. A change of school culture and practice to promote collaborative learning is apparent. One of the ways to re-culture our school and professional development is offered by the EMB. That is the recruiting of experienced teachers for the position of Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) (or Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) to work as curriculum leaders in local primary schools. This paper looks at the curriculum leaders’ expectations and to see how a training programme meets their needs.

Curriculum Reform and Curriculum Leaders

The current curriculum reform has its root dated back to the Education Commission Report No. 7 on “Quality School Education” in 1997. Report No.7 initiated further discussion on the weaknesses and strengths of the education system (Sweeting, 2004, p. 527-528). The system has been searching for a right structure, curriculum and personnel to better develop the potential of our younger generations and to produce the citizens and workers for a competitive economy. The aims are to develop our students become independent-minded and socially-aware adults, equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes to lead to a full life as individuals and play a positive role in the life of the community.

The government is also aware that a school-based management system works well with the current efforts in curriculum reform to nurture more productive and entrepreneurial citizens (Advisory Committee on School-based Management, 2000). Similarly, teachers’ professional development is regarded as an inseparable part of the curriculum reform (Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications, 2003). Without the participation of knowledgeable and committed teachers, it is hardly possible to bring about changes in school curriculum, let alone accomplishing the desired objectives. School re-culturing and restructuring of the school starts from the practitioners. Little (1993, p. 130) is right to say that teachers are the shapers, promoters and well-informed critics of curriculum reform.

It is against this background the PSM(CD)s scheme was recommended in 2001 by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR (Chief Executive, 2001). Local primary schools which wanted to join the scheme could recruit one additional teacher for the position. These PSM(CD)s are curriculum leaders who are responsible for implementing curriculum reform and to promote professional development in schools. They are expected to be the

change agents and teacher leaders in schools. These PSM(CD)s could join a training programme to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for the new position.

The focus of the paper is to investigate the PSM(CD)s' expectations about the course and to see how far the training programme has met their needs. Some important issues were raised by the PSM(CD)s and implications for providing better training programme were discussed.

Changing School Culture

The school-based management movement has triggered significant impact on school culture (Gamage, 1996; Caldwell & Spinks, 1992). One of the apparent changes is that practitioners must have to make demands on their own school and to allow themselves to work individual and collaboratively in a creative way so as to suit their own curricular circumstance (Joseph, et al., 2002). However, it does not mean to ask for a 'tinkering' vision, as described by Huberman (1993), which stitches up teachers' demands and suggestions in a casual way. It asks for a holistic vision which addresses the school issue and culture systematically and collaboratively and in a sustainable manner (Fullan, 2005). This means that those teachers are the genuine participants in the process of change for school culture and curriculum (Conley & Muncey, 1999; Lieberman, 1988). Their knowledge, skills and experiences are considered assets and must be geared toward building a better school for student learning. A shift of paradigm on how to empower and to develop practitioners inside schools is paramount. Teachers now have to work and learn together and their own wisdom and experiences are perceived as professional resources. Adequate opportunities must be given to teachers to learn from their own day-to-day work. Schools have to be organized as places for teachers to learn as well as to teach. In short, teachers are practically engaging in the whole process of school change and curriculum reform.

The Need for Curriculum Leaders

Curriculum leaders are appointed to take the need in changing the school culture. They are teacher themselves but who knows the teachers well and can give them guidance and support and are models for colleagues. Their roles are distinctly different from that of the traditional administrative or managerial leadership--school principals (Wynne, 2001; Alvarado, 1997). It is a concept which moves away from the top-down hierarchy modes of operation towards a shared decision-making and team work. It aims at nurturing new school culture to facilitate teacher professional development as well as school curriculum reform. Research has shown that school culture is not easily changed with prescriptions and managerial orders (Goodlad, 1984; Heckman, 1987; Lashway, 1995). Great administrators are not always great classroom leaders (Poplin, 1992). New school culture demands new leaders. New leadership which looks for teacher collaboration and empowerment may hold the key for successful curriculum reform.

Curriculum leaders are teachers and they work within the framework of a school plan for curriculum change. They are expected to know the best form of instruction and are able to work with their colleagues closely by providing guidance and support in changing classroom practices. In this way, curriculum leaders also take care of the professional growth of their colleagues. The key word here is 'facilitative'. Facilitative leaders are able

to foster the involvement of school staff at all levels to adopt, solve problems and to improve practice collaboratively (Conley & Goldman, 1994). In short, their major role is to make curriculum reform easier to happen.

The Roles of Curriculum Leaders

Curriculum leader is a term used widely but loosely to describe practitioners who play a leadership role and operate in a different professional space different from that of administrators or principals (Lord & Miller, 2000, p. 7). Some (e.g. Lee & Dimmock, 1999, p. 2) would like to draw a distinction between 'leadership' and 'management'. The former refers to high-level activity excused in setting goals and monitoring others to achieve them and the latter is often concerned with maintaining performance and allocating resources towards that end. While there is no general agreement on the role of curriculum leaders, it is more intelligible to determine their roles on a day-to-day basis in different contexts. Researchers have come up with a list of roles they play in schools (e.g. Tucker, 1999; Lord & Miller, 2000; Lee & Dimmock, 1999; West-Burnham, 1996; Lontos, 1992; Leithwood, 1992; Devaney, 1987; Alverado, 1997; Crowther, 1997; O'Hair & Reitzug, 1988). The following are the major roles as defined by these researchers:

- ♦ Keeping standards in and enhancing instructional skills;
- ♦ Fostering teacher learning and development;
- ♦ Conscious and committed to student learning;
- ♦ Actively involved in action research and promoting it to colleagues;
- ♦ Maintaining and assisting collegial and collaborative school culture;
- ♦ Socially conscious and politically involves in school level decision-making;
- ♦ Mentoring new teachers;
- ♦ Risk-taking and continuous to learn to improving oneself;
- ♦ Providing curriculum knowledge including goal-setting, planning, developing and review education programme in schools;
- ♦ Organizing and participating peer reviews of school practice;
- ♦ Allocating school resources

To accomplish these duties or roles, curriculum leaders need to use many strategies and skills (Sagor, 1992; Poplin, 1992; Leithwood, 1992; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 1988). These include non-instructional skills such as rapport building, interpersonal skills, team building, coordination and conflict management, creating communication networks and collaborative politics and organizational diagnosis skills. Curriculum leaders also know that they have to offer advice and assistance for quality teaching and curriculum reform whenever asked for.

Curriculum Leaders in Hong Kong

The scheme for the creation of curriculum leaders was first released to the public by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR in his 2001 policy address. The name of the additional teaching post was known as 'Curriculum Officer' and was later re-titled as Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) (or Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development)). The purpose is to enhance the quality of teachers and teaching and to lead internal curriculum development in primary schools

(Chief Executive, 2001). This was a promotion post for only 5 years with the major task for advancing curriculum reform in Hong Kong schools. As specified by the EMB (2003):

The PSM(CD) will serve as a curriculum leader to help the school in reforming the curriculum in accordance with the educational aims to promote whole-person development and life-long learning. The duties of the curriculum leader in more specific terms are:

- (i) *to assist the school head to lead and coordinate whole-school curriculum planning so that each school can strike a balance between the central curriculum, the mission of the schools and learning needs of students according to the recommendations of the curriculum reform;*
- (ii) *to support the school head in planning and coordinating assessment policy and assessment practices;*
- (iii) *to lead teachers/specialist staff in improving learning and teaching strategies and assessment practice through staff development days, collaborative lesson preparation, selection and development of appropriate learning and teaching resources, etc;*
- (iv) *to promote professional exchange culture within the school and to establish links with other schools for sharing of experiences in learning, teaching and curriculum development; and*
- (v) *to take up a reasonable teaching load (which should be less than 50% of the average teaching load of a teacher of the school) so that the curriculum leader can keep close contact with the real situation of daily classroom learning and teaching. (EMB, 2003)*

The curriculum leaders have to take up 50% of the school teaching load while the rest are for carrying out the responsibilities of curriculum leadership in schools. Since the appointment of the post is unprecedented, the newly recruited curriculum leaders are expected to learn to perform their tasks on-site and by actually doing them.

Training Programmes for Hong Kong Curriculum Leaders

A series of training and various education opportunities were assigned and arranged by the EMB with local institute and teaching training institutes to provide training to enrich and to empower these PSM(CD) appointees. Attending these courses and training are one condition to taking up the post (EMB, 2003)

The EMB approved and tendered out a 136 hours of in-service training programme for these curriculum leaders. The full programme consisted of the following components:

- a. *curriculum reform in Hong Kong (27 hrs)*
- b. *web-based course on curriculum reform (20 hrs)*
- c. *curriculum planning & design, learning theories, learning and teaching strategies, action research, professional development & organization learning, workshop on change agents in curriculum reform, and building a learning community (68 hrs)*
- d. *assessment for learning (9 hrs)*
- e. *learner diversity (9hrs)*
- f. *winding up session (3 hrs) (Tsui, 2004)*

This paper is concerned with component C. The major topics introduced are summarized in Table 1¹.

Table 1: Summary of the Two Courses Undertaken by PSM(CDs)

| Course 1 | Course 2 |
|---|---|
| Focus: New ideas, new challenge, new thinking, new skills, to bring changes to classroom practice | Focus: Action research project, with improved student learning |
| Session 1 & 2 – curriculum planning and design Session 3 & 4 – learning theories Session 5 & 6 – learning and teaching strategies Session 7 & 8 – presentation of project outcomes | Session 1 & 2 – action research and reflective practices Session 3 & 4 – professional development and professional learning Session 5, 6, 7 & 8 – tutorials Session 9 & 10 – presentations of project outcomes School visits |

(based on Kennedy & Hui, 2004)

All together there were 228 appointed curriculum leaders enrolled in the Course C – both C1 and C2. Broadly speaking, the C1 focussed more theory and C2 was more practical in nature. Every participant was asked to develop and implement an action research project in their own schools. The themes and foci of these two courses were determined by the course provider – the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Methods

Questionnaires, evaluation questionnaires were used and interviews were conducted for data collection. An open-ended questionnaire was designed to tap into the PSM(CD)s' experiences of being curriculum leaders in the local schools². The questionnaire asked the leaders about their experiences and perceptions of their roles in the school. They were asked to express their expectations of the course. Course evaluation questionnaires at the end of each session as well as end-of-course evaluation were conducted to see if the course has met their needs. Interviews³ were also conducted during the school visits. Each of the interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. In the interviews they were asked if they found the Course useful and had met their expectations or not. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis by the researcher.

Sample

The questionnaires were distributed and administered on the first meeting of C1. There were eight groups of PSM(CD)s. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire in the first meeting and at the first 10-15 minutes. Among these 228 course participants, half of them have finished C2 when they came to C1 and vice versa. 27 interviews were conducted during school visits. End-of-the course evaluation were conducted at the last meeting.

Results and Analysis

¹ A full description of programme for Component C can be found at: <http://ci-lab.edu.hk/clprogramme/CL04/index.html>

² The questionnaire contains questions which were not analysed in this paper.

³ The aim of the interview was not confined to understanding of the curriculum leaders' expectations. But they were asked about if their expectations were met.

Expectations of PSM(CD)S

215 participants returned their questionnaires. Among them, 6 did not answered the part on expectation. As a result, only 209 participants had expressed their expectations of the questionnaire with a total of 302 entries. A summary of their expectations was listed in Table 2. Their expectations can be classified and ranked into 17 broad categories with the top expectation “to equip them with skills for curriculum development” and the last expectation “to enhance professional exchange among schools”.

Table 2: A summary of the major categories of PSM(CD)s’ Expectation of the Course

| Ranking | Major Categories | No of entries |
|----------------|--|----------------------|
| 1 | To equip them with skills for curriculum development | 44 |
| 2 | To boost their confidence in curriculum leadership | 39 |
| 3 | To equip them skills in initiate curriculum reform in schools | 38 |
| 4 | To enhance their own professional development | 31 |
| 5 | To learn how to practice action research | 21 |
| 6 | To better understand curriculum theories | 19 |
| 7 | To enhance their thinking and reflective skills | 15 |
| 7 | To equip them skills to lead colleagues | 15 |
| 9 | To help them to solve problems in schools (e.g conflict or to help them to apply new instructional skills) | 14 |
| 10 | To supervise curriculum development project in schools | 12 |
| 11 | To better understand of the roles of PSM(CD) | 11 |
| 11 | To be useful for them | 11 |
| 13 | To equip them with knowledge of curriculum leadership | 9 |
| 13 | To better understand of education theories | 9 |
| 15 | To know how to make friends with colleagues (e.g. building rapport) | 7 |
| 16 | To enhance professional exchange among local schools | 5 |
| 17 | Others | 2 |
| | | |

These expectations indicated the vast range of skills and knowledge needed for performing their duties in school. These expectations also reflected that the work of PSM(CD)s is quite a demanding post. These expectations are more or less equivalent to the roles identified by other researchers (see p. 3) except that these curriculum leaders did not expect the course to prepare them for allocating school resources and to deal with issues concerning peer review.

Course Evaluation

Results of the course evaluation on each of the session were released at the Second Programme Management and Quality Assurance Committee Meeting in June. The results showed that the percentage of participants rated on the high score (i.e. 4-6⁴). The results of the end of the course questionnaire showed similar results as report at the Third Programme Management and Quality Assurance Committee Meeting. A summary of feedback on two relevant questions from the course participants of C1 and C2 are listed as follows⁵:

Table 3: Summary of feedback from the course participants of C1 – Question No. 1

| Question | Rating | Group (%) | | | | | | | | Average (%) |
|--|------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------|
| | | C1a | C1b | C1c | C1d | C1e | C1f | C1g | C1h | |
| <i>Programme/ services content is relevant to the aims</i> | 4 | 25 | 39.29 | 19.05 | 23.53 | 15.38 | 23.53 | 25 | 40 | 26.3 |
| | 5 | 55 | 35.71 | 80.95 | 64.71 | 69.23 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 50 | 60.4 |
| | 6 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 11.76 | 15.38 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.64 |
| | Total 5-6 | 65 | 35.71 | 80.95 | 76.47 | 84.61 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 50 | 65.04 |
| | Total 4-6 | 90 | 75 | 100 | 100 | 99.99 | 82.35 | 93.75 | 90 | 91.39 |
| | Mean index | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4.63 |

Table 4: Summary of feedback from the course participants of C1 – Question No. 3

| Question | Rating | Group (%) | | | | | | | | Average (%) |
|---|------------|-----------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------|
| | | C1a | C1b | C1c | C1d | C1e | C1f | C1g | C1h | |
| <i>Content suits professional needs</i> | 4 | 55 | 42.86 | 38.1 | 11.76 | 23.08 | 35.29 | 25 | 30 | 32.64 |
| | 5 | 30 | 32.14 | 61.9 | 58.82 | 69.23 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 40 | 52.46 |
| | 6 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 11.76 | 7.69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.68 |
| | Total 5-6 | 40 | 32.14 | 61.9 | 70.58 | 76.92 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 40 | 56.14 |
| | Total 4-6 | 95 | 75 | 100 | 82.34 | 100 | 94.11 | 93.75 | 70 | 88.78 |
| | Mean index | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.63 |

Table 5: Summary of feedback from the course participants of C2 – Question No 1

| Question | Rating | Group (%) | | | | | | | | Average (%) |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-------------|
| | | C2a | C2b | C2c | C2d | C2e | C2f | C2g | C2h | |
| <i>Programme/ services content is relevant to the</i> | 4 | 27.78 | 47.62 | 35.71 | 66.67 | 29.17 | 40 | 16 | 38.46 | 37.68 |

⁴ The rating of the evaluation questionnaire is from 1 to 6. '1' means 'very dissatisfied'; '3' as the mid-point; '6' very satisfied.

⁵ Other questions asked in the evaluation questionnaire include the programme/ service is highly recommendable; appropriate level of interest; course arrangements are appropriate; the programme/ service should be introduced to more people; tutor's preparation is adequate; good interaction between tutor and participants; quality of learning materials and handouts is satisfactory; the programme/ service should be publicized; etc.

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|-------|-------|
| <i>aims</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 5 | 55.56 | 42.86 | 50 | 33.33 | 58.33 | 53.33 | 64 | 38.46 | 49.48 |
| | 6 | 16.67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12.50 | 3.33 | 12 | 23.08 | 8.54 |
| | Total 5-6 | 72.23 | 42.86 | 50 | 33.33 | 70.83 | 56.66 | 76 | 61.54 | 57.93 |
| | Total 4-6 | 100 | 90.48 | 85.71 | 100 | 100 | 96.66 | 92 | 100 | 95.61 |
| | Mean index | 5 | 4 | 4.5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.69 |

Table 6: Summary of feedback from the course participants of C2 – Question No 3

| Question | rating | Group (%) | | | | | | | | Average (%) |
|---|------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------------|
| | | C2a | C2b | C2c | C2d | C2e | C2f | C2g | C2h | |
| <i>Content suits professional needs</i> | 4 | 55 | 42.86 | 38.10 | 11.76 | 23.08 | 35.29 | 25 | 30 | 32.64 |
| | 5 | 30 | 32.14 | 61.9 | 58.82 | 69.23 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 40 | 52.46 |
| | 6 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 11.76 | 7.69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.86 |
| | Total 5-6 | 40 | 32.14 | 61.9 | 70.58 | 76.92 | 58.82 | 68.75 | 40 | 56.14 |
| | Total 4-6 | 95 | 75 | 100 | 82.34 | 100 | 94.11 | 93.75 | 70 | 88.78 |
| | Mean index | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4.63 |

Some participants had written comments on the course. Most of them focused on how the course could help them better. While acknowledging the usefulness of the course and the good performance of the tutors, they had the following suggestions:

- ♦ *The course is demanding and should be given sufficient time for us to finish the project*
- ♦ *The course should be lengthened so that we could have more time to discuss things in detail.*
- ♦ *It is best if the course could be arranged before we were appointed the post*
- ♦ *It is very difficult to find the time to finish the action research project.*

These are valuable comments for the course developer to consider if the course is to be run again in the future.

Interview Feedback

Twenty-seven interviews with the curriculum leaders showed that they were positive toward the course. These are some of their feedback:

- ‘... the course was really helpful. I now have a better understanding of my position. However, I am also scared after I knew I had a lot of work to do in school.’ (Teacher 1)
- ‘Though the course is very heavy, it is useful. There are a lot of new things that I have not learned before.’ (Teacher 4)
- ‘I learned many new things such as cooperative learning and action research. I never expect the course could teach me these things. The experience is wonderful!’ (Teacher 9)
- ‘The course is what I have expected. But I’d rather get the training first before I started my job in school.’ (Teacher 17)
- ‘This is a good course..... There is too much to learn and to do.’ (Teacher 22)

As the course continued, some new expectations had emerged. One such expectation was the need for more professional exchange from the course. The curriculum leaders would ask for more opportunities to talk and share among curriculum leaders in the sessions they attended. Their suggestions were very useful for the evaluation of the course.

(a) they expect more professional exchange from the course

It is interesting to find out that they did not consider professional exchange was something they expected in the training course. However, they found that the opportunities for sharing their problems and issues of curriculum leadership were very helpful:

'It is a pity that the course is very packed. I would expect more time for dialogues and professional communication among the participants every night when we meet in the classroom' (Teacher 7)

'I have some happy time when we meet each other in the course. We can share our questions, issues and problems in school. You know there are not many people who know what you are talking about. This is not what I expect from the course' (Teacher 9)

(b) they expect more professional assistance and help from the course tutor

In one occasion, the researcher was asked by one course participant if he could conduct an action research workshop for his colleagues in school. When the other participants knew that they could ask the course tutor for help, their expectations for professional assistance from the course tutors increased.

'I didn't know if the course tutor could help us to conduct workshop..... I would expect the EMB could arrange extra workshops for us and for our colleagues.' (Teacher 12)

'I have been waiting for you to come. I expect you to give me some advice on your 5-year school development plan before I forward it to our headmistress' (Teacher 4)

Discussion

To expect something is to look forward to its probable occurrence or appearance. It is also the inference about the probable occurrence of something. In this regard, to a large extent, the course for the curriculum leaders has fulfilled their expectations. This is evident in their high rating scores on the evaluation questionnaire to the questions (1) "programme/ service content is relevant to the aims" and (3) "content suits potential needs" (see Table 3, 4, 5, and 6).

However, a comparison among the specific components of the training courses specified by EMB (see p. 4), the general roles of curriculum leaders listed (see p. 3) and the curriculum leaders' expectations showed that there are gaps needed to be bridged. First, the training courses did not provide little or no input to help them to deal with issues concerning peer review and allocating school resources. As curriculum leaders, the issue is urgent since the EMB are now trying hard to cultivate a collaborative culture in schools. The lack of such skills and knowledge will leave the curriculum leaders in a disadvantage position in building collaborative school culture. Second, it might well be that, for most of the time, allocation of resources is a job for the school principal. In some extent, this is no longer true when curriculum leaders are assisting the principals in working out the five-year plan for school development. In most cases, the curriculum leaders are responsible in deciding target curriculum projects in school. School target projects are to receive more support and attention from the school. In this regard, the curriculum leaders have a part to play both directly and indirectly in allocating school resources. The training courses are not able to equip the curriculum leaders with this kind of capacity.

Furthermore, one expectation as show in Table 2, “to boost their confidence in curriculum leadership”, is worth considering. What kind of expectation is this? Why did these leaders would expect that the course could boost their confidence? The statement may be short but it tells a lot. It is likely that they are not very well prepared for the job in school. They lack the confidence in carrying out the duties in school. The question is how can a course which is designed for prepare them for competent curriculum leadership also look after the affective side of their competence. When we consider other expectations such as ‘to equip them skills to lead colleagues’ and ‘to know how to make friends with colleagues’, we might get a better picture of the whole issue. One of the difficult tasks in school curriculum reform is how to deal with people or ‘*guangxi*’. Making curriculum change may not be difficult technically but to talk to people to change is completely a different thing. It is not easy to change people. It is even more difficult for people to listen the PSM(CD)s who are new to the school and who have only five year commitment.

Bolam and Deal’s (1991) identification of a human resources and political frames are instructive here. They argue that facilitative leadership requires richer perceptions of organization life from the human and political perspective. To mentor teachers, to supervise school-based curriculum project, to engage colleagues in curriculum reform, and to allocate resources requires curriculum leaders not just technical skills and knowledge but also communication competence and political sensibility. The principal of the school will certainly have a role to play. Principals’ support may boost the confidence of PSM(CD)s in school.

Their request for more time in their training is appropriate given the demanding nature of the job they are required to perform. Also, it is understandable that the newly recruited PSM(CD)s found it hard to finish their action research projects in schools. They have their own teaching load to finish, they have to perform their duties as curriculum leaders and their own assignments in the training course. Course arrangement is an issue needs to be look into in order to suits the curriculum leaders better.

Implications

If the curriculum leaders are lack of confidence in performing their job in school, equipping them with skills and knowledge will not enable them to do the job well. It takes time for them to gain considerable experiences and to establish their own image among colleagues in school before they could feel confident enough to lead curriculum reform in schools. Curriculum change is a people-oriented process (Kennedy & Hui, 2004). Knowing how to do curriculum development matters but it is not sufficient. It is how the curriculum leaders influence people and to get people involved and engaged in school reform with commitment that matters most.

The support from the administrative personnel, for example, the principal, in school is critical. Schools that honour a collaborative culture and atmosphere will be more beneficial for school curriculum reform. It is perhaps a good idea to implement the scheme in stages. Only schools who are able to develop positive culture which complements with the curriculum reform can facilitate the work of PSM(CD)s. Lessons need to be learned from successful cases. These experiences are useful for school managers as well as curriculum leaders and offer insight for better school curriculum reforms.

A re-think on the criteria for appointing the position to experienced teachers might be needed as well. Experience certainly counts for the position but more is needed. What counts most are strong leaders who can deal with interpersonal and communication issues in schools. Appropriate experience in school curriculum development and school administration are necessary but not sufficient. The criterion of a minimum of 5 years of teaching experiences for the appointment of the position is also debatable. A track record of teacher leaders is more important for leading curriculum change in schools.

Curriculum change in school relies on the cooperative and collaborative efforts of all colleagues who are willing to take up the challenge. The need to include training in communication skills, team building and rapport as well as politics (Ball, 1987; Siskin & Little, 1995) in school administration is apparent. These skills and knowledge are not only expected by the curriculum leaders but also needed to facilitate their work in school. Otherwise, the fear for building rapport and leading colleagues to school curriculum reform would mean difficult. In this regard, those schools with a more collaborative atmosphere and culture would be more beneficial to the curriculum leader, the less experienced ones in particular. It might well be argued that it is those schools with a more hostile culture needs re-culturing from the curriculum leaders. However, it might also be that the hostile culture is just too much for the curriculum leaders who are not so confident and are still establishing their own image among colleagues. Support from outside might be needed for re-culturing the school instead of shouldering the responsibility to the PSM(CD)S alone.

One of the ways to boost their confidence and to help them in building a collegial culture is to provide on-site assistance from their tutors to make them feel competent and to help them to lead their colleagues in school curriculum reform. While there is no sure way to do curriculum reform in school, the commitment of the curriculum leaders is a major factor for successful school reform. If the curriculum leaders know that there is strong support and professional expertise to assist them from universities or teacher training institutes, this could be confident boosting. In addition, this provides an opportunity for university-school collaboration. This mode of collaboration has proven successful for school-based development.

Conclusion

What do we know about professional development affects our practice on school curriculum change. New knowledge is not led by academic theoreticians and more problems need to be understood and tackled on-site and by practitioners (Fullan, 2005, p. xii). PSM(CD)s are people who play a leading role in introducing appropriate strategies for professional development. They need to work hard in facilitating an appropriate atmosphere for collegial efforts in tackling these problems. The ultimate success of school curriculum reform is chemistry between curriculum leaders and teachers in school. The study provides an opportunity for us to examine issues in appointing curriculum leaders in school and in providing training course for them. Curriculum leaders need not just technical know-how but also the software of how to deal with people in school to boost their confidence in performing their duties.

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