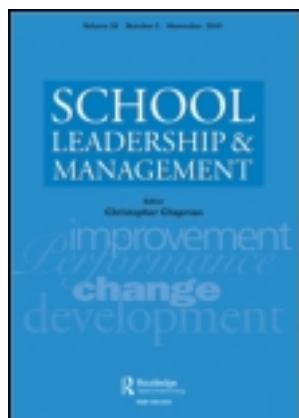


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School leadership in Asia Pacific: identifying challenges and formulating a research agenda

Philip Hallinger^a & Allan D. Walker^a

^a Asia Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change Hong Kong
Institute of Education, Hong Kong

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EDITORIAL

School leadership in Asia Pacific: identifying challenges and formulating a research agenda

The genesis of this special issue of *School Leadership & Management* dates back to a set of independently conceived papers published 15 years ago by Professors Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid (1996) at the Institut Ahminuddin Bagi in Malaysia, Cheng Kai Ming (1995) at the University of Hong Kong, and Philip Hallinger (1995) at Chiang Mai University in Thailand. Disseminated during a period when the forces of globalisation were beginning to gain prominence, these papers raised questions about the portability of the formal knowledge base in educational leadership and management across national borders and cultural contexts. Drawing upon well-established theoretical frameworks underlying studies of leadership and management (see Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell 1968), the authors articulated a challenge to the notion that the extant knowledge base in this field was universally applicable. They had identified what Hallinger and Heck (1996) later referred to as a ‘blind spot’ in the conceptual lenses employed by scholars in the empirical study of educational leadership and management. In their own words 15 years ago:

Finally, although the studies included in this review were conducted in a variety of countries and cultures, the conceptualizations of leadership were all based on Western notions of how leadership is exercised in organizations. This covers up an assumption that characterizes empirical research as well as theory in educational administration. There has been surprisingly little research that is either cross-cultural in nature or that employs indigenous conceptions of leadership in non-Western cultures (Hallinger 1995). This is a glaring shortcoming that needs to be addressed. Such research will need to take into account not only potentially different conceptualizations of leadership, but also different views on the desired outcomes of leadership in other cultures. The serious consideration of non-Western conceptions of leadership and effectiveness have the potential to open our eyes to very different theoretical treatments of this domain. We believe that this will be an increasingly important area of inquiry in future years. (Hallinger and Heck 1996, 783)

This collection of papers continues in the intellectual lineage of this earlier work. The papers were drawn from presentations prepared for the *Asia Leadership Roundtable 2010*, an annual international meeting¹ hosted by the Asia Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The purpose of the *Asia Leadership Roundtable* in 2010 was to set the stage for the next generation of research on educational leadership and change in Asia Pacific. This region of the world had demonstrated a rapid expansion of its K-12 and higher education systems over the prior 20 years. In most countries (e.g., China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam), this had led to a major revamp of

system policies (e.g., recruitment, selection, evaluation of principals) and leadership preparation and development programs in school leadership and management.

Yet, despite evidence of some progress in generating empirical research from the region (see Cheng and Walker 2008; Dimmock and Walker 2005; Hallinger and Kantamara 2001a, 2001b; Kantamara, Hallinger, and Jatiket 2006; Lam 2003; Walker and Dimmock 2002), there remained a pervasive feeling that policy-makers and practitioners continued to rely too heavily on both a knowledge base and training programmes that were generated from other cultural contexts. Thus, the Roundtable meeting sought to place a 'marker' (see Hallinger, this issue) in the intellectual journey that describes the development of our discipline as a global enterprise. It was our goal to challenge the region's scholars to engage more proactively in conducting regionally relevant empirical research into educational leadership and management.

This framed the broad purpose of the *Asia Leadership Roundtable 2010* as well as this special issue of *School Leadership & Management*: to stimulate debate and develop a more coordinated agenda for empirical research on educational leadership and management in the region. This can be delineated in terms of more specific goals:

- (1) To examine the geographic, cultural and political terrain of the current knowledge base in educational leadership and management.
- (2) To assess the relevance of the global knowledge base in the field for the Asia-Pacific region.
- (3) To explore regional challenges facing school leaders and the implications for theory and empirical research.
- (4) To offer strategies for accelerating the development of a regionally grounded knowledge base for our region of the world.
- (5) To provide a model that could stimulate growth in the development of theory and empirical research in other parts of the developing world where limitations of the current knowledge base appear equally relevant.

The opening article, authored by Professor Philip Hallinger of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, sets the stage for the special issue. He begins by reviewing the argument for approaching educational leadership and management as a culturally-mediated endeavour. Next he seeks to validate the assertion that published inquiry in this field is subject to distortion, a lack of representativeness of knowledge generated across national and cultural contexts. He then examines the process of knowledge production in our discipline. This leads to the explication of both challenges and directions for thinking about how scholars might accelerate the development of a regionally relevant knowledge base.

This broadly conceived paper is followed by a series of reports that outline challenges and research agendas that are shaped by the experience of leading and managing schools in several specific cultural contexts within several Asia Pacific societies: Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Australia. The first is authored by Professor Clive Dimmock of the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Singapore has sought to provide intellectual leadership in the region through integration of global knowledge into its own organisation of education at both the K-12 and higher education levels. The

government has also been proactive in seeking to build stronger capacity for research. Professor Dimmock's paper outlines the framework that is guiding a well-funded research effort into school leadership in Singapore. More specifically, his article sketches the politico-cultural-economic conditions of Singapore in which such an agenda has been formed. He goes on to describe the main features of the NIE's funded research in educational leadership and management, and relate its features to the broader Asian and international research agenda in school leadership.

Professor Pan Hui-Ling Pan and Assistant Professor Chen Peiyong of the National Taiwan Normal University, next discuss the intellectual challenges that are engaging scholars in the study of school leadership and management in Taiwan. They begin by outlining the changing context of education in Taiwan. The litany of education reforms will sound familiar to scholars throughout the world: teacher empowerment, decentralisation, quality, accountability, parent involvement. They analyse how these reforms have played out in the Taiwanese context and the resulting challenges faced by school leaders. Drawing upon this background, the authors describe the state of the literature on school leadership and management in Taiwan and suggest priorities for future research.

Australian scholars have a long tradition of contributing to the global research community. Nonetheless, we included a paper from Australia since it is also an important contributor in the Asia Pacific through provision of training programmes and engagement in intellectual discourse on school leadership and management. Assistant Professors Lawrie Drysdale and David Gurr from the University of Melbourne have been engaged over the past decade in the International Successful School Principals Project (Leithwood and Day 2007). Drawing upon their own empirical research, they offer an updated model of successful school leadership based on Australian case studies. This model attempts to capture the relationship between the characteristics of Australian school leaders (who they are), the interventions they initiate (what they do), and the way they respond to the context in which they operate. The model is interrogated by exploring three areas of our continuing research: the role of instructional leadership, sustainability of success and the preparation of future school leaders. This paper provides a useful example of how collaboration among researchers working within a common framework, but focusing on their own national contexts, can contribute to the advancement of local and global knowledge.

Professor Allan Walker and Dr James Ko, of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, provide another example of how regional research informed by the global knowledge base can contribute both locally and internationally. Their paper reports the results of an empirical study whose conceptual framework and methodology were informed by an empirical study conducted in a different cultural context (see Day et al. 2010). Hong Kong's educational system is strongly influenced by its combined British and Chinese historical context. This paper employs current data that describe the impact of Hong Kong's 'high accountability' context on the work of school leaders. As accountability is a pervasive feature of the global education context in 2011, papers such as this illustrate the intellectual leverage that can be gained for advancing both local and global knowledge in the field.

The final paper in the issue is authored by Associate Professor Edmond Law, also of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Dr Law addresses a topic of increasing interest in Asia Pacific, the linkages between culture and changes in educational roles

and leadership practices. More specifically, Law reports findings from his research on how teacher leadership is conceptualised and practiced in a strongly hierarchical Chinese society and educational system. Law employs discourse analysis in order to reveal tensions that arise at the intersection of culture and change in roles and responsibilities. The use of qualitative methods offers useful insight into how these changes are experienced in practice.

In formulating this special issue, it was our hope to provide rationale, direction and examples for other scholars in this and other regions of the world where the cultural context differs from the 'norm' that predominates in the published literature in educational leadership and management. We note that this norm does not describe the state of affairs in the broader management literature, in which international and cross-cultural research is more firmly established and widely reported (see House et al. 2004). Indeed, it is our hope that 15 years hence, when other scholars will review progress in this field, they will conclude that substantial progress can be discerned in both the scope and impact of research generated from the Asia Pacific and other regions of the world that are currently under-represented in the global knowledge base in educational leadership and management.

Philip Hallinger and Allan D. Walker
Asia Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change
Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Note

1. <http://www.ied.edu.hk/apclc/roundtable2010/>.

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