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Allan Walker and Philip Hallinger

Over the last 20 years discussion about how to better prepare leaders for their role in increasingly complex schools has featured prominently in political and professional forums. Debate about the place, shape and intricacies of what constitutes meaningful development are common across geographic, systemic and cultural boundaries. These run within broader interest and investigation into what constitutes successful school leadership. It is now accepted that you can neither discuss successful leadership without reference to leader development, or leader development without reference to what we know about why and how leadership works best.

The constantly shrinking void between knowledge generated iteratively in different corners of the world has shown that many of the issues that continue to bedevil meaningful leadership development exhibit a certain commonality across very different settings. Equally, however, and at the same time, they reinforce the reality that where leaders work – their context – refracts these commonalities to the extent that by the time they reach functionality they are hard to recognize. It is therefore not only important to examine leadership and leadership development within different contexts, but to cast the net globally in order to understand the range of practices and what appears to make a difference.

The purpose of this special issue is to critically analyse the state of school leader development across a number of societies. As such, it aims to contribute to previous efforts to examine broad global trends in this domain (Brundrett and Crawford, 2012; Hallinger, 2003; Huber, 2004; Lumby et al., 2008); as well as in more geographically defined slices, such Europe (Muller and Schratz, 2008); Asia (Walker et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2007) and the USA (Young et al., 2009). Completed and in-train studies in the area range from investigations across societies (comparative), studies examining the intersection between policy and leader development, and research at the programme level.

In this issue we include these diverse perspectives in three types of articles. The first type provides a *comparative* perspective on leader development programmes and focuses predominantly on programme ‘definition’ and/or the design of programmes. Definition refers to underpinning rationales and processes of programmes and design refers to the structure and content of these programmes. The comparative articles aim to provide a broader, cross-national base from which to discuss leader development.

Corresponding author:

Allan Walker, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, 10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, Hong Kong.

Email: adwalker@ied.edu.hk

The second type of article examines the definition and design of leader development in a single country from a policy perspective. The three contexts addressed through this approach are Australia, China and England. Discussion drawn from national contexts holds currency and ramifications both within and beyond their borders. For example, the impact of development programmes on leadership practice and the role of the state in defining such programmes are of interest across national boundaries. Single country papers aim to provide readers with insights into key leader development issues in specific countries while, at the same time, stimulating reflection on similar issues within their own contexts.

The third type of article examines the design, development and impact of specific leadership focused programmes within two countries, Germany and the USA. Both articles target the efficacy of specific, more focused, development interventions around feedback and self-assessment.

For this volume we used a number of selection criteria. First, we included countries recognized as among those leading the way in attempts to improve leader development. For example, because of China's performance on the recent PISA results there is much interest, both in and outside of China in how leaders are prepared. The establishment of new, well-resourced professional bodies established in Australia to improve the development and professionalism of school leaders is of international interest, as is the continuing evolution and impact of the National College in England.

Second, we wanted to provide at least some coverage of countries in different contexts, including some where little has been written until quite recently (in English) about leader development. Examples of this include Germany and China. To cover as broad a spectrum as possible in a restricted space, we included perspectives from these two countries, as well as from the USA, the UK and Australia. Third, we wanted to provide explicit as well as implicit comparison in terms of the definition and design of leader development programmes. To this end we included two articles that took this perspective. As with any restricted collection of this nature, we acknowledge that much interesting and meaningful work in the area is not included.

Our objectives for this special issue are to:

1. examine the state of play in school leader development across a number of societies and programmes;
2. identify the key trends emerging from a comparison of leader development programmes internationally;
3. explore some of the challenges facing those involved in school leader development and the implications these may hold for research.

The first group of papers takes an international comparative perspective on leadership development; there are two articles in this group. The opening article examines some of the major features of selected principal preparation programmes across five different education systems; all of which are considered high performing. In the article, Walker and colleagues attempt to identify key characteristics with and across these programmes in order to inform further development practices. The authors delineate key profiles for each of the programmes and then unpack these further in order to identify both commonalities and variations between and across leadership programmes. These are discussed terms of the guiding frameworks, content and operational features of programmes. The authors round out the article by suggesting some important implications for policy and practice.

In the second comparative article, Hallinger and Lu ask what we can learn about preparing school principals through researching three different types of master's degree programmes. The programmes analysed include master of business administration (MBA), master of public

administration (MPA) and MBA programmes with a concentration in education (MBA-Ed). As in the first article the authors identify patterns across programme types in terms of structure, curriculum, content and the kind of learning methodologies used. The analysis results in the identification of a number of features that have the potential to enrich university-based master of education degree programmes, which often double as principal preparation courses.

The second group of papers examines in more depth leader development in specific countries and its connections with the broader policy context. Bush provides a retrospective analysis of the National College for School Leadership (now known as the National College) in England. After tracking its political development, Bush focuses on what is perhaps the most well-known of the College's programmes – the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). He critiques the NPQH from a political as well as a professional perspective. He questions the decision to make it non-mandatory, asserting that leadership development 'cannot be left to chance'.

The second article in this group analyses policy and politics around leadership development in Australia. Dinham and colleagues track the development of professional standards for principals. This major initiative of the government-established Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was launched in 2010. The role of this fledgling body is to provide education leadership nationally through promoting excellence in teaching and school leadership aimed at driving 'transformational change'. The authors outline the origins, iterative process and context development of the AITSL. The authors describe and analyse the national piloting of national standards, as well as mechanisms put in place to support the use of standards in practice.

The third article in the 'policy' group analyses the continuities and changes in principal development in Mainland China over the past two decades. Zhang and colleagues analyse 14 key policies that have shaped principal development in an attempt to identify their influence on programs. Among the key changes they identified were the high-level recognition of the link between principal development and effective change in schools; significant growth in the number and background of development providers; and shifts in the officially articulated purpose, content, curriculum and pedagogy of the programmes. However, as the authors explain, there has been little change in the level of control maintained by the state over the ideology dominating development. This may serve as a factor limiting the potential of principal development programmes to effect real change in schools.

The final two articles look at leader development programmes in two countries and how they have been evaluated. The first, by Huff and colleagues, describes a multi-phase coaching model that was implemented to help principals improve their instructional leadership practices. Findings are reported in the form of contrasting cases that illustrate how two principals' responded to coaching. This analysis informs discussion about how the principals' coaches differed in how they implemented the model across two dimensions – 'dose and the quality of program delivery'. Huff concludes the piece by suggesting how the findings of his research might inform future leadership coaching programs and how to increase the impact of coaching on principal practice.

In the final article Huber investigates the use of multiple learning approaches and types of learning in principal professional development programmes. Huber is particularly interested in self-assessment and feedback and lays out the 'Competence Profile School Management' model, which includes mechanisms for participants to engage in self-assessment and receive feedback. The author then investigates the impact of the self-assessment and feedback on participants' learning. Among his findings were that participants involved in the mechanism were more likely to reflect on their practice, gather more information about themselves, and apply this to their day-to-day practice. In addition, participants were more willing to apply different types of leadership in their schools and systems.

We hope readers find the collection of papers useful and that, individually and together, they contribute some worthwhile perspectives to ongoing discussion about ways to make school principal development more relevant to the building of successful schools.

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Author biographies

Allan Walker is Joseph Lau Professor of International Educational Leadership and Dean of the Faculty of Education and Human Development at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. His research interests are in cross-cultural leadership and leadership development.

Philip Hallinger is Joseph Lau Professor of Leadership and Change at Hong Kong Institute of Education. His research interests are in leadership effects and school improvement.