

www.ncsl.org.uk

International Research Associate Summary Report

Shirley Wong, Principal, TWGH's Kap Yan Directors' College,
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China

Perceptions of the Impact of Leadership Training on Newly Appointed Female Principals in Middle and Secondary Schools in England and Hong Kong

Spring 2006

Introduction

In recent years, the burden placed on school principals has become even heavier with increasing accountability, due to higher visibility and implementation of various quality assurance mechanisms. It is not surprising, then, that leadership training for school principals has grown in priority for governments all over the world (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Bush, 1998; Blandford and Squire, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Hobson et al, 2003; Wong, 2004).

Arguably the need for high-quality training and development is greatest for newly appointed principals (NAPs), because, as Robbins and Alvy (2004), suggest:

Patterns or habits developed in one's initial years of service tend to influence success in the remaining years of one's career.

There is no clear-cut definition for NAPs, but usually the term refers to principals who are in the first two to three years of their principalship. Most developed countries now have some sort of leadership training programmes provided for this group of headteachers.

This study aims to investigate what, if any, impact leadership training had on a small group of female NAPs at the secondary and middle school level in Hong Kong and England. Participants were asked to describe the direct or indirect impact of the various components in the formal training course provided for NAPs on their knowledge, skills, values, attributes, leadership styles, and on being a principal as a whole in the context of their schools.

Research project and methodology

Research was conducted during the period from March to July 2004. In both Hong Kong and England, five female NAPs were selected on the basis of their being at the initial stage of their principalship, their recent experiences of training and their willingness to contribute to the focus of the study, namely, understanding the impact of the leadership training.

During the interviews, the respondents were asked to describe the types of impact their NAP training had on their knowledge, skills, values and attributes.

In the case of the English heads, this is considered through reference to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the New Visions Programme for Early Headship (New Visions), the latter being one option available under the Headteacher Induction Programme (HIP).

The research was also informed by a review of relevant literature on the evaluation of professional development, a summary of which is available in the full report from this project.

Research findings

1. Background to training programmes for NAPs in Hong Kong and England

Between the 1980s and 2000, NAPs in Hong Kong were required to attend an administrative course organised by the Hong Kong Education Department (HKED) to equip themselves with basic management concepts and skills for carrying out their duties as principals (HKED, 1999, p.4).

In September 2000, HKED introduced a designated training programme for NAPs. This programme was established as an interim measure prior to the introduction of the Certification for Principalship in July 2002. Attainment of this certification has been mandatory for all prospective heads seeking appointment since September 2004.

In England, induction and management development opportunities for newly appointed headteachers were offered at the discretion of individual local education authorities in the 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in some diversity in the quality of support offered (Blandford and Squire, 2000, p.21).

However, since the mid-1990s, a series of measures has been introduced by the government to ensure greater parity of opportunity. In 1995, the Headteachers' Leadership and Management Programme (Headlamp) was introduced with the aim of providing access to an open market of induction and management development opportunities for newly appointed headteachers, each of whom would be entitled to a grant of £2,500 to purchase approved training and support within two years of their appointment. This programme was replaced in 2003 by the Headteacher Induction Programme (HIP), which, while maintaining the basic entitlement, introduced a more structured approach to the provision of support.

In addition, NPQH was introduced in 1997 by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) as a means of preparing prospective headteachers. This was subsequently revised and transferred to the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2001, before becoming a mandatory requirement for those looking to take up headship from April 2004.

When comparing the NAP training programmes available in Hong Kong and England, the Hong Kong programme is more structured and is mandatory, while Headlamp and more recently HIP allow greater freedom for the new headteachers to decide on what to do with the training fund.

2. Impact of aspects of NAP training programmes

All of the respondents who had participated on NPQH considered it useful in enhancing their competence and hence their confidence in handling their work. It therefore seems clear that some kinds of preparatory courses for aspiring principals is useful in providing those who take on headship with the necessary competence.

When asked about the overall perception of the training, both the NAPs from Hong Kong and England felt that this support had been essential, as it enhanced their confidence and provided some kind of emotional support, though they vary in telling exactly what the impact is. The findings are in line with those of Bennett and Smith (2000) in their earlier work in this field.

This study found a number of factors were important in determining NAPs' perceptions on the impact of their development.

1. The previous experiences of NAPs had a marked effect on how they perceived the impact. Those respondents who were groomed to be the successor by their previous principals and those who had actually acted up to the head's post tended to underplay the impact of the training. This is probably related to the confidence they had built up from their previous experiences.
2. Immediate applicability of the learning tends to enhance its impact. It is obvious that NAPs will find the greatest impact if they can apply their learning immediately in their schools at a time of need.

3. The mode of delivery of the training is an important factor. Interactive activities involving opportunity for reflection and sharing, as in New Visions and the Extended Course in Hong Kong, were felt to have had greater impact than courses that were ostensibly concerned with information-giving, which had less impact. Some support existed for replacing such programmes at least in part with some form of handbook that principals could refer to in times of need. As new principals vary widely in their professional competences, readiness and approaches to learning, opportunities for them to learn from each other and to have some sort of ownership of their learning are important considerations.

4. The timescale over which impact is assessed is of major significance. Learning is an accumulative process and when the perception on impact is recalled after various periods of time, the perceived impact may have changed.

5. The opportunity for professional socialisation is a further area of importance. All the respondents considered the networks they formed with each other had the greatest impact, reducing their sense of loneliness as they connected with others who were in the same situation. This is of considerable importance in supporting the professional socialisation of NAPs.

6. The performance and commitment of the experienced principals involved in the Hong Kong programme for new principals was the final area that affected the impact of this support. It is clear that NAPs look to the experienced principals for understanding and modelling, so the selection of experienced principals to help in NAP training needs to be careful.

Recommendations

In research conducted for NCSL, Hartle and Thomas (2003, p.4) point out that the schools sector is facing serious recruitment and retention problems for teaching and leadership posts, especially for recruitment to headteacher positions. Similar worries also exist within the Hong Kong schools context. With reducing numbers of candidates applying for headship in both England and Hong Kong, a high-quality NAP training programme may help to alleviate some of these concerns and lessen the worries of potential applicants.

To have greater impact on the participants, it appears that a NAP programme should provide:

- a handbook with necessary information for NAPs to refer to when necessary
- a needs analysis mechanism with outcomes that need to be followed up
- opportunities for networking among NAPs themselves, and a short residential or offshore programme to enable NAPs to be really free from their work and to get to know each other better
- opportunities for reflection and discussion about values and the big picture of the educational scene
- shared experiences with experienced principals, who should be committed and willing to model for NAPs
- support in helping NAPs face ad hoc problems related to current issues or technical difficulties

This study also suggests that the programme should consist of a core element together with some elective elements so that NAPs can choose in accordance with their needs and contexts. The values and attitudes of experienced practitioners seem to have a significant impact on the values and attitudes of NAPs, and the selection of experienced practitioners appears to be critical in shaping the mindsets of NAPs.

Finally, it is important that professional development to support heads at the start of their headships forms part of a broader continuum of activity, intended to support individuals throughout their careers. In England, entry to headship represents one of five identified stages of school leadership (ie emergent leadership, established leadership, entry to headship, advanced leadership and consultancy leadership), intended to cover the entire career spectrum. In Hong Kong, the professional development of NAPs is part of the Principals' Continuing Professional Development framework, which covers three stages of school leadership (ie aspiring principals, newly appointed principals and serving principals) and which also provides continuing support.

References

- Bennett, N & Smith, B, 2000, Assessing the impact of professional development in educational management, *Professional Development Today*, 3(2), 71–81
- Blanford, S & Squire, L, 2000, An evaluation of the Teacher Training Agency Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (Headlamp), *Educational Management and Administration*, 28(1), 21–32
- Bush, T, 1998, The National Professional Qualification for Headship: the key to effective school leadership?, *School Leadership and Management*, 18(3), 321–33
- Hallinger, P, 2003, The emergence of school leadership development in an era of globalization: 1980–2002. In Hallinger P (ed), 2003, *Reshaping the Landscape of School Leadership Development: a global perspective*, Netherlands, Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers
- Hartle, F & Thomas, K, 2003, *Growing Tomorrow's Leaders: the challenge*, Nottingham, NCSL
- HKED, 1999, *Leadership Training Programme for Principals: consultation paper*, HKSAR, Education Department, Task Group on Training and Development of School Heads
- Hobson, A, Brown, E, Ashby, P, Keys, W, Sharp, C & Benefield, P, 2003, *Issues for Early Headship: problems and support strategies: a review of literature carried out for NCSL*, Nottingham, NCSL
- Robins, P & Alvy, H, 2004, *The New Principal's Fieldbook: strategies for success*, Virginia, ASCD
- Weindling, D & Earley, P, 1987, The first years of headship: towards better practice, *Educational Research*, 29(3), 202–12
- Wong, P, 2004, The professional development of school principals: insights from evaluating a programme in Hong Kong, *School Leadership and Management*, 24(2), 139–62

Research associate reports available in spring 2006

■ **Comparing the Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Leaders in English Schools and Cross-boundary Leaders in South Africa**

Professor Kholeka Moloi, *University of Johannesburg*
and Geraldine Potgieter, *Head of Department, Naturena Primary School, Johannesburg*

■ **Developing the Person in the Professional**

Building the capacity of teachers for improved student learning: the missing basket – personal learning

Jan Robertson, *Associate Professor, University of Waikato, New Zealand* and Lesley Murrihy, *Principal, Manunui School, New Zealand*

Research Associate Programme

Summary and full report versions of this and previous research associate studies are available from the NCSL website at **www.ncsl.org.uk/researchpublications**

We welcome enquiries about the Research Associate programme. For further information about:

- current projects
- previously published reports
- becoming a research associate

Please visit the website:

www.ncsl.org.uk/researchassociates

**National College for
School Leadership**
Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155
F: 0115 872 2001
E: ncsl-office@ncsl.org.uk
W: www.ncsl.org.uk

Disclaimer

In publishing Research Associate reports, NCSL is offering a voice to practitioner leaders to communicate with their colleagues. Individual reports reflect personal views based on evidence-based research and as such are not statements of NCSL policy.