

## **Understanding the Ecologies of Education Reforms: Comparing the Perceptions of Secondary Teachers and Students in Five Countries**

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### **Introduction**

In the 1990s, education reforms emerged around the world (Fullan, 2000). Reform in education often demands changes in practice that challenge teachers. These changes can trigger resistance, debate, and passivity. Teachers do not resist change; they simply resist the transitions required to change their tried and true lesson plans, activities, and assessments (Sowell, 2005; Wiggins &McTighe, 2006). In reform efforts, teachers often report feeling overwhelmed and under-supported (Helsby, 1999; Lasky and Sutherland, 2000; Soucek and Pannu, 1996; Taylor, 1997).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate secondary teachers' and students' perceptions of how teachers in China, Sierra Leone, Brazil, Jamaica and Canada (Ontario and Quebec) are implementing secondary school reforms. Areas of interest include curriculum, teaching strategies, student evaluation methods, special education, classroom management, and high-stakes examination.

### **Research Methods and Sources of Data**

Major sources of data were anonymous surveys for sample teachers and students in respective countries. Survey questions involved 5-point Likert scales of how often a teaching, evaluation, and management strategy is used, amount of planning and support, and degrees of satisfaction. It also contained open-ended questions. In each country, 12-20 sample schools were selected. At each sample school, 25 randomly selected teachers and two/three representative classes were asked to complete the surveys. Surveys are designed to provide a synthesis of what happens in the classrooms from the stakeholders' perspectives.

### **Roundtable Abstract (Dissemination of Results)**

The objective of this study was to examine how and to what extent teachers have implemented educational reforms in China. This session will focus on results from data obtained recently in SW and NE China). Major sources of data for this study were separate anonymous surveys for teachers, parents and students in eight sample schools (data analyzed so far). The study concluded that teachers and parents were satisfied with the reform initiatives. Most teachers were able to make changes that include curriculum, teaching strategies, and student evaluation. Special education is not a major concern for teachers. Teachers had enough resources and in-service training (not sure about the rural areas). However, they are beginning to experience classroom management problems and difficulties that arose from the conflict between activity-based learning and exam-oriented systems. Chinese educators are at the crossroads of whether

the 'quality' education reform is needed at this time or change the high stakes examination system.

### **Research Proposal (for Discussion)**

Now that the data collection stage of the study is almost complete, the objectives of future research for the remaining of Stage 1 include the following:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the reforms among different settings?
2. What are the similar and different perspectives from stakeholders in different context?
3. Given our understanding of the nature of relationships among phenomena within education, and social issues in different cultural contexts, can we establish theories and strategies with respect to teaching and learning in reform initiative?

### **Stage 2: Research Questions and Methodology**

1. What are the characteristics of high performing principals in terms of successful implementation of education reforms?
2. What roles do principals play to foster successful reform implementation in their schools?

This study will use the mixed method approach to explore the factors which define the high performing principals in terms of successful implementation of education reforms. Sample principals who satisfied the criteria for high performing in each country will be identified from the sample schools in Stage 1. They will be interviewed to determine the characteristics, abilities and behaviour associated with high performing principals. These include (a) a sense of mission for the school community and education in general, (b) instructional leadership—focusing on the quality of teaching and learning, (c) building strong relationships with community and parents, (d) including staff, parents and key constituents in a participative approach in the life of the school, (e) hands-on monitoring of staff and school performance, (f) hands-on involvement in teacher selection and replacement, and (g) improving academic performance. Each interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes.

The analysis of data will be focused on placing the factors associated with high performing principals into categories based on the consistent patterns of behaviours, characteristics and actions which emerged during the interviews conducted. The categories will be further fine tuned by literature review and a process of continuous reflection on the responses provided by the interviewees and a review of the tapes along with field notes collected. The findings will be classified into nine categories, which defined the high performing principals: (a) Personal

Philosophy and Beliefs, (b) Personal Strengths, Qualities, and Abilities, (c) General Leadership and Management Qualities, (d) Academic Development and Achievement, (e) Students Development and Achievement, (f) Staff Development and Relationship, (g) Community Development and Relationship, (h) Ministry of Education, Regional Office and Board Support and Relationship, and (i) Plant and Facilities Maintenance and Development.

This study was performed recently at the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica.