



Principal life histories in relation to education reform: reconceptualising agency and empowerment'

Dr Paul Campbell

This paper explores the intricate relationship between principals' life histories and educational reform, with a focus on reconceptualising agency and empowerment. Drawing on empirical research involving Hong Kong public school principals, the study examines how these leaders interpret and construct their roles amidst dynamic socio-cultural, linguistic, organizational, and policy conditions. Utilizing sensemaking theory and Emirbayer and Mische's 'chordal triad of agency,' the research highlights the influence of personal experiences and career histories on leadership narratives and decision-making processes.

The study investigates how principals describe their career histories in relation to educational reform, emphasizing the interplay between past practices, envisioned goals, and situational constraints. By adopting a qualitative, life history narrative approach, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how principals negotiate the complexities of educational change, prioritize policies, and make decisions about school improvement.

This multi-layered analysis contributes to the theoretical development of educational leadership, particularly in under-represented contexts like Hong Kong. It offers insights into the co-construction of reform and policy implementation. The findings underscore the importance of considering principals' identities and experiences in shaping their leadership practices, ultimately informing strategies for supporting their professional work and enhancing school practices.

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