The 2nd Hong Kong School Principals' Conference 2006

Keynote Speech

Leading Schools in Troubled Times: Salvaging and Restoring Professional Identity, Purpose and Satisfaction

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Abstract - Summary

These are troubled times for school leaders and teachers. This paper begins by alluding to the high levels of stress and pressure they are currently experiencing. It then outlines the imminent crisis reflected in the shortage of potential and actual school leaders and unravels the reasons and causes for it. Why are so many principals disillusioned and stressed? Why is the supply of principals not matching the demand? Government policies and societal expectations are changing the leadership role so fundamentally that the professional identities of those who become leaders are being transformed. They can no longer practice according to their beliefs, or be true to themselves. Stress and dissatisfaction result. How can their sense of self-worth, their professional identity, their purpose as leaders and their job satisfaction, be salvaged and restored?

The solution, it is argued, rests on re-discovering their personal and professional identities, that is, the values and beliefs they, as leaders, truly believe in. This involves – 1) leading according to a clear set of values and developing passionate leadership; 2) deciding on a realistic, achievable set of goals and culture for the school; 3) focusing on the things that matter to them and on which they have expertise – curriculum, teaching and learning, and above all, care for the general welfare of students; 4) recruiting and developing a critical mass of trusted team leaders who will

work to achieve the same goals. In these ways, the goals of optimizing leadership effectiveness, enhancing curriculum and instruction and energizing teacher capacity are most likely to result.

Introduction

In recent times, Hong Kong principals and teachers, like their counterparts elsewhere, have experienced particularly high levels of stress and work pressure. Arguably, the stress has been the result of frequent and top-down education reforms, negativity caused by serious competition between schools for students, and the lingering threat of school closures in Hong Kong. A spate of reports in the past two years suggests that 25% of teachers are in a state of depression and burn out, and more than 50% have the intention to retire or resign earlier than they need. Following recent tragic suicide cases, 10,000 teachers in Hong Kong protested against education reforms. These are troubled times, indeed, for teachers and principals in Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

In many education systems around the globe, a developing crisis in teaching and school leadership is apparent. Potential recruits are deciding not to enter the teaching profession. The supply of teachers applying for leader positions - especially but not exclusively, the principalship - is dropping significantly at the very time when policy makers are placing more responsibility and importance on school leaders to deliver on policy initiatives. In 2003 in the UK, secondary schools received an average 16.5 applications for headship, compared with 65 in 1980 (Howson, 2003; Morgan et al, 1983). In 2002-3, the average number of candidates for each primary headteacher vacancy in the UK was less than 5. In London, 55% of 79 schools that have recently advertised for a head failed to fill the post, and currently 25% of London primary schools are without a head. Some groups are conspicuously absent from leadership positions – these include women and teachers of minority ethnic origin. The crisis is deepened by stringent requirements that leaders have training and certification in leadership prior to appointment, and by a growing problem of retention as leaders opt for early retirement. The crisis has little to do with salaries, which have risen substantially. Arguably, the morale of principals has never been lower.

Why this crisis? The responsibilities and accountabilities placed on leaders are now so immense that potential leaders are voting with their feet – the rewards are not worth the pressure and stress associated with a job that carries immense responsibility, is excessively assessed, and for which there is often little job security. The pace and

nature of policy change often fails to make sense to potential and actual leaders who entered the profession as teachers, and developed strong professional identities as educators in what was a caring profession. Relentless waves of policy initiatives - many of which seem to lack coherence or to make sense to principals - are challenging their professional identities and contributing to the crisis referred to above. Principals are finding it impossible to reconcile their personal and professional identities as educators and upholders of the welfare of their students and teachers. They feel unable to lead schools in the way and in the directions they want.

The three conference sub-themes - optimizing leadership effectiveness, enhancing curriculum and instruction, and energizing teacher capacity – point the way forward. Underlying all three is the need to salvage and restore the professional identities of principals (and other leaders) as true professionals. Principals' and teachers' professional identities – their self image and what they believe in - centre on being educators primarily driven by student interests and concerns for student development and welfare, rather than reform agendas that focus on exam scores, academic outcomes and market-driven policies.

This paper argues that the way to overcome contemporary problems is to salvage and restore the professional identities of principals (and teachers). It is claimed that there are four ways in which this can be accomplished by principals - i) developing a strong sense of personal and professional values for education – on which to base passionate leadership; ii) deciding with the school community what is a realistic scenario for the nature and character for their school – given its student and resource intake; iii) re-focusing professional experiences and thus identities on what principals and teachers best know and love – improving teaching, learning and curriculum; iv) proactively recruiting and developing a critical mass of professionals and community to support the desired school culture. These steps hold promise not only for restoring the authentic professional identities that principals want to nurture, but for re-establishing their sense of purpose and re-kindling their job satisfaction. Until these happen, principals and teachers will remain vulnerable to government and outside pressures that deny them their professional identities and career trajectories as educators. If, on the other hand, they can be achieved, principals and teachers will make schools strong, robust organisations able to withstand and mediate the outside demands of governments and others.

My argument is that both the stresses in teachers' and principals' professional lives in Hong Kong and the supply crisis, are to be understood, as they are elsewhere, through

the interplay of three concepts – *professional identity*, *organisational and professional socialisation experiences*, and *career trajectory*.

Identity is how we perceive ourselves, our self-image - in relation to specific contexts and roles in life and work (Giddens, 1991, Jenkins 2004). Professional identity derives from our self-perception, our self-image, and our self-efficacy in relation to our work and career (Goodson and Walker, 1991). It is also dependent on how we think others judge us. There may be tensions between self-image and social role. Identities are a product of both structure and agency, and the interplay between them; they are in a constant state of flux, shifting and changing over time. Some argue (Holquist, 1990; Holland and Lave, 2001) that that principals and teachers, for example, have multiple identities for different functions and roles. These multiple identities sometimes conflict. Identities largely form through our socialisation experiences.

Socialisation, following Merton's (1963) distinction, has a *professional* component, resulting from learning about a role or roles that develop through personal experiences of schools, teaching, and leadership, and from formal courses. Wenger (1998), for example, has suggested that professional identities are formed through membership of, and participation in, communities of practice. An *organisational* component comes from the learning and experiences gained from a particular role in a specific organisation. Socialisation processes help explain how identities are formed and re-formed over time.

The conception of *career trajectory* refers to the historical sequence of past, present - and possible or intended future, roles and positions. It is the interplay of identity and socialisation experience that influences career trajectory, and the latter in turn feeds back to influence professional identity and socialisation. For example, specific past socialisation experiences of teachers may influence their professional identities, which in turn affect whether or not they aspire to promotional positions. If they attain such promotion, new career opportunities feedback to affect their socialisation and identity. We need to understand more about these interdependencies through further research. For example, what are potential and actual leaders' experiences and perceptions of their past, present and possible future roles in school in relation to leadership, and what are the processes and influences by which their identities are shaped and formed (socialisation)? How do teachers' identities shape their view of their career paths and the choices available to them (career trajectory)?

Like other professional groups, teachers are socialised into ways of being and they develop highly embedded value systems (Johnson 1972; Larson, 1977). Teachers are socialised into a world of classrooms, personal contact with students, and collegial relations with colleagues, and may thus find predominantly managerial roles involving notions of hierarchy, management, budgeting, and leadership, unattractive. Teachers are trained and socialised into the profession through notions of pedagogy and the classroom rather than organisational control and management. Friedson (2001) posits that there are fundamental differences between professional attitudes to work and market based or organisational attitudes, and that this will be one of the key social divides of this century. The state's desire to promote more 'leadership' may actually be challenged by the intangible but deeply held value system of teaching professionals. It is important to establish therefore how identities of 'leadership' are formed

- Is there a distinct leadership identity, and what are the socialising experiences that shape and form it?
- To what extent might leadership identities be congruent, or in conflict, with teacher identities?
- Is it more appropriate to consider leaders as having multiple identities?
- If so, how are these reconciled, and where are the tensions?

The three concepts I believe help explain the stress levels of teachers and principals and the crisis in leadership supply. People learn to adopt expected roles through their socialisation experiences at work and elsewhere; their perceptions of how they perform these roles allow them to form a sense of professional identity. Professional and social experiences influence their career trajectory in terms of the positions and roles to which they aspire or otherwise, and whether or not they stay in or leave the profession; and if they stay, whether or not they seek promotion.

What is being argued is that the professional identities that leader-principals are nowadays expected to assume are remote and distant from those that they were attracted to when they entered the profession as teachers, and even remote from their original conception of the principalship. For many principals, the policy environment has changed dramatically and with it the internal organisational culture of schools. The roles now expected of teachers and principals are so radically different from those on which their professional identities were formed. To be a teacher or a principal now is to operate in a system that is driven by learning outcomes and

examination results, market-driven policies, inter-school rivalry and competition for students, cost-effectiveness, hard bottom-line budgets, and in some places, increasing reliance on non-government, private sources of funding. A constant state of flux as wave-after- wave of new government policies is implemented has become the norm; these seem to be structural rather than process oriented, cosmetic rather than substantive, political rather than educational. To principals and teachers they are difficult to identify with.

From principals' and teachers' viewpoint, there is increasing disenchantment with government education policies that place expectations, roles and accountabilities on them that run counter to their professional values, beliefs and priorities. Moreover, potential principals – teachers, department heads and deputies – are voting with their feet – they are no longer attracted to leadership – because the requirements and expectations of becoming a leader do not match with their personal and professional identities. Those whose ambitions carry them into leadership positions are often stressed and disillusioned – the nature of their work and expectations of them are increasingly dictated by others, especially policy makers – and these conflict with their own personal and professional values and identities. This leads many to feel unable to believe in the job, and instil their own professional values on their schools.

Occupational stress comes from being expected to assume professional identities that are alien to and in conflict with existing self images, values and beliefs. Some people can manage multiple identities, but only if they do not conflict. Likewise, people tend not to make career decisions which place them in roles that conflict with their values, self image and professional identity. Sometimes, however, the policy environment substantially changes roles that are currently occupied so much that professional identities are challenged in extreme – and this may well what is happening to principals and teachers now.

The way forward - salvaging and restoring professional identities

According to the argument, the way to relieve stress and to instil satisfaction back in the work lives of principals and teachers is to salvage and restore professional identities. The three conference sub-themes - optimizing leadership effectiveness, enhancing curriculum and instruction, and energizing teacher capacity – point the way forward. All three suggest ways to reconstruct professional identities that are based on principals' and teachers' core beliefs and values, and their self-image.

In particular, I identify four strategies and actions that principals need to take towards these ends. They are -

i) develop a strong sense of personal and professional values for education – on which to base passionate leadership;

ii) decide with the school community what is a realistic emphasis for the nature and character of their school – given its student intake and resources;

iii) re-focus professional experiences and re-build professional identities on what principals and teachers best know and love – caring for students as young people and improving teaching, learning and curriculum;

iv) proactively develop and recruit a critical mass of professionals and community to support the desired school culture.

These steps hold promise not only for restoring the authentic professional identities that principals want to nurture, but for re-establishing their sense of purpose and re-kindling their job satisfaction. Each is now briefly elaborated.

1. Leaders develop a strong sense of personal and professional educational values

In a thought-provoking paper, Gold et al (2003) claim that the ultimate focus of school leadership practice – that is, the efficient and effective preparation of young people to be productive members of society – is, in the end, now defined by the government, thus leaving school leaders in a position of what Wright (2001) terms 'bastard leadership'. Wright goes on ….

> Leadership as the moral and value underpinning for the direction of schools is being removed from those who work there. It is now very substantially located at the political level where it is not available for contestation, modification or adjustment to local variations' (p.280).

This analysis agrees with my assertion about the loss of identity. If the basis of all successful leadership is values, then Wright is asserting that leaders cannot exercise it because it is now monopolised by government. Leadership at school level is measured by league tables and inspection regimes that are nationally defined and unresponsive to local circumstances. Talk of transformational and instructional leadership is futile,

since the scope for initiative at school level is so narrow when government defines the goals and the values.

Moreover, in the UK, two models of effective leadership dominate. One is the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) outcomes-focused model, and the other is the NCSL (National College for School Leadership) process-focused model – both are imposed from outside. Very little of either model is empirically based; rather, both are prescriptive. Principals are strongly urged to adopt one or other, or even both!

The key point, however, to Gold et al's paper is the ten case studies of excellent leaders who they found were breaking the mould. Herein lies the first means of optimising leadership effectiveness. Gold et al (2003) assert, 'The school leaders in our case-study schools were clearly avoiding doing "bastard leadership" by mediating government policy through their own value systems' (p.131).

But note the implication here – the principals mediated government policy through their own value systems. They all had strong value systems of their own in the first place. The basis for all successful leadership and decision making is values. So how do leaders develop values?

In a previous talk to Hong Kong principals, I outlined ways of achieving this. The conditions for a strong personal and professional set of coherent values are that they –

- Arouse the leader's strong emotion and passion
- Engage the leader's personal commitment to 'do something about….'
- Be enduring over a long time period in the leader's mindset
- Mirror larger macro-society issues in the smaller micro-school community
- Align with future priorities/trends in education policy and practice.

How might leaders develop such a set of values? A number of ways are possible; leaders need to be:-

- Self-aware in regard to their inclinations and pre-dispositions
- Draw on personal life experiences, such as victimization, bullying, social injustice, failure at school…
- Aware of their learning through reading, formal education, sensitivities….
- Influenced by significant others, such as tutors, mentors, superiors…
- Engaged with political, social and economic ideologies, policies and trends.

Most powerfully, leaders' values need to engage and link future socio-economic-political trends in society with the future visioning of schools. Values grow from reactions to socio-political-economic situations – such as feelings about inequities of particular minority ethnic groups, or injustices between males and females, or between the life chances of different socio-economic groups. It is not difficult to predict future social trends that will impact schools: societies and school intakes will continue to become more diverse and multi-ethnic; social justice will continue to become increasingly important as the gaps between social groups widen – inclusivity will mean schools striving to engage more diverse problematic students (on SES and ethnicity criteria); non-traditional family structures will continue to grow; societies' willingness to trust professionals will continue to lessen as parents and others become more empowered; governments' inability to fund public education will see more diverse funding patterns; after a slow beginning, computer technology will be embedded in all aspects of school work; lifelong learning will be pressed; traditional school environments will be challenged by more applied knowledge settings.

In a project conducted for the NCSL in 2004 my colleagues and I in the Centre for Educational Leadership and Management at the University of Leicester found that successful leaders of multi-ethnic schools in the UK showed one outstanding quality that defined their leadership – a passionate belief in, and vision for, the creation of a socially just, inclusive, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic school society. When we talked to teachers, parents and students – they all said the same thing – the infectious enthusiasm of the head had rubbed off on them, thereby creating a school-wide commitment to the same shared values. 'Passion', 'infectious', 'shared beliefs' – are all core features of leaders who develop their own strong values through which government policy and outside values are distilled and mediated inside the school. Note also that the passionate leadership was focused on values pertinent to the kind of society and personal morality they wished to create and shape – not explicitly on student examination results.

In support of this claim, Gold et al (2003) found with their case leaders that despite the present heavy hand of government, 'principled leadership' is still possible. Such leaders have a sense of missionary zeal, they mediate government initiatives to the school's benefit, and their values are often described in the following way:

> ..social democratic or liberal humanist in nature. They were concerned with such matters as inclusivity, equal opportunities and equity or justice, high expectations, engagement with stakeholders, cooperation, teamwork, commitment and understanding…a simple shift from 'welfarism' to the 'new managerialism' …was not apparent (Gold et al, p. 136).

The 'new managerialism' referred to by Gold is a technicist, managerial view of leadership, such as that espoused by the UK government and Ofsted, emphasising efficiency, effectiveness and performance. This is not to say that they were unaware of the need to manage resources effectively – both human and financial – and of the significance of parental choice and market forces – but these were not at the heart of their values. Instead, they were driven by a different set of values based on their own intrinsic values not imposed from outside by others. Of these – 'the most important were the wider educational, social and personal development of all students and staff' (Gold et al, 2003, p. 136). This is what is meant by 'welfarism'. Outstanding leaders were those who articulated strongly held personal, moral and educational values which might not at any given moment align with government initiatives or policies.

I now turn to address the second means of salvaging and restoring professional identity – deciding on the type of school the community wants, its realism and its feasibility.

2. Leaders decide with their communities what is a compelling and realistic image of, and strategy to achieve, the nature and potential of their school

This is the second means by which leadership effectiveness can be optimised. A similar pattern of thinking applies to the type of emphasis thought by leaders, teachers and parents to be desirable and feasible for their school. Governments are presently driving this agenda by emphasising academic results, league tables, and market competition, using the same criteria and measures to apply to all schools. These criteria, however, suit those schools with good SES intakes and highly achieving students. But not all schools conform to this profile.

As illustrative of this point, our research in the inner cities of the UK found schools with large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who constitute a transitory, mobile population; at any time they may decide to uproot and move to another area or city and another school – often in large numbers (see our report for NCSL, 2004).

Their mobility, coupled with the fact that in most cases, the children speak no English, mean that Government policies such as academic targets and league tables are meaningless for the schools that accept them. And the schools that take them do so because they have the spare capacity, and are usually at the bottom of the league tables. For them the system is a vicious cycle.

As societies become more diverse, more multi-ethnic and more problematic, so do school students. The more generic are government policies, the less appropriate and relevant they are to particular schools. If principals and their school communities do not forge strong and explicit goals and cultural expectations for their schools, then by default the government criteria become the sole and dominant measures of school achievement. These types of school described are then set up to fail, with resultant low morale.

Salvaging and restoring professional identities entails school communities forming their own strong goals, expectations and cultures that are realistic but challenging given their intakes and resources. How might they do this? Leithwood et al (1999, 2003) suggests some answers in his recognition of three different designs for future schools based on their divergent strengths, resources and goals, as follows:

- Inclusiveness – emphasising school as community of diverse members
- Efficiency and effectiveness – emphasising school as high reliability organisation
- Improvement and adaptability – school as learning organisation.

The school that emphasises **inclusiveness** places a premium on-

- Community relationships
- Binding interests and ideals
- Shared decision making and involvement
- Personal, social and emotional as well as intellectual growth
- Catering to diverse multi-ethnic student needs
- Catering to and understanding diversity in ability as well as culture.

The school that emphasises **efficiency and effectiveness** (high reliability organisation) focuses on –

- Student academic results and academic learning

- Teaching performance and selective teaching practices
- Use of technology to support performance
- Rewarding teachers/students on the basis of their fidelity to effective practices
- Rewarding teachers/students on the basis of persistency to achieve outcomes.

The school that emphasises **organisational improvement and learning** realises that **–**

- Its structure and culture will need to adapt to support best practices
- Turbulent environments mean constant change is necessary in goals and expectations
- Continuous professional development and openness to new ideas
- Strong collegiality.

Each of these represents a type of school, with different emphases, goals and expectations. Elements of the three models are not mutually exclusive – schools combine them. But where they place the emphasis is all important – given that no school can do it all equally well. Each model, however, has some validity and each is based on different sets of assumptions about learning, motivation and goals. For example, on *learning*, the effectiveness and efficiency model stresses an information processing view of learning as opposed to a social view of learning underpinning the other two. On *motivation*, the community school fulfils Maslow's affiliation needs, the high performance school fulfils Maslow's achievement needs and the learning organisation school meets his self-actualisation needs. On *goals*, the community school stresses equity, inclusion and socio-emotional goals, while the high performance school places excellence and traditional goals at centre stage, and the learning organisation emphasises continuous quality improvement.

In summary – schools as *communities* seek social and psychological stability and trust among members; schools as *high performing organisations* aim to satisfy achievement goals of parents and students, while schools as *learning organisations* seek new ways of learning, practices and outcomes.

This is only one schema by which to recognise different types of schools. There are certainly others. But the question is – which type of school best suits your own community, taking stock of its intake, parents, community and resources? Which type is most compatible with your own leader and parent values? Which type would you as a leader feel most compatible and comfortable with? All three designs are justifiable -

as are different mixes or combinations of them – at some points in time, for some people and in some contexts.

Deciding the appropriate choice of emphasis means bringing clarity and intentionality to what the school stands for, it means defining it as an organisation and community, and it means developing the school's own measures of success and failure, thus enabling it to mediate government assessments. This is a crucial element in salvaging and restoring the professional identities of teachers and principals – enabling them to re-define their professional goals and work lives, as well as their progress and success. Establishing realistic goals, strategies and cultures for schools enables teachers and principals to identify with purposeful organisations that have the support of their communities, which in turn energizes all. It means not surrendering the sole definition of schools by default to government.

3. Leaders re-focus on what really matters – improving schools as caring, learning communities with a focus on appropriate teaching and learning

As previously claimed, teachers' and principals' socialisation experiences centre on classrooms and relationships with students and colleagues. They are trained and socialised into the profession through notions of pedagogy, classroom life and student development rather than through supervisory control and management. To many, a policy environment that operates through a system of market place economics and competition and that emphasises only academic test and exam results is anathema to their values and professional identities.

Re-focusing their professional lives on their original professional identities is crucial in energizing them through restoring job satisfaction and morale. Depending on the type of school and its intake, caring for students' moral and social development may take precedence over academic achievement. What is the appropriate balance between personal and social learning on the one hand, and cognitive learning on the other – will vary. In today's secular society of drugs, broken homes, violence, poor parenting, cultural and racial tensions, and increasingly in many countries, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers (many of whom can only speak their native language) - the main challenge for teachers and principals is to establish psychological and social stability for these students. Government policies of accountability for academic learning outcomes are almost irrelevant for schools with substantial numbers of such students.

Moreover, the conflicts and inconsistencies within government policy can often be astonishingly obvious; unfortunately, they mean that some schools are unavoidably set up to fail. In the UK, parent choice and market competition between schools, assisted by league tables of academic performance - mean that problematic students (for example, those with behavioural problems and learning difficulties, and non-English speaking immigrant children) may only be able to find places in less popular schools with poor reputations, because they are often the only schools with unfilled places. Hence schools that are already struggling with problematic, non-academic students receive even more such students, thus trapping them and reinforcing their positions at the bottom of the league table in an invidious market driven system. These schools fulfil a vital and important role, but when governments then assess them by the same criteria as the high flying middle class, wealthy, suburban schools – it makes no sense. No wonder teachers and principals despair.

Policy makers and government officials need to recognise and value the broad educative function of schools - including moral, social, psychological, aesthetic and physical maturation of young people for their integration into adult society – when holding schools to account as much as academic outcomes and examination results. Principals' and teachers' professional identities are founded on this caring, welfare, communitarian, developmental role as much as on promoting cognitive learning. Government policies, however, emphasising the latter, have tended to distort the identities of teachers and principals, especially in less academically-oriented schools.

Even so, for many principals and teachers the focus of their work, and the part that brings them most satisfaction, is the academic learning of their students. For principals, this means focusing on instructional leadership, ensuring that teachers adopt best teaching practices for student learning, that they keep up-to-date with the latest pedagogical and technological ideas, that learning theories underpin classroom practice, and that through appraisal and supervision high standards of teaching and learning are upheld. Instructional leadership also involves over-viewing the school curriculum to ensure balance and quality (Dimmock, 2000).

Many principals, however, find it increasingly difficult to fulfil this instructional role, and to keep in close touch with teaching, learning and curriculum in their schools, because they are preoccupied with meeting other role expectations of a managerial or administrative kind. Consistent with the argument espoused in this paper, however, principals want to identify with this aspect of their schools, and for them to do so

promises improved teaching and student learning outcomes, and the prospect of the school meeting government academic targets.

None of the possible solutions to this overload dilemma is easy. They range from principals re-prioritising so that curriculum and instruction assume higher prominence in principals' work lives, to pressure on governments to lessen the administrative and non-instructional part of their role. It is argued that when principals place more focus on curriculum and instruction in their schools (compared with administrative functions that are often driven from outside the school), they re-connect with the aspects of their work that they best know and identify with, and they restore their professional identities as educators. This in turn is likely to energize principals and teachers through restoring their professional identities and thus improving their job satisfaction and morale.

4. Leaders bring intentionality to recruiting and developing a critical mass of supportive senior staff and teachers

The fourth element in my argument is the one that specifically addresses the energizing of teacher and leader capacity. Schools become robust organisations and strong professional communities when all staff agree a common vision and set of goals, a shared value system and implement school-wide informed practices of teaching and learning (Dimmock, 2000).

Traditionally, schools have rarely achieved this degree of close coupling and synergy. Rather, they are described as loosely-coupled systems (Weick, 1976), especially in respect of teachers in classrooms. School-wide policies on teaching and learning practices for all teachers and students to engage, rarely exist. The importance of leadership teams and delegation of leadership to all levels of school operation - through middle management to teacher level - have been strongly advocated by many over the last few years (Gronn, 2000, 2003; Harris 2004; Harris and Muijs, 2005). The fact that schools are complex organisations, facing rising expectations and accountabilities, places a premium on developing leadership capability through the school; it is now well accepted that the immense challenges facing schools can only be met by leadership teams rather than individual leaders. The question arises – how to build leadership capacity throughout the school? A key part of the answer to this is supplied by Jim Collins (2001) in his book '*Good to Great'*.

If the priority is team leadership, then there are massive implications regarding *who* forms the teams and their *composition*. As Collins' (2001) research demonstrates, successful organisations 'get the right people on the bus, and the wrong people off the bus.' Effective leadership teams are thus ideally forged *before* they start working purposefully towards vision, strategy and operational details. Leadership capacity is built when leaders extend the exercise of leadership to trusted, competent colleagues on whom they can rely to make good decisions in line with organisational goals. The leader needs competent and trusted colleagues before growing leadership through the organisation. These are important caveats that often go overlooked in discussions on shared or distributed leadership.

School leaders are constrained more than their business counterparts in being able to forge teams by manoeuvring people in and out of the organisation, as advocated by Collins. Nonetheless, school leaders can spot and develop potential leadership talent on their staff; they can re-deploy people, and ultimately they can pressurize people to leave who are counterproductive and obstinate in blocking progress. When vacancies arise, they can seize opportunities to appoint people who will 'fit into the team,' assuming that selection and appointments procedures are rigorous in identifying the right people.

All principals and leaders will testify to the importance of forming a 'critical mass' of like-minded staff in turning a school or organisation around, once it is in difficulty. This does not mean a team of individuals who instinctively always think alike and never hold divergent views. What it means is that all team members command trust, respect and have commitment to the cause – so that they feel secure in speaking frankly and are not likely to be misunderstood by colleagues who have full confidence in their ultimate commitment and loyalty to the team and organisation.

When leadership teams of such status are formed, the difference in the organisational culture and work environment can be astonishing. Teacher capacity, morale and professional identity begin to thrive. The work environment assumes a collective purpose that builds capacity and inspires energy of all staff within the school.

Conclusion

Schools, principals and teachers in Hong Kong, as elsewhere, are facing troubled times. Morale has rarely been lower, stress and pressure never higher. Moreover, a deep crisis looms in finding enough aspiring leaders to move into middle and deputy

leader positions, from whose ranks the future supply of principals will come. Among current principals, there is a problem of stemming the flow of resignations and early retirements.

The main purpose of this conference, however, is to encourage principals to look beyond these leadership dilemmas to focus on three sub-themes - optimizing leadership effectiveness, enhancing curriculum and instruction, and energizing teacher capacity.

Rather than address each of these themes explicitly, I have chosen to address the underpinning problem that connects them – the attrition, distortion and diminution of professional identity among teachers and principals. The problem of professional identity for principals and teachers is caused by the loss of control over their professional lives and the changed nature of their work and goals. They have become estranged from the values and practices that matter to them. Many are voting with their feet to leave the profession, or remain as teachers rather than seek promotion to leadership positions. Governments are accused of seizing control of the agenda through vigorous and continuous policy changes; that they have been able to wrest control in this way is partly a case of default, brought about by the absence of strong leadership and professional identities at the school level.

The solution is for school leaders to build capacity so that schools become internally strong. The four strategies discussed all promise to salvage and restore professional identities, create positive organisational socialisation experiences in school and resurrect the attractiveness of leadership positions. Schools and those who work in them need re-empowerment in order to be healthy, strong, and purposeful. It is not in anyone’s interests - not least the governments’ - to have school leaders and teachers as merely passive recipients of outside policy and control. That was never the intention of authentic school-based management. Smart governments realise that it is in their interests as well as the interests of school communities to have robust school leaders able and willing to interpret, mediate and implement practices that fit the change agenda to their individual school needs within its local context. To do this, however, principals and teachers need to restore their professional identities, their sense of priority and influence over the things that really matter, and their belief that a career in teaching and school leadership is still worthwhile.

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