

Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century: Preparation of School Leaders in Australia and Hong Kong

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School Principals hold the key to effectiveness and quality in education, as they are the vanguards of stability and agents of change. School-based management (SBM) in New South Wales in Australia and Hong Kong has given the principals increased autonomy in managing the schools with accountability. Current trends in both systems indicate commitments for consolidating SBM, making the quality of leadership vital in institutionalizing change. Both systems select principals on merit, as leadership qualities are partly inborn and partly learned, resulting in a number of programs offered by the universities in meeting the demand for professional development. This paper presents practitioners' opinions on the

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effectiveness of the Master of Leadership and Management in Education (MLMEd) offered by the University of Newcastle and the Preparation for Principalship (PFP) program by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Methodology included both quantitative and qualitative approaches and thus the findings are based on student evaluations and interviews with school leaders who followed these programs.

Key words: professional development programs, school leaders, school-based management

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the school principal holds the key to achieving school effectiveness in the midst of a rapidly changing educational environment. As school administrators, the principals are the vanguards of stability as well as agents of change, which require them to be flexible and seek re-education and re-training in facing the new challenges (Gamage & Ueyama, 2004). In the early 20th Century, the United States was the first country to organise professional development in educational administration and leadership for the school personnel. Institutions such as the Teachers' College in Columbia (now, University of Columbia), and Universities of Stanford and Harvard played key roles in offering professional development (PD) programs. Later, programs for the accreditation of school personnel for leadership roles were introduced.

Baltzell and Dentler (1983), Bennett (1987) and Baron (1990) have pointed out that in almost all American states; one of the key criteria for appointment to principalship is a master's degree in educational administration. When one observes the current trends in Australian, English and Welsh systems who have adopted School-based management (SBM), it is likely that these systems too could follow the American example by requiring pre-service training in leadership and management for principalship. The latest teacher training inquiry instituted by the New South

Wales (NSW), in its report (Ramsey, 2000), has emphasized the desirability of recognizing qualifications in leadership and management for appointing candidates to principal positions. Now, most Australian universities offer a wide array of courses and graduate programs aimed specifically at the school administrators. They are available at graduate certificate, masters, and doctoral degree levels. Umphrey (2002) asserts that principals have the power to use their resources in building a community of learners, cultivating an atmosphere of learning and working towards the spirit of collaboration in order to realize school visions and goals. Fink and Resnick (2001), assert that PD is not something that is separate from the administrative duties and responsibilities; rather it could be considered the centerpiece of effective leadership committing to improving student learning. Mansell (2000) states that the National College for School Leadership in England has planned to provide PD training for up to 100,000 principals for the English and Welsh systems. Hong Kong which was a British colony until 1990s, has shown more progress in introducing accreditation as a mandatory requirement and commissioning three tertiary institutions to provide preparation for principalship (PPF) program for 1000 school personnel by 2006.

With the implementation of SBM in most school systems, the Principalship has become the structure, which undergoes the most significant changes with new challenges. Now, almost all education systems acknowledge that the school leaders should be provided with adequate PD opportunities to equip them with skills and competencies in coping with these new challenges.

In 1990, NSW introduced SBM by encouraging the school principals to establish advisory school councils (SC) in their schools (Scott, 1990). In 1991, Hong Kong introduced SBM known as the school management initiative (SMI) by encouraging school principals to establish advisory school management committees (SMC) similar to that of NSW. Both systems envisaged wide ranging devolution of authority to their SCs and SMCs in a gradual process requiring the school leaders to develop new skills and competencies in leading their schools as the bureaucratic structures were to

be phased out as and when these assume the status of governing bodies. These new challenges necessitated the current and aspiring school leaders to undertake PD to equip them with the required skills and competencies. The tertiary institutions in both systems developed appropriate PD programs to meet these increasing demands. This paper focuses on the effectiveness of the Master of Leadership and Management in Education (MLMED) of the University of Newcastle and the Preparation for Principalship (PFP) course of The Chinese University of Hong Kong based on both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of research undertaken by the authors with alumni and current students of these programs.

Systemic and Institutional Profiles

Currently, the University of Newcastle is one of the top ten leading comprehensive universities in Australia, with a high national and international reputation. With the introduction of SBM in NSW schools in 1989, representative advisory SCs were established in most schools. With these changes the bureaucratic structures were restructured to meet the changing demands of the system. Cluster Directors were appointed to groups of 1–18 schools to provide support to the principals in leading and managing schools with the advice of SCs. These reforms required the principals to acquire new skill and competencies in confronting the new challenges including increasing societal and systemic demands. Thus, decentralization and delegation of authority to schools increased the demand for more effective better-trained school leaders. In response, the universities in NSW developed graduate level PD programs. The Faculty of Education of the University of Newcastle responded by offering two courses in Educational Administration in 1989 and four semester courses (subjects) by 1990. At this stage, the NSW Department of School Education (DSE) approached a number of universities including the University of Newcastle to develop a master's degree course to be taught jointly by the university academics and senior DSE officials to train school leaders. DSE offered 20 scholarships to

each university to encourage school leaders. Thus, by 1991, the University of Newcastle offered five courses in Educational Administration towards the Master of Educational Studies (MEdStud) Program. Later, due to the pressure from graduate students and the systemic authorities for a specialist program, the Master of Leadership and Management in Education (MLMED) Degree Program was developed.

In 1991, Hong Kong schools system also introduced SBM with SMI. As recommended by the Education Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1997), by the year 2000, all schools implemented SMI. According to Pang (1998a) the aim of the reforms was to: improve the efficiency and effectiveness, enhance professionalism, ensure accountability, and assure quality in education. These reforms resulted in a significant demand for university level PD programs. The demand for PD by the current and aspiring school leaders and the pressure applied by the systemic authorities encouraged the Chinese University, the Hong Kong University and the Institute of Education to offer graduate level programs in Educational Administration and Leadership. In 2002, with the introduction of mandatory training in principalship by the then Education Department [now, Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)], all aspiring principals were required to obtain the Certification for Principalship (CFP) from one of the accredited institutions. In 2002, the Chinese University was invited to pilot the program by developing the designated PFP courses.

Developments at the University of Newcastle

In July 1995, based on student demands since 1992 (Gamage, 1992, 1994, 1995a), a market survey and the pressure exerted by the NSW/DSE in 1994, the Faculty Board of Education adopted two resolutions to expedite the institution of a specialist master's degree program. But, the shortage of academics qualified in Educational Administration and Leadership forced the Faculty to develop a strategic alliance with the Faculty of Economics & Commerce to develop the program.

On an invitation extended, Angela Thody, the Professor of Educational Management of the University of Luton in the U.K., who was also the President of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration (CCEA) attended the inaugural meeting held on 6 July 1995. At this meeting, she stressed the importance of moving with the changing times and developing a specialist program to provide PD for leaders and managers in education. Accordingly, a smaller Planning Committee was empowered to propose a suitable program for consideration by the Program Team.

The Planning Committee, chaired by the Interim Program Director, considered two discussion papers; one by the Chair (Gamage, 1995b) and the other by the NSW/DSE (1995) leading to another discussion paper for consultation with relevant constituencies and consideration by the Planning Committee (Gamage, 1995c). The deliberations resulted in the recommendation of a Master of Leadership and Management in Education (MLMED) Program. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Board considered the Program Team's recommendation and after lengthy deliberations recommended the same for the approval of the Academic Senate. Program structure comprised of a Compulsory Course on "Leadership & Strategic Management" as well as Group A, and Group B courses. Group A Courses included several courses with a high degree of practical orientation to suit the changing school environments. Even courses usually included in MBA programs such as Organizational Behavior, Managing People (HRM), Information Technology, Statistics & Quality Management in Education, and Finance & Planning were included. Group B courses comprised of electives related to Educational Administration and Leadership as well as other courses depending on special interests of the candidates to be approved by the Faculty Board. The Academic Senate approved the program vesting the administration of the Program with the Faculty of Education and authorized offering MLMEd both on-and off-campus modes from 1997. Accordingly, the Interim Director was appointed as the Program Director to organize the development of the program in consultation with the MLMEd Program Team.

Developments at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Since 1982, the Education Department (ED) has been providing an induction program for the newly appointed principals in public sector schools. It was a nine-day secondary school administration course with six months of action plan projects to acquire management concepts and skills for becoming effective administrators (Education Department, 1999). No other substantial pre-service or in-service training was provided.

The quest for quality education in Hong Kong resulted in a number of initiatives, recognizing the vital role played by principals in achieving the Government's aim in providing a quality education for the young (Education Department, 1999). These initiatives made significant demands on principals, requiring them to take on new roles. The expectations were obvious from the paragraph 2.1 in the continuing professional development (CPD) framework (Education Department, 2002a, p. 6):

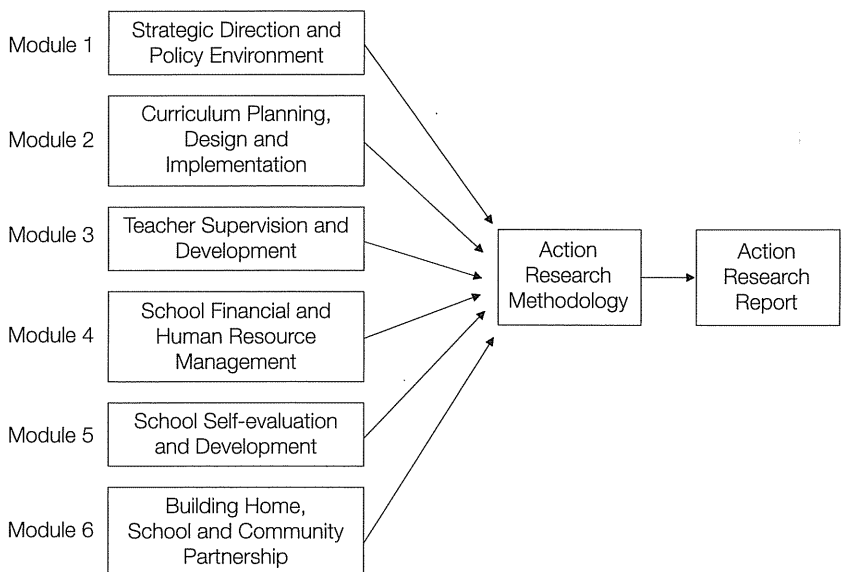
For schools to thrive and meet the ever-increasing demands of a 21st Century society, principals as school leaders must be more professional and personally competent than ever before. To guide their schools and students toward a productive future, principals must have clearly defined values and be dedicated to continually upgrading their knowledge and skills, and those of their colleagues in schools. Working with the teachers and the School Management Committee, the principal provides a vision, leadership and direction for the school and ensures that it is managed and organized to meet its aims and targets.

The implementation of SBM provided the principals with more autonomy and flexibility in the deployment of resources, curriculum development, staff development and other professional and managerial matters in return for greater accountability. The reforms called for changes in students' learning attitudes and habits, new learning processes and teaching strategies. It was believed that the quality of school leadership is pivotal in bringing all these changes into reality (Education Department, 2002a, p. 1). Accordingly, principals were required to acquire a variety of skills, values and attributes to cope with the increasing demands of a modern society.

In consideration of the critical skills, values and attributes in leading schools, Pang (1998b) suggests that school administrators should empower the teachers and emphasize on rationality, participation, collaboration, collegiality, communication and consensus building in their management practices towards building a quality culture. The Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) teams stressed “professional competence” and “working relationships” (QAI reports, 2000/2001 & 2001/2002) (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003) as the two important leadership skills.

In 2002, ED published its Guidelines for Principals’ CPD. A new leadership-training program was designed to equip the principals with appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in leading schools. Its mission was to empower principals to be effective, dynamic, and accountable leaders in creating professional learning communities (Education Department, 2002b, p. 6). The values, knowledge, skills and attributes needed by principals as they pursue CPD within the interrelated leadership domains were clustered into six core areas, as shown in Figure 1 (Education Department, 2002b).

Figure 1 Structure of the PFP Program by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2002–04



The Aim, Objectives and Structure of the MLMEd Program

The MLMEd was designed as a cutting edge program to meet the growing demand for professional development of educational leaders and managers of the 21st Century. The aim was to provide advanced studies geared towards improving the professional skills and competencies of the practising and aspiring leaders, managers, executives and educators in educational institutions, systems and other training, leadership and managerial situations. The specific objectives were to:

- broaden the knowledge and understanding of organizational contexts and operations;
- provide theoretical foundations and the best practices in organizational and administrative behaviour;
- develop skills and competencies to employ the techniques of continuous quality improvements; and
- become more competent and effective pro-active leaders, managers and educators.

In keeping with the needs of the contemporary education systems in meeting the new challenges, the program structure was designed to include a core component with a fair degree of individual choices and elective courses to suit individual needs and interests. Accordingly, courses were grouped into three categories: Compulsory, Group A and Group B which also included a research strand. As the title indicates, the MLMEd recognizes the pre-eminence of leadership studies and practices as shown in the course structure in Table 1. In addition, the students are allowed to take one or two other electives outside the program within Group B.

To qualify for the MLMEd degree, a candidate needs to complete a program comprising of 80 credit points including the Compulsory course (10cp), not less than three Group A courses (30cp), and not exceeding four courses (40 cp) from Group B. For the MLMEd Honours, a candidate needs to complete a program of 120 credit points, along with EDUC6048: Research

Table 1 Structure of the MLMEd Program

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Points
Compulsory Course: EDUC6016	Leadership & Strategic Management	10
Group A Courses:		
EDUC6017	Organizational Behaviour & Managing People	10
EDUC6018	IT & Education	10
EDUC6019	Instructional Leadership & Program Evaluation	10
EDUC6020	Operating Contexts in Educational Management	10
EDUC6032	Introduction to Educational Administration	10
ACFI5110	Finance & Planning	10
STAT5030	Statistics & Quality Management in Education	10
Group B Courses:		
EDUC6033	Educational Administration: Theory & Practice	10
EDUC6034	Leading Educational Change	10
EDUC6035	Administrative Behaviour & Educational Management	10
EDUC6036	Informational Technology & Educational Leadership	10
EDUC6048	Research Methodology	10
EDUC6049	Educational Research Methodology – Qualitative	10
EDUC6050	Educational Research Methodology – Quantitative	10
EDUC6026 & 6027	Minor Thesis (2 semesters)	20

Notes:

Group A courses: a candidate needs to take not less than three courses.

Group B courses: a candidate needs to take not more than four courses.

Duration: all the courses last for one semester except for EDUC6026 & 6027.

Methodology and either EDUC6049 or EDUC6050, along with a minor thesis (EDUC6026 & EDUC6027) of around 15,000 words based on a small scale research project.

The Specific Objectives and Structure of the PFP Program

The specific objectives of the Program are to:

- allow participants to satisfy the Government's requirement for certification for principalship ;
- provide basic skills, knowledge and perspectives for aspiring principals in advancing towards full principalship ;
- prepare aspiring principals to confront emerging challenges;
- enhance the operational efficiency of the schools through the formal training; and

- encourage participants to embark upon continuous professional upgrading.

The basic framework for the PFP program comprises of (1) Strategic Direction and Policy Environment; (2) Curriculum Planning, Design and Implementation; (3) Teacher Supervision and Development; (4) School Human Resource and Financial Management; (5) School Self-evaluation and Development; (6) Building home, School and Community Partnership; and (7) Action Research Methodology. On completion of the modules, candidates were required to select action research topics relating to modules studied, enabling the transfer what they have learnt to real world contexts. Participants were required to complete the Project in six months.

In ensuring appropriate training, experienced principals were employed in many aspects in delivering the training package.

- Three tutor principals assist each instructor in organizing the learning experiences such as small group discussions, assessment of outcomes, etc.
- In the action research, principals of the schools were involved in monitoring the process, assisted by tutor principals in reviewing progress.

While instructional methodologies vary from module to module, inductive teaching was a common characteristic. Apart from lectures and discussions, the modules were delivered through instructional approaches such as case studies, simulated exercises, games, role-plays as well as work experience. The pilot program was delivered in four cycles with 450 participants, divided into 15 groups from September 2002 to December 2004. Two levels of assessment were built into the program. At the first level, each module was independently assessed for learning outcomes. Participants' perception on learning process, usefulness of module experiences, and satisfaction in respect of contents were documented. At the second level, action plan crystallizes the learners' acquired knowledge, skills and techniques in terms of their transferability. The implementation stage should truly reflect the degree of comprehensiveness in terms of what they learnt

and in terms of flexibility that they have to acquire in transferring them to their unique settings.

Development of Course Material by the University of Newcastle

In early 1996, separate course teams were established with the relevant academics as the course coordinators for developing the course contents and course material. The MLMed Program Committee, determined that each course should comprise of comprehensive lecture notes on each topic within a course, complemented by not less than two directly relevant readings drawn from journal articles or book-chapters along with a comprehensive list of supplementary readings and prescribed texts. All students were provided with access to the University email system enabling them to communicate with the academics supplemented by the provision of blackboard facilities for discussions with peers and academics. Provision also was made for on-line courses. In addition, on-campus students were provided two-hour sessions per week comprising of lectures, student seminars and group discussions for each course. The participants were required to submit three written assignments for each course for assessment and these were designed in advance for the students to submit them on appointed dates as the studies progress. Distance learning students were also extended the privilege of talking to the relevant academics over the telephone or by on-campus appointments.

The program was offered for the first time in February 1997 attracting 150 enrolments from all Australian states and territories. However, in 1998, when the Federal Government required the universities to charge full tuition fees for all post-graduate course-work programs, MLMed program came under a full-fee paying regime in its infancy. New enrolments dropped sharply but 1997 students were allowed to continue under the Higher Education Contributions Scheme (HECS). Yet, the Faculty was able to fix somewhat lower fees in comparison to programs such as MBA. However,

an overseas student was required to pay double the fee by a local student providing an impetus to market the program overseas.

First Two Years and Subsequent Developments at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

In July 2002 the EMB announced that from 2004/05 all newly appointed principals will be required to attain the Certification for Principalship (CFP), in addition to complying with the appointment conditions, for consideration for appointment. The CFP comprises of a needs analysis, completion of PFP, and a submission of a portfolio. The EMB contracted the Chinese University to deliver the PFP as a pilot project during the period 2002–2004 to help participants to complete the second component. The Program lasted for 75 contact hours and included a number of compulsory assessment tasks. In terms of EMB's policy on CPD, all newly appointed principals had to complete PFP by September 2004. By that time, those who completed the pilot project were able to complete the second component of the CFP. Once they complete a needs analysis and submit a portfolio, they become eligible for consideration for appointments as principals.

Based on the framework developed by the Chinese University as shown in Figure 1, EMB decided to involve the other higher education institutions to meet the increasing demand for training by aspiring principals. Accordingly, the Chinese University, Hong Kong University and the Hong Kong Institute of Education were accredited as PFP course providers for the period 2004–2006. It is estimated that by 2006, nearly 1000 aspiring principals would complete the PFP courses, leaving sufficient numbers of trained personnel for consideration for principalship s.

Success Achieved by MLMEd and Student Evaluations

In 1998 and 1999, the new enrolments were badly affected due to full tuition fees. But, since 2000, in a gradual process both local and overseas enrolments

started to improve. However, there came a real threat to its survival because of the development of a new “Master of Applied Management” (MAM) program by the Graduate School of Business (GSB) with an Education strand in direct competition with the MLMed. Unlike the MLMed Program the MAM Program had the vast resources of the GSB for marketing both locally and overseas. Another adverse effect on the MLMed was the competition from the Faculty’s own MEdStud Program, which was the main stay of the Faculty of Education for over two decades. Only weapons that the MLMed Program had to fight these new threats and challenges were the quality of the Program and the appeal of its course structure and title to the prospective students. In 1997, as far as it is known, the University of Newcastle was the first university to place such high emphasis on leadership and name its program as “Master of Leadership and Management in Education” (MLMed).

With the dedicated efforts of the program director and the program team, in a short period of time, the MLMed program was able to attract considerable student numbers from Australian school systems, tertiary institutions, the health sector and even the industrial sector, complemented by increasing numbers of international students. Because of MLMed’s attractiveness, MAM Program was unable to attract sufficient enrolments and had to be discontinued in 2005. When MEdStud Program was also running into difficulties, it was reorganized as an umbrella program with several specializations. In the circumstances, MLMed Program became stronger and stronger attracting both local and overseas students. So far, it has attracted students from all the eight Australian school systems and countries such as Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, New Zealand, Philippines, PNG, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, the U.K. Kingdom, the U.S., Vietnam, Western Samoa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. According to the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Education and Arts (Lovat, 2003), MLMed program has become one of the five most viable master’s degree programs in the whole university under the full-fee paying regime.

Wide-ranging student evaluations have been undertaken since its launch in 1997. Almost all evaluations have been positive with expression of views as to how the respective courses and the program improved their knowledge and understanding and how much they gained from it towards the refinement and improvement of their practice. A few of the comments are quoted below to show the usual pattern of student appreciation of the usefulness and the practical nature of the courses. An off-campus student who completed the course on 'Introduction to Educational Administration' in 2001, states: "I personally enjoyed assignments for direct relation to my work. ... Overall, I found the course to be very useful and it broadened my levels of knowledge and understanding". Another off-campus student who followed the course "Introduction to Educational Administration" in 2004, after rating all aspects evaluated at 5, on 1-5 scale, has stated:

I believe that this is an excellent subject and the tasks require the students to demonstrate an understanding of the content in relation to their own personal context. I firmly believe that this subject has improved my capacity to be an effective educational leader in my school. The readings and lecturer knowledge are outstanding.

Two of the off-campus students, who completed the course on "Educational Administration: Theory & Practice" in Semester 2 of 2001, have commented:

Fantastic subject, that contributed to my professional role significantly, very enjoyable and thought provoking. I enjoyed the assignments and found the overall course structure easy to follow and well set out. Thank you very much.

At first, I thought the course was "dry" but really got interested in the first module. I found the assignments extremely useful as a teaching/learning tool - especially, the Assignment 2 on the "Effective Leader".

Another off-campus student who completed the course on "Administrative Behaviour & Educational Management", in 2001, has commented, "I thoroughly enjoyed this subject. ... Overall, readings provided were very helpful and I enjoyed research and readings." Another off-campus

student who followed the course “Organizational Behaviour and Managing People” in 2004, after rating all aspects evaluated at 5, on 1–5 scale, has commented, “Thank you for your input and advice at the beginning as I thoroughly enjoyed all the reading and obviously got ‘right approach’ by the end. Great course! Very relevant.”

Another off-campus student with 30 years of teaching experience and have already completed 75% of the course-work, sending an email to the first author in mid-June 2005 has stated:

I have thoroughly enjoyed all your subjects. I sometimes wish I was not working full-time and could absorb more information. ... I would also like to say I love the way you have constructed our papers and I am very enthused by your writings. I really thought at one stage I was too idealistic; however, you seem to create practical pathways to find direction in the field and to develop our own concepts and ideals. Thank you for re-inspiring me in my 30th year of teaching.

In the First Semester 2005, 130 individual enrolments were recorded including 34 overseas ones, in courses on “Leadership & Strategic management”, “Introduction to Educational Administration”, and “Administrative Behaviour & Educational Management”, which were considered as significantly high numbers at masters level. In an empirical survey of 34 on-campus students conducted in April/May 2005, almost all the students have expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the courses and the program. Some have added comments such as “the course is very comprehensive and very well structured for someone preparing into a leadership and management role”. “Well structured course, which is relevant to the practising teachers and potential managers”. “It is a very good and practical course”. In an analysis of the data of the empirical survey of all those who were attending on-campus classes for EDUC6016, EDUC6032, and EDUC6035, in evaluating the courses on 1–5 scale (where 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = neutral; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree) revealed the results shown in Table 2.

Table 2 An Analysis of Student Evaluations in April 2005

(N = 34, on 1–5 scale)

Statement	EDUC6016		EDUC6032		EDUC6035	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
A1. I have found this course interesting and stimulating.	4.4	0.60	4.6	0.69	4.4	0.50
A2. I have learned a lot from this course.	4.3	0.66	4.6	0.50	4.8	0.42
A3. The course has been presented in an interesting and stimulating way.	4.1	0.75	4.3	0.67	4.4	0.50
A4. The workload in this course is reasonable.	4.3	0.68	4.6	0.50	4.6	0.69
A5. Assessment in this course is fair.	4.3	0.56	4.7	0.47	4.4	0.69
A6. Assessment in this course sets a suitably high standard.	4.6	0.48	4.7	0.47	4.7	0.47
A7. Sufficient help and advice has been provided whenever I needed it.	4.4	0.48	4.4	0.83	4.8	0.42
A8. Sufficient resources are available to support the teaching of this course.	4.6	0.48	4.6	0.69	4.6	0.50

In addition, the students were presented with two groups of courses (subjects) under Group A and B and asked them to rate on 1 – 5 scale as above. The Group A comprised of (1) Instructional leadership, (2) School Law, (3) Educational Psychology, (4) Curriculum Development, (5) Research methods, (6) Teaching & Learning, (7) Child Adolescent Development, (8) School Principalship, (9) Historical & Philosophical Foundation in Education; which are the common courses included in more than 80% of the American Programs (Levine, 2005, p. 27). The Group B comprised of courses included in the MLMEd Program. The students who followed EDUC6016 rated Group A with a mean value of 3.3 whereas they rated Group B with a mean value of 4.6. Those who followed EDUC6032, rated Group A, at 2.7 while rating Group B, with a mean value of 4.8; and those who followed EDUC6035, rated Group A, at 2.0 (total disagreement) while rating Group B with a mean value of 4.5.

Student Evaluations and Their Opinions of the PFP Program

Wide-ranging participant evaluations have been undertaken since the inauguration of the PFP Program in 2002. All those ($N = 450$) who completed the six modules were invited to assess the effectiveness and the usefulness of the modules. Table 3 shows the data of an empirical survey of the participants in evaluating them on a six-point Likert scale (where 6 = strongly agree; 5 = agree; 4 = slightly agree; 3 = slightly disagree; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree). Table 3 reveals that most participants have rated the modules including the design, curriculum contents, teaching strategies, activities organized and whether achieving the predetermined objectives. Almost all evaluations have been positive including comments that the program as a whole improved their knowledge and understanding the role of Principalship towards the refinement and improvement of their practices. Of the six modules, majority rated Module 1 and Module 5 as most contributive to their PD, Module 6 and Module 2 the next, and Module 4 and Module 3 as the least important.

After the pilot project on the designated PFP was completed in 2004, a considerable number of PFP graduates have now taken up positions as school principals. The second author interviewed five of them about the effectiveness of PFP to examine the extent to which it has been useful and helpful to their new roles. A few of the comments are quoted to show the usual pattern of comments relating to usefulness and practical nature of the PFP modules.

While they emphasized the importance of PFP as a whole, a new high school principal appreciating “financial management” module stated, “When I was a senior teacher in a high school, I didn’t have a chance to handle finance. Managing finance of the school is very important in the principal’s role. After attending the module of financial management, at least, I have no fear about budgeting and accounting and get me ready for it.” A primary school head who graduated with PFP commented:

Table 3 Overall Course Evaluation by the Participants in the PFP Program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Preparation for Principalship (PFP) Course	Module 1		Module 2		Module 3		Module 4		Module 5		Module 6	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1. I am satisfied with the design of the module.	5.06	0.23	4.81	0.19	4.64	0.47	4.73	0.20	4.98	0.12	4.94	0.18
2. I am satisfied with the curriculum contents of this module.	4.99	0.24	4.87	0.21	4.64	0.38	4.80	0.19	4.98	0.15	4.90	0.18
3. I am satisfied with the teaching strategy of this module.	5.12	0.28	4.67	0.22	4.62	0.56	4.73	0.19	4.99	0.16	4.93	0.23
4. I am satisfied with the activities organized in this module.	4.96	0.29	4.69	0.19	4.66	0.50	4.70	0.18	4.96	0.16	4.90	0.24
5. The instructors achieved the objectives of this module.	5.05	0.22	4.75	0.18	4.66	0.40	4.75	0.22	4.98	0.14	4.93	0.22
6. This module has enhanced my knowledge about the roles and duties in principalship	5.18	0.22	4.91	0.22	4.75	0.34	4.96	0.21	5.06	0.17	5.03	0.19
7. This module has promoted my professional competence and confidence.	5.15	0.21	4.96	0.21	4.78	0.38	4.87	0.17	5.12	0.19	5.03	0.17
8. On the whole, I am satisfied with this module.	5.10	0.25	4.83	0.18	4.68	0.45	4.81	0.18	5.01	0.14	4.97	0.20

Notes:

- Module 1: Strategic direction and policy environment; Module 2: Curriculum planning, design and implementation; Module 3: Teacher supervision and development; Module 4: School financial and human resource management; Module 5: School self-evaluation and development; Module 6: Building home, school and community partnership.
- A total of 450 participants completed the 15 courses (with 30 participants in each course) in 2002-2004.
- The participants rated the courses in different criteria on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, and 6 = strongly agree.
- The "means" indicate the overall means of evaluation among the 15 courses and the standard deviations (SDs) among the courses. That is, the evaluation score for each course is taken as the basic unit for analysis.

All the components are very informative and concise. The discussion exercises can stimulate interests. I have a better understanding of the up-to-date education development and the essence of various education reforms. When I have to start development planning, I know what I have to do... I am more prepared and confident to cope with the challenges in the new position as the Principal in a new school.

Most of the participants treasured contributions by experienced educators. Another high school principal reflecting on his experience stated:

I learned the most from sharing ideas from experienced principals as well as the practical case studies. During the group discussion and sharing sessions, I was able to get into my deep personal views and values towards education and I asked myself whether I could formulate my visions of my career, of school development, and of educating children.

FPF allowed the participants to exchange views with experienced principals who shared their working philosophies and their operational experiences. A primary school head appreciating the utilization of front-line experienced principals as Instructional Associates (IAs) stated:

The two principals attached to my class were excellent. They were my respectful mentors! They always shared with us their practical and professional experiences of problem solving in their own schools. The stories and cases were genuine, but complicated. Their sharing of experiences in human resources management and their ways of handling conflicts among the teachers provided me very rich insights. The skills and experience of managing people through their personal manifestations, surely, are something that I cannot learn from the textbook or the training package.

Another principal who recalled the teaching strategies including role-play and other activities commented that “the activity approach in the instructional strategies kept me motivated, attentive and participatory in the learning process. Through the participation in the activities, I still have a fresh memory of what were discussed and what I have learnt.”

On the whole, positive feedbacks were consistently received at the different rounds of surveys supplemented with verbal comments. It seems

to suggest that the overall, design and delivery achieved the objectives of the PFP. It has been very fruitful for participants to learn a broad range of perspectives on education. Inspirational talks by experienced principals, course lecturers and sharing amongst participants contributed to the success of the PFP.

Discussion

In 1990, NSW in Australia introduced SBM on a voluntary basis with advisory school councils. The bureaucratic structures, which were directing principals, were replaced with supportive structures to assist the principals to lead their schools resulting in significant changes to their duties, responsibilities, and accountabilities. The changes were so significant that the DSE gave serious consideration for training school leaders and sought the support of the universities to provide PD. Six NSW universities were involved to offer joint master's level courses by the academics and DSE officials with scholarships to persuade the practising and aspiring school leaders to complete their master's degrees in the areas of leadership and management. In 1995, the DSE approached the University of Newcastle to organise a specifically designed specialist master's degree program in educational administration in place of a generic program for school leaders. These efforts resulted in the development of MLMED Program in meeting the needs of a rapidly changing educational environment, based on the felt needs on the part of the systemic authorities and aspiring school leaders.

Similarly in 1991, Hong Kong introduced SBM with SMI on a voluntary basis with advisory school management committees in public schools. These reforms resulted in significant changes to the duties, responsibilities and accountabilities of school leaders. The school leaders and EMB felt the need for requiring new skills and competencies in meeting the new challenges. When increasing numbers of schools were embracing SMI, EMB gave serious consideration as to how to cope with the emerging needs. Later, they approached the Chinese University of Hong Kong to design a specialist

program for PFP for the purpose of accrediting the candidates for principalship. In this context, it is clear that both NSW and Hong Kong, systemic authorities had similar intensions in getting the University of Newcastle and the Chinese University to develop PD programs for their school leaders to confront new challenges. However, Newcastle program was developed as a master's degree program whereas the Chinese University program was developed as an accreditation program in terms of PFP requirements of the EMB. But it was designed for candidates with similar qualifications and experiences, covering similar grounds but with a lighter workload than for a master's program. Accordingly, it was appropriate to examine these two programs, which are based on similar philosophies and concepts for the practising and aspiring school leaders.

In Newcastle, the program planners were familiar with PD programs around the world and the perceptions of school leaders for practically oriented courses for employing theoretical concepts to guide and improve the practice. The Program Team comprised of representatives of all the relevant employers and associations of the practitioners as well as the academics of the Faculties of Education and Economics & Commerce. Both the title and program structure were organized in a manner, which appeals to the prospective candidates, as there were no prescriptions. Some courses which were usually key offerings at School of Business Studies rather than at Schools of Education were also included as core-components of the program to meet the emerging challenges.

In both programs, the modules comprising course materials were designed in an up-to-date, comprehensive and self-sufficient manner, which appealed to both the busy practising and aspiring school leaders. The assessment tasks were also designed with a high degree of practical orientations to refine and improve the practices, which dispelled the fears of highly theoretical programs. These features made the two programs successful and effective for the PD of current and aspiring leaders and managers. It is important to note that the latest findings of several research projects on reforming PD programs; one involving 623 principals in seven

American states (Salazar, 2003) and another involving program coordinators in 47 American universities (Gordon, 2003) presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) in August 2003, have confirmed the need to develop PD programs with a practical orientation.

The implementation of SBM in NSW since 1990 and in Hong Kong since 1991 has given principals more autonomy and flexibility in the deployment of resources, curriculum development, staff development and on other managerial matters in return for greater accountability. These reforms call for changes in students' learning attitude and approaches to cater to new learning processes and teaching strategies while recognizing that the quality of school leadership is pivotal in bringing all these changes into reality. Even though NSW strongly encourages PD, DSE did not make it mandatory whereas in Hong Kong, it was made mandatory by the EMB in 2002. The programs have been designed to equip the practicing and aspiring school principals with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes in becoming competent school leaders and managers of the new millennium. The systemic missions were to empower the principals to become effective, dynamic and accountable leaders in developing professional learning communities to face the challenges of ever-advancing knowledge-based societies while cultivating congenial climates to maximize the benefits. The values, knowledge, skills and attributes needed within the interrelated leadership domains were ingrained in these programs. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of participant evaluations suggest that both programs have been successful and effective with good practical orientations.

Conclusion

Today, it is widely acknowledged that leaders make a difference to the institutions and people they lead. Indeed, leadership is often regarded as the single most important factor in success or failure of institutions. Many researchers have confirmed that the principal's role is crucial to school

effectiveness and improvement. The principals often stand at the very centre of school level reforms, his/her leadership is critical to the success of these initiatives. Even though the designs, contents, and modes of delivery of the two programs look a bit different, the underlying values, philosophies, aims and objectives are quite similar. The underlying beliefs in MLMEd and the PFP programs are that: (1) If the principals need to optimize the all-round development of every student, they must continue to develop themselves professionally; (2) Principals must have clearly defined values and be dedicated to continually upgrading their own knowledge and skills to guide their schools and students towards productive futures; (3) Principals must help develop sound visions, strong leadership and long-term directions for their schools to ensure that they are well organized and managed to realize the visions; and (4) Principals must develop and maintain effective communication with parents, local community, employers, other schools, higher education institutions and related stakeholders to secure their commitment in enriching and enhancing students' learning.

Both the MLMEd and the PFP programs have been designed with strong practical orientations including the assessment tasks in meeting the needs of rapidly changing educational environments. Both programs have involved various categories of stakeholders at the initial stages of planning and design. The major strengths are the manner, in which course materials are designed to be comprehensive, self-sufficient and self-explanatory, which appeal to both aspiring and practising principals. Both programs charge tuition fees, though the time lines and workloads for the two programs are different. The analyses of participants' evaluations shown in Tables 2 and 3 and their comments on the courses of the two programs have been very positive. There are many similarities between the two programs in their aims and objectives as well as the design and instructional approaches. A significant difference is that the MLMEd program is optional and is open to all those who are interested in leadership and management studies. The PFP is mandatory for accreditation for principalship and the courses are specifically designed for aspiring principals. Through the credit transfer arrangements,

PFP serves as a ladder to obtain advanced standing for the Master of Educational Administration and Leadership program.

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