A Comparative Study on School Personnel Preferences

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ABSTRACT---- *This study seeks to find out how much teacher involvement in change do principals support and do they believe teachers wish to be that involved, as well as to find out how much teacher involvement in change do teachers actually aspire, and do they believe that principals support that amount of involvement. Findings reveal that Singapore principals and teachers responded favourably to teacher involvement in change. However, existing mutual underestimation and differences in preferences could be areas of concern. The challenge ahead for Singapore education system would be to harness the positive culture and maximise the potential of school principals and teachers in effecting healthy change in their own schools.*

Keyword--- Change, Singapore, schools
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1. INTRODUCTION

The positive contribution of teachers as agents in the leading edge of change is generally acknowledged, with reference to change ranging from classroom level to system-wide impact (DeVillar & Binbin, 2013; Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006; Yeap, Khine, Lim, & Low, 2005; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). Teachers prefer schools that provide them with opportunities to experiment and design appropriate programmes for their students; they do not prefer schools that load them with additional responsibilities and keep them away from their students (Poppleton & Williamson, 2004). Further, it was surfaced that "the more freely that teachers can express" the belief that "schools can be enhanced rather than diminished by adopting a critical perspective on change", "the stronger the professional community will be" (p. 318). The active involvement of teachers in school change promotes positive work life outcomes for teachers, as well as generating teachers' receptiveness and positive feelings toward change itself. In relation to the above, relationships with significant others, inclusive of colleagues who collaborated in education change activities, appear to achieve the outcome of confirming the systemic value placed on education reforms enacted by teachers (Sinclair, 2005). Many writers (for example, Hallinger, 1992; Lane, 1992) have also maintained that a school as effective as its leadership, in congruence with the centrality of the principal's role as a key finding in numerous research (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979). There is a need to generate more knowledge and increase our understanding of forces that influence the participation of teachers in school change. This paper is part of an international study that focuses on the perspectives of principals with regard to the involvement of their teachers in school change.

2. METHODOLOGY

A survey instrument consisting of twenty scaled sub-sectioned questions was used, with a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from "none" to "very much". School principals and teachers were requested to conceptually connect various possible responsibilities of teachers in school change with issues that were related to their own levels of openness to teacher involvement. For each responsibility, the input focussed on the extent the respondents perceived that teachers wished to take part, and should take part.

Questionnaire items were clustered into positions on a continuum of role responsibility. Items that correspond to administration and coordination of school activities were assigned the Administration and Coordination Index. Items under this index include the following: determining student enrolment in classes (item 1), conducting staff meetings (item 10), setting policies and criteria for hiring teachers (item 12), and deciding on the distribution of school budget (item 15). The Human Relations Index includes items such as formulating changes in teacher-administration relationships (item 7), giving organized feedback to the administration and staff (item 9), setting policies for changes in parent involvement (item16), creating new ways to improve school's relationships with the community (item 18) and organizing new programs for the use of volunteers in the school (item 20). The Teacher Support Index covers items 3, 4, 6, 14 and 17 which deal with organizing supportive assistance for teachers; developing policies on professional benefits; developing professional in-service programs; developing and conducting information programs; and developing approaches to the induction of new teachers respectively. Items that correspond to the fundamental role of teachers on

classroom matters that directly affect them were clustered in the Classroom Learning Index. This index includes developing new departmental courses for students (item 2), planning school changes in curriculum content, method and materials (item 5), setting policies for student behaviour (item 11), and planning innovative ways of class scheduling for teachers and students (item 19). In addition, this index is inclusive of items that concern implementing and evaluating change (items 8 and 13) as such responsibilities would probably affect changes in the classroom. Fifty returns from principals and 100 returns from teachers were used for data analysis.

3. RESULTS

Singapore versus All ten countries

This section presents prominent features of the Singapore findings and attempts to integrate that information with other existing local research. As predicted by role expectation theory, the Singapore means of the four major indices, Administration, Human Relations, Teacher Support and Classroom Learning, increased in the order listed for all of the four Teacher Involvement variables. All differences among the ordered index means were statistically significant except for the following: Human Relations versus Teacher Support difference which was non-significant for three involvement variables: Principal Estimates, Principal Support, and Teacher Estimates; as well as Human Relations versus Administration difference which was non-significant for two involvement variables: Principal Estimates and Teacher Aspirations. In Singapore, both principals and teachers consistently assigned higher Teacher Involvement ratings to activities traditionally seen as a teacher responsibility, and lower ratings to tasks that were traditionally a principal responsibility.

In Singapore, 44.8% of principals preferred that teachers should be strongly involved in Administration compared to only 35.8% of principals in All Ten countries combined. For the other indices, the corresponding percentages were 66.8% versus 58.8% for Human Relations; 68.7% versus 66.7% for Teacher Support; and 87.0% versus 76.8% for Classroom Learning. The overall average was 68.9% versus 61.6%. There was a positive difference in each Singapore versus All Ten comparison for every index or thematic cluster. The differences ranged from 2.0% for Teacher Support, 8.0% for Human Relations, 9.0% for Administration, to 10.2% for Classroom Learning.

The highest percentage difference between the principal preferences of Singapore and All Ten countries combined was Classroom Learning. A comparison of the percent distributions of indices also revealed that 42.3% of the teachers in Singapore scored 4 or 5 for Administration compared to 44.5% of the teachers in All Ten countries combined. The corresponding percentages for the other indices were 47.9% versus 46.0% for Human Relations, 58.2% versus 52.9% for Teacher Support, and 69.8% versus 65.7% for Classroom Learning, and the difference in Grand Mean was 3.2%. The only negative difference between Singapore versus All Ten comparison was the Administration index. While the percent of teachers in Singapore who indicated a preference for strong involvement was higher than the percent indicated by their overseas counterparts in Human Relations, Teacher Support and Classroom Learning, they preferred less involvement in Administration. Comparing the percent of strong scores for Singapore versus All Ten countries combined, teachers in Singapore preferred to focus more on strong involvement in Classroom Learning and focus least on Administration.

Principals versus teachers

The average difference between Principal Support and Teacher Aspirations for All Ten countries combined was 8.9%. A comparison of the percent distributions of indices for All Ten countries combined indicated that with the exception of the Administration index, principals preferred strong involvement of teachers, more than the teachers themselves. The corresponding index differences in ascending order, between All Ten Principal Preferences and All Ten Teacher Preferences, were as follows: -8.7% for Administration, 11.1% for Classroom Learning, 12.8% for Human Relations, and 13.8% for Teacher Support.

The average difference between Singapore Principal Support and Singapore Teacher Aspirations was 13.0%, which was 4.1% higher than the difference between All Ten Principal Preferences and All Ten Teacher Preferences. 44.8% of principals in Singapore preferred that teachers should be strongly involved in Administration compared to 42.3% of teachers in Singapore. For the other indices, the corresponding percentages were 66.8% versus 47.9% for Human Relations; 68.7% versus 58.2% for Teacher Support; and 87% versus 69.8% for Classroom Learning. The index differences between Principal Support and Teacher Aspirations in ascending order were as follows: 2.5% for Administration, 10.5% for Teacher Support, 17.2% for Classroom Teaching, and 18.9% for Human Relations.

For Administration, Human Relations and Classroom Teaching, the differences in scores between the principal and teachers in Singapore were higher than those between principals and teachers in All Ten countries combined. The score differences in the Administration, Human Relations and Classroom Teaching were 11.3%, 6.1%, and 6.1% respectively. While principals in other countries expressed lower preference than teachers with regard to strong involvement in Administration, principals in Singapore indicated higher preference than teachers.

Principal and teacher estimates

With reference to the percent of responses with strong scores for Singapore, the overall or average percent of the principal estimates of teacher aspirations was 42.7% whereas the overall percent of the actual teacher preferences was 55.9%. A comparison of the percent distribution of indices indicated that 32.6% of the Singapore principals estimated that teachers preferred to be strongly involved in Administration. The actual Singapore teacher preference was 42.3%. For the other indices, the corresponding percentages were 37.8% versus 47.9% for Human Relations, 44.3% versus 58.2% for Teacher Support, and 55.5% versus 69.8% for Classroom Learning. Principals in Singapore underestimated teacher preferences for all four indices, and the differences were 9.7% for Administration, 10.1% for Human Relations, 13.9% for Teacher Support, and 14.3% for Classroom Learning.

There was a difference of 14.1% between the average percent of principal support of 68.9% and the average percent of teacher estimates of 54.8% of principal support. The percent of responses for principal support and teacher estimates were 44.8% versus 30.3% for Administration, 66.8% versus 51.9% for Human Relations, 68.7% versus 57.4% for Teacher Support, and 87.0% versus 69.5% for Classroom Learning. The corresponding differences in percent responses were 14.5% for Administration, 14.9% for Human Relations, 11.3% for Teacher Support, and 17.5% for Classroom Learning. The comparison indicated that teachers in Singapore underestimated principal support for teacher involvement in school change in each of the indices, with the highest underestimation in the Classroom Learning index.

4. CONCLUSION

Singapore principals and teachers adopted the traditional role expectations in consistently allotting higher Teacher Involvement scores to items traditionally perceived as related to roles of a teacher, and lower scores to those traditionally associated with a principal. As such, for all four measures of Teacher Involvement, the Singapore means increased in ascending order with regard to the four major indices of Administration, Human Relations, Teacher Support, and Classroom Learning.

Singapore principals indicated preferences for teachers to be strongly involved in all indices of school change, higher than what Singapore teachers indicated for themselves. Singapore principals also preferred strong teacher involvement in Administration as well. There was also mutual underestimation. Singapore principals underestimated the extent of teacher aspirations to be involved in school change. Likewise, Singapore teachers underestimated the support of their principals. In both cases of mutual underestimation, the greatest difference was in Classroom Teaching.

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