School Leader Evolution of Instruction

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Refection Five for Research, Theory, and Practice in Education Leadership

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# The purpose of this reflection paper is two-fold: briefly summarizing three readings related to the topic of school leader evolution of instruction, and discussing the instruction evolution practice in China.

# Comprehension & Evaluation

Evaluation for individual teachers is widely used as a tool for school leaders to improve instructional performance. However, it is unclear about what aspects of teacher quality should school leaders measure. Giersch and Dong (2018) explore how principals perceive the characteristics of teachers in job applicants. They find that principals prefer applications with a certain level of classroom experience (5 years) and certain level of educational degree (bachelor). Additionally, school leaders at higher achieving schools pay less attention than those at lower achieving schools towards whether teachers emphasizing state standards. Instead school leaders at higher achieving schools focus more on other characteristics, including innovative instructions, current research, and schools’ mission. Giersch and Dong (2018) also point out the two main perspectives in teacher evolutions: teachers’ contribution to student achievement (value-add measure) and general teacher quality (e.g., personal resource, attribute, and activities outside the classroom).

Harris, Ingle, and Rutledge (2014) ­­ further analysis the teacher evaluation by comparing teacher value-added measure and principals’ teacher effectiveness rating (which based more on the general teacher quality). According to their research, the correlation between principal ratings and teacher value-add are modest. However, principals are able to identify the high flyers without the help of value-add measures. Among all the general teacher quality principals think effective teacher should have strong teaching skill, high motivation, contribution to the community and school, and ability to work well with team. More importantly, they discuss how measurements will affect the school development in practice. They find that the method of evaluation principals use may not only affect which specific teachers are rewards in short term, but also shape the qualities of teachers and teaching students experience in the long term.

Even though the preference of principal in hiring for new teachers and method principal used in evaluate current teachers affect the school staffing. However, the movement, generation, and production of teacher is not just based on the evaluation. Reininger (2012) analysis the geographic mobility of new teachers. She finds that local nature of the labor force and the differential rates of graduation and production of teachers from traditionally hard-to-staff schools are reinforcing existing deficits of local teacher labor supply. To solve this issue, she suggests that the school and district leader with inadequate local teacher supply need to design incentives (both pecuniary and non-pecuniary aspects of the teaching job) as well as increase the number of local high school students who graduate from college.

# Application

One of the salient characteristics of educational supervision in China is a combination of administrative supervision and educational inspection. This combination is backed up and legitimized by laws (e.g., *The Education Laws of the People’s Republic of China*) and regulations. Four-tier administrative system for educational supervision (i.e., central/national, province, city, and county) has been established (Ling and Liao, 2005). Consequently, supervision office in the government could check, monitor, direct, and evaluate educational quality. Each office has its own human capital, regular budget and office requirements (Yang and Guo, 2005). The benefit of this system in the past was the enforcement and implementation of compulsory basic education. Today, educational supervision at each level are required to focus on the big tasks of reforming schools in difficulty, narrowing the gap in basic education between urban-rural areas and between schools, and enhancing the capacity of quality educational resources.

However, school leaders, under this system, have relatively limited power and flexibility. Policymakers outside school usually make the general guideline. Regardless of the uniqueness of different school and its community environment, school leaders have to follow the guideline. Though the high-level policymakers usually have rich practical experience in school leadership and try to know what is happening in school by visiting, they may not be able to obtain the timely and accurate feedbacks. For a long time, educational department in government focus on the quantifiable performance indicators (e.g., standardized testing and enrollment rate). Thus, lower achieving schools can be quickly identified. These schools will face the great pressure. To some extent, this pressure promotes the development of reform in school. For example, new principal sometimes will be appointed. Pecuniary and non-pecuniary support will be provided. A series of reforms in instruction in practice are also encouraged. However, it can also over-correct. For example, teachers may only care about the improvement of testing in the short term, while ignore the all-round development of each student as individual in the long term.

Within the school level, the instructional evolution in China is also focus on value-add measure. The hierarchical structure of Chinese K12 school sometimes is more complex than the public schools in United States. Between teachers and principals, there are subject leader, grade leader, and usually the community party leaders. Principal from the high achieving school may also have the opportunities to be assigned as the principal for the school at higher level (e.g., from a district key school to a city key school or a province key school). Similarly, one general teacher can be assigned as the grade leader or subject leader. These promotions usually represent not only higher reputation, but also more bonuses, more protentional opportunities and more resources. Thus, teachers and principals are willing to perform better for promotion. In this way, the schooling system is a more competitive and dynamic market. However, there is no clear evidence of how much experience from the previous environment can be transferred. An excellent principal in one school may not be perform well in another school again. And, it also makes it harder to establish the harmonious relationship between school and community in the long term.

To solve the issues of “hometown disadvantage”, China has a huge public service project organized by the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) and the Communist Youth League (CYL) Central Committee, called “Project of Hope”. Started in1989, it aims to bring schools into poverty-stricken rural areas and to help children to complete school education. By 2014, the Project of Hope have raised over 5.6 billion Renminbi in funds, financed about 4.95 million rural students, built 18396 "Hope Primary Schools” (which consists of 2.5% of all the rural primary schools), and build over 140 distance learning centers. The issues of “hometown disadvantage”, as Reininger (2012) described, is not easy to be fixed by a single school. Sometimes, it will gradually become a vicious circle: less student get Bachler degree leads to less student become teacher, leads to less good teacher come back and apply to the school, leads to the worse teaching and learning. Project of Hope may not be able to solve the fundamental socioeconomic problems of rural area. Once the support from Project of Hope stop, these areas may go back to the vicious circle again. However, these strong supports, at least, give hope. This hope may become a way to turn over the vicious circle into a positive one: more students are educated leads to more young adults get decent jobs, leads to more talent people have the resource and knowledge of how to support their hometown, leads to the socioeconomic status of their hometown improved, and leads to more teachers are willing to come.

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