Leading Pedagogic Leadership in Schools Providing Compulsory Education: A Comparative Study of Head Teacher Between China and the Czech Republic

Danping Peng

Abstract

Pedagogic leadership has been increasingly emphasized in recent decades, in respect of improving teaching and learning as well as for ensuring high quality education reaches the classroom. Based on investigation of the theories surrounding pedagogical leadership, the main purposes of this study are exploring the role of head teacher as a leader of pedagogic leadership in schools providing compulsory education. And major influencing factors of leading pedagogic leadership. Semi-structure interview is used in this study, 4 head teachers from China and the Czech Republic participated in this study. 5 dimensions of the pedagogic leadership are included in the interview. Based on interviews with the study's subjects, discernible differences were noted between Chinese and Czech head teachers as leaders of pedagogic leadership.

Key words: Pedagogic leadership; compulsory education; China; Czech Republic; Comparative study.

Introduction

In modern times, competition among countries is intense in a country's economic per-
formance, and the welfare of its citizens is related to the qualifications of its population.
Education reforms have been pursued relentlessly in many countries with advanced
economies (Fullan, 2000), which emphasizes the crucial position of education. An ef-
fective pedagogic leadership is essential if schools are to achieve the wide-ranging
objectives set for them by their many stakeholders (Bush, 2011). Research shows that
although cultural, capital, and socioeconomic conditions affect student outcomes (Mor-
timore et al., 1988), school leaders are still considered as the second most important
school-level factor affecting student learning after classroom instruction, even if mainly
indirectly through their influence on teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et
al., 2006). The current role of head teachers became more and more complex within
the contemporary global situation. Beside, Harris (2003) claims that the challenges in
education are numerous but the potential of leaders to influence schools still remains
indisputable, and that the importance of head teachers and school improvement has
been demonstrated in both theory and practice.

   This study considers the research status of pedagogic leadership, including the
various viewpoints of conceptualizing pedagogic leadership and its components. As
learning centered leadership, three modes of pedagogic leadership are introduced in
this study. Accordingly, the main purpose is thus to explore the head teachers' role as
leaders of pedagogic leadership in diversity social culture.

1 Theoretical background

1.1 Pedagogic leadership

Most contemporary theories of leadership suggest that leadership cannot be separated
from the context, in which it is exerted. At the core of most definitions of leadership
there are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. (Leithwood, 2003:
3). Various theoretical models have been proposed to account for the nature and impact
of different leadership styles including transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1992),
instructional leadership (Hopkins, 2003), and pedagogical leadership (Sergiovanni,
1998) etc. Plenty of literature about pedagogic leadership consider it as a learning-
centered leadership or leadership for learning (OECD, 2013). For instance, Sergiovanni
(1998: 38) claims that pedagogical leadership:

…invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students
and intellectual and professional capital for teachers. Support this leadership by mak-

ing capital available to enhance student learning and development, teacher learning and classroom effectiveness.

Besides, some researcher stated, "in classical writings about pedagogic leadership, the role of learning in educational communities is emphasized" (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Pedagogical leadership can be seen as a blend of supervision, staff development and curriculum development with the aim of improved learning (Their, 1994). Day and Leithwood (2007) argued that pedagogical leadership can be summarized in three main parts: creating conditions for learning and teaching, leading learning and teaching, and linking the everyday work of teaching and learning with organizational goals and results. Furthermore, "establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching" (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009: 172) has emphasized in pedagogic leadership, which not only including the teaching and learning but also the evaluation.

1.2 Models of pedagogic leadership

Figure 1
Learning centered leadership framework (Murphy et al., 2007)
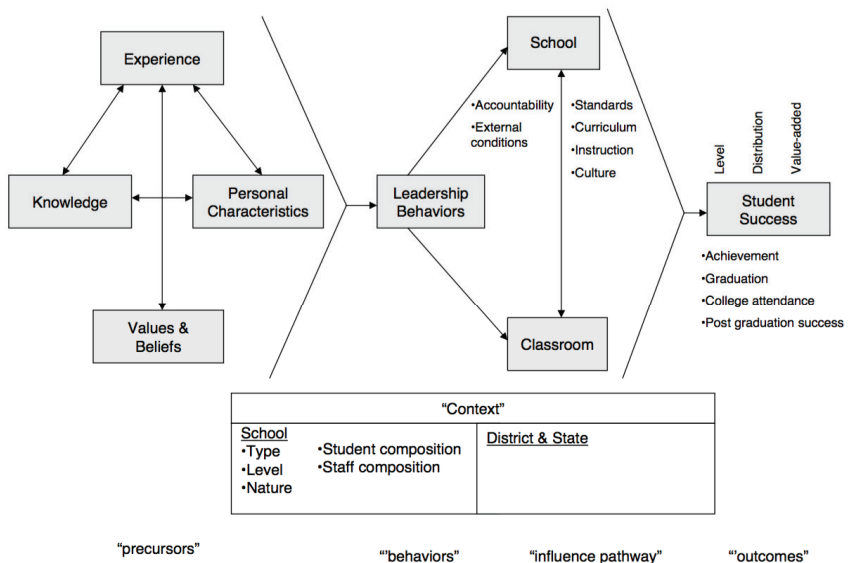
As learning centered leadership, the models of pedagogic leadership (educational leadership) are shaped by four major conditions (Figure 1): the previous experiences of a leader; the knowledge base the leader amasses over time; the types of personal characteristics a leader brings to the job and the set of values and beliefs that help define a leader (Murphy et al., 2007). And the leadership behaviors influence the factors (standards, curriculum, instruction, culture etc.), in turn, influence the outcomes (e.g. student graduation).

In Figure 1, the model of pedagogic leadership, the function of context was emphasized, pedagogic leadership was analyses as a dynamic process. And it is highly related to personal experience and social culture. Besides, MacNeill's (2007) model looked inside of the pedagogic leadership instead of analyses the whole process. 11 dimensions of pedagogic leadership are included in this model (Figure 2). In this model, different roles of head teachers in pedagogic leadership were demonstrated.

Figure 2
Model of pedagogic leadership (MacNeill, 2007)

Direction setting
1. Discharging a moral obligation to students and society.
2. Establishing a shared vision and sense of mission.
3. Gaining commitment by expecting high standards from staff and students
Developing people
4. Facilitating the engagement and empowerment of staff
5. Establishing multiple, collaborative leadership roles
Re-designing the organisation
6. Leading change
7. Balancing administrative roles with pedagogic roles
8. Developing relationships and a sense of community
9. Applying a re-culturing approach to school improvement
Leading the pedagogic program
10. Developing expert knowledge about pedagogy and schooling
11. Creating and sharing knowledge throughout the school

Furthermore, according to S. Gento's (2002) study, a reference model is proposed for Pedagogical leadership and quality of education. Based on this conception, the educational leadership has been analysed through the following dimensions: charismatic, emotional, anticipatory, professional, participative, cultural, formative, and administrative leadership.

Researchers have given different models and dimensions of pedagogic leadership based on their professional background and structure of knowledge. In this research, combining the practical situation with the three models of pedagogic leadership, five dimensions of pedagogic leadership will be discussed: anticipatory, professional, participative, cultural and administrative leadership.

1.3 Pedagogic leadership in schools providing compulsory education

Based on the China Integrated Knowledge Resources Database (CNKI), the related research of pedagogic leadership in China can be divided into three categories. The first category focused on the conceptualization of pedagogic leadership. For instance, some researchers stated that pedagogic leadership is a kind of abilities to help teachers and students to achieve their aims (Zhang, 2015; Zhao & Song, 2014). The second category highlights the head teachers' pedagogic leadership in some specific area. For instance, in Li's study (2009), pedagogic leadership in the area of curriculum reforms and administration was emphasized. The third category is related to how to improve pedagogic leadership in China. Zhu (2008) put forward three suggestions: be intelligent and thoughtful, adhere to the school system construction, and insist on the right values.

In the Czech Republic, a decentralized and participative school system of three levels was established: the state, autonomy and the school. Czech schools providing compulsory school education became legal entities a decade ago. They can be regarded as relatively highly autonomous organizations: in the pedagogical as well as in management issues. This brings consequences for the schoolwork. The primary responsibility for school educational quality lies with Czech headmasters as each school has freedom to formulate and conduct its own (curricular) policy. The school management is expected to apply more participatory approaches from the school improvement perspective and to balance them with activities, which could support school accountability. The duty for quality assurance in the school is therefore spread across various actors, deputy head teachers and teachers too. Despite the fact that head teachers of Czech schools have a high degree of autonomy to manage teachers, many of them still lack preparation for their responsibilities, particularly in the area of leading teaching and learning (OECD, 2013), and the professional development opportunities often lack a focus on pedagogic leadership too (IIE, 2011).

2 Methodology

All research is interpretive and is grounded on a set of beliefs about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin, 2006). Qualitative research takes an in-depth approach to the phenomenon it studies in order to understand it more thoroughly and needs greater awareness of the perspectives of program participants (Weiss, 1998). The roles of head teachers of pedagogic leadership in diversity social culture are related to personal behaviors (leadership behaviors), tendency or attitude; the qualitative method is appropriate for this study because of this manner. And the characteristics of pedagogic leadership in a different culture need to be researched in-depth approach as well. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to increase the knowledge about the role of head teachers as leaders of pedagogic leadership in China and in the Czech Republic. The following three questions have guided the study.

1. What are the major factors influencing head teachers in their role as leaders of pedagogic leadership?
2. Are there differences between Chinese and Czech head teachers in how they look upon their role as leaders of pedagogic leadership?
3. What personal responsibility rests on the head teacher as a leader of pedagogic leadership?

2.1 Instrumentation: semi-structured interviews

In this research, data was collected by semi-structured interviews with head teachers in China and the Czech Republic. An initial conceptual framework was used to guide the research. Thereafter, a set of predetermined questions was formulated and captured on an interview schedule to ensure the interview questions were clearly structured and in a logical sequence.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30–40 minutes and were divided into five sections. According to the theoretical background of pedagogic leadership, five aspects of pedagogic leadership were selected in this research. In the first section, questions were focused on anticipatory aspect of pedagogic leadership. The respondents were asked what aims they set for their school and their vision of the school. The second section comprised questions regarding topic or themes related to the participate aspect of pedagogic leadership. How head teachers participated in the daily work. The third section is related to the professional aspect of pedagogic leadership. Most of the questions in this section focused on head teachers' professional development, and their works on the aspect of support the development of teachers and students. The fourth and last section of the semi-structured interviews included questions on the administrative and culture aspect of pedagogic leadership.

Selection of participants

The participants of the semi-structured interviews were purposively selected to fit the study criteria. The selected 4 head teachers represented a population that acted as the spokespersons for the topic of enquiry. To provide for various perspectives on the roles of head teacher of pedagogic leadership in diversity culture, the following two inclusion criteria were applied:

a) A minimum of 5 years experience in compulsory school (primary school or lower secondary school) as a head teacher or director;

b) School type and its location: public school in the normal second-tier cities (similar economy development condition).

Data analysis procedure

The interview data were analysed with five steps analytic process for analysing qualitative data set out by McCracken (1988). The first stage is reading and reviewing each interview transcript twice, to understand and identification useful comments noted as observations. The second stage involved forming preliminary categories (called codes) of the themes. The third stage involved identifying patterns and connections among the codes, thereby developing themes. The fourth stage of analysis involves a determination of basic themes by examining clusters of comments made by the respondents and memos made by the researchers. The final stage examines themes from all the interviews to delineate predominant themes contained in the data.

3 Findings

3.1 Major factors influencing leading pedagogic leadership of head teachers

Anticipatory dimension

Anticipatory dimension of pedagogic leadership related to the achievement of ultimate goal of the school, mission or the possibilities of change. And it is about the establishment of shared purpose as a basic stimulant for all stakeholders. The more specific practices in this category are building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and demonstrating high performance expectations (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Emphasis on the meaning of decision-making, sharing the understanding of core purpose and responsibilities was manifested during the interview. One participant said:

I have quite clear vision of ultimate goal of my school, but it's not enough, short-term of goal is important as well. And every Monday, we have regular meeting to dis-

cuss the aims of this week, teachers attending to the process of decision-making, and they agree with the new tasks. So they know what they should do in the new week…

Anticipatory is a basic dimension of pedagogic leadership, and it is the precondition of head teachers to leading the pedagogic leadership in school.

Professional dimension

In this research, the professional dimension of pedagogic leadership not only means the professional development of head teachers (for instance, attending professional projects and plans, training courses) but also includes the abilities to support the development of teachers and students (for instance, evaluation of a new teacher's lessons, encouragement to innovation). All the participates of this research agreed to consider the professional dimension as one of the most important factors influencing leading pedagogic leadership in schools providing compulsory education. Some participants explained:

As a head teacher, I never stop to explore the new knowledge. I went to specific training lessons last month, although it's not obligatory. And I learned transformational leadership from those lessons, and it really helps me to develop my school…

Most of time, teachers come to my office only for administrative works but I went to their lessons every month especially the lessons of new teachers. The knowledge and skills of evaluation lesson is really important for me…

Participative dimension

Similar to the professional dimension, the participate dimension including two aspects as well. One aspect is the head teachers' will to collaborate, other aspect is the atmosphere of collaboration in the school. The participants mentioned that the best way to foster harmonious school was to encourage teachers towards a collaborative work. In leading the pedagogic leadership, the participative dimension is the necessary and sufficient condition for a leader.

Teamwork is powerful, not only on collaboration of some project, but also on the debates on some educational topic. Agreement is important in collaboration, disagreement is crucial as well…

Administrative dimension

The results indicated that effective pedagogic leadership engaged in leadership behaviors. The participants' gender, ethnicity, and pedagogical beliefs did not make significant differences in leadership behaviors, but overall years as the current head teacher and overall years of administrative experience did make significant differences. For instance:

The administrative work is really heavy every day, I spent more than half of my working time to deal with it. Even though, I have to say after 8 years "training" by administrative work, I learned so many new skills and invaluable experience. It shows me the way of how to deal with different people and how to maximum the efficiency of work…

Cultural dimension

Feeling safe in school is fundamental for educators to be able to teach effectively and for to students to learn effectively (Thapa, 2012). Positive atmosphere is essential for head teachers leading pedagogic leadership. The participants mentioned two level of culture both affect the pedagogic leadership: social culture and school culture. However, the school culture has more significant effect on leading pedagogic leadership.

Half a year before, other primary school merged with our school, in that case, we built a new identity… I can feel the different school culture and atmosphere after that, so the most important thing for me now is, I think, the unification of the school culture, to let the teachers and students accept new circumstances.

Besides the five dimensions of pedagogic leadership, the changing educational policies and educational expenditure were reflected by participates. Which would consider as influence factors of head teachers' leading pedagogic leadership in schools providing compulsory education as well.

3.2 Different perceptions on leading pedagogic leadership of head teacher in diversity culture

Chinese head teachers

A head teacher's ability to use his/her power is based on two factors, namely legality and legitimacy (Rapp, 2010). However, in compulsory education level, public schools have almost same teaching content and instructional objectives. Head teachers do not have too much autonomy of their work, and the achievement of students is one of the most important norms for the evaluation of head teachers' work. During the interview, the Chinese head teachers expressed the view that to be a leader of pedagogic leadership, one should have a background as a teacher and/or have teaching experiences. One participate said:

I think it is important to be an educated head teacher. I can discuss pedagogical matters and the teachers know that I can deliver in a classroom.

Beside, the employment of head teachers is decided by the higher administrative departments of education, therefore, bureaucrat oriented consciousness was deep-rooted in the society. And head teachers paid more attentions on administrative dimension of pedagogic leadership in the Chinese context. For some of Chinese head teachers, having a good relationship with officers who came from a higher administrative department of education not only means convenient of their daily work but also considered as a guarantee of their jobs.

Czech head teachers

As in many other European countries, the education system in the Czech Republic developed during the 19th and 20th centuries as a centralised system, with the government in the decision-making role (Murden, et. al, 2006). As a concomitant of the 1990 Act, head teachers became full responsibility for the school. For instance, the teaching plan and curriculum, the school's professional and educational standard and students' learning achievements etc.

During the interview, Czech head teachers felt quite confident about their professional dimension of leading pedagogic leadership. They were willing to share the experience of educational training. Being the leaders of pedagogic leadership, they are seeking a better way to corporation, and the participative dimension of pedagogic leadership is highlighted.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the role of head teachers in leading pedagogic leadership. And major factors influencing leading pedagogic leadership of head teachers. Head teachers' perception on their roles is different in various cultures, they are seeking different aims for the development of school or their self-development. However, most educational leaders will experience failure, disappointment, frustration, rejection and hostility at some time during their professional lives (Day & Sammons, 2013). A successful and effective pedagogic leadership requires a long-term study.

The further study of pedagogic leadership would relate to the approaches of improving the teaching and learning. Beside, more works need to be done on the aspect of evaluation pedagogic leadership as well.

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Contact:
Danping Peng
Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc
Žižkovo nám. 5, 771 40 Olomouc
Czech Republic
E-mail: pengdanping2013@gmail.com