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**A Study of Curriculum Leaders' Selves and  
Attitudes toward Action Research in the Postmodern Age**

**Sammy King Fai HUI**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education**

**School of Education  
University of Durham**

**2008**

**0 1 SEP 2008**



**To My Family!**

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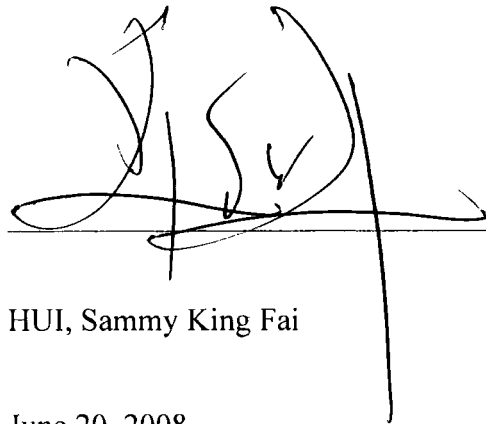
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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgment is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this University or to any other institution for a bachelor, master or doctoral degree.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long vertical stroke extending downwards from the main signature.

Name: HUI, Sammy King Fai

Date: June 20, 2008.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Curriculum leaders are key agents of the recent curriculum reforms in Hong Kong. They are appointed in individual schools and their role is to make sure different reform measures and policies are functioning well and by and large leading to quality school curriculum. To convey these measures and policies to schools and school teachers, a key approach recommended by the authorities is to engage in action research as a means of professional and curriculum development. The purpose of this thesis is (i) to explore the attitudes which Hong Kong curriculum leaders have toward action research and (ii) to examine their perceptions of self which are formulated as a response to the education and curriculum reforms, in an era characterized by the term “postmodern”. From a postmodern perspective the whole project of reform and its means-end logic can be seen as modernist, for it is assumed there is a “promising” vehicle for whole-person development and emancipation that will deliver pre-determined outcomes. However from a postmodern perspective, norms are not to be found in foundations. To curriculum leaders, there is always the conflict between the official expectations of government bodies/policy makers and the actual problems they find in work. Thus, their selves are in danger of getting more and more fragile, more and more fragmented. This thesis provides research evidence not only of the attitudes curriculum leaders have toward action research, but also how they speak, think and act toward the project of education, how they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and how they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change.

Methods used in this thesis include: first a survey research administering the Attitudes Toward Research instrument (ATR) with a large cohort of curriculum leaders who



participated in one of the training programmes that aimed for advancing their work, and second an in-depth exploration, through a dialogical method of informal chats and interviews, with five of them.

Survey results suggested: (i) curriculum leaders in general favoured using research in their work; (ii) apart from what the policy makers promoted as a “communal” sense of research significance for professional development, practitioners were concerned too with a “pedagogical” sense of research significance (which fits well with postmodern thinking) for providing individual solutions for teaching and learning challenges; and (iii) policy makers need to have an alternative, wider concept of the purpose of action research, to empower curriculum leaders to believe more their own efforts of understanding and criticizing the present education context and to develop their own approach to reform.

Informal chats and interviews suggested: (i) although the five curriculum leaders were very different in their life experience and perceptions of self working as curriculum leaders, they all encountered difficulties in leading curriculum change in schools and classrooms; and (ii) curriculum leadership was difficult. In order to spread leadership practices among the school, it is necessary for school leaders, as well as curriculum developers and policy makers, to disseminate curriculum information to schools and the wider public in terms of free and rich communication. The thesis makes recommendations on how reform policy might be conveyed to schools, curriculum leaders and teachers in a postmodern age.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 A Glance at Hong Kong Education and Curriculum Reform**

Curriculum reform is one of the major educational reforms introduced by the Hong Kong SAR government in recent years (Education Commission, 2000). It is a policy measure adopted by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to help school heads and teachers (and curriculum leaders) to reflect upon the strengths of their schools, and to decide how best to reform the curriculum in the context of the school to achieve their educational aims.<sup>1</sup> This policy is based on the main recommendations made by the Curriculum Development Council in its consultation document *Learning to learn, the way forward in curriculum development* (Curriculum Development Council, 2000). The policy puts strong emphasis on achieving the overall aim of the school curriculum, which is to provide all students with essential life-learning experiences for whole-person development.<sup>2</sup> The seven key learning goals which students should be able to achieve through primary and junior secondary schoolings are: (i) recognize their roles and responsibilities as members in the family, the society, and the nation; and show concern for their well-being; (ii) understand their national identity and be committed to contributing to the nation and society; (iii) develop a habit of reading independently; (iv) engage in discussion actively and confidently in English and Chinese (including Putonghua); (v) develop creative thinking and master independent learning skills (e.g. critical thinking, information technology, numeracy

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<sup>1</sup> The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has been restructured and carried the name of Education Bureau (EDB; <http://www.edb.hk>) from 1 July 2007 onward.

<sup>2</sup> The five essential life-learning experiences include: (i) moral and civic education; (ii) intellectual development; (iii) community service; (iv) physical and aesthetic development; and (v) career-related experiences (for junior secondary students) (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 1, p. 8).



and self-management); (vi) possess a breadth and foundation of knowledge in the eight Key Learning Areas; and (vii) lead a healthy lifestyle and develop an interest in and appreciation of aesthetic and physical activities (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 1, pp. 4-5). Therefore, apart from the cognitive learning outcomes of breadth of knowledge, the new Hong Kong school curriculum framework stresses the affective and behavioural representations of positive values and attitudes, and the necessary generic skills to acquire and construct knowledge.

To put the reform into operation, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR in his 2001 policy address announced a raft of initiatives to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and to facilitate each school to build on its existing strengths and plan its curriculum development at its own pace. One of these initiatives was the creation of an additional teaching post for a Curriculum Officer in primary schools “to lead internal curriculum development” (Chief Executive, 2001). These teachers were given the title of Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development), hereafter referred to as PSM(CD). The posts were promotion positions with a limited duration of five years, carrying a significant range of responsibilities for advancing curriculum reform in Hong Kong schools.

These PSM(CD)s are *curriculum leaders*. They are not only expected to set directions for and to control the quality of the school curriculum, but also to take up the challenges in their schools and in their classrooms. Their responsibilities were set out in detail in an EMB circular (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003, p. 2) as follows:

The PSM(CD) will serve as a curriculum leader to help the school in reforming the curriculum in accordance with the educational aims to

promote whole-person development and life-long learning. The duties of the curriculum leader in more specific terms are:

- (i) To assist the school head to lead and coordinate whole-school curriculum planning so that each school can strike a balance between the central curriculum, the mission of the schools and learning needs of students according to the recommendations of the curriculum reform;
- (ii) To support the school head in planning and coordinating assessment policy and assessment practices;
- (iii) To lead teachers/specialist staff in improving learning and teaching strategies and assessment practices through staff development days, collaborative lesson preparation, selection and development of appropriate learning and teaching resources, etc.;
- (iv) To promote a professional exchange culture within the school and to establish links with other schools for sharing of experiences in learning, teaching and curriculum development; and
- (v) To take up a reasonable teaching load (which should be less than 50% of the average teaching load of a teacher of the school) so that the curriculum leader can keep close contact with the real situation of daily classroom learning and teaching.

The efforts of the curriculum leaders should be to improve the quality of a school curriculum, which is measured in terms of its coherence and flexibility to set directions for teaching and learning, and its ability to adapt to changes and the different needs of the students and the schools.

## **1.2 Curriculum Leaders' Attitudes and Perceptions in Quest**

Compared to the ways in which the school curriculum was organized and implemented in the past, the new reform policy is a significant breakthrough, giving individual schools more power and freedom to develop and put into practice their own curriculum, and to realize their goals for quality school education. A wide range of curriculum initiatives and the use of action research are then proposed and adopted by schools to meet the demand. To help students to develop independent learning capacities within and across the Key Learning Areas, the four key tasks – “moral and civic education”, “reading to learn”, “project learning”, and “information technology for interactive learning” – are claimed to be essential and effective (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). Teachers and curriculum leaders in particular are required to incorporate these four key tasks into curriculum planning, to put them into action to achieve the overall aims of the school curriculum, and the “official” means is to take on action research. As emphasized in the government document:

Action research is more than a testing of ideas and improvement of practices. It emphasizes on critical and systematic inquiry in collaboration.

We strongly recommend conducting action research in groups and in collaboration with colleagues in school. (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 10, p. 14)

The whole approach to curriculum reform follows a conventional model of means-end rationality. However there are problems with some of the underlying assumptions. Difference is reduced and ignored. School curriculum is thought to be commensurable and determinable. However, according to Jean-François Lyotard (1984 [1979]), this logic of performance, of optimizing the system's overall

performance, based on the criterion of efficiency, is technological. It violates the heterogeneity of individual difference and “necessarily involves a certain level of terror: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], xxiv). If Lyotard is correct then there may be tension between the way curriculum reform is conceived by policy makers and how it is experienced by those given the task of ensuring its successful introduction. Therefore, although the value of such a policy is undeniable, its success depends greatly on how the PSM(CD)s perceive their roles as leaders for curriculum change, and perhaps the way they take up the challenges in their hearts (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

Curriculum leaders are expected to ensure that the reform policy is introduced in a rational, logical and efficient manner. They are meant to ensure that education and curriculum reform “works” and that they are meant to bring in action research determinably for curriculum development. This is because, to ensure all curriculum leaders have functioned efficiently:

[...] collaborative action research is recommended as a change strategy in teacher professional development and school-based curriculum development. [...] action research should not be taken as an add-on activity but should be integrated into the collaborative cycle of lesson preparation, daily classroom practice, lesson observation and the professional development of teachers. The main purpose of action research is to improve practices and to generate knowledge based evidence through teachers working together. (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 10, p. 13)

The principle is to conduct action research for attaining a good quality school curriculum. The demand for curriculum leaders is to reflect upon their limitations and to bring about improvement through action research. However, before accepting any of these principles of uniformity and “performativity”, the attitudes which curriculum leaders have toward action research and their perceptions of selves, with the challenges that are embedded in the present time, have to be taken into account within any attempt to reform education.

One of the major contemporary challenges, as suggested in the literature, to these curriculum leaders is embodied in the idea of postmodernism. It criticizes the position of viewing education and curriculum reform as a “promising” vehicle (i.e. a vehicle for delivering pre-determined outcomes) through which the totalizing idea of whole-person development and emancipation are realized. To postmodern theorists, reform is nothing more than a project of modernity. The claim is that the period we are now living in has already moved beyond and broken from the social forms associated with modernist ideas (Blake *et al.*, 1998; De Alba *et al.*, 2000). They disagree with the perception of the social world as linear and progressive in nature, and education and school curriculum should therefore not be thought of as vehicles to realize any of the ideals of developing or enlightening human mankind. Adaptation of this “logic” of developing or enlightening human mankind could easily have been found in the recent development of Hong Kong education policies, especially under the influence of fluctuating social, economic and political conditions in the last decade. Among those, the return of its sovereignty to the People’s Republic of China, the drop of the birth rate, the large amount of Mainland children abiding in Hong Kong, and the economic recession after the outbreak of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory

Syndrome) are most critical. Thus, there were (reform) policies to urge schools to put emphasis on their curriculum to strengthen students' sense of national identity and be committed to the nation and society, to prepare students to be "bi-literate and trilingual", to practise inclusive education, to benchmark Language teachers, and to force primary schools to close with insufficient student intake rather than to adopt a small class teaching policy. As argued by Doll (1993), a modernist account of curriculum that built upon a "linear, sequential, easily quantifiable ordering system" should give way to a "more complex, pluralistic, unpredictable system or network" (Doll, 1993, p. 3). For PSM(CD)s whose duty is to make success the reform at school and classroom levels, the job is even more difficult. The crisis in translating and implementing different reform policies in schools and using action research as a critical means, especially when high burnout rate is already a sign of Hong Kong school teachers (Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, 2005) is significant, or in postmodern terms, the loss of meaning and faith toward education, is severe.

The way curriculum leaders perceive the dangers that are associated with those criticisms not only affects their work, but can also cause a chain of reactions to the whole school! To understand the effect is very much a matter of recognizing and understanding the extent to which, and ways in which, curriculum leaders' work and daily lives are invested in and impacted and punctuated by these criticisms and challenges and the "official" expectations against which they emerge as oppositional responses. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to rethink the reform policy, first through an examination of a large cohort of curriculum leaders' "attitudes toward action research", their underlying thought to the official demands, and then a study of the "self" of five of them and the "knowledge" that these stories of selves convey.



The study of the self refers precisely to the way they respond to the education context in which they work, the way they perceive the roles and functions of action research, and the way they speak, think and act toward the project of education. Two different research approaches were used. For the study of curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research, survey research method was used as being the most appropriate method for large-scale data collection. For the study of curriculum leaders' self, a less conventional approach – a dialogical method – was used. This method refers to a kind of interviewing, which aims at having a “critical dialogue” between the researcher and the participants and then transforming any understanding of their “self” and the knowledge gained to a critical level. It is important to highlight that the former survey study provides a general understanding of the attitudes which curriculum leaders have toward action research, and the latter dialogical study helps to explain the issue through a wider perspective of their self. In other words, the study of curriculum leaders' self offers a more precise, meaningful and reality-congruent account of their felt/personal understanding of what the reform means and entails, on top of the surface/official understanding of the reform and action research for effectiveness and accountability. The work will shed light and provide insights to government bodies, policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and frontline teachers to rethink their approach to education and curriculum reform, the limitations that are embedded in it, and to look for possibilities of translating and implementing the reform to the education context.

With regard to the formulation of research questions within the broad conception of “the postmodern age”, Buckingham (2003) acknowledges that postmodernism is seen by many to be “well past its sell-by date” but he goes on to point out that it still

“represents a fundamental challenge to established forms of education – to traditional concepts of knowledge and learning, and to the institutional forms in which they are embedded” (Buckingham, 2003, p. 309). In fact, the idea of the postmodern does not suggest criticisms as the anti-realism or relativism does, and it *does not entail the position that anything or everything goes* (Hollinger, 1994; Usher & Edwards, 1994). Therefore, it is necessary for government bodies, policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and frontline teachers to criticize the project of education and learn from the critique of the postmodern, specifically at a time when they are trying to implement reform, and to “reflect” on the issues that are raised. “Reflection” here refers to an awareness of the present situation of what education could be like, and also a hope of how today’s education could be better. In a sentence, investigation of curriculum leaders’ attitudes toward action research, their self and world-views toward education and reform in curriculum in a period characterized by the postmodern is of primary importance and will certainly advance knowledge in the field through providing more substantive research evidences for discussion. Following Hallway’s description of the postmodern as *an era of both dangers and possibilities* (Hallway, 1985; Nicholson, 1990), this thesis will look in-depth into: (i) the attitudes which curriculum leaders have toward action research, the factors involved, and the variables that are associated with them (these variables include their previous demonstrated research experience, the highest academic qualification they hold, and the psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control); (ii) the way they speak, think and act toward the project of education; (iii) the way they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform; and (iv) the way they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change.

The work will be useful for policy makers to understand in-depth the impact of the reform on curriculum leaders in a period characterized by the postmodern and to postulate “alternatives” of introducing and presenting the reform and reform documents. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used. Quantitative data were extracted from survey questionnaires with a large cohort of curriculum leaders, and qualitative data were extracted from the dialogical method, many informal chats and one interview, with particularly five of them. Statistical analysis was adopted for the questionnaire data (Bryman & Cramer, 1997; Norušis, 2000). For the interviews, data were analyzed first through a narrative analysis of the stories of curriculum leaders’ self (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and second through a process of identifying significant themes underlying their views (Bryman & Burgess, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, by means of reflexively commenting on the knowledge constituted, this thesis will offer an in-depth understanding of how curriculum leaders react to the project of education in an era characterized by the postmodern.

### **1.3 Thesis Overview**

**Chapter 2** reviews the foremost literature of the critical concepts and constructs that are articulated in the thesis, which includes: action research and its relation with other concepts, the meaning of the term “postmodern”, the crisis of education and curriculum reform, the critique of the postmodern, the conception of the “self”, and the impact and fluctuation of teachers’ self in the postmodern age.

**Chapter 3** elaborates the methodology of the thesis, which includes: the research methods – survey and a dialogical method – and the instruments used, the specific

roles of the researcher in this thesis, the cases selected, the fieldwork process, and how the data were being collected and analyzed.

**Chapter 4** presents and discusses results of a survey research with a group of 209 curriculum leaders on their attitudes toward action research, which include the key findings of: the two different senses of research significance, and the implications of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control for policy makers in documenting action research and empowering curriculum leaders.

**Chapter 5** narrates the different stories of the selves of five particular curriculum leaders that were obtained from informal chats and interviews, which refer to the key questions of: the way they speak, think and act toward the project of education, the way they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and the way they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change.

**Chapter 6** comments, in the form of reflexive commentaries, the significant themes and thoughts that were generated from the survey results with 209 curriculum leaders and stories of particularly five of them. These include: rethinking the effectiveness of action research, the challenge of education and curriculum reform to curriculum leaders, the complexity of the nature of curriculum leadership, and the attempt to decipher a postmodern reform policy. Finally, the idea of criticizing as self-referencing is presented as a final word of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section, the foremost literature of the critical concepts and constructs articulated in this thesis is reviewed. These include: (i) the conception of “action research”, its roles and functions in curriculum development, and its relationship to the psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control; (ii) the meaning of the term “postmodern”; (iii) the crisis embedded in the education and curriculum reform when it is being conceptualized as a project of modernity; (iv) the critique of the postmodern; (v) the conception of the “self”, specifically when it is being viewed as a dialectical proposition; and (vi) the impact and fluctuation of teachers’ self in the postmodern age. Finally, a concluding remark is given to address the main ideas conveyed.

### **2.1. Action Research, Curriculum Development, and the Psychological Constructs of Self-Efficacy and an Internal Locus of Control**

Action research has been advocated by the recent education and curriculum reform documents as a powerful means for school-based curriculum development. To connect action research to curriculum development, it is important for curriculum leaders to facilitate the dissemination of research work to colleagues in schools: (i) to help understand the effectiveness of action research in providing feedback and improving practices; (ii) to empower teachers; (iii) to develop common practices; and (iv) to develop collaborative learning culture in schools (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 10, p. 14).

In fact, a great deal of literature exists that documents such a “positive” role of action research in educational practice and curriculum development (Hustler, Cassidy &

Cuff, 1986; Elliott, 1998; Somekh, 2005). The underlying thought is that front-line teachers are not only capable but are also in the right position to do research in their workplace. It should not be considered that teachers are only “users” of the specialized knowledge of academics or experts who claim to know better the educational setting. This is because, for action researchers, educational practice should emphasize the “process-as-a-whole”. The practice of teaching is about “knowing-in-action”, which is modified by a “reflection-in-action”, and the ability to reflect on a situation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, 1988). Practical experience and skilled judgement are more important than the specialized knowledge of academics or experts. Much knowledge is tacit; therefore research into classroom practice can have a potentially pervasive impact on educational practice. A teacher-researcher model (Stenhouse, 1975) encourages teachers to play the role of researchers and to examine their own practice critically and systematically. Action research is about curriculum development, puts provisional practice and new ideas to test, and treats its participants as a kind of social matter, a form of strategic action susceptible to improvement. Each classroom is therefore a “laboratory” which allows teachers to test and verify their ideas. In this way, by realizing their potential, teachers would no longer be kept in ignorance, but rather freed and emancipated. Action research is a tool for teachers to use to investigate educational issues and to take steps to improve or change the situation (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993). It is a process that enhances professional development and is inseparable from the teacher’s practical work in an authentic classroom situation (McKernan, 1996). Recent studies in Hong Kong have also identified the value of action research in classroom practices and curriculum development, and the belief of adopting an action research approach for effective teaching and learning (Kember *et al.*, 1997 & 2001;

Caldwell, Lee & Webb, 2003). The qualities necessary for a successful action researcher are sensitivity and self-reflection, and most importantly having a favourable attitude toward research. However, this confidence must not necessarily be taken for granted because research conceptions vary with the nature of research experience and negative attitudes might also be unavoidable (see, for example, Brew, 2001; Murtonen, 2005). Therefore, it is important to explore the attitudes of curriculum leaders toward action research, to examine if they have a favourable attitude, specifically at time when action research is seriously promoted.

Shumsky's (1958) research attempted to explore teachers' research attitudes in three areas: (i) their feelings of confidence in doing or reading research; (ii) the significance of research to teachers; and (iii) their feelings toward the research course. It was found that the majority of the 25 teachers in the sample expressed confidence in their ability to produce and consume research. On the one hand they considered that research would be practical for teachers, but on the other hand they felt inadequate and apprehensive about having to actually do it. Since research was such an emotionally loaded topic, those who taught it should present it not only as a method of intelligence but also as a way to explore the feelings of the participants about the research experience and how relevant it was to the participants' job. Studies have been undertaken on this aspect, for example Isakson and Ellsworth (1978 & 1979), that seek to establish reliable and valid ways of measuring research attitudes, so as to improve educational research courses.

Other studies have sought to identify those variables that best predicted the attitudes toward research. However, they have not yet yielded a consistent set of findings. For example, Short and Szabo's (1972) early study of 204 secondary school teachers in

western New York State indicated that, although there were variables which appeared to be related to the teachers' knowledge of educational research terminology, their research attitudes might be independent of the knowledge components of educational research. In fact, a more recent survey conducted by Walker and Cousins (1994) of 280 teachers and principals in east-central Ontario (Canada) suggested that a significant proportion of the variance in the attitudes of the teachers toward local applied research – purpose of local research, attitudes toward participation in research, utility of research and support for research activity – could be explained by certain personal and organizational characteristics. These included a prior participation in research, a sense of personal efficacy as a teacher, and a propensity to learn. In the light of such conflicting studies, therefore this study also investigates the variables that are associated with teachers' attitudes to research.

Prominent among the psychological constructs which can help to deepen the understanding of teachers' thinking with respect to research are self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. The psychological construct of self-efficacy is a belief in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997), while the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) asserts that individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions. This self-system serves as a reference mechanism for perceiving, regulating and evaluating behaviours, which results from the interplay between the system and the environmental sources of influence. It also serves as a self-regulatory function by providing individuals with the capability to influence their own cognitive processes and actions and thus alter their environments. As such, the way that individuals



interpret the results of their own performance attainments informs and alters their environments and their beliefs, and this in turn informs and alters their subsequent performances. Self-efficacy is an essential measure for understanding how curriculum leaders' perceived capabilities are related to designated types of performance. This is a key construct for explaining the strengths and weaknesses of curriculum leaders within schools.

The concept "locus of control" in social learning theory (Rotter, 1954 & 1966; Levenson, 1981; Lefcourt, 1982) is crucial for understanding how people learn, and reveals more details of the nature of the human learning process in different learning situations. Locus of control refers to the internal state of mind of an individual concerning how he or she perceives reinforcements and how references are developed for directing behaviours. Reinforcement plays an important role in human learning because, for a human subject, the effect of reinforcement on subsequent behaviour depends upon the degree to which the person perceives a causal relationship between his or her own behaviour and the reinforcement. An internal locus of control refers to a situation in which the person perceives that the event is contingent upon his or her own behaviour or his efforts or his own relatively permanent characteristics. It is an important variable that explains variations in human behavioural choice.

## **2.2. The Postmodern**

The term "postmodern" has become fashionable throughout the past few decades. It is being used, discussed and uttered everywhere in our societies. It has been mystified and demystified again and again. Its meaning and history have been manifested, repeated and even created over several hundred times, and its practical and political implications have also been considered in many sectors of our societies. But what

exactly do we mean by the term “postmodern”? Are we already living in an age characterized by the postmodern or living in a postmodern society in short? To most of the postmodern cultural theorists, like Scott Lash (1990), the answer is positive. Postmodern is cultural because “the cultural terrain on which we now all live, work, love and struggle is pervaded by postmodernism” (Lash, 1990, p. 3). Cultural studies are important because they provide a critical understanding of the manifestations of human thoughts in our daily commonly shared social worlds. However, there are still other aspects of human lives, their subject interpretations in particular, which have not been covered. The question highlighted by Foster (1985) in relation to postmodernism is insightful: “Is it a concept or a practice, a matter of local style or a whole new period or economic phase? What are its forms, effects, place?” (Foster, 1985, vii) There is no one simple definition or answer to the question (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 6). The work of Featherstone (1988 & 1995) pointed out correctly that there is a great deal of confusion that exists over the family of terms.<sup>3</sup> Featherstone therefore suggests the “postmodern something” is a break or a shift from the “modern something” with each constituting its own social totalities, processes and cultures. Such a “break” signifies a discontinuity from the modern to the postmodern, with the latter remarkably different from the former. On the contrary, writers like Harvey (1989) would argue that the postmodern is indeed a continuation of the

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<sup>3</sup> As explained by Featherstone (1988), “the term ‘postmodernism’ is more strongly based on a negation of the modern, a perceived, abandonment, break with or shift away from the definitive features of the modern, with the emphasis firmly on the sense of the relational move away. [...] to speak of postmodernity is to suggest an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organizing principles. [...] If we turn to postmodernization it is clear that a concomitant detailed outline of specific processes and institutional changes has yet to be theorized. [...] Postmodernism is of interest to a wide range of artistic practices and social science and humanities disciplines because it directs our attention to changes taking place in contemporary culture.” (Featherstone, 1988, pp. 197-208)

modern. Let alone the debate on the question of continuity and regularity, their works are insightful to show readers that on one hand it is possible to distinguish between the modern and the postmodern, but on the other hand any attempt to do so is highly contentious. Indeed, this thesis adopts the position that discussion needs to go back to what the modern means, and that the whole idea of the postmodern or postmodernity would better be clarified under the heading of the modern or modernity, since the simplest meaning of the prefix “post” suggests something which *comes after or converts* a new direction from the previous one (Featherstone, 1988; Lyotard, 1992, pp. 75-80).

### **2.3. Education and Curriculum Reform as a Project of Modernity in Crisis**

In the documents of human history, modernity or modernization has been considered to be a successful and instigating product generated by the capacities of human reason. It is an ongoing process of human desire to master the nature, to shape the world, to provide criteria for decisions and to give grounds for humanity (Featherstone, 1985 & 1988; Hassan, 1985). For those who believe in it, human history or civilization is itself progressive in character and goes from its dark side to its bright side. The primary aim for human beings is then to release the latter into its full potentials, and reason is the vehicle of discovering the secret logic of the world.<sup>4</sup> With proper application of reason to the natural and social world, the abstract category of “truth” is said to be contextualized and its legitimacy is thus agreed. Therefore, the (hi)story of modernity or modernization is simply *the (hi)story of reason or rationalization* which marks human interest of comprehending and manipulating the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of this ultimate purpose are the logics of induction and deduction, and the rules of verification and falsification in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The blossoming period of reason's domination was found in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century project known as the Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> The main aim of the Enlightenment was to enhance people in realizing their "potentials" through the use of reason and mind, and after which prejudices, superstitions and intolerance would be eliminated. In the essay "What is enlightenment?", Immanuel Kant (1963 [1784]) explained: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. [...] *Sapere aude!* 'Have courage to use your own reason!' – that is the motto of enlightenment." (Kant, 1963 [1784], p. 3; original emphasis) Under the slogan of *sapere aude* (dare to know), people would no longer be kept in ignorance or blinded by myth, story or superstition, but rather "freed" and "emancipated". Therefore, in the course of postulating and accomplishing reason, the idea of "enlightened" or "emancipated" knowledge was grounded. Education is then viewed "as the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realized" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 24). With this emancipatory trust in mind, people spread reason like light. They considered reason or rationality as if it were the only valid and legitimate form of thinking, a means of improving human life and achieving human emancipation (Baum, 1992; Docherty, 1993). Reason becomes a *practical guide* for people's inquiries and conduct in everyday life. The search for legitimated truth in sciences, the enhancement of ordered life in societies, the establishment of efficient regularities in

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<sup>5</sup> It was the time when the new framework of ideas about human, society and nature was created over those conceptions rooted in a traditional world-view dominated by Christianity (Hamilton, 1992). The astronomical discoveries of Copernicus about the nature of the universe and the observations of Galileo concerning the movements of the planets were typical examples. They provided a rational and empirical basis to challenge traditional cosmologies founded upon Christian belief which viewed the Earth as placed at the center of the universe.

economies, the craving for “real” in all aspects of human lives, and, as with this thesis, the thinking and construction of the school curriculum and the corresponding reform, are standard examples. All these are indications of a simple formula of *reality claim* that “truth” and “truthfulness” are both achievable and representable by reason.

The same logic of presuming the school curriculum is for human realization and emancipation has also been applied to the current reform policy. Curriculum developers and policy makers believe that, through the acquisition of essential life-learning experiences, positive values and attitudes, and the necessary generic skills, students will develop in an all-round and life-long manner. Obviously, the intentions of the school curriculum, or in Tyler’s (1949) phrase, the educational purposes we seek to attain, are to ensure that our students are prepared to contribute to the “goodness” of the society. They should not only be intellectually and economically productive, but also ethically, psychologically and socially well prepared to improve the society. As reminded by Morris (1996), there is not one single or simple intention. The four main images which influence our views on what schools and the school curriculum are expected to achieve are “social and economic efficiency”, “child-centered”, “academic rationalist” and “social reconstructionism”.<sup>6</sup> These images at the same time reflect the beliefs and assumptions we have toward our students, knowledge and society. The difficulty is that if those images are epistemologically

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<sup>6</sup> Social and economic efficiency “stresses the role of schools for preparing future citizens are economically productive”; child-centered “focuses on the needs and growth of individual children”, academic rationalist “focuses on the need to either enlighten students with the concepts and information which can be derived from the established academic disciplines (such as physics, history and mathematics), or to use the disciplines as a vehicle for promoting pupils’ thinking and problem solving capacities”; and social reconstructionism “looks to schools to improve society in the future” (Morris, 1996, pp. 12-14).

incorrect, then the thinking and construction of the school curriculum and the corresponding reform policy will be problematic, at least on its aim to realize and emancipate humanity.

However, as argued by Jean-François Lyotard (1984 [1979]), a French thinker who is agreed to be the most influential postmodern theorist, in the book *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, postmodern is characterized by the end of the “grand narratives”, or the “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], xxiv).<sup>7</sup> Narratives are the criteria of truth, justice and beauty, and they function as a set of rules which constitute the social bonds within families, social institutions and societies. Narratives have not only dominated traditional societies, but also administered the world which we formerly addressed as the modern. The crisis is that the grand narratives of modernity have *all lost their credibility* and can no longer develop valid knowledge for humanity, and therefore the claims of having “legitimated truth”, “ordered life”, “efficient regularities” and “being emancipated” are no longer valid. This is because, in the course of using reason to pursue “reality”, what guaranteed its validity and legitimacy is via the practice of “language games”, and unluckily such an appeal to language games is problematic.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Narratives have dominated traditional societies for a long time. They are transmitted by generations and determined what a person should know and how a person should hear, speak and live. They are presented in the form of popular stories, myths, legends and tales, and their practices are legitimated by the simple fact that “they do what they do”.

<sup>8</sup> Language games, as first identified by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1978 [1953]), are discourses with each involve a set of cognitive, historical or ethico-political rules. These rules only exist on the basis of an explicit or implicit “contract” between language users, and it is only with these rules which make the games possible.

What language game means is that, “each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put – in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], p. 10). With this contract, the rules of language games provide a basis of having consensus between users on what is considered to be “true”. That is to say, in the very beginning of a representation as true, we are already in the midst of language games that undermine the very notion of representation. The ultimate aim is to persuade others and arrive at consensus outcomes through the recourse to argumentation in language games. This is also the way curriculum developers and policy makers conceptualize and present the reform to the public. In order to get common ground for agreed knowledge, they have to convince their interlocutors – school principals, teachers as well as parents and students – that the reform is “true” or “correct” by means of proofs. However, such an attempt to achieve and represent something as “true” or “correct” by means of reason is only *a phrase without any meaning*, since as long as one can produce “proof” in language games, one can definitely claim reality is the way one says it is. It is questionable that: “What I say is true because I prove that it is – but what proof is there that my proof is true?” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], p. 24)<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in implementing the education and curriculum reform, there are always controversies on the nature of those “essential” life-learning experiences, “positive” values and attitudes, and the “necessary” generic

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<sup>9</sup> Daily examples to illustrate the problematic nature of the language games are the existence of UFO, the different interpretations over the usage of scientific truths on human lives, the continuous debates on the degree of governmental interference on free markets, and the awful promises of being happy, loveable or beautiful through participating in various structured programmes.

skills, on how and why they have been proved to be “effective” for whole-person development.

With the above articulation, the reform is nothing more than a form of narrative since it is in *a paradoxical position* to claim of itself as “true” and to bring about “goodness” for students without resorting to other narratives. We can no longer talk about a totalizing idea for “there is no reason, only reasons” (Van Reijen & Veerman, 1988, p. 278). There is no such thing as a systematic or legitimated perspective of school curriculum even it has been agreed, consented or practised among all or some members of societies. Therefore, the story of the reform so far is an illusion to think of people becoming masters of the world “out there” and agents of reality exposition and of emancipation. It is why in one of his letters, *The postmodern explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, Lyotard (1992) reminds the policy makers that:

For at least two centuries modernity taught us to desire the extension of political freedoms, science, the arts, and technology. It taught us to legitimate this desire because, it said, this progress would emancipate humanity from despotism, ignorance, barbarism, and poverty. [...] But it is now impossible to legitimate development by promising emancipation for humanity as a whole. This promise has not been kept. It was broken, not because it was forgotten, but because development itself makes it impossible to keep. (Lyotard, 1992, p. 95)

The conditions of knowledge as well as the criteria of truth, reality and emancipation have changed. According to a postmodern perspective, a modernist account of the reform is in crisis. *It has lost its legacy and credibility regarding what the students should achieve or what the school curriculum could bring about.*



## **2.4. Critique of the Postmodern**

Since the postmodern is characterized by the “incredulity toward metanarratives” which in fact suggests a critique of what is being given, any attempt to give a concrete and finite meaning for it, whether in the form of grand narratives, would turn out to be another state for criticism. The postmodern is something much more difficult to pin down than any single term in the discipline, and the reference is perhaps to something which is not quite presentable in words that we have learned so far. Therefore, in the essay “Rules and paradoxes and svelte appendix”, Lyotard (1986) points out that:

“Postmodern” simply indicates *a mood, or better, a state of mind*. It could be said that it involves a change in people’s relation to the problem of meaning: simplifying a great deal, I would say that the modern is the consciousness of the absence of value in many activities. (Lyotard, 1986, p. 209; my emphasis)

This mood or state of mind refers of course not to a psychological or emotional state of sensing, loving or caring, but rather directs our attention to a way of thinking, seeing and working which is qualitatively different from any position, set of technique or day-to-day practices that were previously suggested by the modern. It indeed signifies a demand, a need *to criticize, to challenge, to have reflexive questioning* on any project, belief, policy or practice which suggests a totalizing idea of reason, truth, reality or emancipation (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Further to the argument related to the rules of language games, in our everyday practice, language is being used by an addresser as a means for producing phrases or in his term “paradoxes” to the addressees. These phrases may sometimes be absolutely strange to the addressees as the rules which these phrases obey make them

impossible to be communicable. Say, the rules of a phrase that describes something are very different from the rules of a phrase that prescribes something. However, one would try to argue that these paradoxical phrases are possible to be transcribed or translated if the rules are made known to each other. Unfortunately, as emphasized by Lyotard (1986), “language comprises phrase games which obey different rules” (Lyotard, 1986, p. 212), and it is a difficult matter to translate one phrase to another. The descriptive phrase “the seven learning goals are good for the students” is not translatable into any prescriptive phrase “the students have to achieve them”. In other words, *descriptive phrases that obey rules of truth are not translatable into prescriptive phrases that obey rules of authority and justice*. Authority and justice are not in play when it is a question of truth, and the claim “what is just derives from what is true” is thus highly problematic. The language of any project, belief, policy or practice, which suggests a totalizing idea of reason, truth, reality or emancipation is not necessarily familiar or communicable to the addressee. Thus, the reform is incorrect to presuppose teachers and students could achieve complete transparency in what they are saying on the one hand, and thinking, seeing and working on the other. Therefore, it is necessary for curriculum leaders to criticize, to challenge, to have reflexive questioning toward the reform and “to watch the infinity of the will with svelteness: ‘work’ much less; learn, know, invent and circulate much more” (Lyotard, 1986, p. 219).

The argument of the relationship between language and truth and justice highlights an important debate between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard.<sup>10</sup> According

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<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Habermas’s critical theory focuses primarily on developing a systematic grounding and substantive foundation for societal rationality, and on grappling with the central paradox of modern life – the loss of freedom, meaning and respect for humanity. This type of rationality, namely

to Habermas (1979 [1976]), in each speech action, actors do anticipate an “ideal speech situation”, through which intersubjective agreement could be achieved. It makes possible the situation of arriving at *rational consensus* between the actors and allows them to decide what is right and what should be done. Rational communication entails consensual criteria for right and justice. This is because Habermas finds all speech actions implicitly presuppose the very existence of four types of validity claims – a “comprehensibility claim”, a “truth claim”, a “sincerity claim” and a “rightness claim”.<sup>11</sup> As illustrated in an example of the situation that, during the seminar, the professor addressed the request: “Please bring me a glass of water!” (Habermas, 1984 [1981], p. 306) to one of his students, these validity claims are the four different dimensions of a rational communicative interaction between the speaker and the hearer. Presumably, the professor and the student have already comprehensibly understood one another what the request is, they could then discuss rationally on what they agree to be true and what they should do.<sup>12</sup> These rational

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communicative rationality, is comprised and practised within our everyday life practice – language, which is a crucial element in constituting the essence of “human being”. That is to say, only under the use of language in communication, one could recognize oneself as a human being and be aware of the existence of others in society.

<sup>11</sup> “The speaker has to select a *comprehensible* expression in order that the speaker and hearer can *understand one another*; the speaker has to have the intention of communicating a *true* propositional content in order that the hearer can *share the knowledge* of the speaker; the speaker has to want to express his intentions *truthfully (sincerely)* in order that the hearer can *believe in* the speaker’s utterance (can trust him); finally, the speaker has to select an utterance that is *right* in the light of existing norms and values in order that the hearer can accept the utterance, so that both speaker and hearer can *agree with one another* in the utterance concerning a recognized normative background.” (McCarthy, 1978, p. 288n; original emphasis)

<sup>12</sup> According to Habermas (1984 [1981]), the professor’s request presupposes a “truth claim” that one could get a glass of water within the campus area; it also presupposes a “sincerity claim” that he really wants a glass of water and is not lying or making a joke; and at last it presupposes a “rightness claim” that according to the normative context of the university, he has the right to have such request.

discussions are known as “discourses” which are practised only by *the force of better argument*. The speaker has to give “reasons” for what has been asserted if s/he wants the hearer to understand what the assertion means or the hearer requests him/her to do so. Therefore, through the anticipation of an ideal speech situation, rational discussion is made possible, rational consensus is arrived at which allows them to determine what is right and just and what is worth doing accordingly.

However, Lyotard views the problem in another way; he thinks the very regulative unity that Habermas clings to is no longer appropriate for our times (Veerman, 1988, p. 275). In his eyes, whatever examples that are given by Habermas are not simply theoretical cases which allow us to determine whether it is possible to anticipate such an ideal speech situation, rational discussion or rational consensus over what is true, right and just. Rather they are *of practical and political meanings* since the student could neither sit still doing nothing nor request the professor to give him/her time to think about it. The professor’s request could not be justified by any proofs or metanarratives as they have all lost their legacy and credibility, and even though this request is true in a sense that the professor really wants to have a glass of water, it does not mean it is just to have the student do it especially if s/he does not want to. Therefore, we cannot infer something is just as it is true, and so it is obviously wrong for us to justify something or claim something as just without considering such a relationship between truth and justice. Although Lyotard rejects Habermas’s ideal of

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Although the professor has presupposed these validity claims, his student may not accept and keep on asking questions to see whether it is possible to get a glass of water within the campus area, whether the professor is joking or not, or whether he has the right to do it or not. In this case, if the professor still wants to have a glass of water, and without the use of any coercive force, he has to anticipate an ideal speech situation in which he could have rational discussion with his student on the validity of either “truth claim” or “rightness claim” or even both.

rational communication and political necessity, he thinks we can still justify something, or claim something as just, as long as we recognize the fact that what one justifies is what one is committed to. That means, we can still justify what we cannot prove the need for but, in doing so, *we ought to expect to have to prove worthy of whatever we do justify*. Lyotard's idea of justice is made clear by Raffel (1992) that it "develops into an interest in never demanding that anyone ever agree with anyone about anything, always leaving all of us *free to enter or leave* social arrangements whenever we personally see fit and similar sorts of ideas" (Raffel, 1992, p. 5; my emphasis).

What are the implications of these ideas for curriculum leaders and the reform? The answer is critical. With the introduction of the reform (and reform documents) and the official proposal of engaging in action research for curriculum development, the education reality or meaning that communicates to curriculum leaders is nothing but political: a top-down legislative procedure of rationalizing means-end unity. Their work and lives will then be impacted and pulled by two different forces of understanding. A surface/official understanding of effectiveness and accountability, and a felt/personal understanding of what the reform means and entails. However, with the above-articulated relationship between truth and justice, whenever these curriculum leaders are involved in practices that aim to improve the school curriculum (for justice), the reasons that are associated with a surface/official understanding are certainly not persuasive to prove them to be worthy (the truth). Therefore, it is important for curriculum leaders to avoid the imposition of any presupposed requirements of political unity or obligation. One argument is that they should be given the right to choose their own sort of goodness and the freedom to decide

whether to join or accept any project, belief, policy or practice without any totalizing idea of truth, right or justice, or any granted conception of curriculum or whole-person development. One should come in contact with each other “face to face with *nothingness*” – the experience of one’s linkage to others is “not necessary and is scarcely foreseeable” (Lyotard, 1989, p. 199; my emphasis). In the light of this demand, this thesis is important for it primarily looks into the attitudes which curriculum leaders have toward action research and the perceptions of selves by which they understand themselves. Again, the work will be useful for policy makers to understand in-depth the impact of the reform to curriculum leaders in a period characterized by the postmodern and to postulate “alternatives” of introducing and presenting the reform and reform documents.

### **2.5. The Self as a Dialectical Proposition**

What is the “self”? This question not only racks sociologists’, psychologists’ and philosophers’ brains, but also worries many ordinary individuals at the level of everyday life. From Karl Marx’s provocative concept of alienation to Jürgen Habermas’s well-known thesis of legitimation crisis, the analytical frameworks developed to articulate human self are largely orientated to modernity (Habermas, 1984 [1981] & 1987 [1981]). Explanation of the self is limited by the consideration of the logic of modern capitalism and the necessity of technological or social domination. The only solution for us is to imagine a mechanism for integration or resistance. However, since the period we are living has already moved beyond such modernist ideas, its implications of the loss of truth and of faith in certainty are severe. Life itself has become a “problem” – its form and constituting elements are no longer plainly attached to previous modernist assumptions and practices. In other words, in

an age characterized by the postmodern, *a parallel re-formulation* of the self is needed.

In fact, in social sciences, the study of the self diverged across different academic interests. From Immanuel Kant's transcendental mind to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical ego to Michel Foucault's de-centered body (Foucault, 1986 [1980]), their account of the human self are incomplete. In their analysis, individuals are conceptualized into one of the two "extremes" – the inner "intentionality" and outer "extensionality". Individuals are either solely guided by their inner "intentionality" (the need to be free from coercion for Immanuel Kant and to repress dangerous drives for Sigmund Freud) or unavoidably controlled by the outer "extensionality" (the necessity of power and domination for Michel Foucault). These two extremes are not mutually exclusive of one another, but *interactive in nature*. The self cannot be merely located in either one of these extremes and it is continuously influenced by both. With this opposition in mind, this thesis agrees with the study of Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm (1992), which analyzes identity through an analogy of the immigration officer examining a passport. The passport, in his eyes, is basically based on two practices or two forms of (external) construction of identity – the ascribed name giving and the modern elements of numbering and picturing. Although the passport tells the immigration officer the name, physical appearance, height, nationality and issuing number of the one who is standing before him/her, the only way to prove one's identity is by means of personal signature or fingerprint. Though the presentation of the self is first assigned by the external origin – the passport here, it finally subjects to the requirement of individual's nomination – the signature or fingerprint. This nomination is essential for self-formation because what one "looks

like” cannot be ascribed solely by the passport, it must be declared by one’s experience and perception of the self. So human self is conceptualized as a dialectic of external determination and self-nomination. As argued by Hoffmann-Axthelm (1992):

[...] the concept of identity must be analyzed into both the competing and the concurrent constituents of a society that is built on the hopes of individuals. The individual’s capacity for experience is one of those components and not just a passive, powerless one. [...] According to modern understanding, identity is indeed stated as a proposition (and as a proposition thereof). This has a twofold meaning: Identity is ascribed, attributed, and it is a proposition of external origin. Identity cannot be asserted as a matter of fact; nor can it be described as an assertion of being-within-itself of the identical. (Hoffmann-Axthelm, 1992, pp. 201-202)

Under this conception, the self is itself an open proposition or context, of which its monitoring prerequisite is the external origin known as the world “out there”, and its regulating mechanism is the internal capacity known as experience. In this sense, if any of the constituents of the world “out there” changes, an adjustment of individual’s corresponding perception follows. The course of adjustment or modification is thus characterized by a dialectical process between how they perceive and how they experience the world (the external, internal and social worlds). Therefore, the self is not fixed, solid or stable, but *opens up as an ongoing project and its establishment is never an end in itself*.



## **2.6. Teachers' Self in the Postmodern Age**

The conception of the self as an open proposition or context is welcomed by contemporary education theorists, like Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1994 & 1999), who concentrate their work on storying teachers, on disclosing the inner world of how they construct meanings of experience and develop their own “personal practical knowledge” for courses of actions. Personal practical knowledge is a narratively constructed concept, tacit and idiosyncratic in nature, which guides not only teachers’ curriculum planning, but also their day-to-day classroom instructional activities (Cornett, 1987). As defined by Connelly and Clandinin (1988):

Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions.

Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher’s practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25)

Although teachers are knowledgeable and knowing persons, the personal practical knowledge constructed is often messy and non-holistic, and therefore Connelly and Clandinin (1999) see the questions of “identity” to be asked by teachers should concern more of “what they know” than of “who they are”.

On the other hand, Goodson (1992, 1994, 1995a & 1995b) argues that, through storying teachers’ self, life and work, it is possible to know both the questions of “who is the person that the teacher refers?” and “what is the critique that the postmodern provides?” In the essay “Storying the self: Life politics and the study of the teacher’s life and work”, Goodson (1995b) claims that:

The current changes in the economy and superstructure associated with postmodernity pose particular perils and promises for the world of education. [...] In the new order, we “story the self” as a means of making sense of new conditions of working and being. *The self becomes a reflexive project, an ongoing narrative project.* To capture this emergent process requires a modality close to social history, social geography and social theory – modes which capture the self in time and space, a social cartography of the self. (Goodson, 1995b, pp. 2-3; original emphasis)

Put it in this way, the potential challenges for teachers are severe and violent as the world they formerly wanted to “make it of their own” no longer lets them do so (Berman, 1992; Cascardi, 1992). Thus, if the postmodern provides an alternative way of speaking, thinking and acting other than the modern ones, there are always possibilities for teachers to anticipate new directions and hopes.

With reference to this concept of the self, if modernity has lost its legacy and credibility (that the world “out there” is always undetermined) and reason has turned out to be nothing but a form of narrative (that subjective perception is always questionable), the two elements of the dialectic of the self, external determination and self-nomination, are therefore highly unstable. For teachers, the modern project of education might be “strange” because the totalizing idea of truth and reality is an empty phrase, the practical guide for teaching has vanished because reason is a form of narrative and their desire to enlighten students might have gone because emancipation is an illusion. It is always hard to understand the one who stands in front of the mirror and hard to make the assertion “I know who I am” (Kellner, 1992). However, there are still people who would argue the above challenge is just an empty

account especially for those who “live in” the modern project of education and experience its influences, it is undeniable that its potential harms and dangers should not be underestimated. Anxiety will go hand in hand with the self as the subject “I” has been made problematic, and one will continuously search for one’s self until the secure “landscape” has been found. However, this notion of anxiety will give rise to another deeper notion of uncertainty because if one holds a feeling of anxiety, it is more difficult for him/her to perceive subjectively what is happening outside and thus impossible to experience his/her self. The more void in the self one experiences, the more anxiety one feels; and the more anxiety one feels, the more uncertainty over the self one experiences. In other words, a “vicious circle” operates; it must have been extremely difficult for people to gain experience of certainty as long as they had little experience of it (Elias, 1956 & 1987). As a result, it can be argued that *the self is getting more and more fragile, more and more fragmented*; and from this vicious circle, there is an urge to research teachers’ self, to know how they speak, think and act toward the project of education.

Certainly, the worry for such potential challenges and the urge for researching teachers’ self have been taken seriously since the 1990s. For example, Hargreaves (1994a) has made clear this conviction in the book *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers’ work and culture in the postmodern age*. “In postmodern societies”, he insists, “the very nature and integrity of the self is placed in doubt” (Hargreaves, 1994a, p. 70), and accordingly “personal anxiety and the search for authenticity becomes a continuous quest in the world without secure moral anchors” (Hargreaves, 1994a, p. 84). The postmodern provides not only challenges to teachers’ self, but also the very questions of what the self is for and what is beyond it. Apart from the

definition of postmodern, he offers particular kinds of contexts and changes, and the restructuring thesis he puts forward at the concluding chapter and in his later writings (1994b & 1994c) is positive. Hargreaves's analysis is convincing and stimulating to demonstrate how tensions are actually inherent in the postmodern and how these confront teachers in their self. Although the potential challenges for teachers are severe, it does not necessarily entail the position of becoming pessimistic. There are always possibilities of anticipating new directions and hopes. In the book *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*, Gergen (1991) provides a very good analysis of the effects of the postmodern on the concept of self. Gergen is uneasy with the term postmodern because of its multiple uses and its faddish and ubiquitous presence in so many different forms of discourses, but still, he argues, "there seems to be a corpus of coherently related ideas and images surrounding the use of the term in many of these contexts, and it would be a mistake to let the term slip away before examining its fuller significance" (Gergen, 1991, xi). The overall message is optimistic. Although "there is little hope that the past can be recovered", Gergen concludes, "[o]ur best option, then, is to play out the positive potentials of this postmodern erasure of the self" (Gergen, 1991, xiii; my emphasis).

## **2.7. A Concluding Remark**

To sum up the arguments: in the postmodern age, it is not just one lonely voice calling both modern and postmodern theorists and educationalists to pay attention to the study of curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research and their selves. Action research has been rationalized by the government bodies and policy makers as a legitimate instrument for advancing school curriculum, because by definition action research puts provisional practice and new ideas to test, and treats its participants as a

kind of social matter, a form of strategic action susceptible to improvement. The qualities necessary for a successful action researcher are sensitivity and self-reflection, and most importantly having a favourable attitude toward research. However, as highlighted in some empirical studies (for example, Brew, 2001; Murtonen, 2005), this confidence cannot necessarily be assumed because negative attitudes might also be unavoidable. Policy makers cannot infer something is just as it is true, because descriptive phrases that obey rules of truth are not translatable into prescriptive phrases that obey rules of authority and justice. Thus, there needs to be a rethinking and critical analysis of the demand of engaging in action research for curriculum development, and the claims of reforming education for providing students with “essential” life-learning experiences, “positive” values and attitudes, and the “necessary” generic skills for “effective” whole-person development. On the side of the curriculum leaders, with the critique of the postmodern toward the narrative of the modernist project of education and curriculum reform, which can be summarized as losing its legacy and credibility for developing valid knowledge for humanity and not providing worthy ground for just political action, it is their concept of the self that gets more and more fragile, more and more fragmented. The potential challenges are severe and violent as the world they formerly wanted to “make it of their own” no longer lets them do so (Berman, 1992; Cascardi, 1992). Therefore, “to play out the positive potentials of this postmodern erasure of the self” (Gergen, 1991, xiii) rather than to celebrate the position that anything or everything goes, the main aims of this thesis are to research how curriculum leaders think of action research and how they perceive (speak, think and act toward) the project of education. More precisely, to explore the “self” of how they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and how they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders

for curriculum change. This study will contribute significantly to the field of education and curriculum reform. It will inform policy makers in particular, the direction which education could take and how today's education could be better.

### **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

Consideration of research method is as important as the actual empirical research work, because the task of carrying out a successful social inquiry is governed by the choice of a proper research method. It is a methodological concern over how research ought to be done and how it is actually done. This requires continual thinking and rethinking *about the goals of the research in hand and the methods being used to achieve them*. It is as well an on-going process that continues throughout the course of inquiry. Indeed, there have been controversies concerning a variety of theoretical perspectives and approaches to research (Blaikie, 1993). Attention has been drawn to the “nature” of social inquiry. That is to focus on how people come to an understanding and comprehension of the social world of phenomena, which are in fact being constructed and conceptualized by human day-to-day interactions. The research process itself then “must be seen as socially constructing a world of worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research” (Steier, 1993, pp. 1-2). Reflexivity should therefore be taken seriously.

The aim of this thesis is to examine curriculum leaders’ “attitudes toward action research”, their underlying thought to the demand of doing and promoting action research and how they perceive the roles and functions of action research, and to study in-depth curriculum leaders’ “self”, the way they speak, think and act toward the project of education. Different research approaches were used to achieve these two different but related research goals. For the study of curriculum leaders’ attitudes toward action research, survey research method was used. This aims not only to compare this study with the previous ones which were quantitative in nature, but also to fulfill the researcher’s intention to add new knowledge and claims to the education

and research community which often accredits a conventional (somehow positivist) approach. For the study of curriculum leaders' self, a less conventional approach – a dialogical method – was used. This method refers to a kind of interviewing, which aims at having a “critical dialogue” between the researcher and the participants and transforming any understanding of their “self” and the knowledge thereby constituted to a critical level. It also allows the researcher to interpret and understand the (personal) way curriculum leaders perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and the (personal) way they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change.

In the following section, the methodology of this thesis is examined in four parts: (i) a report of the use of survey research in collecting curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research and the variables that are associated with them; (ii) a discussion of the meaning of a dialogical method which is suggested for the study of the five particular curriculum leaders; (iii) an examination on the “roles” of the researcher in this thesis; and (iv) an articulation of how the cases were being selected and how data are being collected and analyzed.

### **3.1. Survey Research and the Questionnaires Used**

The survey research method was used for the study of curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Fink, 1995; Munn & Drever, 1999). In a very practical sense, it was selected for three reasons. First, it allowed access to a comparatively large sample of cases within a short period of time. Second, the collection of information was generally anonymous and a high return rate was possible. Third, the use of standardized questionnaires made comparison of information possible.



Three different sets of questionnaires were used to measure and investigate the attitudes of curriculum leaders toward action research and the psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. These questionnaires were found to be reliable and internally consistent. The first questionnaire was the 17-item scale of attitudes toward research (Shumsky, 1958). The items were translated and back translated, from English to Chinese and from Chinese to English, until the Chinese wording achieved the closest match to the original English meaning. However, to make sure that the scale was comprehensive, additional items exploring the implications of research for curriculum development were included. This trial version of the instrument, Attitudes Toward Research instrument (hereafter referred to as ATR), was piloted with 30 in-service teachers. These in-service teachers were part-time B.Ed. second year students of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The pilot was undertaken at the time that they were taking the module “Education Project”, which was designed to provide them with the research tools that they would use in a piece of research which was of interest to them as teachers. The items were examined, and any items which were not consistent with the scale, did not seem valid and which had the least discriminating power were either removed or modified. There were three criteria: (i) items whose means were close to the extremes of the scale; (ii) items whose corrected item-total correlations were less than 0.30; and (iii) items whose removal increase the alpha values. Following this pilot, 5 out of the 17 items Shumsky’s scale were removed, and together with another 3 additional items, a 15-item ATR was developed.

The second questionnaire was the 10-item self-efficacy scale that measures self-efficacy (Schwarzer, 1992). Four items were selected from the scale. They were: “I

can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough”, “It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals”, “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events”, and “No matter what comes my way, I’m usually able to handle it”. The third set of questionnaires were the 23-item internal-external locus of control scale (Rotter, 1966) and the 24-item internality, powerful others and chance scale (Levenson, 1981). Four items were selected from the two scales. They were: “When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work”, “When I get what I want, it’s usually because I worked hard for it”, “My life is determined by my own actions”, and “I can pretty much determine what will happen to me”.

The respondents were asked to indicate, using a 5-point Likert scale, how much they agreed with each of the 15 items of the ATR and the 8 items of the two psychological constructs. The possible responses ranged from “strongly disagree” through “disagree”, “no comment”, “agree” to “strongly agree”, with numerical values of 1 to 5 assigned for purposes of later analysis (please see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire).

### **3.2. A Dialogical Method and the Instrument Used**

A dialogical method was used for the study of the five particular curriculum leaders’ selves. This dialogical method is a kind of interviewing process, which *aims at having a “critical dialogue” between the researcher and the participants*. The course of having a critical dialogue is considered as “an end in itself” because dialogue here is used to provide an understanding between the researching partners and so it is the ultimate intention of the research itself. In this way, the finding resulted from the dialogue is considered as an end, for it gives understanding of the present situation, from which people can gain some common footing for their everyday life conduct. Indeed, the overall research strategy for a dialogical method appears to focus on the

use of an in-depth face-to-face interview which can be defined as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him [her] on content specified by research objectives” (Millar, Crute & Hargie, 1992, p. 9). It is purely qualitative in nature. Also, it takes the form of a semi-structured or even an unstructured interview, since the course of interview is always subject to change or open to modification. That means no exact questions are prepared in advance and no pre-designed order of interview is expected to proceed. The researcher has decided, only in general terms, some of the main themes and topics to be covered (Millar, Crute & Hargie, 1992, p. 10). The researcher has to interview the participants as many times as possible, in order that s/he can acquire knowledge of the participants as much as possible.

This method is very different from the conventional ones because it emphasizes *doing research “with” people* (Blaikie, 1993, p. 5). Researchers are encouraged not to inquire into any subjects in a “monological” manner, as characterized by the methodological distinction between “facts” and “values” (Nagel, 1961, pp. 484-485; Blaikie, 1993, p. 53), and thus the term “dialogical” stresses *a subject-subject relationship between the researcher and the participants*. The position of a subject-subject relationship is not a new idea, but already shared among most of the contemporary social theorists. For instance, as explained by Giddens (1993), in the book *New rules of sociological method: A positive critique of interpretative sociologies*, that:

Sociology, unlike natural science, stands in a subject-subject relation to its “field of study”, not a subject-object relation; it deals with a pre-interpreted world, in which the meanings developed by active subjects actually enter

into the actual constitution or production of that world [...]. (Giddens, 1993, p. 154)

By this token, participants are encouraged to participate actively throughout the whole research process because they know “better” the research area. This suggests the idea of a “tacit understanding” (Heron, 1981, pp. 19-35; Rowan & Reason, 1981, pp. 113-137), that an inquiry is of little significance unless it is rooted in the knowledge of those whole actually involved in. Information of the area that we study must not be projected; it must be derived from the phenomenon itself. Thus, familiarity can be accomplished by visiting the places of significance of the lives of the participants. Accordingly, participants are no longer viewed as the objects of study but indeed considered as “co-researchers” (Rowan & Reason, 1981, p. 113), who have the virtue of being able to have a critical dialogue with and give advice to the researcher.

Following the idea of co-researching, Heron (1981) proposes another way of social inquiry – a “cooperative inquiry” – that the participants do contribute directly to the whole research process. As argued by him:

This contribution may be strong, in the sense that the subject is co-researcher and contributes to creative thinking at all stages. Or it may be weak, in the sense that the subject is thoroughly informed of the research propositions at all stages and is invited to assent or dissent, and if there is dissent, then the researcher and subject negotiate until agreement is reached. (Heron, 1981, pp. 19-20)

This cooperative mode of inquiry is crucial because it is now the researching partners rather than the researcher alone that are “in charge” of the research. They on one hand facilitate the conduct of the research, and on the other hand keep up with each

stage of its process. However, such a subject-subject relationship should not be viewed as a particular kind of research technique, but rather as *a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic* for them. This characteristic is fundamentally important for the whole conceptualization of the dynamics of a dialogical method. It is because, on the first level, to know something necessarily involves the participation of people who really know “what is going on”, and to draw conclusions on these necessarily embodies their dialogue as well. On a more sophisticated level, it is in this relationship between the researching partners that the research is based and the findings resulted.

With such an emphasis on a subject-subject relationship and a cooperative mode of inquiry, teachers who participate in this research are considered as co-researchers who will be invited *to contribute actively and directly to the creative thinking at all stages of the research process*. Such contribution will be centered on research activities such as “sense making” and the “construction” of knowledge. In other words, throughout the interviews, it is always the researcher’s pre-interpreted “knowledge” on the project of education and curriculum reform together with that of the curriculum leaders’ that are subject to dialogue. The curriculum leaders’ self is examined and discussed, and the course of dialogue is of course guided by the critical use of the dialogue itself. As a result, the knowledge which is then “constructed” throughout the research process reflects the self of the curriculum leaders.

To study in-depth curriculum leaders’ “self”, a semi-structured interview schedule that focused on respondents’ thinking, conceptions and behaviours was developed. The interview themes included: (i) why they take up the teaching profession and the position of curriculum leaders; (ii) how they think toward the current education and

curriculum reform; (iii) what they find as their strengths and weaknesses when facing different challenges; (iv) the experience they have in translating and implementing different reform policies in school; and (v) the major factors that motivate them to continue their work. Table 1 shows how these themes were aligned with the research questions identified as important to the study of the self of curriculum leaders.

**Table 1.** Link between research questions in the study of curriculum leaders' self and themes used in interviews

<b>Research questions identified in the study of curriculum leaders' self</b>	<b>Themes in interview questions</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do curriculum leaders speak, think and act toward the project of education?</li> <li>2. How do curriculum leaders perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform?</li> <li>3. How do curriculum leaders conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why they take up the teaching profession and the position of curriculum leaders?</li> <li>• How they think toward the current education and curriculum reform?</li> <li>• What they find as their strengths and weaknesses when facing different challenges?</li> <li>• Experience they have in translating and implementing different reform policies in school.</li> <li>• Major factors that motivate them to continue their work.</li> </ul>

### **3.3. Researcher's Roles in the Thesis**

With reference to the distinct research activities discussed, the role of the researcher seems to be the most important concern for the conduct of a dialogical method in this thesis. There are several conventional roles, which the researcher is required to perform throughout the research process. These usually include activities like gaining access, designation of initial interview themes, initiation of research interview, analyzing interview data, and writing up of research findings. However, apart from these, there are some other roles that are distinctive for the suggested dialogical method, and for the sake of illustration, they can be broadly categorized into three. The first role is called *facilitator* who consciously tries to cooperate with the participants in exposing the conditions for and anticipating the possibility of having a cooperative mode of inquiry. The second is called *interpreter* who constantly puts and views the participants' responses, so as to clarify and discuss critically for each of the confusions faced. The third role, perhaps the most difficult, is *of critical reflexivity*. By critical, here refers to the critique of the use of dialogue which requires distancing one's understanding critically from taken-for-granted knowledge and beliefs (McCarthy, 1990, pp. 440-441). So critical reflexivity refers to a kind of attitudes which transforms understanding of the researcher to a critical level, serving no personal or communal interest. Although these roles are categorized into three, they are interrelated to each other so that, during the interviewing process, the researcher actually needs to perform them all at the same time.

### **3.4. Selection of Cases, Fieldwork, Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The questionnaires for measuring attitudes toward action research and other psychological constructs were administered to 228 newly appointed curriculum leaders enrolled in the PSM(CD) Training Programme, organized by the Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Hong Kong Institute of Education, in 2003/04. The training programme consisted of two courses, C1 and C2. C1 aimed to promote a deep understanding of the most up-to-date learning theories, and issues relating to curriculum design and implementation. Group discussions were the major teaching and learning activities, and participants were assessed on the extent to which they could put those theories into practice and come up with a curriculum plan. C2 required participants to carry out a small-scale school-based action research which could be related to anything they wanted to improve in their job. The teaching method was tutorials, during which they were assessed on the extent to which they could formulate a research plan, collect relevant research data, and draw the appropriate conclusions and apply the results.<sup>13</sup> Action research content was included only in C2 and, therefore, to avoid collecting social desirable answers, the questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of C2. 209 questionnaires were returned which represented a response rate of 91.7%.

The quantitative data were entered into the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis and different techniques were employed (Bryman & Cramer, 1997; Norušis, 2000). Exploratory factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of the ATR. This was important given that it was necessary to identify the pattern of thoughts embedded in the minds of curriculum leaders (Gorsuch, 1983; Beauducel, 1997). To show the distributions and variations of the

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<sup>13</sup> The author was one of the lecturers of the 2003/04 cohort of PSM(CD) Training Programme.



ATR and its sub-scales, mean and standard deviations were reported. Independent sample t-tests were used to test the within group effects in the target variables with the two demographic variables: demonstrated research experience and highest academic qualification held. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to test the degree of association between the target variables and the psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control.

For the in-depth investigation of the five curriculum leaders' self, since a dialogical method focuses on the use of a long-term, in-depth face-to-face interview rather than large-scale data collection, the number of cases selected need not be large. It is not a question of whether they are of theoretical inference or empirical generalization, but whether they can truly reflect their self as curriculum leaders. Since a cooperative mode of inquiry between the participants and myself was fundamentally required, PSM(CD)s who had close contact with me, a convenient sample, were invited. A total number of five PSM(CD)s were accessed. These PSM(CD)s work in five different primary schools which participated in a project entitled "School-based Curriculum Development in Action", in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Hong Kong Institute of Education.<sup>14</sup> At the initial stage of gaining access, they all consented verbally to participate in my doctoral study. The requirement of having many informal chats and interviews was made clear and they all gave permission for the data to be used and reported in the thesis. Each of the PSM(CD)s was given a

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<sup>14</sup> This project aimed to facilitate the practice of school-based curriculum development in Hong Kong primary school context through working in partnership with PSM(CD)s. Objectives of the project were: (i) to support school-based curriculum development projects through the use of an action research model; and (ii) to develop exemplars of successful school-based curriculum development projects in local primary school context, disseminating them to other schools and the wider public through a purposively designed "School-based Curriculum Development in Action" web-page.

code for anonymity: **RsptK**, **RsptY**, **RsptL**, **RsptH** and **RsptN**. They are all females, and all except one are PSM(CD)s with about ten years of teaching experience (**RsptK** holds the position of APSM(CD), Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) as she only has four years of teaching experience).<sup>15</sup>

These curriculum leaders were selected for several reasons. First of all I was the one who initiated the project and invited them to participate in it, and that provided me a direct way to work closely with them. Secondly, since this project was about “school-based curriculum development”, it would be very natural for me to initiate dialogue that focuses on education and curriculum reform, and thus gives a higher possibility to “facilitate” a cooperative mode of inquiry. Finally, throughout the year, there were lots of chances for us to meet, say workshops, staff development programmes and school visits, and therefore it would not be difficult for me to have informal chats and interviews with them to know how they actually speak, think and act toward the project of education, to know how they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and to know how they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change. From a more pragmatic point of view, this setting was appropriate, because it met the three main criteria of access for qualitative research, which are: (i) negotiating entry to the site with gatekeepers; (ii) maintaining unobtrusive presence at the site through appropriate activity; and (iii) being trusted by the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

Fieldwork of the in-depth investigation took place between September of 2005 and August of 2006. There were many informal chats and one interview between each

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<sup>15</sup> According to the *Teacher survey 1999* (Statistics Section, Education Department, 2000), there were all together 21,852 teachers working in primary schools and the male-female ratio was 1 to 3.4).

respondent and me. For the dialogical method used in this thesis, the data collection process is intertwined with analysis of data, and therefore topics for the informal chats were guided by the knowledge which emerged from the interview and vice versa. Interviews took place in October of 2005, and they were conducted in respondents' schools by me with each lasting for more than an hour. There was also another experienced interviewer, Ms Yama Wong, who performed the role of an observer to make sure that I did perform the three distinctive roles of a dialogical method, which are facilitator, interpreter and of critical reflexivity, and to see if I had missed out some important questions and she reminded me accordingly.<sup>16</sup> Interviews were in the local Chinese dialect (Cantonese). All interviews were both audio- and video-tape recorded (except **RsptN** who felt uneasy with the video-taping), transcribed, and translated into English as necessary. Written transcripts were analyzed first through a narrative analysis of the stories of curriculum leaders' self (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and second through a process of identifying significant themes underlying their views (Bryman & Burgess, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and reflexively commenting on the knowledge constituted. In the discussion of curriculum leaders' self, an interpretative summary, supported with illustrative quotes, has been provided. This is intended to help readers to understand the ways in which respondents answered the questions, the meanings of the dialogue, and most importantly the strong feelings the respondents held regarding the way they put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change. It is important to highlight that

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<sup>16</sup> Ms Yama Wong worked as a Research Assistant for the project "Co-curricular Activities to Develop Students' National Identity in Primary and Secondary Schools in Hong Kong" in 2001/02 in the Department of Education, The University of Hong Kong. (My capacity was the Project Director.) Ms Wong was a fresh graduate of the department major in English Language teaching and she was trained by me from that time onward in doing research.

all five respondents were consulted on the final narrative accounts of their self, the stories, and they agreed to the analysis and the way which the quotes was reported.

**CHAPTER 4 CURRICULUM LEADERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ACTION****RESEARCH**<sup>17</sup>

One of the main themes of this thesis is to examine curriculum leaders' "attitudes toward action research", and in the following chapter, results of the survey research with 209 newly appointed curriculum leaders are presented and discussed. There are three major findings. First, the curriculum leaders in general favoured using research in their work. Second, a four-factor model of the Attitudes Toward Research instrument (ATR) suggested a clear distinction between what policy makers promote as a "communal" sense of research significance for professional development and what practitioners concern as a "pedagogical" sense of research significance for providing *individual* solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies. This pedagogical sense of significance fits well with the postmodern thinking, and that action research needs to provide practitioners the chance to investigate educational issues and take action to improve or change practice in *their own* authentic classroom situation. Third, the positive associations between attitudes, sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control leads to advice for policy makers to take alternatives, to document action research as one's personal journal and endeavor of reforming education and curriculum and achieving success in one's own territory. Thus, it is important to empower curriculum leaders to believe more their own efforts of understanding and criticizing the present education context for their own approach to reform.

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<sup>17</sup> Results of the investigation of curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research were presented at the AARE 2004 International Education Research Conference, "Doing the Public Good: Positioning Education Research" held by the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) in the University of Melbourne, Australia, Nov 28 – Dec 2, 2004 (Hui, 2004). Later, the paper was published: Hui, S.K.F., & Li, W.S. (2005). Attitudes towards action research: The case of curriculum leaders in Hong Kong. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 14(2), 115-137.

#### **4.1. Four Dimensions of Attitudes toward Action Research**

To identify the underlying dimensions of the Attitudes Toward Research instrument (ATR), exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used with principal components analysis as the method for factor extraction, followed by oblique rotation. The initial factor matrix extracted three factors, and the items of each factor were compared and contrasted. However, this pattern did not reveal any meaningful explanation, even taking into account the three areas of research attitudes which Shumsky's scale tried to measure, so further alternatives were explored. When the 15 items were extracted for four factors, the pattern was meaningful. Table 2 shows the rotated factor loading for the 15 items.

The first factor consisted of 6 items which referred to a communal sense of the significance of research as a means for professional development. The second factor consisted of 4 items which referred to teachers' perceived ability to do research. The third factor consisted of 3 items which referred to a pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means to provide solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies. The fourth factor consisted of 2 items which referred to the feelings of the participants about the research course. These four factors explained 69.6% of the total variance.

**Table 2.** Rotated factor loadings of the 15-item ATR

<b>The 15 items</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>
Research should be carried out by school people in order to improve classroom teaching.	0.914			
I think that participation in research can lead to more change in the participant's school practices than this reading the research of others.	0.816			
Teachers should not only learn from the results of research studies but also do research themselves.	0.786			
Research activity on the part of the teacher is a growth-inducing enterprise.	0.677			
Research activity facilitates school development.	0.594			
I see research possibilities in my work.	0.421			
I am capable of meticulous research work.		0.802		
I feel fairly confident about my ability to do research on job.		0.797		
Research is not highly specialized activity, I can handle it as well.		0.737		
I feel adequate in reading and interpreting general published research.		0.701		
Research is of great help in meeting classroom problems.			0.805	
Results of research studies help to enrich what existing theories claim.			0.702	
Research helps to identify ways to meet school problems.			0.693	
This research course provides an opportunity to work on a problem which has been bothering me.				0.751
This research course provides with me the method to resolve doubts in teaching.				0.710
Eigenvalue (% of variance explained)	6.8 (45.5)	1.8 (11.8)	1.0 (6.7)	0.8 (5.7)

Note: Only values of 0.42 or above are shown in the table.

Reliability analysis was further run for the four factors of the ATR and all the factors were found to be internally consistent (Cronbach Alphas ranged from 0.753 to 0.894). This is because Cronbach Alphas were short of the 0.8 criterion and the factors are regarded as reliable for most purposes.

To report the attitudes curriculum leaders held toward action research, group mean scores for each of the four ATR dimensions were computed, and their distributions and variations have been summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Means (and standard deviations) of the four dimensions of attitudes toward action research

<b>The four dimensions</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
A communal sense of the significance of research as a means for professional development.	4.02 (0.59)
Teachers' perceived ability for doing research.	3.62 (0.63)
A pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means of providing solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies.	3.78 (0.61)
Teachers' feelings toward the research course.	3.75 (0.60)

Note: When computing the mean, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = no comment, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

In general, the 209 curriculum leaders in this sample favoured including research in their work. They perceived themselves as having the ability to do research, valued research as a means for professional development and to provide solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies, and had a feeling that the action research course in which they participated to be useful.



Independent sample t-tests were further run for the group mean scores between curriculum leaders who had some or did not have any demonstrated research experience, and between curriculum leaders who had a Bachelors or a Masters degree. These analyses are reported in Tables 4 and 5 respectively.

**Table 4.** Compared means (and standard deviations) and significance tests of the four dimensions of attitudes toward action research between curriculum leaders who (i) had some or (ii) did not have any demonstrated research experience

<b>The four dimensions</b>	<b>Curriculum leaders who had some demonstrated research experience (N = 100)</b>	<b>Curriculum leaders who did not have any demonstrated research experience (N = 99)</b>	<b>p (by t-test)</b>
A communal sense of the significance of research as a means for professional development.	3.99 (0.67)	4.04 (0.53)	0.595
Teachers' perceived ability for doing research.	3.68 (0.58)	3.54 (0.69)	0.125
A pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means of providing solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies.	3.75 (0.66)	3.79 (0.58)	0.633
Teachers' feelings toward the research course.	3.74 (0.63)	3.74 (0.59)	0.978

Note: When computing the mean, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = no comment, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

**Table 5.** Compared means (and standard deviations) and significance tests of the four dimensions of attitudes toward action research between curriculum leaders who held (i) a Bachelor degree or (ii) a Master degree

<b>The four dimensions</b>	<b>Curriculum leaders who hold a Bachelor degree (N = 163)</b>	<b>Curriculum leaders who hold a Master degree (N = 46)</b>	<b>p (by t-test)</b>
A communal sense of the significance of research as a means for professional development	4.03 (0.59)	3.98 (0.61)	0.614
Teachers' perceived ability for doing research	3.56 (0.63)	3.80 (0.60)	0.026
A pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means of providing solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies	3.80 (0.61)	3.71 (0.63)	0.393
Teachers' feelings toward the research course	3.77 (0.58)	3.65 (0.68)	0.237

Note: When computing the mean, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = no comment, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

The results indicated that demonstrated research experience and holding a higher degree did not seem to make a significant difference to curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research. It could not be said, therefore, that previous research experience, or a higher degree, say a Masters degree, would mean that they could claim to be more capable of doing research, value more the significance of research, or find the action research course more useful.

The attitudes were further tested for their degree of association with the two psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. These constructs were found to be reliable (Cronbach Alphas ranged from 0.711 to 0.838), and their correlations with the four dimensions are reported in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Correlations between the four dimensions of ATR and the psychological constructs of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control

The four dimensions	The two psychological constructs	
	Self-efficacy	An internal locus of control
A communal sense of the significance of research as a means for professional development	0.328 **	0.334 **
Teachers' perceived ability for doing research	0.416 **	0.326 **
A pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means of providing solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies	0.402 **	0.340 **
Teachers' feelings toward the research course.	0.297 **	0.305 **

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The two constructs were associated positively with the research attitudes of the curriculum leaders in this sample, and many of the associations were regarded as moderate ( $10\% < r^2 < 40\%$ ). In other words, the more they believed in their capacity to organize and execute courses of action, the more they perceived themselves to have

the ability to do research ( $r = 0.416$ ) and to value more the significance of research as a means to provide solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies ( $r = 0.402$ ). The more they perceived success to be the result of their own efforts, the more they valued the significance of research as a means to provide solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies ( $r = 0.340$ ) and for professional development ( $r = 0.334$ ).

#### **4.2. Communal vs. Pedagogical Sense of the Significance of Research to**

##### **Curriculum Leaders**

The successive factor and reliability analyses carried out on ATR identified a distinctive factor structure that was found to be valid and reliable. This factor structure raises a number of issues about the distinct pattern of thoughts that the curriculum leaders in this sample have toward action research. The extraction of the first and third factors of ATR suggested that a distinction could be drawn between the communal and the pedagogical sense of the significance of action research. This was different from the case of Shumsky's sample that revealed only a general sense of the significance of research. The term "communal" refers to the situation that beliefs are shared among members of a group, which is a major belief and is in line with the expectations of the government policy. Hong Kong curriculum leaders tended to share the common perception that research would contribute to their professional development in general, meeting the recommendation of action research "as a change strategy for teacher professional development and school-based curriculum development" (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 10, p. 13). However, they were also concerned with the practical (pedagogical) aspects of how it could help to facilitate student learning and classroom teaching. Teachers are trained or educated to believe that research contributes to professional development, and curriculum leaders value too if

research could help in the classroom. This pedagogical sense of the significance of research certainly influences how curriculum leaders accept research on a personal and practical level.

This pedagogical sense of the significance of research fits well with the postmodern thinking and is critical to achieving a full understanding of the attitudes of curriculum leaders toward action research. Action research emphasizes the impact on practical curriculum development in the school. It puts provisional practice and new ideas to test, and treats its participants as a kind of social matter, a form of strategic action susceptible to improvement (Stenhouse, 1975). It provides teachers with a tool to investigate educational issues and take action to improve or change the situation (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993). This has implications for the documentation of reform policy and the promotion of any curriculum leadership courses having action research elements for curriculum development. It is important for the reform documents to directly address this sense of significance, to highlight that action research focuses on improving teaching and learning. The idea is to link up the real problems that are of concern to curriculum leaders' work and daily lives. Policy makers are encouraged to support curriculum leaders to "work smart", and it would be valuable by any standard to support them to focus on small-scale but significant action research projects that lead to improvements in student learning and classroom teaching. Once the short-term and specific objective of helping curriculum leaders and teachers to overcome teaching and learning deficiencies has been achieved, the long-term and idealistic aim of improving the school curriculum is more likely to follow. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inappropriate to ignore this personal goal of resolving teaching and learning deficiencies in real classroom situation, but to

expect curriculum leaders to follow the official recommendation of conducting action research for the sake of contributing to professional and curriculum development. In short, unless a pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a way of finding individual solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies has been taken into account, successful curriculum improvement will be difficult.

To summarize, the differences between the conceptions of a “communal” and “pedagogical” approach to action research are more of degree than of kind. There may somehow be an overlap between the two senses of significance of research. This is to be expected because they both come under the general heading of “action research” which, as explained in the literature review, puts provisional practice and new ideas to test and requires teachers to play a critical role toward their day-to-day work (Stenhouse, 1975). The approach to action research recommended in the context of the curriculum reform has more to do with a “general” curriculum development, giving attention to the pedagogical approach to meet the needs of individual teachers/researchers and the aims of the reform itself.

#### **4.3. Knowledge and Psychology Components of Action Research**

The comparisons between the demographic and psychological variables suggested another important lesson. On the one hand, the results indicated that it was not the case for this sample that relevant previous experience results in the teacher having a more favourable attitude toward action research. Curriculum leaders with previous experience did not tend to perceive themselves as being more capable of research, nor did they value more the implications of research for professional development, personal growth and classroom teaching, even if they had gone through the process. This confirmed the findings of Short and Szabo’s (1972) early study that research

attitudes were independent of the knowledge components of educational research. Prior participation in research related courses or in research evidently did not influence the attitudes of participating curriculum leaders. The assumption that involvement in research would entail changes in perceptions was not supported in the present data. Curriculum leaders used to doubt whether they were ready and adequate to deal with research, citing the great investment of time it would require, their feelings of insecurity, and the insufficient support available to them, as the main reasons for this.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, however, attitudes toward action research were associated positively with the two psychological constructs. Curriculum leaders considered that they were more able to do research and valued more the implications of research to them as teachers, when they had a higher sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control. This again has implications for the official promotion of action research for curriculum development, and for what should be accentuated when working professionally with curriculum leaders and teachers. Compared with the necessary basic knowledge and skills that are cited in most research textbooks (see, for example, Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006), it is equally important to seek to enhance significant psychological components in the curriculum leaders. Doing action research should not and could not be seen as an official demand, but rather a personal journey of reforming education and curriculum in one's own territory. These could include, for example, the belief in and perception of their capacity to cope with future uncertainties in reform areas and the expectancy of success in curriculum research and development as the result of their own efforts.

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<sup>18</sup> This analysis is based on the author's experience of teaching the 2003/04 cohort of PSM(CD) Training Programme.

Research on the teacher's sense of efficacy suggests that performance indicators, such as their motivation to engage in and persist in a task, risk taking, and the use of innovations are related to the degrees of efficacy (Ashton, 1985; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Highly efficacious teachers are more likely to take part in research and be ready to change their attitudes, some of which may have been driven by stereotypes, toward research (Gelso, Mallinckrodt & Judge, 1996). The relationship is clear. Developing self-efficacy is important and so it is necessary to rethink the intention of what should be the reform context. Self-efficacy is task or content specific and depends on the situation or context in which the action or task is to be performed. It would be helpful, therefore, to construct the idea of action research as a personal endeavor that aims to achieve critical research performance for curriculum development. The same pattern of relationship is evident with respect to an internal locus of control, and it is important to empower curriculum leaders to believe more their own efforts of understanding and criticizing the present education context for their own approach to reform (Kennedy & Hui, 2004 & 2006). The comments made by Blake *et al.* (1998) help to supplement such an empowerment in the context of curriculum development:

Those who established curricula within institutions have values and principles of their own which may not be those of curriculum developers. [...] Curricula must be defensible in terms of the relationship – ethical and political – that they establish between the institution and the needs, wants, aspirations, obligations or rights of students or pupils. In short, the curriculum must have a legitimacy in the context in question. Without acknowledged legitimacy, the curriculum may not survive or even become established. (Blake *et al.*, 1998, p. 91)



Thus, it is at the level of a personal sense of efficacy, efforts and ownership of change and reform that policy makers should aim to achieve.

## **CHAPTER 5 STORIES OF CURRICULUM LEADERS' SELF**

Apart from examining curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research, this thesis aims too to study in-depth the "self" of particularly five of them: the way they speak, think and act toward the project of education, the way they perceive the critiques and merits of the education and curriculum reform, and the way they conceptualize and put forth themselves as leaders for curriculum change.

From the informal chats and interviews, the five PSM(CD)s were found very different in their life experience and perceptions of their self working as curriculum leaders. RsptK found herself lacking experience in translating and implementing different reform policies in school, however, with the full support of the principal, she gradually developed her capacity. RsptY was a very committed teacher; she basically agreed with the direction of the reform, and was very much willing to learn with colleagues to develop a learning community in curriculum areas that suited her school. RsptL had a strong mission toward education; she was persistent in developing the school curriculum, however, when nurturing collegial collaboration and participation, she obviously struggled with the human relations involved. RsptH was a humble teacher; she often claimed being lucky in her achievement, but in fact believed those achievements were dependent upon her own efforts; with a strong emphasis on developing and excelling teachers professionally, quality teaching and school curriculum were on the right track. RsptN had a good understanding and experience of what curriculum development and PSM(CD)s meant; she did well and developed a lot of confidence in the first two years, but unfortunately was not trusted by the new principal, and from that time onward her work and life was difficult. The following were stories of curriculum leaders' self, the stories which signified what their self was.

### **5.1. RsptK: Lacking Experience But is Well Supported by the Principal**

After received her Bachelor degree in Translation and Chinese in 2001, RsptK started her teaching career in a primary school in Lantau Island, holding the position of Certificate Master/Mistress (CM). RsptK made a joke that she had never thought of teaching until she was unemployed for a period of time. In her words, “I could not find a job for quite a long time, and I then started to apply for teaching post; that school employed me, so I started”. RsptK had a great pressure at her first year of teaching because her students did not seem to like her. As she said, “one student asked where was their previous class teacher when I first met them, s/he said they liked her!” However, because of her patience and many different interesting activities introduced in class, for example games, students eventually admired her. A smile came out of RsptK’s face when she recalled what that student said later: “Ms RsptK, I missed you very much!” RsptK enjoyed being with students and thus was willing to exert extra effort to help them learn. She emphasized, “really, to be with the kids is the happiest thing, and I enjoy very much teaching them, teaching them to know something”. Knowledge was not the most important aspect which RsptK focused on in her teaching, however, knowing how to behave properly in real life and be a decent person in fact got more of her attention. She said, “I put more emphasis on virtues, that means although one has a poor academic result, I think if one is ‘good’ and willing to learn, s/he will eventually catch up”. To RsptK, being good is perhaps the necessary condition to student learning because, with that mentality, “students are willing to listen to you, willing to try”.

After a year of teaching, RsptK did her 2-year part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education, majoring in English Language and Putonghua. In her second year of study,

in 2003, she joined the current school and a year later, she was promoted to the position of APSM(CD). When asked about the feeling she had so far with the job, RsptK said there were both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, she made a joke that “I didn’t realize there is a large increase of salary and the position is so prestigious”; on the negative side, she felt that she might be inexperienced to win the support of colleagues, and thus she tried very hard in the first year to motivate other experienced and older teachers, although only twelve in total, to participate in certain curriculum reform initiatives. Therefore, she was satisfied when she did implement some of these trials, for example, “in ‘peer coaching’, I did prepare some inter-disciplinary activities for students, and colleagues were willing to help, it was a great satisfaction”. RsptK’s work was on a better track when a new principal came a year later and provided her with a lot of guidelines and support. She said, “at first, he didn’t trust me because he found me very young, however, when he discovered that I was willing to try, he taught me how; in fact, the role of the principal is very important, he gives me the framework and I’m there to help him to implement”.

To the theme of education and curriculum reform, the first impression which RsptK had was “a lot of reforms, continuous reforms, never stop!” Although she agreed with the rationale of the reform, she found the pace was too fast. She explained with her observation that, “just like what you see on the TV advertisements produced by EMB, they never stop, one by one, one hasn’t been reformed yet, and then comes another one!” The reform as presented to RsptK was a form of narrative which was delivered to the wider public through propaganda. The negative feeling was common among her colleagues: “they have similar viewpoints, however, they seem to dislike it more than me”, and she laughed and added, “because I’m in this position, I have to like it!”

The emotional impact of the reform on teachers is obvious, and as a curriculum leader who needs to nurture collegial participation for different reform policies in school, the challenge for RsptK is great. In fact, once RsptK promoted the position of APSM(CD), she did try hard to gear the school to meet the reform. As she said, “there has been a great change, I don’t know if it relates to my leadership, we have to make the school match with the education trend”. She was asked to clarify further the meaning of the phrase “match with the education trend” and RsptK’s response was interesting: “EMB suggested many things [reform practices], if we can do it, we will do it, however, we don’t follow them closely, we select some to do ... we do ‘peer coaching’, we don’t do ‘teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua’ because I’m the only one in this school who knows Putonghua ... we select those which we are capable of and suitable for us to develop”. Primary factors that were associated with her choice were the principal’s support and collegial consensus. When asked to provide concrete examples of how to choose what to implement, RsptK further articulated that, “I will select those [reform practices] which I think I’m capable of doing and good for the school [and students], and if the principal thinks they are feasible; it’s not that I find something good and they should be put forth, they are all subject to principal’s approval ... in fact, I’m still scared, if colleagues could cooperate and help, however, if they don’t see the needs and you insist, outcomes would be terrible”. School culture was also an important factor: “we are different from large schools, we don’t necessarily do what the large schools do, like ‘peer coaching’, for example, since we have only one class in each form, then we do the coaching [preparation of teaching materials] across different subjects; also, like project learning, I heard from other PSM(CD)s that you need first to start project

learning in General Studies, then other subjects, and all teachers involved have to go into the same classroom, to guide different groups, however, I think it's too hard".

Among the above-mentioned three factors, principal's support was the most influential, and "peer coaching" was one of the initiatives that he encouraged most. In RsptK's words, "my original idea was to have all teachers of different forms of General Studies to do the coaching [preparation of teaching materials] together, then I went to discuss with the principal, since I have to develop the curriculum plan with him, to discuss what we want and what we don't; however, he said it's not feasible, because only one teacher would be preparing the materials [of a form] and all others are there only to give advice, and he asked if I have thought of 'theme-based teaching' which requires teachers of different subjects of a form to work together". This theme-based teaching is very similar to what we commonly know as curriculum integration, however, at that time, RsptK did not know what to do and how to get started.

Eventually, she invited teachers of different subjects of a form to try. She said, "we first identified a theme to start in P.2, we chose 'Merry Christmas'; at that time, we were all very nervous, and we finally constructed this learning portfolio [pointing to the portfolio which she brought along], inside which consists of many worksheets developed by different subject teachers ... so we do this in Chinese Language, do this in English Language, these are Christmas songs [pointing to the worksheets in the portfolio], and students have to do some physical movements". With the support of the principal, results were successful and rewarding, and therefore RsptK extended this modified version of "peer coaching" to different forms. More important, she gradually developed her efficacy in translating and implementing different reform policies in school. The leadership style of the principal had a great impact on the

development of RsptK's self, to facilitate her more to conceptualize and put forth herself as leader for curriculum change.

The leadership style of RsptK's principal was "educational" in nature. Educational leadership is "seen as developing strategies so that a variety of management instruments can be used to achieve a school's most important primary task" and an educational leader is "someone whose actions are intentionally geared to influencing the schools' primary processes" (Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003, p. 403). For educational leadership, the primary task for a school leader is to work cooperatively with other school practitioners to determine and implement all school policies.

Educational leaders are more able to facilitate the utilization of elements embedded within the process of student learning because, according to Joseph Murphy (1990), they are capable of: (a) formulating and communicating the school mission and goals; (b) promoting, supervising and evaluating quality teaching, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student learning; (c) promoting professional development, establishing positive expectations and standards, and providing incentives for teachers and students; and (d) creating a safe and orderly learning environment, providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement, developing staff collaboration and cohesion, as well as forging links between home and school (Murphy, 1990, p. 169; cited in Caldwell & Spinks, 1992, pp. 58-59).

Although there was at first worry and unconvinced psychology among colleagues, including RsptK, the principal could trigger positive responses and smooth the implementation of reform policies. This psychology, as argued by Hui and Cheung (2006), refers to the influence of the Chinese cultural practice, or in Ho's (1986) term, Chinese patterns of socialization, which are famed for reinforcing a bureaucratic or

even a patriarchal social structure, and thus hinder people in an inferior position within an organized structure to take on an active role in participation, contribution and decision making. Thus, within the Chinese culture, motivation for teachers for behaving in a disinterested way to favour the development of the school is difficult because they will devote limited effort to take up leadership responsibilities.

Participation is often subordinated to a more dominant organizational objective (Raftery, Csete & Hui, 2001; Hui & Cheung, 2004).<sup>19</sup> Teachers may try hard to limit their contribution to the minimum required of them, and the backwash is that, no matter how clear and explicit the call for teachers to share decision-making powers with the principal, they may just take no notice. However, as suggested by Hui and Cheung (2006), a possible way out is to distribute appropriate task-specific leadership practices to school members, giving them “confidence about their ‘collective ability’” (Hui & Cheung, 2006, p. 182), and reinforce their self-efficacy through doing and experiencing. Certainly, RsptK’s principal was able to take advantages of this strategy. As commented by her, “leadership of principal is crucial ... it’s really interesting that he always pretended not to know how to do it [a reform policy] and ask me: ‘oh, how could we do it?’, but in fact when I gave him some ideas, he helped

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<sup>19</sup> These two studies were conducted by the author and other fellows. Raftery, Csete, and Hui (2001) examined how professionals in the construction and property field take risks and make decisions in different economic situations, and Hui and Cheung (2004) explored how church members learn and behave after participating in an adventure team-building camp. Although neither of them focused on educational organizations, they both came up with the same findings, namely that the risks taken, the decisions made and the behaviour revealed by the subjects were subordinated to a more dominant organizational objective. In the Raftery, Csete, and Hui (2001) study, it is the company’s goal to “keep the business running” that shaped the professionals’ attitude to risk and the corresponding decisions made, while for the Hui and Cheung (2004) study, it was the church’s consensus that “some missions are good” that was at the center of its members’ behaviour.



to make them better, and then he would pass them back to me to implement with other teachers”.

With the guidance and facilitation of the principal, RsptK did realize change over her “self”. When asked whether she realized changes in the way she sees herself, she replied, “I will now drive for what I want; most of the time, I won’t push other teachers, but now I will be a bit stronger and tell them: ‘that’s not OK, you have to do it’; I mean sometimes I have to be stronger, it’s because there won’t be anyone to help you, to stand out and speak for you”. She added, “I always remind them, always encourage them, which means I will give them advice; I really do give them advice and they always accept; if I don’t do so, they won’t know what I want”. The way RsptK conceptualized her relationship with colleagues was interesting and did imply both the cooperation and negotiation. She explained that, “it’s really interesting, although I’m holding the position of APSM, they all call me ‘Ms RsptK’ [not APSM which is higher in the job ladder], and only if I’m implementing something, they then think I’m in a higher position”. Although RsptK knew how to insist and cooperate skillfully with others, things did not always go well as she expected. The example she cited was the time she tried to propose giving every teacher a pocket book, an approach that she learned from other PSM(CD)s, which complied with many skills of doing reform practices in school, say cooperative learning, curriculum integration, and so on. Some of her colleagues did not appreciate this and turned it down. The degree of experience of the colleagues explains the situation, because RsptK found, when compared with young and new colleagues, the experienced were not that willing to help. Those colleagues did not at all want to attend any of the forums, seminars or workshops organized by EMB or relevant education bodies, talking about reform

initiatives or policies. This was also the case for RsptK's participation in the "School-based Curriculum Development in Action" project, that she had been very strategic and respectful to colleagues' will and therefore she was the only one who attended the three seminars/workshops organized throughout the year. When asked about the lesson she learned from these ups and downs, RsptK said, "I just try my best to do what I can and sometimes learn to 'let go' ... it's sad because some of the work is really important but they just don't want to do it". In a nutshell, RsptK concluded, "the principal is really important, I'll talk to him when there's difficulty and his support is good ... for example, in 'peer coaching', not only helps me to monitor the progress, but also gives me confidence ... he always says: 'it's good, go ahead, it's OK, don't worry!'"

The other interviewer, Ms Yama Wong, also realized the strong influence that RsptK's principal had on her, she then asked a few more questions to clarify her views. She asked if there was any circumstance that RsptK proposed some ideas but were rejected by the principal. She said, "yes, for example, there's a time I suggested having every teacher in turn to share their teaching, and the principal said 'they won't like it, and even if there is someone who supports this idea, it's still meaningless'".

Ms Yama Wong then further probed to see if RsptK did ever insist on her ideas when there was resistance from the principal, she replied, "no, because most of time he does agree with my ideas". In a sentence, the above dialogue confirmed the support of RsptK's principal on her leadership of the implementation of curriculum practices. To finish our dialogue with the quality RsptK found being a successful curriculum leader, she said, "the other two PSMs (Primary School Masters/Mistresses) in school are very experienced, all teachers are willing to assist them, however, to me, I'm

doing things with passion, they do know it and therefore help”. She finally commented that others would describe her being an “industrious, young and hardworking” curriculum leader, however, those adjectives were different from the way she saw herself. She thought, “I would say I work very hard but with not much reward, and also I do worry all the times”.

To conclude, because of the limited experience, RsptK’s work was not at all easy, but with the full support of her principal, she gradually developed, learned how to motivate and cooperate with colleagues, and translate and implement different reform policies in school. She agreed with the rationale of the reform, but she found the pace was too fast: “a lot of reforms, continuous reforms, never stop”. She tried hard to initiate different reform practices in school in order “to match with the education trend”. With the inspiration of the principal, RsptK had successfully implemented “theme-based teaching” and the results were encouraging. However, with the worry and unconvincing psychology among colleagues of contributing to the success of quality school curriculum, collegial participation was still minimal. RsptK realized change over her “self”, getting stronger in her belief, but with a strong feeling of an imbalance over the time and effort put in and the reward that she received, she had learned to “let go”.

### **5.2. RsptY: A Committed Teacher who Always Learns with Colleagues**

RsptY’s wish to be a teacher was deep-rooted in her secondary school time when she met several good teachers who she admired a lot. She said, “I remember one teacher was graduated from CUHK with a first class honours, s/he was always proud of his/her students because s/he said her students could at least get a credit in public exam ... s/he’s really charismatic, s/he’s my idol, that’s why I think teachers could

make students admire them ... there wasn't only one teacher like that, but two to three teachers, and that's why I chose this field". RsptY's university education was in Education and she joined the current school after graduating and held the position of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (APSM) teaching Chinese Language, Math, General Studies, Religion Studies and Music. The time when the interview was conducted was the ninth year that RsptY worked in the school. When asked about taking up the position of PSM(CD) in 2003, she said, "if I could remember clearly, in 2002, there was a circular from EMB talking about this position and the principal asked all APSM(CD)s if we were interested; it was a kind of promotion, needed to prepare a 5-year curriculum plan and to be interviewed, and since I had been teaching for five years, I would therefore like to try, to see if I had the ability ... the position was a new establishment, and there wasn't any explicit requirement, except you had to participate in some kinds of training and I thought they might be useful ... it was a risky decision because at that time, I wasn't even a member of the curriculum development team". Although RsptY found herself lacking experience in curriculum planning and development, she did in fact have quite a lot of experience in handling school administrative work, such as student allowance, student affairs and ETV (Education Television).

To the reform, RsptY's comment was "too fast, really too fast". What upset her most was the unrealistic amount of workload and expectation which EMB put on teachers. She said, "what I find heartbreaking is the non-stop demand of training for teachers; there're a lot of workshops, but I doubt how much teachers could absorb and learn from those workshops; it's because I don't think teachers would benefit from a course say for 100 hours, and then become competent in any kinds of curriculum

development, I think teachers really have to try, for example try to know how to create learning environment for teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua; sometimes I find teachers are just over-loaded". The rationale behind EMB is obvious but controversial: "To reform education, reform teachers first!" The same logic had not only been applied to the training of frontline teachers but also principals. It was the belief of the Education Department (prior to the EMB) that, through training, the school principals would be instilled with appropriate leadership skills to enable them to manage their schools and to face new changes and challenges, especially those that arose from the current education reform. However, the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes were not clearly or well defined at all. With regard to this kind of training, Wong (2001) already pointed out its shortcomings of developing a vicious circle on the leadership practice of principals. First of all, the Education Department became accustomed to giving out instructions and setting the basic requirements for potential principals, and the principals grew accustomed to receiving those instructions and requirements and felt bound by them. Since the assumptions were set by the Education Department, principals who participated in these programmes frequently complained that the contents and materials were of no use to them for handling everyday routines in their schools. There was also criticism that the government was wasting money on this kind of training programme.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Wong argued that, "the Education Department [should] be aware of its limitations, and that the Education

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<sup>20</sup> This statement is based mainly on information drawn from observation and informal chats with school principals who participated in some of these programmes organized by various academic and government bodies. The last one the author attended was the Secondary School Principals Training Programme organized by the Centre for Educational Leadership (<http://www.hku.hk/educel>, accessed on October 5, 2005), Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, in the academic year 2001-2002.

Department should change their leadership role to one of providing support” (Wong, 2001, p. 11).

With the emphasis on the logic of “proper training leads to proper performance” (see, for example, Tam & Cheng, 2001), little room is left for teachers’ professional judgement and professional development. This is why RsptY commented, “the thought is too ideal, but when it comes to implementation, it can’t cater for the needs of teachers and very often without any empathy ... like our school, because it’s a half-day school, there’re a lot of constraints in space in implementing many of the reform practices”. Although RsptY respected much teachers’ (and school’s) autonomy, she basically agreed with the direction of the reform in strengthening teachers’ professionalism. This is because, RsptY found, when compared with other well-established professions, it is a bit strange for teachers not having much challenge. She said, “doctors and accountants and so on have to keep on taking exams in order to earn their professional status, however, teachers don’t have to; like the benchmarking of Putonghua and English Language teachers, I personally see it as a challenge, a way to strengthen teachers and eliminate the weaker ones ... exam can also be seen as a way to give a person challenge, to up keeping oneself”. The above comments reflected not only how RsptY sees the profession, but also the way she evaluates herself. RsptY has a strong sense of “self”, believing in her ability to cope with different challenges and difficulties. As she elaborated, “fundamentally, there are two types of teachers, some reject very much the reform, they just want to safe guard their job, some are willing to accept the change because it is good for the students ... I think I belong to the latter type because I agree that there’s a need to reform education”. RsptY shared the rationale of the reform, which is for the benefits of

students and to improve the learning outcomes of students. She cited “assessment for learning” as an example that, “students shouldn’t only be concerned about the exam results, assessment should therefore facilitate student learning, and teachers should concentrate on teaching students to know how to improve and how to do better”.

The work orientation of RsptY was positive. She liked her job; she would seek responsibility and was highly motivated to improve her work. Obviously, when facing challenges and difficulties, RsptY’s answer would be: “Yes, I can!” Although RsptY had a strong conviction toward education, or education and curriculum reform in particular, she found the support given to schools was not enough. For example, following the comments of the proper direction of reforming assessment, RsptY added, “what is mentioned in the documents is good since it focuses on student learning, however, it doesn’t mention what teachers should do ... like now, we have to evaluate student performance, but I don’t think colleagues, including myself, know how to construct a reliable and valid questionnaire, let alone interviewing which I don’t think we know what exact questions to ask ... to teachers, there are real difficulties”. When asked to clarify if the workshops provided by EMB were useful to support the development of curriculum, RsptY’s was straightforward: “They are not!” She explained that, “there are a lot of workshops which EMB said are for supporting schools, but there really isn’t one universal true method which is applicable to all situations ... say for example, like the workshop to train teachers to know how to do ‘project learning’; at that workshop, you might be very motivated to learn different computer software, but what if a school doesn’t have the required software?” Although it is highlighted in the current reform proposals that schools are given the autonomy to select and develop curriculum areas that they find suitable, school

culture and resources (in terms of both hardware and human resources) are the major concern and barriers. The process of translating and implementing reform policies in school are embedded with fundamental difficulties. As RsptY explained “it’s good to have colleagues to participate in different workshops, but to have them explain to others and to implement is another story ... we have already developed the culture of sharing what we have learned in those workshops on Wednesday afternoons for about 30 to 45 minutes, but there still needs a transition period for them to get used to those new ideas”.

RsptY’s school had already developed a democratic culture of collective decisions, and colleagues used to vote for whether or not to implement a new curriculum idea or initiative. Not doing “project learning” in the academic year 2004/05 was a typical example of that collective ability. The democratic politics and participatory decision making, together with an ethic of respect for others and the rights of the individual, were pre-conditions for school members to grow and improve as a whole and moving toward the same goals and directions. This is exactly the idea of “learning for all” (Evers, 2000 & 2001), which means every school member should learn together from and for the school policies that aim to improve student learning. With this culture, teachers are more likely to be aware of the factors that may lead to learning success, and therefore curriculum leaders should concentrate on creating an open environment to develop a cooperative and supportive context for learning. As Evers (2001) pointed out, the real essence of leadership is about “leading as critical learning”, that is “to function as researchers or critical learners with the goal of developing their own most coherent account of how their organization works and what it should be doing” (Evers, 2001, p. 112). Therefore, when asked to give details of the factors which she



had taken into consideration for implementing reform policies in school, RsptY's major concern was "collegial consensus" and the "school environment". She said, "the first thing is people, because it's not only me to do it, and therefore I would first consider if colleagues could manage to do it, if we could cooperate together to do it; the second thing is the actual school environment ... like last year, everyone's talking about 'assessment for learning', everyone thinks it's good, it's good for the students, then I brought this idea for discussion ... at the end of the academic year 2004/05, we did a thorough investigation in the 'School Self-Assessment (SSA)' to see what areas we could try this out, but at last we suggested not to do it, because we were not sure about the methods to do it and we worried a lot about the heavy workload put on colleagues and students". It is important to highlight that, although examples of not doing "project learning" and "assessment for learning" were cited, the significance of "learning for all" is not for putting limitations to curriculum development, but to generate possibilities for better curriculum implementation. This is because, RsptY pointed out clearly that, "in the same SSA (School Self-Assessment), we evaluated thoroughly the domain of 'learning and teaching', we did peer class observation, we designed questionnaires for students and interviewed some of them ... we voted twice for setting priorities of areas [new curriculum ideas or initiatives] to improve student learning, we also wrote down the reasons why certain areas should be done first; at last, some colleagues thought they would like to keep on doing what they have been doing and some would try something new ... the English Language team decided they would like to try 'project learning' in one to two forms [in the academic year 2005/06]".

The achievement of this “learning for all” is reflected significantly in RsptY’s participation in the “School-based Curriculum Development in Action” project. The project proposed by RsptY was about curriculum integration, integrating 7 subjects (Chinese Language, General Studies, Music, Visual Arts, Computer Studies, Library Studies, and Putonghua) under the broad theme of “Penta-prime on Mainland China”. It aimed to help students to integrate the knowledge learned in different subjects to understand the current situation of Mainland China, to enrich their learning experience, and to facilitate the development of different generic skills. In fact, that was the third year which RsptY implemented curriculum integration in school. In the first year, because of limited experience, the curriculum integration in P.3 and P.4 was not very successful. However, with the collective will to improve student learning, colleagues were very supportive and considerate, and a lot of constructive advice was received at the evaluation meeting. As RsptY said, “I really thanked my colleagues, they were very tolerant, they bore a lot the chaotic situation that I created; they were nice at the evaluation meeting; they suggested if things could be done in this way, if things could be done in that way”. Therefore, with this support, the second year implementation in P.1 and P.2 was far more successful, and she included too a lot of initiatives, like students’ visits, parents’ training, adding new reading materials etc., to the programme. When asked about the feeling she had with this successful experience, RsptY’s answer was positive: “A lot firmer the belief!” She said, “at the first year of taking up the position, I really knew nothing, I had to participate in different trainings, 4 nights every week for the whole year, I felt really pained, I didn’t know which colleagues could help me [in the work]; also, I was terrified by having meetings, because I didn’t have the experience to hold meetings with so many heads of different subject teams; really I was afraid to attend meetings, really a lot of

pressure, and my first year feeling was: ‘I’m lost!’” RsptY added, “there were a lot of things that I had to report to the principal, there were a lot of details to be written for different subjects, but being frank, I really didn’t know how to do it ... it seemed that everything matters to me, and my work at the first year of taking up the position was not very good, however, at the second year, I learned from those experiences, the plan [curriculum integration] was quite good; of course, it was not only me who thought it was good, at the evaluation meeting, colleagues thought we could continue next year, but with some minor modifications in the design of worksheets [in student learning portfolio] that some questions could be written in a clearer manner”.

RsptY elaborated her comments of “getting firm the belief of being a curriculum leader” with the prime factor – collegial consensus – which she took into account when translating and implementing certain reform policies in school. She said, “I used to do a lot of research and preparation before proposing a particular plan, I will then forward to colleagues for comments, thus, in all circumstances, I will say this [plan] is collectively designed by us ... it’s interesting that sometimes my colleagues, for example the Chinese Language team, said: ‘no no, it’s designed by Ms RsptY’, but my reply was: ‘it’s given to the Chinese Language team, so it’s the collective product of the team’”. The term “collegial consensus” entails not only the cognitive aspect of agreement but also the affective aspect of a sense of “we-ness” and commitment among members of the same school. People usually conceive commitment as a good thing, because commitment incurs the pledging or binding of oneself to a course of action (Kiesler, 1971; Ghemawat, 1991). Commitment should not be understood as a polar contrast in that one is deemed as being committed or not; rather it is a matter of degree that people are referred to as more or less committed to some behaviour. This

is why RsptY always reminded herself that, “it’s common to have colleagues who are not very supportive; say for example, when there are 8 out of 10 colleagues support your initial plan, what you could say is only that, they would not be harsh to you at the beginning, and not all of them would be willing to cooperate with you, but at least they would not be against you”. Commitment is characterized by a strong belief in the organization’s goals and values, and a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Mentor, 1995). Therefore, in most of the school situations, commitment inspires the persistent devotion and obligation that succeeding in curriculum implementation entails, and a firm belief and continual effort on the side of the curriculum leader is necessary for school to excel in education and curriculum reform. RsptY’s commitment to her work is reflected too in the way she cooperated with her colleagues. She was willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that which is normally expected in order to help the school be successful; she said, “I used to list down in the agenda that: ‘if needed, PSM(CD) will work with you on the curriculum plan’; it’s because some colleagues are very independent and some really need guidance, and I will provide help whenever needed”. RsptY respected too a fair working ethic, she added, “this is a proper attitude to work with colleagues because when I participate as a member in other working teams [not relating to curriculum development], other team leaders are doing the same; it shouldn’t be that when you’re the leader, you expect people to do more”.

Based on the analysis so far, it appears that RsptY was successful in facilitating colleagues’ participation and in inspiring the very best of them in work performance, however, she showed humility toward these achievements. Although colleagues found RsptY was smart in leading and implementing curriculum reform initiatives,

she did not quite agree. She said, “there’re really a lot of people smarter than me, like my relatives, my friends, and therefore I always think I’m not smart; till now, I still think I’m not a smart person, but a stupid person”. She added, “I always remind myself that there are smart people who can handle complicated tasks, and they sleep less; they can do it, why not me; so I now manage to sleep 6 hours a day and spend all the other time on work”. Therefore, the first lesson RsptY learned in these years endeavor was: “industry will make up clumsiness [a Chinese idiom]”.<sup>21</sup> She said, “when you ask me if I’m with high IQ, I would say no, because whenever people give me IQ questions, I surely couldn’t answer, I’m really stupid ... on the other hand, colleagues find me with high EQ, they find me having good temper”. The views of colleagues played a significant role for RsptY to shape her identity of being a curriculum leader in the school. This is because when asked about how RsptY understood the concept of the “self”, as the central theme of this thesis, her answer was: “I always think this is in relation with other people, because how I see myself will affect directly how I deal with others and how others deal with me, and therefore it’s meaningless to talk about the ‘self’ if it is independent from others”. The social nature of human beings is emphasized, and this is precisely the concept of “figuration” – the networks of interdependent human beings – which Elias (1978 [1970]) proposed. According to Elias, human societies are made up of thousands or millions of human beings, who are interdependent with each other in a variety of ways, and whose lives involved are significantly shaped by the social figurations they form together, say teachers and students in a class, doctor and patients in a therapeutic group, regular customers at a pub, children at a nursery school, and so on (Elias, 1978

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<sup>21</sup> Translation of this idiom from the MBDG Chinese-English dictionary:  
<http://www.mdbg.net/chindict/chindict.php> (assessed on July 13, 2007).

[1970], pp. 104-133). Such a figuration or interdependence is not static but “processual” and dynamic in nature, because people’s thoughts and actions are interdependent, and that the changing patterns of the figurations created by the people involved are determined “not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other” (Elias, 1978 [1970], p. 130). Figurations are continually in flux, undergoing changes of many kinds, and at the core of the changing figurations is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to the other. Therefore, the pronoun “I” is used to communicate to other that its function can only be understood in the context of all the other positions to which the other terms in the series refer. In other words, “one cannot imagine an ‘I’ without a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, a ‘we’, ‘you’ (singular and plural) or ‘they’” (Elias, 1978 [1970], p. 123). Personal pronouns are relational and functional that they, on the one hand, express the fact that every person is fundamentally related to other people and, on the other hand, refer all relationships between people as a matter of perspectives and functions according to the way power is distributed. With this understanding of the “self”, RsptY therefore was accustomed to self-reflection. She said, “I always reflect how others see me, and this lets me know what to improve”.

To conclude, RsptY was a committed teacher with a prime concern of getting colleagues’ consensus of reform policies, to inspire them to cooperate and plan together in an open atmosphere, and to realize the idea of “learning for all” for quality school curriculum. She agreed with the need for education reform but she commented on it as being “too fast, really too fast”. She was upset with the unrealistic amount of workload and expectation that EMB put on teachers, because she found the reform

simply could not cater for the needs of teachers. RsptY's work orientation was positive; she liked her job and was highly motivated to improve it. With a democratic culture of collective decisions and a cooperative and supportive environment for collegial consensus and participation, RsptY was able to win the support of colleagues. She had successfully initiated and implemented many reform practices in school, and these included "curriculum integration" and "project learning". Therefore, she got a firm belief of being a curriculum leader, with an aspiration to plan the curriculum with colleagues and to celebrate the reward with them. RsptY did not consider herself as a smart person; however, she was able to constantly reflect for improvement.

### **5.3. RsptL: Having Strong Mission toward Education But Struggled with the Human Relations Involved**

RsptL did not have any formal teacher training when she started to work as a primary school teacher in 1991, right after obtaining her degree in Chinese. Although most of her classmates preferred to teach in secondary schools, RsptL chose primary school on purpose. This is because she found that she enjoyed playing with children and most important that it was her wish and belief to teach children to learn to be good. As she said, "I enjoy very much teaching, particularly when I enter the classroom, facing the students, that gives me a lot of satisfaction ... I believe that people can affect each other, and therefore I want to do something for the kids, to teach them to be good or to learn something". RsptL's strong belief also motivated her to take up the position of PSM(CD) in 2003, six years after she joined the current school; she said, "I applied for this position partly because I felt that the school was not performing well ... also, because we were having difficulties in recruiting students, and if I could work in this position for another five years, I might be able to help ...

and I could gain some experience too”. Although the intention was good, RsptL indicated expressively that, at the beginning of taking up the position, getting colleagues’ support was not easy. She said, “I tried to explain to them at the beginning my role and direction, however, their response was: ‘you’re lucky, you have fewer lessons, you only have 15 lessons, we have 30 lessons, and you don’t have to teach Chinese Language!’ ... this indicated they focused only on the so-called advantages; also, I tried to be more empathetic, and later when they knew what my duties were and how I did things for the school, they gradually supported”. Caring and communication aiming at a mutual understanding seemed to be effective.

RsptL’s view on the current education and curriculum reform was distinctive. She preferred the word “development” to “reform”, because the word “reform” to her entailed a negative meaning of not doing things properly and thus needing to “fight” to get them right. The word “development” was much more appropriate because it indicated a progressive nature of doing things better. No matter how, RsptL basically agreed with the direction of the “development”, and she explained her view with an example of a shift in teaching knowledge to generic skills. She said, “say in the past, when we went to school, teachers taught us a lot of knowledge, but I think that could be a bit flexible now since students are able to acquire knowledge by themselves, and therefore I agree with the emphasis on developing students’ generic skills, or nurturing more their interest to read, etc.”. RsptL also supported what EMB recommended as having schools selectively develop any curriculum areas that they found suitable. She cited IT as an example; she said, “each school has its own needs, like ‘incorporating IT in teaching’, since two-thirds of our students don’t have a computer at home and we are half-day [AM] school that students can’t access the



computer room in the afternoon, and therefore we don't do this". On one hand, RsptL was clear as to the relationship between EMB and schools, and their responsibility, as set out in the official document: "Each school builds on its existing strengths and plans its curriculum development at its own pace according to the readiness of its teachers, school conditions and the characteristics of its students." (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 1, p. 14) On the other hand, she knew the idea was too ideal because all other schools were incorporating IT in teaching and the existence of many external factors (for example School Self-Assessment and External School Review) really put her school in a difficult situation. One way or another, the prime factor which RsptL took into account when translating and implementing certain reform policies in school was students' needs; she said, "I put a strong emphasis on students' needs".

With the above dilemma and effort made in striking a balance between what she found as the needs of students and many of the external constraints, therefore, when asked to comment on this reform (development), RsptL's response was similar to the last two respondents. She said: "It was too fast!" RsptL found "the development was too fast, which just made it hard for teachers to accept" and also "some of the proposals were not very successful". This is because, with her last two years' experience, RsptL noticed that there were generally three different types of attitudes which teachers would have to the reform. They were: "object and defend their own beliefs", "being pessimistic and you need to persuade and work with them", and "believe but with reservation ... that they respect what you're doing and they will participate if you prove it works and with positive outcomes". To get along with these attitudes was demanding but, as RsptL pointed out, they all existed in her school.

Therefore, when planning to implement some of the reform policies in school, RsptL would strategically and thoroughly get herself prepared. She said, “say for example, if ten elements are needed for an initiative, I will prepare nine of them and persuade colleagues to work on the tenth with me”. The achievement of collegial participation was valuable but the time and effort spent in persuading others was enormous.

Unfortunately, handling human relations was not what RsptL wanted and it was often in conflict with her foremost mission of teaching children to learn to be good. She explained: “in the past, I was only responsible for students’ learning and didn’t have to handle any of these problems, didn’t have to persuade others, but now, all these give me a lot of emotions ... also, that violates my very first principle of choosing the profession, I have less time to prepare for class, say preparing teaching materials and searching for extra information, you might say I’m now working on a broader level, organizing curriculum for students of the whole school, but I really feel sorry for the class I teach”. Therefore, when asked to indicate whether she would take up the position of PSM(CD) again if she had a choice, RsptL’s answer was negative. She said, “no, it’s too complicated, the human relations involved are too complicated, which makes me frequently feel hesitated, stopped, not very smooth [in developing the school curriculum]”.

Complexity of human relations lay beyond an expectation of reasonable communication that aimed at arriving at a rational consensus, and that troubled RsptL. The unpleasant experience which RsptL cited was the initiative last year which planned to work with the PM school teachers on activities for Chinese writing. This initiative was about designing some teaching and learning activities to enrich students’ Chinese writing: “say for example, if we want students to write ‘A Visit to

Ocean Park’, we need to give them some input, design some activities, like to provide them with some phrases, some adjectives, to have them browse the Ocean Park website though they might not have a chance to visit it”. Since RsptL and her colleagues had implemented it in P.1 to P.3 and found it effective, they would like to collaborate with the PM school teachers during the summer to design activities for this year P.4 students (in both AM and PM schools). However, when the PM school PSM(CD) informed RsptL that his/her teachers were too busy and not able to help, her colleagues’ response was a little bit irrational. She said, “they insisted if the PM school teachers were not doing it, then they wouldn’t do it; their argument was that: ‘it’s not fair, why are they not doing it, if we have to do it, do it together, it’s not fair that we do it very hard, come up with some materials, and they then use it next year [when the two schools combine to become a whole-day school] ... it’s tedious that we do all the planning all the time”’. Negotiation is again the strategy RsptL used but this time she failed to persuade them, and finally they agreed they would try on their own, as to finish the task that was originally proposed. Although some of the colleagues really did try it and found it useful, they insisted “not to continue, better leave it next year to work together [when the two schools become one], it’s all because they keep emphasizing that ‘it’s not fair”’. Although RsptL used the word “surrender” to describe her feeling and there were too a lot of ups and downs throughout her endeavor in mobilizing colleagues’ to work toward quality curriculum, she indicated clearly that they didn’t move her belief. She stressed, “no, I haven’t changed my belief, I’m rather a strong person, and I have a high expectation of colleagues”. Having a strong mission toward education kept encouraging RsptL to work as a leader in curriculum development because the way she described herself was: “I have a mission, I want to do something for the school, hoping students could

learn more, could learn more happily, and I'm hardworking". On the other hand, she thought colleagues would describe her as "hardworking and very nice". Having a good relationship with colleagues and being nice might ease RsptL's attempt to initiate the reform policies, but these also bothered her in the implementation. This is because, she found, "I started to worry that I might be too caring and colleagues might give themselves an excuse and say: 'Ms RsptL will forgive me [for not doing some of the curriculum initiatives]'"'. When facing this situation, RsptL had made herself clear to colleagues that "my bottom line is: 'we need to do them'"'.

RsptL was persistent in developing the school curriculum, however, she also struggled with the necessary but complex human relations involved in nurturing collegial collaboration and participation. She said, "there are more or less half of the teachers in this school who will object to any of my proposals, it's really hard, and therefore, most of the time, before a meeting, I will check with the teacher list and see who will support ... deliberately, I have to first talk to teachers who will be involved, to persuade them, and hope that they will speak for me in the meeting and support the proposal". The picture was similar to politicians lobbying government policies, but RsptL did find it useful. She added, "like now, whenever there's meeting, I will use this method, first to find colleagues who might be able to help, are familiar with the ideas, or who might be easier to accept the ideas". Certainly, RsptL was dependent on her colleagues, and Elias's concept of "power balance" is illuminating to explain the situation. Power balance, according to Elias, is the name of a relational and processual concept which denotes the relationships between the interdependent human beings, and human beings are therefore constituted to, connected with and influenced by the complex and fluctuating power relationships that they form (Elias, 1978 [1970],

pp. 104-133). Power balance is a capability which is not primarily the quality of an actor, but a structural property of a social relationship, a relation of relations, and therefore “others have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement” (Bogner, 1986, p. 394). In other words, if the figuration they created was a “game”, then RsptL’s colleagues had a greater chance to guide her thoughts and courses of actions because the “players” were not approximately equal in “strength”, but a strength tipped in their favour. The asymmetric power balance developed between RsptL and her colleagues was the result of a long-term development of seeking out “power”. As noted by Mennell (1989), balances of power are usually labile and fluctuate to a greater or lesser degree, and “changes in the overall nexus of social interdependencies [...] may trigger trials of strength, in the form of acute and violent conflicts, or in the form of smoldering conflicts inherent in the structure of a society [and a community]” (Mennell, 1989, p. 264). Thus, it is clear why RsptL struggled with the human relations involved. If the situation had not been handled properly, different kinds of conflicts would be generated, both apparent and hidden. Therefore, in the process of reducing conflicts, and striking for a symmetric power balance and “a fair game”, RsptL had made her bottom line clear to colleagues. She explained that, when colleagues were trying not to be cooperative, she would stay firm with what she insisted: “I will definitely speak out, in a very polite manner, to help them to get back on track”.

From the above analysis, it is quite clear that although RsptL found the human relations involved were very complicated, with an asymmetric power balance and generated a lot of ups and downs, she could handle them properly. She said, “I think

if you ask whether I can handle the relations, my answer is: ‘yes, I can’, but deep inside my heart, I really don’t want to deal with them, don’t like to handle them!’”

On the other hand, the lesson RsptL learned was not to be that involved in whatever she experienced. Like her last unpleasant experience of getting colleagues to design activities for P.4 Chinese writing, RsptL said, “I didn’t want to surrender at that time, but I really didn’t have other choices, I had already tried all the methods, and so I surrendered, in fact I learned to surrender”. Elias’s (1956 & 1987) theory of knowledge – the theory of “involvement” and “detachment” – is insightful to explain how RsptL learned. According to Elias, the growth of human knowledge is a long-term development process along a continuum of involvement and detachment on the level of humanity as a whole. The terms “involvement” and “detachment” have been chosen in preference to other more familiar terms. This is because they on one hand express quite clear the idea that changes in a person’s relations with others (whenever with men, non-human objects or him/herself) and the psychological changes (say change on thoughts, feelings, drives, controls and self-regulations) are distinct but inseparable phenomena, and on the other hand suggest a processual model that indicating knowledge as a continuation of a whole range of balances between representations of communal self-experience and representations of objects that s/he experience and strive to know. The balance of involvement and detachment, or simply the degree of detachment, varies from individual to individual and from situation and situation, and the growth of human knowledge is thus a long-term process of rising standards of detachment, in contrast to involvement, which requires not only a rise in the standards of self-control, but also a transformation of personality structure (Elias, 1956, pp. 228-229; Mennell, 1989, pp. 162-166). That is to say, it is the way which oneself speaks and thinks that matters most. Accordingly, the

questions which Elias finds significant for oneself to gain a high level of detachment are: “What is it?” or “How are these events connected with each other?” rather than “What does it mean to me?” In other words, in order to gain a more reality-congruent (not fantasy content) representation of the situation, a disciplined and qualified exercise in “self distancing” is required. If one fails, then it will be extremely difficult for him/her to gain experience of certainty as long as s/he has little experience of it. The “principle of increasing facilitation” is that a greater capacity for distancing oneself for a while from the situation of the moment will open the way toward greater detachment from the wishes and fears of the moment, and gives a feeling of confidence, concomitant and increasing facilitation (Elias, 1956, p. 231; Elias, 1987, xv). Therefore, to the human relations that RsptL struggled with, as long as she realized that she had distanced herself from the complexity, she could get a greater control of what the relations were, why colleagues responded in certain ways, and eventually learned. She said, “I have learned to compromise, particularly after taking up this position”. M. Scott Peck’s (1978) famous quote, in *The road less traveled*, is illustrative to demonstrate the significance of this learning process: “Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”

To conclude, RsptL had a strong mission toward education which is characterized by a wish to teach children to learn to be good, however, she did not enjoy much the complex human relations involved in nurturing collegial collaboration and participation. She preferred the word “development” to “reform”, because the former

was more positive, indicating a progressive nature of doing things better. She agreed with the direction of the reform which meant to meet more the needs of students, but she commented on it as being “too fast”. She had tried very hard to motivate colleagues to function as a team and to contribute to curriculum development, however, they often negotiated and the results were not very rewarding. With a control over her emotions of not to be involved in the ups and downs she experienced, RsptL eventually learned to strike for a symmetric power balance between herself and colleagues, and to compromise for the goodness of developing quality curriculum to cater for the needs of students.

#### **5.4. RsptH: A Humble Teacher who Emphasizes Teachers’ Professional Development**

RsptH had been teaching in the current school for twelve years, first holding the position of Certificate Master/Mistress (CM) and five years later promoted to Assistant Master/Mistress (AM), in which she had gained a lot of administrative experience. She said, “when I was an AM, I was responsible for quite a lot of school administrative work, say recruiting students, organizing school timetable, arranging teaching loads, etc., and I had almost touched upon every single aspect”. Those administrative experiences were beneficial to RsptH, because after she earned her Bachelor degree in Education, and when EMB announced the new establishment of PSM(CD), her principal strongly recommended her to apply for it. She said, “when I got my degree, I did not have the chance to get to PSM (Primary School Master/Mistress) as no extra position was available that time, but when the school was offered with PSM(CD), the principal encouraged me to try”. The time taken by RsptH to decide whether to apply for the position was long and it was not until the



second year that she had made up her mind. She explained: “I wasn’t that aggressive at the beginning, but the principal kept saying: ‘you’re the one, not other people!’ ... In fact, there was another colleague who tried at the first year but failed, and the School Management Committee decided to leave it at that moment”. Eventually, she took up the job a year later with the goal to help colleagues to share and learn more.

Apart from the rich administrative experience, the strengths which RsptH accredited herself were being able to teach well and having “a good analytical mind” and “a high level of acceptance and tolerance”. RsptH found herself good at analyzing and handling things (including human relations) and very often could come up with different scenarios: “that means I can think of different possibilities, gather and analyze people’s opinions, and then choose the best option”. To the psychological qualities, acceptance meant: “I can accept different views”, and tolerance meant: “I can bear others’ views though I don’t agree with them”. RsptH also mentioned she was “lucky” to have an excellent performance in her last appraisal; she got full marks in all evaluation items, which included appearance, teaching, marking, relationship with colleagues, administration, and so. Certainly, RsptH had a high regard for her capacity; however, the experience she had after meeting the School Management Committee was a different story. She said, “after the meeting, my principal told me that: ‘you should have performed better, more aggressive, you know it’s me that helped you to get this!’” Though she was not sure about the intention of the principal, RsptH expressed clearly that “I did mind as she told me that I got the job not because of my ability, but with her help”. This hard feeling did not contradict what RsptH claimed as “lucky” in having excellent performance in the appraisal (and many of her claims throughout the interview of being “lucky” in promotion and finding people to

help for curriculum initiatives), but in fact inferred that luck or chance were not likely to have so much influence. Put another way, RsptH agreed that she had put a lot of effort into her job, but she showed “humility” in the face of her victory. This relates closely to Chinese patterns of socialization which value being gentle, humble, submissive and non-competitive (Ho, 1986; Bond, 1991). Using the concept of “locus of control” (Rotter, 1954 & 1966; Levenson, 1981; Lefcourt, 1982) – the degree to which an individual perceives the events that happen to be dependent on one’s own behaviour or the result of fate, luck, chance or powers beyond one’s personal control and understanding – to explain the situation, it is clear that RsptH had a high level of internal locus of control and perceived her achievements were contingent upon her own behaviours, her own efforts or her own relatively permanent characteristics. It is important to highlight that locus of control is crucial for understanding how people learn, as it reveals details of the nature of human learning in different learning situations. It refers to the internal state of mind of an individual concerning how he or she perceives reinforcements and how references are developed for directing behaviours. Accordingly, the appraisal results and the achievements she had in these years reinforced RsptH to establish a causal relationship between her efforts and the rewards that entailed.

When asked to comment on the current education and curriculum reform, RsptH found, “it’s world-shaking, one wave by one wave, and if you can’t grab them, then you will be pulled away by them”. There were both positive and negative meanings attributed to the expression. On one hand, RsptH agreed with the direction of the reform which highlighted the importance of “life-long learning”, “self-learning” and “learning to learn”, but on the other hand she did not support the way those principles

were put into practice. RsptH questioned if many of the reform practices, though had proved to be effective in other countries, would work in the local context. She said, “I feel that EMB often uses what other countries have done and then puts them in Hong Kong, I wonder if they work, and there’re also cultural issues among teachers in Hong Kong”. With this concern, therefore, RsptH was always critical of and selective toward the reform policies. She said, “mainly based on my experience, say in ‘developing students’ reading strategies’ project, others will implement in this way or that way, but I will implement with my own style, what I want, taking the school culture into consideration, and most important to influence colleagues to support what I believe”. When getting colleagues’ support, RsptH honoured her ability to express things; she claimed, “when I want to explain something, I will use examples and evidence, and people will understand and say: ‘oh, yes!’” To the “cultural issues” she mentioned, RsptH found teachers in Hong Kong were not used to new policies, not only a kind of psychological resistance but also the habit of not being active enough and not taking them seriously. Like the teachers in her school, although the principal had announced explicitly that they had to check e-mails in the school intranet, pay attention to notice board, sign after reading important notices about curriculum plans, and to prepare for meetings (say to meet deadlines and to divide the work among themselves), they always said they did not understand what the plans were. Therefore, when there came important curriculum plans, RsptH would use florescent pen to highlight the main points on the notice and to remind them from time to time. Another strategy was to compromise first with the principal and other subject panels on the plans, to have a consistent view when having Executive Meetings with teachers. Although this was quite a good strategy, RsptH still received attack from colleagues. She said, “there happened a few colleagues who were on the same line and attacked

me severely”. Also, she remembered once a colleague scolded at her in front of all the teachers in the staff room: “it never happened before, it was after I got promoted to PSM(CD) that a colleague scolded me in the staff room, I was calm and didn’t fight back; other colleagues kept saying: ‘say something, say something’; perhaps I was too slow and not used to respond in situations like this, but I did think ‘compromise will make a conflict much easy to resolve [a Chinese idiom]””.<sup>22</sup> RsptH further added, “I know this is because of his/her personality, s/he didn’t intend to scold at me, s/he will scold at anyone at anytime”. This demonstrated a good quality of acceptance and tolerance.

The conflict with colleagues actually made RsptH reflect again what education meant. She said, “in the past, I didn’t realize human relations were so critical, I used to think ‘education is simple’ that to teach well and having students to remember you after graduating were good enough; also, I thought as long as I had analyzed a problem with different perspectives and come up with the best direction, there shouldn’t be any objections, but now I really don’t understand why people think in certain ways”. Getting colleagues’ support in what she tried to implement was not an easy task, however, RsptH did not seem to bother much about the trouble but on the contrary had strengthened her belief; she said, “I have a stronger belief now ... people in the past used to term me as ‘easy to cry’, and so I have to behave much stronger ... to those who have different views, who keep rejecting new things, what I can do is to try my best to influence them”. With this mentality, RsptH seemed to enjoy the implementation process: “it isn’t that difficult [to implement certain curriculum plans],

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<sup>22</sup> Translation of this idiom from: <http://chi.proz.com/kudoz/772503> (accessed on July 13, 2007), and its face meaning is: “when you take a step back in a conflict, you will find the seas and the skies boundless”.

only if you have explained to them clearly and explicitly what to do and how to do, they will follow". This was also the positive experience I had with RsptH's participation in the "School-based Curriculum Development in Action" project, which primarily focused on "developing students' Chinese and English reading strategies". Actually, her colleagues were very willing to follow and contribute to what the project aimed to achieve. It is important to mention that, more than one-third of her colleagues attended the first project workshop on September 24, 2005; also, they were all participative and constructive at the Staff Development Day that I organized on January 3, 2006.<sup>23</sup> Using Hui and Cheung's (2004) conceptual model to explain the orientation of RsptH's colleagues, they are more likely to fall onto the category of "followers" who are characterized by a relatively high level of commitment toward school but a relatively low level of self-efficacy.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the "attack" was basically the defense mechanism for their lack of confidence, and thus RsptH was recommended to focus on developing their self-efficacy through distributing appropriate task-specific leadership practices to them, giving them confidence, and reinforcing their belief system through doing and experiencing (Hui & Cheung, 2006).

On the other hand, the conflict with colleagues made RsptH more sensitive to her thinking and behaviour. She said, "from my colleagues, I realized the fact that teachers do have a lot of weaknesses, and therefore I need to be more reflective, to

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<sup>23</sup> Details of the Staff Development Day are available at: <http://home.ied.edu.hk/~skfhui/sc.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Hui and Cheung (2004) have developed a 2-dimension conceptual model, using the constructs of "organizational commitment" and "self-efficacy", to explain how church members learn and behave after participating in an adventure team-building camp. The four distinct types of people of an organization are: "leaders" (with a high level of organizational commitment and a high level of self-efficacy), "followers" (with a high level of organizational commitment but a low level of self-efficacy), "challengers" (with a low level of organizational commitment but a high level of self-efficacy), and "outsiders" (with a low level of organizational commitment and a low level of self-efficacy).

always try to improve myself, and to become more critical to the influence I have on my students; also, if I can see the weaknesses of others, I wonder if others can also see my weaknesses, and therefore I need to think more how I could do things better and how I could influence others". The phrase "to influence colleagues" had been emphasized throughout the interview, and this seemed to be a dangerous thought because the critique of the postmodern is a critique of what is being given, the "incredulity toward metanarratives", and that it is not warranted for someone to attempt to give "meaning" for others. However, RsptH always bewared not to be manipulative, and the expectation she had on colleagues was minimal and fundamental, emphasizing teachers' professional development. She explained: "what I really want is to influence colleagues to do well in their teaching; according to my experience, teaching is most important, teachers are most significant to whether students learn; though you have prepared good materials, when there comes different teachers, the results would be very different, and therefore if we all have the same goal of achieving certain outputs [quality student learning], try our very best to do it, then we are able to claim we do the job properly". To this expectation, RsptH was optimistic that: "I believe if I can do it, why not you!" The rewarding example that RsptH cited was her first attempt of a Quality Education Fund (QEF) proposal which got approved. She said, "we are granted with 120 thousand dollars, quite a large amount of money, I feel that colleagues are all proud of it; now we have distributed the work to different teams, some activities have been conducted and the results are quite satisfying". What encouraged RsptH more from this QEF project was that: "teachers begin to open their classroom, to peer observe each other's lessons, and to discuss how each other teach". The professional capacity of teachers could therefore be tested. Though it was the second year which RsptH worked as a curriculum leader,



she on the whole was satisfied with the achievement. When asked to rate the performance so far out of a scale of 1 to 10, RsptH considered it as “somewhere between 3 and 4”. She said, “this is a demonstration of my efforts, I know I don’t have remarkable leadership skills, especially when meeting with other PSM(CD)s, but I’m satisfied, this is because to pace the school to achieving quality curriculum which people acknowledge is important”. Such satisfaction was a sign of reward to RsptH’s effort in school curriculum development, however, when asked if she would take up the position of PSM(CD) again if she had a choice, her answer was: “No, if I had been thinking more rationally and carefully!” She admitted that she did not look into the issue thoroughly, and since at that moment she had already had the intention to take up the job, it would be difficult for her to “stand back” and not to do it. Anyway, the feeling she had so far with the job was: “because of the satisfaction, I can still stand for it!”

RsptH always put strong emphasis on teachers’ professional development and was resolute to what she believed. Say for example, in the very first stage of participating in the “School-based Curriculum Development in Action” project, her principal was not very supportive, and RsptH had put a lot of effort into making it work. She recalled what the principal said: “we have already joined the ‘English Reading Scheme’ of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, they will collect students’ academic results, and I think the other ‘reading strategies’ project will collect too their academic results and push you, therefore, you better decide if we can handle them at the same time”.<sup>25</sup> In fact, RsptH’s principal had misunderstood the background of the “School-based Curriculum Development in Action” project, which was not to spoon

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<sup>25</sup> Note that because of not having enough schools to participate, the “English Reading Scheme” of the Chinese University of Hong Kong eventually called off.

feed teachers and students with ready-made reading strategies and push for significant academic improvement, but to support and facilitate the practice of school-based curriculum development in school through empowering and building on teachers' tacit knowledge. Accordingly, RsptH had not only tried hard to break down the stereotype, but also lobbied colleagues to collectively demonstrate their willingness of the participation for the goodness of students. She said, "many of my colleagues find it difficult to communicate with the principal because she won't listen ... I therefore talked to the English teachers one by one, to if see they were in conflict to participate in two projects, like having more workload, and to see if they really wanted to develop students' English reading strategies ... then two days later, in a teacher seminar, the principal did raise the issue, and I then invited those teachers to stand up and share their views". Of course, teachers were all supportive, and this indicated the positive influence which RsptH had on them, and the good virtue of being resolute in emphasizing and excelling teachers' professional development.

To conclude, RsptH was a humble teacher who liked to claim "luck" in the face of her victory of excellent appraisal performance, promotion, and getting external support. She agreed with the direction of the reform which emphasized "life-long learning", but she did not support its implementation and even found it "world-shaking". She questioned if many of the reform practices, which were found to be effective in other countries, would work in the local context. Therefore, with her rich administrative experience, RsptH had been critical and selective to those practices, and implemented them in her own way, taking the school factor into account. Although many of the colleagues were willing to follow her curriculum plan, some of them still attacked her. These had not weakened RsptH's belief, but made her to be more sensitive and



reflective to what she insisted as to influence colleagues to do well their teaching and to develop professionally. Because of the strong emphasis she put on developing teachers professionally, both daily classroom teaching and trials of curriculum planning, the school was on the right track to quality curriculum.

### **5.5. RsptN: Clear about What Curriculum Development Means But is Not Supported by the New Principal**

RsptN had started her career as a primary school teacher since 1988, and before joining the current school in 1994, she had been teaching in 2 other primary schools. The reason for RsptN to choose the profession was interesting: “all my family members are in the teaching profession and it’s quite natural for me to become a teacher, or I should say I didn’t think of other choices that time”. She added, “also, I was calculating, because the salary was good, with lots of holidays, and only half-day work!” Though at first the incentive was confined to some cost-benefit rules, she did develop a firm belief toward education in her later study.<sup>26</sup> She said, “it’s after getting my degree that I have a deeper view on education, I feel that when a child receives education, his/her teachers are most influential ... I like more the profession, and I have this strong belief [toward education] till now”. This belief, as retrieved later in our dialogue, was “to have the students ultimately to depend on themselves”. After obtaining her Bachelor degree in Education in 1997, she was promoted to the position of Assistant Master/Mistress (AM) and a year later to Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM). During her service as PSM, RsptN was given many chances to participate in seminars and workshops, and had already been involved in a lot of initiatives relating

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<sup>26</sup> Cost-benefit rules assume that people are able to generate and choose a repertoire of strategies for maximizing their overall welfare (Payne, Bettman & Johnson, 1992).

to curriculum development: “my last principal gave me a lot of opportunities to work for curriculum development, say organizing a curriculum integration week and different school-wide activities to engage students to learn, however, those were quite superficial”. With this experience, therefore, when the last principal asked her to try to apply for the position of PSM(CD), RsptN’s response was positive. She said, “three years ago, the principal asked if I was interested in the job, her thinking was to have a PSM transferred to work for curriculum development, it was definitely advantageous to the school, this is because, when from the experience of other PSM(CD)s who I talked to, there were inherent difficulties if the position were promoted from an APSM(CD) or hired from outside or promoted from a librarian”. The difficulties were not generated from a lack of acquaintance with existing staff, but a dilemma of authority that the job entailed. RsptN explained: “there’s a view that the position is temporary, it lacks credibility, and thus it might not be necessarily consented by teachers of the executive body, or even other ordinary teachers”.

At the first two years working as PSM(CD), RsptN found her work satisfying; she said, “the last principal did trust me and gave me full support in curriculum development, it was quite handy and therefore I had developed much confidence in my work”. She added, “there wasn’t much pressure at the first two years, in fact I can handle much work pressure”. However, when it came to the point of translating and implementing different reform policies in school, there were still barriers. RsptN made a joke that, “when colleagues saw me, they would smile at me and say: ‘please you don’t walk close to me!’, ‘what do you want!’, ‘please don’t bother me!’, and ‘I don’t want to see you!’” Of course, her colleagues knew RsptN was a nice person and could make fun of her, and therefore they demonstrated their resistance with those

expressions. This resistance was caused mostly by a change over her role from a PSM to PSM(CD); she said, “in the past, my role was more like a follower, but now, I’m more like a leader”. RsptN further explained that, “I think it’s because we were used to the past centralized curriculum, passed down from the top, and which only required us to teach what was given, but now, we really need time to work it out”.

What RsptN pictured was EMB’s high expectation put on school and school teachers: “While following the central curriculum, schools should have some flexibility in school-based curriculum development to satisfy the needs of their students.”

(Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 1, p. 7)

Like other PSM(CD)s, after taking up the position, RsptN received a series of training which she found useful. One of those she appreciated was offered by the Department of Curriculum & Instruction, Hong Kong Institute of Education. She said, “the training of HKIED (The Hong Kong Institute of Education) was really good, not only taught us a lot of theories and knowledge, but also allowed us to put theories into practice”. Following this comment, RsptN put forth a strong criticism that, resources should not only be put on the training of PSM(CD)s but also to the principals and teachers. She found this was the fundamental weakness of the reform: “this relates to the issue of credibility of PSM(CD)s; it’s wise for the EMB to try to claim to the authority of higher education institutes, to empower the leadership of PSM(CD)s, but the training to the principals and teachers is obviously not enough; they don’t even know what’s in the reform, what’s in some of the important government documents, or some of the successful examples of other schools; if they have a chance to look at them, they would have much confidence to follow, much confidence to see how their own school could implement, and those successful examples in fact are encouraging”.

When further asked to clarify the kind of training that was needed, RsptN's answer was straightforward: "it's just about education theories, say for example, the phrase 'high order thinking', they simply don't know what it's about". Of course, it is debatable if principals and teachers were clear about issues of the reform, but RsptN's criticism raised an important concern that collegial collaboration and participation as well as the support of principal were crucial to the reform.

When asked to comment on the current education and curriculum reform, RsptN answer was noteworthy: "Lost!" She found herself always got lost with the reform; she said, "I sometimes feel lost; what I mean 'lost' is that I don't know 'what to reform?', 'what are the steps?', 'how to lead colleagues?', 'are they cooperative?', 'do they agree with what you're doing?', and 'is the principal supportive?'; even if I sit down and think, I couldn't get the answers". The pressure came partly from the expectations of others, but mainly from her eagerness to outdo others. She said, "being a leader, you need to have a mission, be responsible, and if you believe in the reform, you really need to do something, to demonstrate what you do, and to see if those curriculum initiatives work". In fact, like other respondents, RsptN agreed with the direction of the reform. She said, "I won't question about the reform or what's being put in the government documents, because they are so pleasing, for example to train students with the ability to learn, and something like 'ability-oriented', these are by all means undeniable ... however, when it comes to practice, we have to consider as well many school factors and the characteristics of students". RsptN explained that, "when you want to implement something, there's always the situation that some teachers just don't grasp the meaning, don't understand, or some might think there isn't really a need, and so sometimes there's conflict". To solve the conflict, though

not very often as RsptN mentioned, her strategy was “to communicate and explain”. She said, “we do respect each other ... for the students, finally, we would implement [some of the curriculum plans] and see if they worked ... also, we adjusted, it wasn’t the case that we insisted on what we believed, but to discuss and compromise until we met the equilibrium [consensus]”. This again demonstrated RsptN’s long and good relationship with colleagues could help to ease the process of curriculum implementation.

RsptN further exemplified the situation as “chaotic”; she echoed what she learned from one of her teachers in the Chinese University of Hong Kong: “Education reform is chaotic, and you will find the way out after the mess of trials and errors!” She found different schools had put in place different curriculum practices and policies, say for example “service learning”, “project learning”, however, she wondered if changes should ultimately happen in the classrooms. She said, “for example, what we mean by ‘generic skills’ should be practised in the classrooms”. This comment was insightful and matched exactly with what Scheerens and Bosker (1997) pointed out in the book *The foundations of educational effectiveness*, that schools would not be able to accomplish anything if the process at the classroom level was not linked to or in gear with the process at the school level. In other words, the process of student learning at the school level (degree of achievement-oriented policy, educational leadership, consensus, cooperative planning of teachers, quality of school curricula in terms of content covered and formal structure, orderly atmosphere, and evaluative potential) and process of student learning at the classroom level (time on task, structured teaching, opportunity to learn, high expectations of pupils’ progress, degree of evaluation and monitoring of pupils’ progress, and reinforcement) should inform

and be “tapped” with each other (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997, p. 46; Caldwell, 1998, pp. 34-35). Therefore, the processes and the linkage at the outset need to be optimal in order for teachers to be responsive to student learning. When asked if she doubted about the reform, RsptN’s reply was: “No, in fact I agree a lot!” Apart from the barriers in the implementation mentioned before, what RsptN found not enough was “the time [set for teachers to work it out]”. She added, “teachers are not even having enough energy ... we don’t really have the time to sit down and discuss, don’t have the time to look into materials, since apart from teaching, we have much other work to do, say school administration and personal development, and this is the major obstacle”. Therefore, throughout the process of developing and implementing school curriculum plans, RsptN would by all means support and accompany colleagues; she said, “I will try my best to attend each of the meetings, just to sit there and support; this is because sometimes they just don’t understand something, perhaps some of the theories or background, and thus are not yet ready to handle things smoothly”.

Based on the analysis so far, it appears that RsptN was clear about the work of curriculum development and being a PSM(CD), she not only criticized the biased allocation of resources, but also ascertained the necessity of support of school principal and colleagues, and the linkage of student learning at school and classroom levels. Among the above, what RsptN at the moment suffered most was to win the support of the new principal.<sup>27</sup> RsptN’s new principal came at the end of the last academic year, with the foremost mission of rescuing the school from not having

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<sup>27</sup> Note that it was because of the lack of trust of the new principal that RsptN felt uneasy with the video-taping. She got emotional and cried when talking about this lack of trust, therefore, in order to protect the respondent from any of the unnecessary harms, only brief account of the issue, and no quotes, will be reported.

enough P.1 students and being forced to close. When this mission failed after two months effort over the summer in recruiting students, the principal did not trust her anymore. A clear sign of this was to replace RsptN with another teacher to do the liaison of the school's participation in the "School-based Curriculum Development in Action" project. RsptN did challenge the decision but received no proper reply. Informal chats with other teachers who participated in the project retrieved an interesting thought of the principal that, when the school got "killed", it would be due not to his inability, but the unwillingness of teachers to work with him. To this, RsptN simply thought the principal was finding a scapegoat, and thus all his actions to reduce RsptN's power in curriculum development were examples of that, and remember in the initial meeting I had with the principal and other teachers in cultivating the project objectives and understanding more the school environment, the principal put forth the claim, in front of other teachers, that they were not very eager to work on and improve the curriculum.<sup>28</sup> The principal intended to strengthen the thought that his teachers had a lack of enthusiasm, and therefore RsptN's observation was well-grounded. To this lack of trust, RsptN's strategy was to keep herself at low profile and not to have further conflict with the principal, however, she did not give in her belief nor questioned her ability, but looked for the chance to prove to others. Not being supported by the new principal indeed allowed RsptN to figure out clearly the critical factors that are associated with successful curriculum leaders. These critical

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<sup>28</sup> Right after RsptN agreed to participate in the project, her principal invited me for an initial meeting with him and other teachers, to explain the project objectives and to compromise on the curriculum areas that they would like to develop. In that meeting, the principal claimed teachers in school were not very eager to work on and improve the curriculum, and I was thereafter in a serious debate with him. This is because, first, I think it is inappropriate for a school principal to criticize any of the school members in front of others; and second, it is my expectation that in any circumstance the school principal should empower the staff.

factors include: “knowledgeable both in theories and subject matters”, “having a good relationship with principal and colleagues”, “having a good network with other schools and higher education institutes”, “high ability to work things out (school administration and curriculum policies and initiatives)”, “be creative to the direction but sensitive to the details”, and “having a high EQ”. Unless a trusting and cooperative relationship is established between school principals, curriculum leaders and teachers, successful development of school curriculum and successful implementation of education and curriculum reform will be difficult.

To conclude, with a good experience in leading the school curriculum and nurturing collegial participation, and a contrast from being supported by the previous principal to not being trusted at all, RsptN was clear about what curriculum development and being a PSM(CD) meant. She agreed with the direction of the reform and would not question about its intention, however, with the experience that teachers were used to follow the central curriculum, she found herself getting “lost”. She was not clear on what to focus, how to implement and how to lead colleagues, and therefore she questioned the “credibility” of the position of curriculum leader, stressing the need to gain the consensus of the principal and other teachers in school. Because of her good relationship with colleagues, RsptN had communicated and explained to them many reform policies, and practiced them in school accordingly. However, since the new principal did not at all trust and support her, RsptN was suffering at the moment.



## **CHAPTER 6 REFLEXIVE COMMENTARIES**

The analysis of curriculum leaders' attitudes toward action research and the stories of the five particular curriculum leaders generate three significant themes and thereafter two thoughts for further (reflexive) discussion. First, there are two conditions that are necessary to rethink the effectiveness of action research to facilitate curriculum leaders' participation in school-based curriculum research and development. Second, from the interviews, the five curriculum leaders agreed with the direction of the education and curriculum reform, however, they found the agenda problematic, creating different problems during its realization. Third, when taking the leadership role of translating and implementing reform policies and practices in school, they all encountered different measures of difficulties, which ranged from the lack of support to the complexity of the nature of leadership. The complexity relates primarily to the "nature" of the present reform policy, and thus there comes an attempt to decipher a postmodern reform policy, which reassesses the policy on three dimensions: its underlying political intentions (of what the school curriculum aims to achieve), its pedagogical strategies (which the reform policy employed to demonstrate reasoning for individual students), and its representational styles (which the reform policy defines). Finally, the thought of criticizing as self-referencing is presented as a final word of this thesis.

A common understanding of action research is that it is aimed at professional and curriculum development, and that education enables people to fulfill human good, in terms of exercising individual agency, subjectivity and rationality. However, this educational thinking does not sufficiently take account of the postmodern thinking, because such educational theories and practices are founded in the modernist tradition.

The challenge of the postmodern to educational theories and practices is unlimited because education, in the eyes of postmodern theorists, is a socio-cultural structure and process which aims to present (and re-present), create (and re-create) and disseminate (and re-disseminate) what is normatively regarded as reasonable and legitimate. In other words, the view of action research for development and the assumption of education as the vehicle to realize the Enlightenment ideals do not stand, since there is no unified concept, structure or hierarchy of knowledge that educators used to refer to. In this sense, the discourse of postmodern is often associated with plurality and difference (Lash, 1990). Instead of going to an extreme of celebrating relativism and the position that anything or everything goes, there needs to be an account of how the curriculum leaders acquire knowledge and thereafter to lay a “foundation” for conveying “warranted” claims or discourses of educational theories and practices. The position of Usher and Edwards (1994) is forward-looking:

Since a postmodern perspective is itself a questioning one, it does at the very least provide an alternative discourse (a different way of speaking, thinking and acting) which can be appropriated for a critical examination of the theory and practice of education. (Usher & Edwards, 1994, pp. 25-26)

The hope is a different way of looking at education and education process, specifically the way which knowledge and meaning is organized and transmitted, as well as a different way of documenting and promoting (on the side of policy makers) and accepting and approaching (on the side of practitioners) action research and the reform.

In the following, the three significant themes and the two thoughts are reflexively discussed in the form of commentaries. By *reflexive commentaries*, it refers to the

third role – of critical reflexivity – that a dialogical method requires the researcher to perform. That is to say, any understanding of the claims involves transforming and distancing oneself critically from taken-for-granted knowledge and beliefs, and bearing in mind on one hand the dangers and limitations of the claims conveyed, and looking for the significance and possibilities on the other.

### **6.1. Rethinking the Effectiveness of Action Research**

On the basis of the quantitative evidence up to this stage, there are at least two conditions that are necessary to rethink the effectiveness of action research to facilitate curriculum leaders' participation in school-based curriculum research and development. These are (i) the attention to a pedagogical sense of the significance of research as a means to provide solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies and (ii) the development of the curriculum leaders' self-efficacy and an internal locus of control in their role.

First, although by definition action research aims to solve problems that teachers face in their classrooms, a pedagogical sense of the significance of research in any form has to be addressed directly. It is not skills, a modernist approach of means-end rationality, that matter most. It is the consequences of the action research on personal commitment and development, specifically on providing individual solutions for teaching and learning deficiencies, that counts. Action research is a practical science (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993), however, the ultimate goal should not be placed on emphasizing the technological sense of equipping knowledge and skills on the side of practitioners, or highlighting any criterion of efficiency or performativity of developing determinable school curriculum. The argument is clear: “classroom [action] research, well informed by pedagogical and content knowledge, makes a

direct contribution to the advancement of pedagogical content knowledge and constitutes an act of scholarship of teaching” (Paulsen, 2001, p. 28). In other words, on top of the government’s expectations of action research for teacher professional development and school-based curriculum development, it needs to provide curriculum leaders and teachers the chance to investigate educational issues and take action to improve or change practice in their own authentic classroom situation.

Second, besides placing an emphasis on action research in the official reform documents, the development of the curriculum leaders’ self-efficacy and an internal locus of control appear to be an alternative objective. This is about stimulating these psychological components while emphasizing curriculum leaders’ duty to perform and promote action research. This process is important in a Chinese context, where the pattern of socialization emphasizes a patriarchal social structure and this can erect barriers to the development of these psychological components (Ho, 1986; Bond, 1991). An implication for reform is to try to get curriculum leaders to understand and challenge their own views and conceptions of the present education context (Murtonen, 2005), and to get them involved in the thinking of how to approach the reform.

## **6.2. Education and Curriculum Reform as Challenge**

As retrieved from the interviews, all of the five curriculum leaders spoke and thought of the education and curriculum reform as a means for students to achieve their full potentials. Their understanding of the reform was grounded on the basis of their experience of the old education system, which was closed and had little reference to the real world. They saw the need for an open system which should have more reference to what students need to perform in the real world and emphasizing life-long

learning. Openness simply refers to new experience with new and multiple meanings. Therefore, they all thought of the reform as a process of development to bring in new ideas and values. However, when it came to practice, specifically under their capacity in leading curriculum change in school and the classrooms, they found it problematic. The challenge was two-fold: the official claim that the reform is “for betterment”, and the diffusion of power over individual school and teachers.

First, they all agreed with the direction of the reform, and the reason they attributed to such a belief could be reduced to the “goodness” of students. They found what were being proposed in the documents could help students to excel their potentials. Typical comments of this “goodness” included: “I will select those [reform practices] which I think I’m capable of doing and good for the school [and students]” (RsptK), “everyone’s talking about ‘assessment for learning’ ... it’s good for the students” (RsptY), and “I put strong emphasis on students’ needs” (RsptL). They questioned the old practice of transmission of knowledge, but welcomed the ideas of equipping students with generic skills and for life-long learning. To a great extent, they appreciated the official statement of the overall aims of education for the 21st century.<sup>29</sup> Typical views included: “I agree that there’s a need to reform education ... what is mentioned in the documents is good since it focuses on student learning” (RsptY), “students are able to acquire knowledge by themselves, and therefore I agree

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<sup>29</sup> The aims of education for the 21st century is: “To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team-spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large.” (Curriculum Development Council, 2002, Booklet 1, pp. 1-2)

with the emphasis on developing students' generic skills, or nurturing more their interest to read, etc." (RsptL), and "I won't question about the reform or what's being put in the government documents, because they are so pleasing" (RsptN).

Accordingly, they all had a great hope of making the most of themselves (or their self) to contribute to its success, and this was also the motive for them to take up the position of PSM(CD). They participated in trainings and developed many skills in translating and implementing different reform policies and practices.

Throughout their endeavor in moving the school forward for quality education and curriculum, the five curriculum leaders realized human capital is most crucial. They had been critical and selective to those reform policies, finding the best practices that allowed their school to build on its existing strengths and excel student learning, however, the majority of their colleagues did not appreciate the reform idea. The comment of RsptK is illuminative; she said, "they seem to dislike it more than me ... because I'm in this position, I have to like it". RsptL felt upset with the human relations involved and RsptH's colleagues even attacked her. Only RsptY was able to win the support of colleagues, to learn with them, and to cultivate their commitment through getting their consensus and working together in a democratic and open atmosphere. Such a resistance was understandable and the five curriculum leaders had pointed out many of the reasons behind. Among those, the high expectation put on teachers was most critical. For example, RsptY found the non-stop demand of trainings for teachers heartbreaking, RsptL observed there were teachers who always liked to defend or being pessimistic, RsptH discovered teachers were accustomed to a passive role in curriculum planning, and RsptN reminded teachers were used to follow the central curriculum. The reform as presented to most teachers was a form of

challenge, which used to create pressure not only to their work but life. To this situation, regardless how the five curriculum leaders perceived their role in leading curriculum change (developing: RsptK; facilitative: RsptY; getting stronger: RsptL & RsptH; reflective: RsptN), they did question their original belief of the reform as a platform to bring in new ideas and values. Referring to the argument of the rules of language games, it is clear that descriptive phrase of “reform is good for the students” is not translatable into prescriptive phrase of “teachers should by all means help to realize it”. In other words, the “languages” and “meanings” of the educational policies and practices that are documented in the reform are not necessarily familiar or communicable to teachers. As questioned by Lyotard (1984 [1979]): “What I say is true because I prove that it is – but what proof is there that my proof is true?” (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], p. 24) Therefore, with the effort put in translating those languages and meanings to colleagues, and in implementing those policies and practices in school, the five curriculum leaders were unconvinced with the reform ideal. They termed the reform in a negative way: “never stop” (RsptK), “too fast” (RsptY & RsptL), “lost” and “chaotic” (RsptN), and even “world-shaking” (RsptH). They found the reform failed to recognize the humanity of teachers (and somehow students), and thus presented (and re-presented) to them as challenge. Therefore, the critique is clear that, *the grand narrative of the reform, as to sustain and embody itself “for betterment”, had lost its legacy and credibility for quality education and curriculum in school.*

Another challenge to the realization of the reform is rooted in the diverse nature of schools. No doubt, the reform documents highlighted the fact that individual schools do have the power and freedom to develop and put into practice their own curriculum,

and to realize their goals for quality school education. However, schools are of different size, scale and structure. Some of them are really small (RsptK & RsptL), some are half-day schools (RsptY & RsptL), and some are of limited space and equipments (RsptY & RsptH). Therefore, when it comes to the assessment of school effectiveness, there are constant checks and balances to whether a particular school has implemented some of the curriculum and instructional strategies which are thought to be “significant”. Typical examples were found in the five interviews, like the suggestion of RsptK’s principal on “theme-based teaching”, RsptY’s critique of using computer software for “project learning”, the lack of computer of RsptL’s students, the insistence of RsptH’s principal to join the “English Reading Scheme”, and to have a good understanding of many education theories, like “high order thinking”, among RsptN’s colleagues. There was insufficient guidance on how to put into practice the reform ideas, and schools would be penalized, specifically in School Self-Assessment and External School Review, if they could not keep up with the trend. This punishment in fact signifies Michel Foucault’s formula of the diffusion of disciplinary power. In the book *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*, Foucault (1977 [1975]) made clear that “disciplinary power” is a system of surveillance which is exercised continuously at a minimal cost. It is the general practice of domination in modern societies that transforms the scale, object and modality of the exercise of power to all knowable individuals. In Foucault’s term, it is “the soul”, or “knowable man”, as conceptualized in terms of psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness and individuality, which serves as the direct target of exercise of power.



The effect of disciplinary power is that it is internalized to the point that each person is his or her own overseer. The success of disciplinary power connects to the use of simple instruments, such as hierarchical observation, normalizing practice and judgement, and the system of examination. Disciplinary power is exercised on non-observance of imposed terms that aims to narrow the gap between humanity's deviances and societal norms. As put by Foucault (1977 [1975]):

[...] as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts [...] (Foucault, 1977 [1975], p. 193)

Since the political technology of disciplinary power is to maintain governmentality and social regulation as a whole, there is a diffusion of disciplinary mechanism throughout the whole society. Through this diffusion, *a social network of visibility, the "all-seeing", and a set of normative guidelines are developed*. In other words, there is a "power of mind over mind" (Foucault, 1977 [1975], pp. 206-207), and disciplinary power is exercised on the whole indefinite domain over all individuals. This mechanism of diffusion of disciplinary power, as argued by Foucault, exists in all aspects of our society and social structures. From the interviews, it is clear that the five curriculum leaders and their principal and other teachers concerned were bothered with some forms of external criteria of measuring school effectiveness. They had developed the "right" guidelines for actions, and internalized the power-knowledge formula of thinking of their school as a place at which knowledge is produced and power is exercised. As pointed out by Foucault, "power and knowledge directly imply one another [...] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and

constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1977 [1975], p. 27). Therefore, they were all scared of the functional effects of punishment, put emphasis on “significant” practices, and thus virtually realized the “all-seeing” of “power of mind over mind”. Reform could never be context-free and in order to justify the knowledge of “it is good for the students”, disciplinary power was therefore diffused in school to every single individual, teachers in particular.

To conclude, education and curriculum reform presented to the five curriculum leaders was nothing but challenge, because too much expectation was put on them and other teachers as agents for change. In order to make possible the reform, in terms of what it means to “enlighten” students, there was a diffusion of disciplinary power to teachers that the government bodies have employed different review measures and mechanisms to make teachers afraid of not doing it “properly”. With the limitations of guiding individual school and teachers in the relationship of theory and thought to practice, the reform on one hand turned out to be a language game that lacks justification or proofs, and produced knowledge and exercised power on the other.

### **6.3. Complexity of Curriculum Leadership**

Experience of the five curriculum leaders suggested curriculum leadership was not at all simple. Complexity arising not only from the reality that schools are complex, nonlinear and unpredictable systems, but also from the dynamics and process of interaction of the elements involved. These elements, as retrieved from the interviews, included: (i) the necessary support of principal; (ii) consensus, participation and collaboration of colleagues; (iii) professional needs of teachers; (iv) characteristics and needs of students; (v) the school culture (or the diverse nature of schools as discussed before); (vi) review of school effectiveness; (vii) issue of theories to

practices; and (viii) the personal qualities of PSM(CD)s. The interaction of these elements did not follow any simple models of causality, linearity or stability, but acted in very unpredictable ways. RsptK was young and supported by the principal, but participation of her colleagues was still minimal. RsptY knew how to plan and implement the curriculum with colleagues and even learned from the school review, but the school environment and lack of support to teachers' professional needs did set limits for trying out some initiatives. RsptL emphasized designing curriculum to meet the needs of students, but the process of leading colleagues to function as a team and the outside pressure of implementing "significant" curriculum strategies just upset her. RsptH possessed many good qualities of a leader, especially in leading colleagues to develop professionally for quality school curriculum, but she had not yet got the consensus of all teachers. RsptN was clear about the limitations of putting educational theories into practices, in a local context in particular, but the long tradition for teachers to follow the centralized curriculum and the distrust of the new principal really put her in a difficult situation. Therefore, they described their journey of leading curriculum change in school as "sometimes learn to let go" (RsptK), "not smart" (RsptY), "learned to surrender" (RsptL), "can still stand for it" (RsptH) and "sometimes feel lost" (RsptN).

Difficulty in curriculum leadership, as experienced by the five curriculum leaders, matches well with the theory of complexity in educational administration.

Complexity theory is the offspring of chaos theory, but moves beyond it. Whilst chaos theory emphasizes the unpredictability of the future and the importance of examining nonlinear systems, complexity theory "incorporates, indeed requires, unpredictable fluctuations and non-average behaviour in order to account for change,

development and novelty through self-organization” (Morrison, 2002, p. 7). In contrast to the conventional wisdom of thinking of social rules and behaviours in schools as regular and progressive in nature, complexity theory signals a paradigm shift of accounting for change in schools as irregular, diverse, uncontrollable and unpredictable. Complexity theory examines phenomena as “complex responsive process” (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2000), with components at one level acting as the building blocks for components at another. At the center of this process, there involves dynamical interactions of the constituent elements, as well as an emergence of structures and social relations which strive for unachievable equilibrium or homeostasis. It is therefore not possible to determine in advance the results of that emergence, but the fact is that the systems are constantly modifying and rearranging their building blocks in the light of new experience and learning. Systems with similar initial conditions can produce qualitatively dissimilar outcomes, and it is this idea of uncertainty that distances complexity theory from any project of modernity.

Leadership in the eyes of complexity theorists, for example Morrison (2002), is distributed throughout the school and is a contract to bring out the best in everyone for the “good” of the school. Complex organizations have their own internal dynamics which is not always contingent on leaders, and “order without control” and “leaders by not leading” are therefore possible (Morrison, 2002, pp. 58-59). No single person can display leadership in all contexts, and there is a need for leaders to respond to the needs of the school and to spread leadership practices. Multiple channels of free and rich communication are deemed crucial to co-evolution of the school and its environment. The task of school leaders is then to disseminate information rather than restrict it. However, communication could be a source of chaos and it is

therefore necessary for school leaders to be critical to meanings of the policies and practices that conveyed. As highlighted by Morrison (2002):

Words are inherently ambiguous; not only do they mean different things to different people but what is innocuous to one party can cause offence to another. [...] the implication is that the sender has to consider the possible or likely effects of the message on the receivers. (Morrison, 2002, p. 153)

The sender does not only include school leaders and administrators, but also refers to curriculum developers and policy makers, specifically to what they see as “good” at both policy and school level. To put it another way, with the emphasis of complexity theory on free and rich communication from the curriculum developers and policy makers to the wider public, the demand for a policy with appropriate language and will is huge. Therefore, it is necessary for government bodies, curriculum developers and policy makers to reflect on what the postmodern indicates as “a mood or a state of mind” and to postulate the possibilities of a postmodern reform policy. In the following, the idea of a postmodern reform policy is discussed.

#### **6.4. Toward a Postmodern Reform Policy**

With the critique of the postmodern toward the current education and curriculum reform, the questions left for curriculum developers and policy makers are: “What does the adjective ‘just’ mean at the level of education and curriculum reform?” and “Are there any ‘justifiable’ epistemological bases for cognitive, ethical and political judgements?” To decipher a postmodern reform policy starts on the policy itself, which demands reconceptualization on at least three dimensions of thoughts, namely

the political, pedagogical and representational dimensions.<sup>30</sup> That a postmodern reform policy should distinguish itself by its *political intentions* of what the school curriculum aims to achieve (responsibility to otherness vs. responsibility to act), its *pedagogical strategies* which the reform policy employed to demonstrate reasoning for individual students (reason as critique vs. reason as coercion), and its *representational styles* which the reform policy defines (policy as discourse vs. policy as text).

The political dimension examines the intentions of the school curriculum as responding to the ethical and political “needs” of individual students. The traditional sense of *responsibility to act* in the world in a justifiable way, a moral-prudential obligation to acquire reliable knowledge and act to achieve practical ends in some defensible manner, is not satisfactory to account for the appropriate intentions of the school curriculum. This is because, to meet this sense of responsibility, on the level of everyday life, individuals are expected to interact with each other in a responsible way, so that they should acquire the highest practical ends of living with each other peacefully, avoiding harm physically, and meeting expectations of other members of society ethically (White, 1991, pp. 19-23). On the level of politics, these practical ends include decisive support to political profiles and decisions, and respectable realization of documented political values. However, in a modernist perspective, “[t]o act in this sense means inevitably closing off sources of possible insight and treating people as alike for the purpose of making consistent and defensible decisions about alternative courses of action” (White, 1991, p. 21). Any of the personal and political dissonance is not allowed, and is then either pushed aside, devalued or forced to

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<sup>30</sup> This idea generates from the work of Conatas (1998), in the essay “Deciphering postmodern educational research”.

conform or disciplined. This dissonance is exactly what the “others” – the group of people who have been marginalized and forcibly homogenized – demanded or voiced. Therefore, in a postmodernist perspective, to better prepare students for the future challenges, another sense of responsibility, *responsibility to otherness*, is needed. When thinking and constructing the reform policy, curriculum developers and policy makers should not reject but expose the ineradicable presence of dissonance to the dominating narrative traditional thoughts, to challenge their harmony and unity, to foster otherness, and to take “others” into account. Again, there should not be any imposition of presupposed ethical or political unity, legitimacy or obligation. The school curriculum is no longer defined by a sense of responsibility to act, homogeneity, unity, totality or totalized theme of knowledge and practices, but a new paradigm which emphasizes sense of responsibility to otherness, heterogeneity, individuality and plurality.<sup>31</sup> Although there is an implication that all modernist modes of thinking are equally infected with the disease of willful subjectivity, there is always an open question that “how much a given perspective on ethics and politics – which responds to the responsibility to act – actually implies dangers postmoderns have associated with subjectivity” (White, 1991, p. 21). The problem of otherness cannot be adequately settled within a modernist account of the school curriculum and

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<sup>31</sup> One of the best-known representatives of this approach is Gilligan’s (1993) study of feminism. In the book *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women’s development*, she found that the qualities of women’s everyday experiences have been neglected or subordinated in prevailing the conceptions of ethics and politics. This is because, in the existing socialization patterns which emphasize traditional positions of women in the family, certain values are typically woven more deeply into the fabric of women’s everyday life than of men’s. So “women’s morality” could not be adequately described by the dominant mode and value of an “ethic of justice”, and another orientation to an “ethic of responsibility and care” is more appropriate to describe and care for the everyday life of women.

the corresponding reform policy and *it is crucial to address a postmodern theorizing of the underlying political intentions.*

The pedagogical dimension examines the strategies which the reform policy employed to demonstrate reasoning for individual students. Although as argued before reason is nothing but a form of narrative, which is problematic in its nature to build any future claims from, *it does not entail the position that anything or everything goes.* There is always more that can be said and more that can be done. It is still important for policy makers to examine both the limitations and possibilities of the force of reasoning within the school curriculum. The claim is that reason needs not to be demonstrated as a form of coercion but critique, which challenges the practical and societal contexts of the knowledge within. In the following, I am going to borrow some ideas from Michel Foucault, his *method of genealogy* in particular, to enrich the arguments.<sup>32</sup> Foucault's method of genealogy is based on a vision of history derived from Friedrich Nietzsche, who thought it is not the case that history should necessarily be conceptualized in terms of a linear development, of which events are being inserted into a series of explanatory systems and documented into self-evidential texts. On the contrary, since every single event possesses its own meanings and historical significance, singularity of events should be preserved from this totalizing form of historical analysis (Sarup, 1993, pp. 58-59). The present has

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault is one of the most influential thinkers in the contemporary world, his work has been considered as postmodern because it has reflected on the disorder of the discourse and has emphasized on the incommensurability in this fashion. Although there are notably differences between Foucault's early and recent works, central to his studies an underlying continuity concerning the forms of domination of modern societies can be found (Foucault, 1986 [1980] & 1986 [1984]). This domination is basically practised through the exercise of specific forms of power and the emergence of specific forms of power-knowledge relation, and genealogy is the method which he used for investigations.



been delegitimized by separating it from the past, and so the attempt of genealogical analysis is to establish and record events which have been neglected or denied by history. As noted by Foucault (1986 [1971]) in the essay “Nietzsche, genealogy, history” that genealogy “must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts [...] genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized” (Foucault, 1986 [1971], p. 76). By this idea, history itself is a realm of conflict which is characterized by an insurrection of subjugated knowledge, and therefore people should focus on a wide range of knowledge which has been disqualified as inadequate and unimportant. Genealogy is then referred to the tactic of using this discontinuous, discredited, disqualified and illegitimate knowledge to criticize against the claim of any totalized or unitary theme of knowledge and practices.

In more details, genealogy is *a form of critique*. It rejects the notion of ideology and what is taken for granted; disrupts the self-evident grounds for knowledge; and aims at transforming our understanding of the present by showing that things are not always what they seem to be. Transformation refers to an awareness to create a critical distance from the taken for granted projects, beliefs and practices, and to “reflect” on the knowledge constituted. Note that reflection here also refers to *a form of critique toward “practical” reason*. This is because knowledge in the eyes of Foucault and other postmodern thinkers is a social product which inherently and necessarily possesses *a primacy of the practical over the theoretical* (McCarthy, 1990, pp. 438-439). There is no such claim as transcendental or trans-historical

understanding toward knowledge because understanding itself is influenced by practical experiences. Knowledge itself is in fact embedded in the practical contexts of society. If we turn our attention away from the philosophical tradition of knowledge, namely transcendental representations of reason, and focus on the practical and societal dimensions, namely values and norms, we can easily see there are practical, cultural and normative presuppositions for every social activity.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is epistemologically incorrect for any education policy to demonstrate reason as the way it is, and/or to coerce students to accept things as what they seem to be. Reason itself demonstrates a form of critique. This critique situates the very reality one seeks to comprehend from nowhere, and tries out relation of “knowledge of the present” with “what is being thought about” in a practical manner. It accounts for the constitution of knowledge without making any reference to presumed projects, beliefs and practices, but rather relating it from the practically interested standpoint of an anticipated future. In short, *the pedagogical strategies for the reform policy should aim at distancing students’ understanding critically from the taken for granted or “modern” projects, beliefs and practices, and to reflect practically on the issues raised with reference to the practical, cultural and normative contexts of society.*

The representational dimension examines the styles which the reform policy defines itself. Representation and conceptualization are important aspects for policy theorization. As pointed out by Ball (1994), the way we define conceptually the term policy affects not only how we analyze but also how we research policy and how we

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<sup>33</sup> Examples of these practical, cultural and normative presuppositions over human social activities include the practical establishments of different kinds of social agencies that deal with “problematic” people and units, the cultural interpretations of “stylish” fashions, and the normative explanations of “acceptable” behaviours in different social settings and occasions.

interpret what we find. There is not one successful single-theory explanation, and the two very different conceptualizations which Ball finds himself inhabited are *policy as text* and *policy as discourse* (Ball, 1994, pp. 14-27). Though he admitted the point he is moving on to is that “policy is not one or the other, but both: they are ‘implicit in each other’” (Ball, 1994, p. 15), the representation of policy as discourse is obviously more welcomed by postmodern thinkers since it opens up the possibilities of a critical understanding, questioning and somehow careful application of a given work. In more details, the premise of policy as text suggests, to control the meanings of their texts, policy authors have to “make concerted efforts to assert such control by the means at their proposal, to achieve a ‘correct’ reading” (Ball, 1994, p. 16). That the texts need to represent itself as “true” and “correct”, and which demand control over both the encoding mechanism (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and the decoding mechanism (via actors’ interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context). However, as clearly argued by Foucault (1986 [1980]), in the essay “Truth and power”, truth is not the reward of free spirit but “a thing of this world”. It is produced only by the virtue of multiple forms of constraint, and it cannot be understood in isolation with practical and socio-historical contexts. *Truth is not outside power*: it is “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” (Foucault, 1986 [1980], p. 74). Power relations are both the conditions and effects of the product of truth, and it is therefore important for policy authors to represent policies in a way which facilitates an understanding of how truth is produced and sustained through power relations. This relation is exactly what the premise of policy as discourse highlights, as it appreciates “the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a *production of*

‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, as discourse” (Ball, 1994, p. 21; original emphasis). It represents the policies with discourses of what can be said and thought, and who can speak, when, where and with what authority. As Foucault (1986 [1980]) suggested, truth must be understood in relation to politics, or simply a “*politics of truth*”, which refers on one hand to how the true and the false are separated by the ensemble of rules and how specific effects of power are attached to the true, and on the other hand how “the soul”, or “knowable man”, is served as the direct target of the exercise of power. Therefore, the political question left for human “is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself” (Foucault, 1986 [1980], p. 75). Accordingly, *the reform policy should represent itself as a discourse, which allows others to recognize and analyze the existence of “dominant” discourses, regimes of truth, and erudite knowledge within.*

To sum up the above arguments, the postmodern as pointed out by Lyotard “signifies not the end of modernism, but another relation to modernism” (Van Reijen & Veerman, 1988, p. 277). The current attempt to decipher a postmodern reform policy highlights this relation, in terms of its underlying political intentions opposing the imposition of presupposed ethical and political unity, legitimacy and obligation for students, its pedagogical strategies on one hand distancing students’ understanding critically from the taken for granted projects, beliefs and practices, and on the other hand entailing a form of critique with reference to the practical, cultural and normative contexts of society, and its representational styles conceptualizing policy as a discourse which discloses the existence of “dominant” discourses, regimes of truth, and erudite knowledge. This relation in short indicates a mood or a state of mind that signifies a demand, a need to criticize, to challenge, to have reflexive questioning, and

to provide an alternative way of speaking, thinking and acting other than the “modern” ones. Presumably, this reflective questioning and alternative way of speaking, thinking and acting should start right in the domain of action research, releasing it from a restricted goal of just implementing curriculum development to embrace a personal sense of understanding, challenging and approaching the reform.

### **6.5. A Final Word: Criticizing as Self-Referencing**

As a final word, if the criticisms made on Enlightenment reason, emancipation and the education and curriculum reform of Hong Kong are valid, that is, that they turn out to be nothing but a form of narrative, and if the suggestion made by the postmodern toward any of these modern projects, beliefs, policies and practices are well-grounded, that they demand a critique, a challenge and a reflexive questioning, then the current attempt to rethink the reform in the postmodern becomes significant. Again, although the postmodern criticizes the position to view education and curriculum and its reform as a “promising” vehicle through which the totalizing idea of whole-person development and emancipation are realized, it does not entail the position that anything or everything goes. The postmodern not only goes beyond anti-realism and relativism, but also carries forward people’s views more thoroughly and without nostalgia or regret for the lost ideals (Hollinger, 1994, p. 177). The current claim is not that there are no norms in education and curriculum reform but that they are not to be found in foundations. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to address the critique of the postmodern with curriculum leaders’ attitudes toward action research and stories of their selves, and to look for the possibilities of how reform policy could be conveyed to schools, curriculum leaders and teachers. Also, it intends to ground a platform for attention and debate of what postmodern means to education.

In a sentence, the intentions and desires of the curriculum developers and policy makers to enlighten our students no longer stand. To revisit the reform in the postmodern is to subvert these foundations, and to subvert these foundations “is not to court irrationality and paralysis but to foreground dialogue, practical engagement and a certain kind of self-referentiality” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 27). Self-referentiality is perhaps the most influential thought of the postmodern that it constantly reminds us when articulating anything in the postmodern, we have to start a dialogue ourselves. By definition, self-referencing always creates a “disconnect” between the perceived phenomenon and the actual environment that it copes with. It also refers to the ability of a subject to speak of or refer to him/herself: to have the kind of thought expressed in English by “I”.<sup>34</sup> The idea of self-referentiality matches perfectly well with Lyotard’s view of the postmodern as a mood or a state of mind that all curriculum developers, policy makers and curriculum leaders in particular have to question is *something that exists in their mind*. It is not any of the ideas of reason, truth, reality or emancipation that draws our attention but the “beliefs” which these people hold onto that demand a critique, a challenge and a reflexive questioning. Again, the postmodern “signifies not the end of modernism, but another relation to modernism” (Van Reijen & Veerman, 1988, p. 277).

To curriculum leaders, when thinking about the relationship between educational policy and practices, there is no ground for them to accept the applicability and superiority of the former to the latter. One should come in contact with each other “face to face with *nothingness*” – the experience of one’s linkage to others is “not necessary and is scarcely foreseeable” (Lyotard, 1989, p. 199; my emphasis). There is

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<sup>34</sup> Definition of the term “self-reference” is from Encyclopedia of The Free Dictionary: <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/self-reference> (accessed on October 31, 2007).

no presupposition of superiority or inferiority. Professional practice is not merely about the application of educational ideas to practical situations. There is always room for alternation and modification. In other words, educational practices could not and should not solely be determined by policy. Professional practice of front-line educators is indeed characterized by a *knowing-in-action*, which is not only different in character to educational policy but also rigorous in its own terms. Action research should not be conceived as just the warranty for school-based curriculum development. Knowing-in-action is always in flux with *reflection-in-action*, an ability to think about what one is doing while doing it, and it is through such reflection-in-action that professional skills and wisdom are built up in the course of experience (Carr, 1987). Although educational ideas and the corresponding policies constantly remind front-line educators to which concept or thought a practice refers, the essential role of professional knowledge and judgement in all practical situations should not be left out. Therefore, on one hand, front-line educators should beware of how knowing- and reflection-in-action function in the course when they think and act toward an educational policy, and on the other hand critically examine the way policy makers justify and make sense of a given document. Last, if the postmodern provides an alternative way of speaking, thinking and acting other than the modern ones, it is the primary job of front-line educators *to reflect on how they speak, think and act toward the project of education and curriculum reform.*

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**APPENDIX 1****課程發展主任對教育研究之態度**

香港教育學院課程與教學系現正進行一項有關「課程發展主任對教育研究之態度」的研究。所得的資料將有助評估「課程領導訓練課程」之成效。希望各課程發展主任能抽出數分鐘將本問卷完成，並於下課前交回本堂之導師。多謝合作！

**第一部分：對本「課程領導訓練課程」之期望**

請跟據你個人的經驗及感受，回答以下各問題。

1. 你對本「課程領導訓練課程」有什麼感覺／見解？  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. 你對本單元「C2：行動研究，專業發展及團體學習」有什麼期望？  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. 請簡述你希望於本單元「C2：行動研究，專業發展及團體學習」達成些什麼。  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## 第二部分：對「教育研究」之態度

請跟據你個人的經驗及感受，回應及圈出你有多同意以下各句子。

(註：SD = 十分不同意；D = 不同意；NC = 無意見；A = 同意；SA = 十分同意)

對「教育研究」之態度：	十分不同意					十分同意
	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
1. 我有能力閱讀和理解一般的研究報告。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
2. 我頗有信心能在我的工作範圍內做研究。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
3. 我有能力完成需嚴謹處理的研究工作。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
4. 研究工作並不是非常專門的活動，我也能夠勝任。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
5. 老師不單應從別人做的研究成果上學習，更要親身做研究。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
6. 我相信親身參與研究比單憑閱讀研究報告更能帶動學校改革。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
7. 如果要改進教學，研究應由學校成員開展。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
8. 參與研究工作有助老師達成專業成長。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
9. 研究活動能促進學校發展。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
10. 對於學校遇見的問題，研究能協助尋找出路。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
11. 研究活動對於解決課室問題是有作用的。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
12. 研究所得的資料，有助豐富理論所提倡的學說。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
13. 我預見在自己的工作範圍內有做研究的機會。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
對於現時參與的「C2：行動研究，專業發展及團體學習」單元：						
14. 它提供給我一種探究教學疑難的方式。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
15. 它給予我機會研究一個困擾我教學工作的難題。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	

### 第三部分：對「任職學校」之態度及各項「個人取向」

對「任職學校」之態度：	十分 不同意					十分 同意
1. 我感覺我對我所任職學校很盡忠。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
2. 我很樂意付出額外的努力去令這學校成功。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
3. 我會自豪地告訴別人，我是這學校的一份子。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
4. 我真的關心這學校將來的發展及命運。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
「自我效能」：						
5. 如我足夠努力，我能經常解決困難問題。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
6. 我很容易能堅持目標及達到目的。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
7. 我有信心我能有效地處理未能預計的事情。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
8. 無論什麼出現在我面前，我能經常有能力去應付。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
「歸因模式」：						
9. 當我策劃工作時，我經常可令它們得以實行。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
10. 正因我的努力，我通常可得到我想要的東西。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
11. 我的一生是我自己可決定的。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
12. 我常可預計將在我身邊發生的事情。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
「性格模式」：						
13. 當別人在我忙於重要工作時詢問我意見，我會很不耐煩。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
14. 對於某些反對我的人，我會堅持自己的做法，旨在獲勝。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
15. 我經常發現別人會嫉妒我於工作上有好的構想。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
16. 當我嘗試去改善或改動某些東西時，我會對別人發出直接指令。	SD	D	NC	A	SA	
17. 請以三個形容詞去描述你自己：  _____、_____、_____。						

## 第四部分：個人資料

1. 性別：
  - 男
  - 女
  
2. 教學年資：
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 年
  
3. 職銜：
  - PSM(CD)
  - APSM(CD)
  
4. 最高學歷（已完成）：
  - 學士
  - 碩士
  - 博士
  
5. 獨自完成研究之經驗：
  - 有（請說明：\_\_\_\_\_）
  - 無
  
6. 校內職務（可選多項）：
  - 教學
  - 觀課
  - 學術委員會
  - 家長教師會
  - 統籌課程發展
  - 統籌課外活動
  - 班主任
  - 科主任
  - 研究（如本科、QEF …）
  - 行政（如編制時間表、安排代課 …）
  - 統籌資訊科教育
  - 統籌教師培訓

- 問卷完，多謝合作 -

