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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH A  
UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP:  
A CASE STUDY IN A HONG KONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

CHI-SHING CHIU

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

2004



23 JUL 2004

# **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH A UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP: A Case Study in A Hong Kong Primary School**

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education, University of Durham, 2004.

Chi-Shing CHIU

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the impact of a school improvement model based on a university-school partnership in a Hong Kong primary school by studying the reactions of the professional staff to the reform initiative and the conditions for its success. Data were collected from multiple sources, including questionnaires, interviews and documents, but the descriptive interview remained the major source of data in the analysis of the results. Results indicated that: (a) the quantitative analysis showed a modest but consistent improvement in professional development in the teachers; (b) all the change agents contributed to school improvement; each agent was part of a complex dynamic, interwoven with the others, under the constraints of the school culture; (c) teachers' capacity in designing and implementing teaching and learning activities was enhanced; (d) good teaching and learning programmes with appropriate implementation strategies had the greatest impact in changing the previous teaching paradigms and techniques; (e) partnership projects should be built on mutual trust and confidence, with a good mix of academic advice and practitioners' experience. The implications of the findings for improving primary schools and educational policy in Hong Kong are discussed. Directions for further research are also discussed. It is concluded that school improvement projects should pay more attention to the underlying principles of professional development, since those are crucial to their impact in schools.

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## LIST OF FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

ASP Accelerated Schools Project

ASQE Accelerated Schools for Quality Education

EC Education Commission

IQEA Improving the Quality of Education for All

ISIP International School Improvement Project

MSIP Manitoba School Improvement Project

PDS Professional Development Schools

SDO School Development Officer

SFA Success for All

TOC Target Oriented Curriculum

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## DECLARATION

I honestly declare that the work submitted in this thesis is the results of my own work, though I have been greatly benefited by the invaluable contributions and inputs of my colleagues in the university-school partnership project. I further declare that the material in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree in the University of Durham or any other university.

## Chapter One: Introduction

The return of Hong Kong to China in July 1997 marked a new political era. Immediately after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government, the Chief Executive entrusted the Education Commission<sup>1</sup> (EC) to conduct a comprehensive review of the education system with a view to drawing up the aims of education and a blueprint for reform for the 21st Century. This had important implications for school development and improvement in Hong Kong. Change became inevitable as stipulated in the motto of the first chapter of the Consultation Document<sup>2</sup> of the EC: The world has changed, so must the education system. Most schools and teachers in Hong Kong are daunted by the ‘invasion’ of education reform and curriculum innovation. It is not surprising that schools are seeking external help and support in generating school improvement strategies. They have similar pressures as schools in the United Kingdom: greater central accountability and control on one hand, an increased responsibility for self-management on the other (Harris, 2000:1).

One of the most significant changes in the history of Hong Kong education was the implementation of the 9-year free and compulsory education in 1978. Since then, substantial quantitative and qualitative changes have been experienced in the last two decades in the Hong Kong school education. In 1982, a report on ‘A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong’ (Visiting Panel, 1982) was published after an international panel of four distinguished educators conducted an overall view of the entire education system. It lifted the curtain on educational changes in Hong Kong, at both the macro and micro levels. It was not until 1990 when the Educational Commission Report No. 4 (ECR 4) was released, that a policy document emerged elaborating on the need to move from a concern for the quantity of provision to improving the quality of schooling. In

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<sup>1</sup> The most powerful consultative committee in Education.

<sup>2</sup> Review of Education System: Reform Proposals Consultation Document Hong Kong Special Administration Region of The People’s Republic of China, Education Commission, May 2000.



the context of free and compulsory education, ECR 4 examined and focused on two aspects of the school system, the curriculum, and behavioural problems in Hong Kong. A system of 'Targets and Target Related Assessments' (TTRA), which was subsequently entitled the 'Target Oriented Curriculum' (TOC) was introduced in this report. It was described by Griffin et al. (1993:18) as one of the most ambitious changes attempted by an education system. TOC represented the most comprehensive and significant attempt to reform the Hong Kong school curriculum in the previous 50 years. The report of the Advisory Committee on Implementation of TOC (Education Department 1994) defined TOC as a reform which was designed primarily to bring about changes to all elements of the curriculum, including the goals of schooling, the teaching methods used, learning styles promoted, and the nature and role of assessment. In short, on one hand, the government insisted that all schools should implement the new curriculum, employing a highly bureaucratic and top-down strategy of curriculum development. On the other hand, the government was unwilling to pursue reform in the face of opposition; hence, the curriculum policy was vague and easily twisted by the practitioners. Unfortunately, this most ambitious curriculum was almost dead by 2000, when the new curriculum consultation document: Learning to Learn was released, with no further mention of the TOC (Curriculum Development council, 2000). In September of 1997, two months after the handover, ECR No. 7 titled Quality School Education was released, emphasizing the need for quality school education, the inculcation of a quality culture, the accountability and the cost-effectiveness of education, signifying that a performance-driven atmosphere was prevailing in school education (Education Commission, 1997).

The report of the visiting panel in 1982, the ambitious education and curriculum reform of TOC and the emphasis on quality and accountability of school education after the hand-over are important in this brief historical account of change in education in Hong Kong. The visiting panel report was the first example of thorough consultation in



education policies from all walks of life. The curriculum change in TOC not only resulted in the opposition to a basically top-down reform strategy initiated by the government, but also in strong resistance to change from practitioners, who were more comfortable in teaching in a teacher-centred manner and retaining the conventional practices. Nonetheless, the curriculum reform in 1994 did develop a partnership relationship between the Education Department of Hong Kong and a number of pilot primary schools which were regarded by policy makers as 'model schools' in the implementation of TOC. At the same time, school-based adaptations of curriculum policy were pursued, which was a significant step in school development as a strong degree of dependency on the government policy had been common in the past. The striving for quality school education stipulated in the ECR 7 in 1997 set the stage for the schools to establish a school improvement culture and to develop a self-enhancing mechanism for change. Cheng (2000) categorises the educational changes and developments in Hong Kong into two waves; the first was generally characterised by a top-down approach with an emphasis on external intervention or increasing resource inputs. The effects of these changes on school improvement were limited because i) there was a lack of knowledge base and research support; ii) over-emphasis on research inputs and iii) ignorance of school-based needs. The second wave is still in progress with special emphasis on a school-based and frontline practitioner-based approach.

In view of the above scenario, the Faculty of Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong launched a school improvement programme called Accelerated Schools for Quality Education (ASQE) in 1998, aiming at enhancing quality education in Hong Kong through a university-school partnership. ASQE was adopted from the school restructuring model of the Accelerated Schools Project, first launched by Professor Henry M, Levin at Stanford University (Hopfenberg, Levin & Associates 1993). ASQE is a comprehensive approach to school change, encompassing an integrated restructuring of three dimensions, namely, school curriculum, instructional

strategies and organization. 50 local schools (26 primary and 24 secondary schools) joined the project for a duration of three years (September 1998 - August 2001). The improvement programme was comprehensive in the sense that it covered the dimensions of administration and management, curriculum and teaching, as well as parents and community resources. The approach was termed organic as only broad principles and general guidelines were introduced and the improvement was interactive and evolving. Strategies used were general and multi-dimensional, sometimes with specific learning and teaching programmes if the teachers were ready. The school studied in this research was one of the participating schools in the above project.

## **1.1 Summary**

University-schools partnerships based on an extensive school improvement model as in ASQE, are uncommon in Hong Kong, especially when Hong Kong is experiencing a critical stage of educational change. The evolution of a basically subject-bound, teacher-centred and examination-oriented education system to an education reform with 'student-focused, no losers, quality-driven, life-wide learning and society-wide mobilisation' as principles (Education Commission 2000:36) is exciting and worth studying. The improvement programme has its distinguished features in i) the partnership is on voluntary basis, ii) a school-based approach, iii) an experimental and evolving school improvement programme.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The researcher is interested in the study because there has been much improvement activity in schools but little debate about the underlying principles of school improvement. Those within the school improvement field are in a theoretical impasse (Bennet and Harris 1999:534).

The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of a school improvement model through university-school partnership in a Hong Kong primary school by studying the reactions of the professional staff on the reform initiative and the conditions for the success of the improvement initiative.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Research questions are designed to investigate:

- 1) Under what conditions has the school improvement project contributed to the improvement of the school?
- 2) What sort of professional experience has been acquired in relation to the reform initiative and how has it affected teachers' perception of their roles as reflective practitioners, their learning capacity and their attitude towards school improvement through school-university partnership?
- 3) How have these experiences affected their conceptions of teaching and learning, and what has been the impact of their conceptions of curriculum change in their school?

The terms relevant to the study are defined in the chapter on research methodology.

### **1.4 Limitations**

The researcher was the programme coordinator of the project under study. Therefore he may have lacked the perspective or critical awareness of an outsider. A phenomenological approach is adopted: research data and outcomes are context specific and the researcher observed, recorded and studied the research data. Research outcomes mainly came from the perspective of the study participants. The collection of qualitative data involved interviews which relied on the ability and willingness of subjects to accurately recall their activities and to reflect their thoughts and beliefs.

Such an approach may allow the researcher to study the issue in greater detail and the lack of a priori hypotheses may add to 'the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry' (Patton, 1990:12).

Limitations described above may be offset by the thorough understanding of the research procedures and the methodology for using multiple data sources.

## **1.5 Significance**

As the improvement project is not a mechanistic instructional approach directly aiming at enhancing the students' achievement, evidence on changes and developments in the school cannot accurately reflect the positive effects on students' achievement. Instead, the comprehensiveness of the project and its organic nature provide a thorough understanding of the impact of such a project on a 'common and normal' primary school in Hong Kong, which has a standard school structure, curriculum design, textbooks, teaching strategies, as well as assessment procedures. The impact may include: the effect of the work of the school-university partnership, as Fullan (1993:120) claims teacher development and institutional development must go hand in hand; the catalyst effect of external support in the form of intensive site visits of personnel from the university; the changes in teachers' capacity including the principal, the middle management group and the frontline practitioners; and also the conditions for a school to excel and improve.

If a school-university partnership of this kind is proved to have an effect, it can certainly offer intellectual, motivational and attitudinal benefits to both partners. The school teachers may acquire more expertise and knowledge, whereas the university faculty members may enrich the instructional teachers' training programmes.

# **Chapter Two: Literature Review 1. School Improvement: A Review of Evidence**

## **2.1 Introduction**

The chapters on review of literature include a description of methods identifying literature for review, the theoretical framework of the study, and a description and synthesis of some of the literature on school improvement and university-school partnerships. In the search for relevant literature, the computerized database of ERIC (1982/01 to 2001/03) and the books, dissertations, journals, electronic journals and the micro-fiches located in the Education Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Distant Learning Centre in the British Library in Hong Kong were used.

There are two chapters in the review of literature. This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on the concept of change and the debate between the two areas of school effectiveness and school improvement, which have historically been very different in core conceptualizations, beliefs, and proposed strategies for furthering school change (Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins & Stringfield, 2000:206). It is followed by a literature review on school improvement projects. Writings and findings on the collaboration between schools and universities will be reported in the next chapter. A comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the three reviews will contribute to the theoretical framework of the researcher's study, placing emphasis on the change of school culture through an enhancement of teachers' internal capacity.

## **2.2 Change and School Improvement**

In the first policy speech by the Chief Executive, Mr. Tung, of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after the hand-over of the sovereignty, an important blueprint for educational reform and development was established (Tung, 1997).

Educational reform and change were presented in an extremely high-handed way before and after the published document of the Education Commission - Review of Education System: Reform Proposals Consultation Document. The atmosphere that 'change is inevitable' spread through not only the educational sector, but to all walks of life in Hong Kong. Certainly, change is endemic in education but it does not necessarily lead to improvement (Ainscow et al.,1994, Hopkins, 1994). The interest of the researcher in this study is alerted by reading the question raised by Cuban (1988:341): 'How can it be that so much school reform has taken place over the last century yet schooling appears pretty much the same as it's always been?' Cuban categorises changes into first and second-order, concluding that the effect of the first order changes is not significant as the changes do not disturb the organizational features and the roles of stakeholders. The second-order changes which seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including new goals, structures and roles, are more appropriate. Fullan (1991) also declares that 'the challenge of the 1990s was to deal with the changes that affect the culture and structure of schools, restructuring roles and reorganizing responsibilities.' In contrast, Fink's (1999:269) study on the attrition of change shows that many newly established schools lose their momentum and innovative directions after a certain period of time. If the early indications of the attrition of change are understood and anticipated, further erosion of the school's vision could be prevented. Fullan (1991) also remarks that the change process is not linear, but consists of a series of stages merging into each other, namely, initiation, implementation and institutionalization.

Hargreaves concludes (1997:27) that we need to redefine educational change - broadening it beyond the school, and deepening it emotionally and morally within ourselves, in order to benefit the children that we teach.

From reading articles on educational change related to school improvement, the researcher is more concerned with effective educational change and meaningful school

improvement, through a substantial build-up of teachers' capacity, rather than with cosmetic and superficial action tasks. The researcher is fascinated by Dalin's research on the change process in schools, unfolding the culture of the schools into:

- 1) fragmented or 'loosely coupled' schools (with or without innovative experience);*
- 2) project schools that have successfully implemented projects in various departments and sections of schools;*
- 3) organic schools that have a common ideology and norms, and are used to cope with changes as a learning process through the organization.*

*(Dalin, 1993:15)*

### **2.3 School Effectiveness and School Improvement**

The two most frequently asked questions by educators are: 1) Which of the many activities that we do have greater benefits for students? and 2) How can we make our schools better than they are now? The first question focuses specifically on the impact of schools on students' outcomes and the characteristics of effective schools, whereas the second addresses the implementation of change and school improvement (Stoll & Fink 1992). Nonetheless, the former places emphasis on the product, effect and the final outcomes of what the schools can do, and the latter focuses more on the process that schools go through to become more successful, with improvement sustained (van Velzen 1987, Fullan 1991).

Undoubtedly, for the past three decades, the school improvement literature has been dominated by the above two lines of school effectiveness or school improvement (Murphy, 1992:90). Though the two schools of researchers have increasingly looked towards establishing some kind of synergy in both fields, the attempts have not sufficiently addressed their different perspectives on organisational development and

change (Bennet & Harris 1999:533). Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins & Stringfield (2000:208) also comment that the two areas have been very different in their core conceptualizations, beliefs, and proposed strategies for further school change. Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber & Hillman (1996:152) give an extremely comprehensive account of school effectiveness and school improvement in the United Kingdom, concluding that the interface between school effectiveness, school improvement and educational policymaking is proving to be a productive one. School effectiveness research aims to describe what an effective school looks like and to search for adequate and reliable quantitative data to measure the quality of the schools (Mortimore 1991, Stoll 1996). Reynolds & others (1996:138) have highlighted the four positive features in school effectiveness research in the United Kingdom:

- *high levels of methodological sophistication;*
- *the use of multiple measures of pupil outcomes;*
- *the use of multiple measures of pupils on entering school;*
- *the development of advanced conceptualisations and findings about the effectiveness at school level.*

Numerous research findings on school effectiveness may provide a substantial knowledge base for educational change and school improvement, for example Murphy (1992:91) comments that 'educational reform via the effective schools model has established a framework that is quickly becoming a necessary component of any school improvement.' However, Fullan (1991:22) questions the genuine help provided by the 'effectiveness researchers' for school improvement and states that school effectiveness 'has mostly focused on narrow educational goals, and the research itself tells us almost nothing about how an effective school got that way and if it stayed effective.' Stoll and Fink (1992:19) also think that school effectiveness researchers should have done more to make clear how schools can become effective. Creemers & Reezigt (1997:399) show the differences between school effectiveness and school improvement in Table 1.



**Table 1: Differences between school effectiveness and school improvement**

School effectiveness	School improvement
School improvement	program for innovation
no time limits	need for immediate action
focus on theory and explanation	focus on change and problem solving
searching for stable causes and effects	dealing with changing goals and means
searching for objective knowledge	dealing with subjective knowledge
strictness in methodology and analysis	design/development instead of evaluation
focus on student learning/classroom level	expanding universe factors and participants

Source: Creemers & Reezigt, 1997

As a matter of fact, many researchers have worked on linking school effectiveness and school improvement like Stoll (1996), Reynolds et al (1996) and David Hargreaves (1995). The report on the special session and plenary at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and School Improvement written by Creemers, Reynolds, Chrispeels, Mortimore, Murphy, Stringfield, Stoll & Townsend (1998:132) denotes much closer link in the future between the two, supporting each other with research findings and practical experience in helping the school practitioners. David Hargreaves (2001:1) expresses his view on linking school effectiveness to school improvement by the concept of 'capacity for improvement', which is 'assumed to characterise a school that sustains its effectiveness by successfully managing change in a context of instability and reform'. In the new international handbook of school effectiveness research, Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) actually include school improvement as a part of school effectiveness research.

It seems that the merging of the two clearly fragmented intellectual communities of the 1980s mentioned above is the only solution for the field of educational change to move on. On one hand, the 'school effectiveness' experts may produce a long list of factors and figures accusing schools of ineffectiveness, but cannot produce any concrete suggestions help improve learning outcomes. They seem to have run into a cul-de-sac in

their field. On the other, the 'school improvement' professionals have recently been regarded as major players in the field of educational change, and are funded generously by all governments in the world. Unfortunately, the positive impact of the school improvement programmes on classroom practices which may lead to fruitful learning outcomes is still not very significant. This might be because of the weak methodology in the school improvement movement. The experts in the two fields may complement each other through cooperation. Focussing upon the importance of pupil learning outcomes and adopting a 'mixed' methodological orientation are two of the key characteristics of the new, merged paradigm (Reynolds, 1998:128).

## **2.4 School Improvement Field**

### **(a) Definition**

The discussion of the two lines of research in school effectiveness and school improvement is essential as the study of the improvement project in this particular case in Hong Kong belongs to the school improvement model, possessing the features listed in Creemers & Reezigt (1997) and Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber & Hillman (1996).

The most frequently quoted definition of school improvement is 'a systematic sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively' (van Velzen et al., 1985 International School Improvement Project ISIP).

The key assumptions of school improvement as an approach to educational change are (van Velzen et al., 1985; Hopkins, 1987, 1990):

- *The school is the centre of change;*
- *A systematic approach to change;*

- ⊗ *A key focus for change;*
- ⊗ *Accomplishing educational goals more effectively;*
- ⊗ *A multi-level perspective;*
- *Integrated implementation strategies, balance between top-down and bottom-up*
- ⊗ *The drive towards institutionalization*

Stoll (1996:56) also identifies seven features in school improvement:

- *A focus on process*
- *An orientation towards action and ongoing development*
- *An emphasis on school-selected priorities for development*
- *An understanding of the importance of school culture*
- *The importance of a focus on teaching and learning*
- *A view of the school as the centre of change*
- *Qualitative research methodology*

In another school improvement framework, Joyce (1991:60) describes five different doors leading to school improvement: collegiality, research findings, site-specific information, curriculum initiatives and instructional initiatives. Stoll (1996:53) states that school improvement researchers aim to ‘understand the processes and stages of change that lead to successful outcomes.’

To conclude, Hopkins (1996:32) regards school improvement as a strategy for educational change that enhances students’ outcomes as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change. It is about the strategies for improving the school’s capacity for providing quality education in times of change.

## **(b) The phases of school improvement**

According to Hopkins and Reynolds (2001:459), the history of school

improvement has passed through three distinct phases. In the late 1970s and early 80's the field emerged as a distinct body of approaches. Another paper, from Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins & Stringfield (2000:206), identifies four phases of school improvement instead, with a finer distinction in the early years.

Hopkins & Reynolds (2001) say the first phase of school improvement was epitomized by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) International School Improvement Project (ISIP). Unfortunately, many of the initiatives associated with this phase of school improvement were 'free floating', but not a systematic, programmatic and coherent approach to school change. School self-evaluation and the 'ownership of change' by individual schools and teachers were absent and these initiatives were loosely connected to student learning outcomes, both conceptually and practically; they were variable and fragmented in conception and application. Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins and Stringfield (2000) label the first phase, which dates from the mid-1960s, as a period emphasizing the adoption of curriculum materials. Though the curriculum materials were of high quality, the fact that teachers were not included in the production process and the inservice that accompanied the new curricula contributed to the failure of such innovation.

The second phase (Reynolds and Teddlie's classification) which covered most of the 1970s' work, documented the failure of change, especially the ineffectiveness of 'top-down' models, and the implementation of school improvement was considered as complex and lengthy from then on. The third phase (1970s to mid 1980s) was a period of success, with major large scale studies of school improvement like the OECD International School Improvement Study (ISIP) (Van Velzen et al. 1985), and contributions from Michael Fullan & Bruce Joyce.

But Hopkins and Reynolds (2001:460) classify the second phase as the period

of the early 1990s which resulted from interaction between the school improvement and the school effectiveness communities. The school effectiveness community provides a knowledge base for this intellectual enterprise and the school improvement tradition was beginning to provide schools with guidelines and strategies for implementation that were sufficiently powerful to begin to take educational change into classrooms. This is almost the same period of time as the fourth phase of Reynolds & Teddlie's paper – the management of change towards success. This phase is the management of change, which is the most difficult and hopefully productive of all, as researchers and practitioners struggle to relate their strategies and their research knowledge to the realities of schools in a pragmatic, systematic and sensitive way. There is indeed a move away from the study of change as a phenomenon to actually participating in school development, and the best of the current work on educational change is coming from people who are actually studying change as they are engaged in bringing it about.

The third phase (Hopkins & Reynolds' classification) of school improvement was around mid- to late 1990s. Evidence shows that the contributions of the school improvement communities of many countries may not have been particularly successful, especially in their impact upon overall level of student achievement, though some programmes appear to be effective, like Slavin's Success for All (Slavin & Fashola 1998, Slavin & Madden, 2001) or The Halton Project (Harris, 2000). The school improvement projects will be discussed in a later section.

### **(c) Critique of school improvement/effectiveness**

Having mentioned all of the debates between the outcomes of schooling in the two streams of research in school effectiveness and school improvement, John White and Michael Fielding look at the outcomes from different perspectives.

White (1997:29) queries the definition of school 'effectiveness' in numerous research projects which place too much emphasis on short-term academic outcomes, neglecting the long term educational aims and objectives in cultivating pupil characteristics like happiness, personal autonomy, moral goodness, imaginativeness and civic-mindedness. Fielding (1997) also expresses a number of reservations about the attributions of both school effectiveness and school improvement research. He explores the positive nature and potential for 'mapping' change in the school improvement process, and suggests an "alternative 'transformative education' – to develop transformative student involvement and to explore structures and practices of dialogue which move beyond the residual atomism of collaboration to the potentially transformative mode of collegiality and community" (Fielding, 1997:7). The above approach of Fielding is characteristically informed by democratic values, dispositions and processes that have at their heart a sense of person-hood and human flourishing which is both the purpose of the good life and the means of achieving it. Schooling is not enough, only education will do.

Chitty (1997:45) argues that the school effectiveness/improvement movement is deficient in four important respects:

- *It places too much emphasis on the notion of progressive school management as the dynamic of change;*
- *It fails to take full account of the characteristics of the education system as a whole;*
- *It shows little regard for issues of social class;*
- *It has little to say about issues of curriculum content and pedagogy.*

Chitty (1997:60) concludes that 'programmes of school improvement will have little effect in the down at-heel areas of our large cities unless they are accompanied by other measures to regenerate the community'.

The strongest criticisms of the work of the school effectiveness/improvement field come from Thrupp (1999, 2001) and Slee, Weiner & Tomlinson (1998). A heated debate between Thrupp (2001), Slee and Weiner (2001), and Teddlie and Reynolds (2001) with a strong critique of the school effectiveness research, is recorded in the special issue (vol.12 no.1, March 2001) of the *School Effectiveness and School Improvement Journal*. Thrupp (1998: 160) also fires at school improvement writers like Barber, Hopkins, Fullan, Stringfield, Stoll and Gray saying that the picture they have portrayed so far in school improvement is not very clear about the social limits of reform and the likely impact of neo-liberal and managerial policies.

## **2.5 School Improvement Projects**

Numerous school improvement programmes have been implemented in the past two decades. They have all had objectives of different kinds; some were shown to be effective in terms of students' achievement in a particular subject or domain, others were reported as bringing changes and innovations to the schools in areas like the internal capacity of the teachers, leadership, school culture and others. The researcher will review from the literature some of the large scale educational reform and school improvement projects with special reference to the United Kingdom and North America.

Fifty nine school improvement initiatives practising in England are listed in the paper by Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber & Hillman (1996), but they are broadly conceptualised as school improvement and school development. According to the above researchers, two-thirds bear the same aims as the school effectiveness tradition, using similar factors in measuring outcomes. Some of the distinguished examples are the Improving the Quality of Educational for All (IQEA) project at the Cambridge Institute of Education (Hopkins et al. 1994); the Lewisham School Improvement Project

(LSIP) commencing in Spring 1993, a partnership project between the Lewisham Local Educational Authority and the London Institute of Education (Stoll, Reynolds, Creemers & Hopkins 1996b); the Schools Make a Difference project established by Hammersmith and Fulham LEA in early 1993 (Myers, 1995); and other improvement initiatives like the value-added analysis service (Monitoring ALIS, YELLIS, PIPS) (Fitz-Gibbon 1996, Fitz-Gibbon & Tymms, 1996); the High Reliability Schools Project which include effective training programmes and standardized operation procedures (Stringfield, 1995a; Reynolds, Bollen, Cremers, Hopkins, Stoll & Lagerweij, 1996); and the National School Improvement Networks at the Institute of Education in London (Reynolds et.al. 1996). For school improvement projects, the early pioneer works of Hopkins (1987) in the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) is important as it had major influence on British school improvement work (Frost, Durrant, Head & Holden, 2000:5).

In the United States, The American Institute for Research (1999) examined the 24 school-wide approaches to educational reform (ranging from the 1960s to 1990s), but only a few approaches have documented positive effects on students' achievement. Among them, only three projects are reported to have had strong evidence of positive effects on students' achievement, namely the Direct Instruction (DI) introduced in late 1960s (Becker & Gerstein, 1982; Ashworth, 1999); High Schools That Work (HSTW) and Success for All (SFA), both launched in 1987 (Herman R. & A.I.R. 1999). It has to be noted that due to the nature of the American Institute for Research's review, quantitative achievement measures are highlighted, like the measurable achievement outcomes of test scores, grades and graduation rates. This may not be fair to those programmes which are comprehensive and organic in nature, with a longer period of research in which qualitative data can be interpreted and actualised. The costs of each approach make a lot of difference as well, e.g. the first year costs for the named effective approaches, DI, HSTW and SFA were \$244K, \$48K and \$270K respectively.



For the programmes like Accelerated Schools, with around 1000 schools practising (equivalent to SFA and Coalition of Essential Schools), the first year's cost was only \$27K, and is rated to have had marginal evidence of positive effects on student achievement.

Michael Fullan and his colleagues' efforts in Canada have contributed significantly to the school improvement field. The Learning Consortium work of Fullan and the others at the University of Toronto and the Effective Schools Project in the Halton and Durham Boards of Education in 1986 were very promising, and were originally an attempt to bring school effectiveness research results in Britain into the school practices of Canada (Mortimore et al., 1988). In Australia, Caldwell & Spinks (1988) adopted a self-management approach with a management cycle of six phases to school improvement, which has been widely disseminated.

To clarify the nature of the school improvement project, Alma Harris (2000) gives an extremely comprehensive and in-depth analysis of what works in school improvement. Using Hopkins and West's categorisation (1994) of the school improvement field into organic or mechanistic approaches, and general or specific strategies, the wide range of school improvement projects currently operating around the world is classified and evaluated. The classification is adopted and re-arranged and presented in Figure 1 by the researcher of this study as a framework for reference in discussing a case study of the school improvement project in the primary school in Hong Kong. Harris (2000:1) explains:

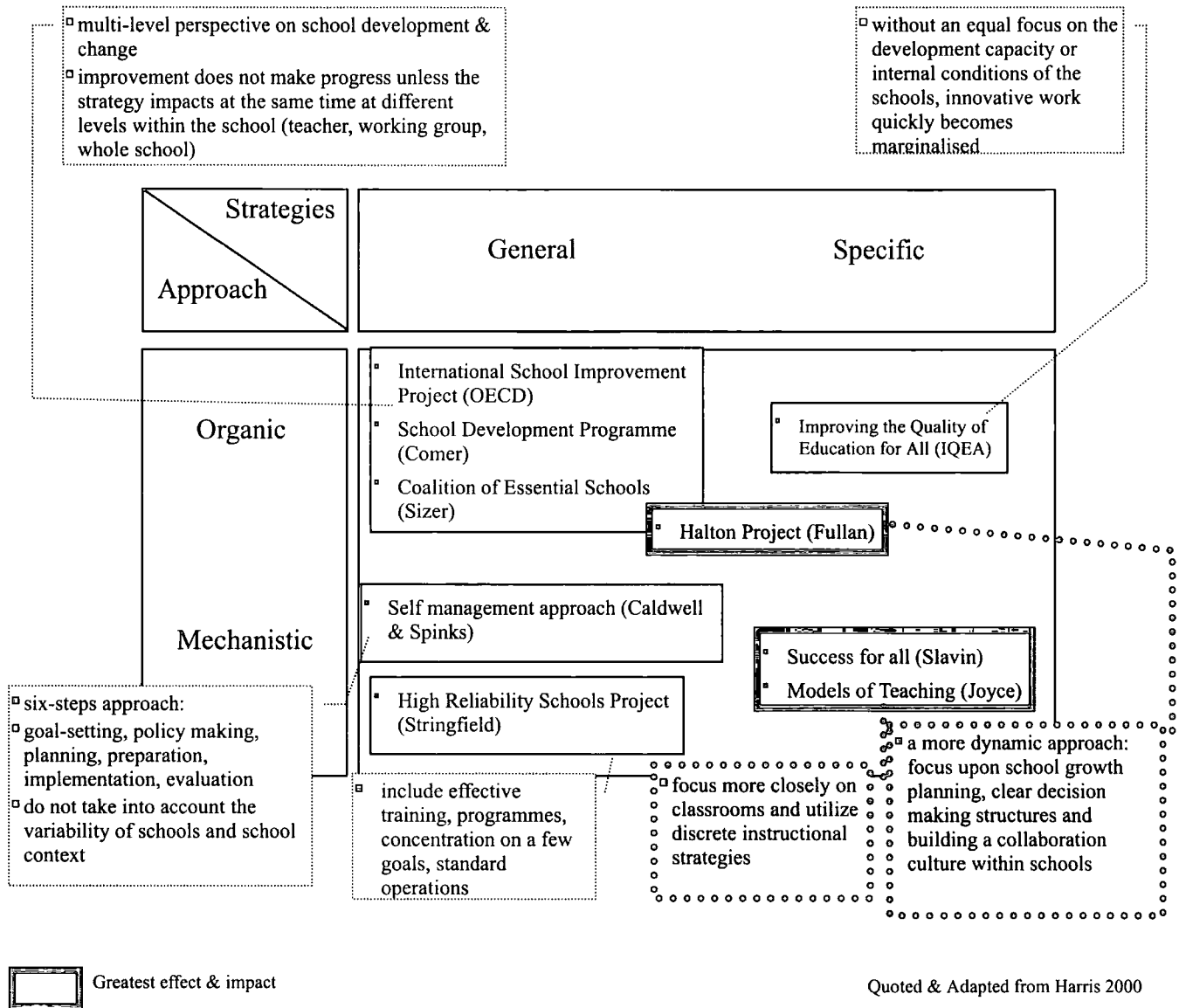
*School improvement that is organic suggests broad principles, or general guidelines within which schools are likely to flourish. Conversely, school improvement projects that are mechanistic provide direct guidelines about exactly what to do in a 'step-by-step' way. In some cases, these approaches are highly prescriptive in both content and instructional approach.*

*A number of school improvement projects have been formed on the basis that they*

*promote a particular philosophy ..... a sort of school improvement club where admission is dependent upon agreeing to a set of project rules and guidelines. Another group of contemporary school improvement programmes have taken a more dynamic approach to school improvement.....place the school at the focal point of change and engage them in a process of school growth planning that is similar to school development planning.*

For projects which are organic in nature, the ISIP (Van Velzen et al.; 1985, Hopkins, 1987) laid the cornerstone for other similar school improvement. Projects organic in nature but dynamic in approach such as the Halton Project (Fullan, 1992; Stoll and Fink, 1992, 1996) have had a positive impact upon schools, with special emphasis on a process of school growth planning, clear decision making structures and building a collaborative culture within schools; and the IQEA project outlines a number of propositions which are important for developing a school's capacity for sustained improvement (Ainscow et al., 1994, Hopkins & West 1994).

**Figure 1: Analysis of School Improvement Programmes**



It is almost unanimously agreed that Slavin's 'Success for All' project stands out as a highly effective programme of school improvement (Harris, 2000; Herman, 1999; Fullan 2000). This is a mechanistic and highly prescriptive project. The same credit also goes to Bruce Joyce's 'Models of Teaching' approach (Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins, 2000).

Reviewing the effectiveness of these improvement projects is essential to the researcher in explaining the approach of the school improvement project in Hong Kong, involving the university and a school partnership, and its impact. The approach of the experimental project in Hong Kong is organic and comprehensive, but dynamic in nature, more inclined to the Halton Approach (Stoll & Fink, 1992), than to Slavin's Success for All Project (Slavin & Madden 2001). For a project like "Success for All", where more mechanistic and quantitative measures can be generated, with structured teaching strategies, it is more reliable and convincing to state the effects of an improvement approach, such as reading scores. Unfortunately, an improvement design which is very prescriptive in nature can only reflect the effects of a particular strategy. The researcher is more inclined to take an organic and comprehensive approach to school improvement, as Sarason (1990:33) argues that reform efforts would fail if the components of the reform efforts were not addressed as a whole. The researcher is also fully aware that the comprehensiveness of the school improvement approach makes it too difficult to track all school improvement outcomes; and sometimes methodologically too weak to measure the outcomes quantitatively, but it is nevertheless still valuable to extract more information on the conditions for success in school improvement by studying in detail the changes generated in primary schools in Hong Kong. Hopkins & Lagerwelj's (1996) work also emphasizes on the importance of establishing positive conditions for change at three levels: the individual teacher level, the working group level and the whole-school level. It stimulated the researcher to conduct a case study on school improvement in Hong Kong with special reference to

the conditions such as the roles of the principal, the internal change agents and the external consultants.

Although the school improvement projects cited above have increased knowledge about the process of school improvement in general, there is still a shortage of evaluative evidence, especially for those taking the comprehensive approach. In the most recent meta-analysis of comprehensive school reform and achievement by Borman, Hewes, Overman & Brown (2003:163), in which 29 widely implemented comprehensive school reform models in USA were studied (including most of the above quoted models like DI, SFA, ASP, HSTW), clear limitations to the overall quantity and quality of studies demonstrating achievement effects were identified.

All these reform models for school improvement have their impact in one way or the other (Borman et.al. 2003), and at a time when claims of success will bring 'funding'. 'What works' and 'what doesn't' is still very confusing. In Hong Kong, the policy makers are very eager to prescribe a 'super' dose of medicine in the form of large scale implementation of a reform model. This inspires the researcher concentrating on a detailed and comprehensive case study of school improvement through a university-school partnership. Reynolds (1998:1275), after an analysis of the researches on school effectiveness and school improvement, makes the following policy recommendations on school improvement: i) importance of school context; ii) avoidance of reinventing the wheel; iii) increase in international orientation; and iv) the necessity to intervene at 'levels below that of the school'. Calhoun & Joyce (1998:1286) compare two major school reform paradigms: the externally-driven Research and Development approach in the late 50s through to the early 70s and the site-based school improvement approach most prominent lately, and say neither have worked as well as they might. They conclude that the success of these improvement programs is dependent on the establishing of sustainable staff development in the work place and action research enquiry on teaching and learning. Fullan (2000:21) also comments on the attempt to

return to the large scale reform, arguing that reform will not happen or be sustained in the absence of a strong teaching profession and corresponding infrastructure like the development of professional assistance agencies, assessment and accountability units, and the strengthening of an institution's training education personnel.

By citing the evidence of large-scale reform efforts, Hopkins & Reynolds (2001:473) conclude that unless central reforms address issues to do with teaching and learning, as well as dealing with capacity-building at the school level, within a context of external support, then the aspirations of reform are unlikely to be realized.

In view of all the arguments between the school effectiveness and school improvement communities, there is still heated debate between academics about the merging of School Improvement and School Effectiveness. The school effectiveness researchers have not answered the accusation from the critical theorists with sociological perspectives. Taking into account all the good, half-successful or half-failed practices in the school improvement/restructuring programmes in the United Kingdom or the New American School Movements, the school improvement programme in Hong Kong is a comprehensive project aiming at revitalizing the school culture by establishing a self-improving mechanism, through building the teachers' capacity and developing learning programmes to enhance students' outcomes .

The researcher has to acknowledge that the study cannot show improvement in student outcomes in the form of academic achievement results in a short period of time. Owing to the nature of the reform initiative: comprehensive, general and experimental, any changes in academic results cannot confidently be attributed to the project. Harris (2000:7) also comments that "while projects like the Halton and the Lewisham projects provide comprehensive descriptive accounts of the process of change, the fine grain analysis of the impact upon teaching and learning is absent". Secondly, the project implemented in Hong Kong is, to a certain extent, an experimental extension of Accelerated Schools in USA, which emphasizes on 1) the three guiding principles of

unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility and building on strengths; 2) participatory process of whole-school transformation; and 3) gifted-and-talented instruction for all students through 'powerful learning'. (Hopfenberg, Levin and Associates, 1993). The effects are more on changes in organisation values and teachers' capacity. Thirdly, at a time when the tide of education reform and curriculum reform is spreading in Hong Kong, with emphasis placed on the promotion of teaching strategies and curriculum designs, and the development of generic skills among students (Curriculum Development Council, 2000, 2002), which are very different from the traditional measurement of students' achievement through standardized subject-bound tests, reliable quantitative results recording generic skills are still in the course of construction. A detailed case study conducted by the researcher may answer the problems confronting the situation in Hong Kong.

## **2.6 Conditions for Successful School Improvement**

In reviewing the international literature in the last five years on school improvement projects, a lot of factors contributing to school improvement projects were reported.

### **(a) Professional Communities and Organisational Learning**

Harris & Young (2000:31) trace the development of Improving the Quality of All Project (IQEA) in England and the Manitoba School Improvement Programme (MSIP) in Canada which have each demonstrated considerable success, and reveal that there are common elements that the two projects share. The area of greatest synergy lies in their ability to encourage teacher collaboration within schools and to foster professional learning communities. Bryk & Camburn's (1999: 755) study shows that the professional community is receiving markedly increased attention

as part of both practitioner and scholarly efforts to promote improvements in instruction and students' learning. They list three key facilitating conditions, namely, the principal's leadership, school size and trust. Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine (1999:130) analyse the potential for a school improvement process to foster professional community in three rural middle schools through the process of organisational learning in a 2-year qualitative case study. The findings show that there are tensions schools must negotiate between bureaucracy and professional community. There are four organisational factors influencing the establishing of professional community: principal's leadership, organisational history, organisational priorities and organisation of teacher work.

Leithwood & Leonard (1998:243) report the results of synthesizing evidence from three independent studies of conditions that foster organisational learning in schools carried out in different contexts, including out-of-school conditions (external environment and policies), school conditions (vision, culture, etc.) and school leadership. Among the most important of these conditions is the transformational form of the principal's leadership. Marks & Louis (1999:707) examine the relationship of teacher empowerment and the capacity for organisational learning by using multilevel analyses and demonstrate a strong and consistent relationship between the two.

Though the majority of literature on school effectiveness and improvement has tended to focus on whole school issues and whole school approaches to improving standards, Haydn's (2001:417) study shows the importance of the development and transference within a school; the improvement work started from a very peculiar department and ends up with a very successful school in his study.

## **(b) Leadership**

Numerous articles review the importance of leadership in fostering change



and guiding school reform. Datnow & Castellano (2001:219) address the issues of leadership in school reform with respect to the roles of the principal and the reform facilitator in the Success for All reform model. Leadership perspectives on the school improvement journey are recorded by Jackson (2000:61). Brown, Rutherford & Boyle (2000:237) examine the role of the Head of Department in UK secondary schools in terms of its potential for school improvement, and conclude that distributed leadership among senior and middle managers still remains rhetoric rather than practice. A very good examination of emerging assumptions about leadership for school improvement is discussed by West et. al. (2000). Ainscow & Southworth's (1996:229) study of the roles of leaders and external consultants in school improvement conclude that there is a significant impact of workspace culture on teacher development and those involved in these developments need to be sensitive to the peculiarities of each school.

Based on a substantial body of school improvement research, Hopkins & Harris (1997:401) suggest that different improvement strategies and types of intervention are needed for schools at different stages of growth.

Though the researcher has quoted a number of research findings on conditions and factors contributing to school improvement, Hatch & White (2002:117) draw on examples from the Authentic Teaching and Learning for All Students (ATLAS) Communities Project, a collaboration among experienced reform organisations in the United States, including the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer,1996), the School Development Program (Comer, 1988), and the Education Development Centre and Harvard Project Zero (Comer, Gardner, Sizer & Whitla, 1996), and conclude that the knowledge needed for successful school reform goes far beyond what is currently available and accessible. West (2000:43) draws upon the work of the 'Moving Schools' project, a small group of selected IQEA schools for further study and also concludes that while the school improvement field has begun at least to delineate the key areas for

support, the understanding of how support 'works' remains partial.

The literature review in the school improvement field provides a strong motivation and intense interest for the researcher to analyse an improvement project in Hong Kong which involves the collaboration of the university and the school.

## **2.7 Summary**

In light of the purpose of the study and the research questions set out in the last chapter, the researcher tries to outline how changes in teachers' capacity and school culture can be related to school improvement. The review of literature starts from questioning the effect of change, the 'narrowness' or the absence of genuine help in improving schools from the school effectiveness research, the definitions and the trends of the school improvement field and ends with the evidence of the effects of large-scale school improvement projects and a general review of the factors and conditions contributing to school improvement.

## **Chapter Three: Literature review: 2. Teachers' professional development and school-university partnerships**

### **3.1 School-university partnership**

#### **History and concepts**

School-university collaboration or partnership is not an innovative relationship from the twentieth century. The history of such cooperation can be dated back to the late 19th century (Goodlad, 1995). In the United States, the recent wave of interest in the professional development of schools through this partnership concept started in the 1980s. This may be related to the phases of school improvement discussed in the last chapter. The first wave of educational reform stressed accountability with an emphasis on academic rigor, and criticised teachers for poor performance (Campoy, 2000:6), whereas the second wave of the educational reform movement, focusing on professionalization of teachers, was led by the three major reports, the Carnegie Forum (1986), the Holmes Group (1986, 1990) and the American Federation of Teachers (Levine, 1988). Dana (1998:111) suggested that collaborative partnerships were examples of how schools and universities could seek one another's professional wisdom and expertise to combat the problems existing in public education. Good partnerships designed collaboratively between school systems and schools, colleges and departments of education should be used to facilitate the integration of pre-service classroom instruction with experience in the field; they should also contribute to the professional development of practicing teachers, administrators and teachers educators, and allow university classroom instruction to be more sensitive to current issues in public education (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

In Goodlad's (1984) and Holmes Group's (1986) studies, the original interest in professional development in schools by joining universities and schools was to improve

pre-service teacher education. It was not until the mid 1980's that the cooperation was seen as something worth paying attention to, as quality of education and teachers was severely criticized by the public and educational reformers. It has become an overwhelmingly hot issue since then. The Holmes Group (1986:4) in the United States published a report on Tomorrow's Teachers, stating that the goals for the reform of teacher education are:

- *to make the education of teachers intellectually more solid;*
- *to recognize differences in teachers' knowledge, skill and commitment, in their education, certification, and work;*
- *to create standards of entry into the profession – examination and educational requirements – that are professionally relevant and intellectually defensible;*
- *to connect our own institutions to schools;*
- *to make schools better places for teachers to work, and to learn.*

As can be seen from the above objectives, the Holmes Group had a 'task' or 'managerial' orientation by emphasizing accountability, raising standards through setting indicators and by establishing a structured managerial system. The establishment of professional development schools (PDS) was set. It was hoped that the PDS could serve teacher education the way the teaching hospital served medical education. It was a place where all the elements of educational reform could come together like the community, the school board, the social service agencies, the school of education in university, the district and all the stakeholders within the schools. Since then, a remarkable flurry of efforts has produced hundreds of school-university collaborations across the United States (Darling-Hammon, 1994:2). A collection of research papers on professional development schools can be found in the Teacher Education Yearbook VII edited by David Byrd and John McIntyre (1999) and published by the Association of Teacher Education. The Houston collaborative described by Houston, Hollis, Clay, Ligons and Roff (1999:27) gives positive findings on the effects of the program as

shown by differences in teaching and higher standardized test scores as compared to those not participating in the collaborative. In another study by Nihlen, Williams & Sweet (1999:143) on the process of decision making undertaken to develop teacher leadership in a professional development elementary school, teachers believe that they have become high-quality teachers who provide high-quality learning for students.

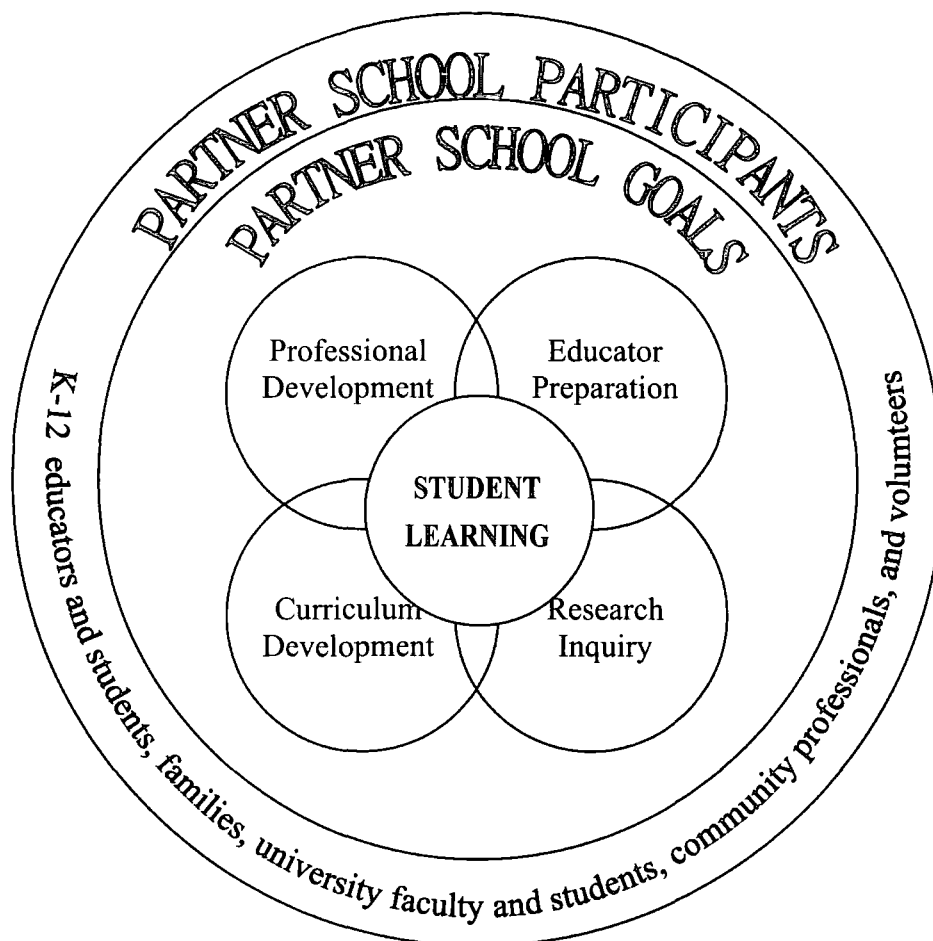
Goodlad (1988) defines a partnership as a collaborative arrangement between different institutions with the goal of solving common problems while advancing self-interest. Goodlad (1994, 1995) describes his blueprint for a centre of pedagogy: a centre where quality teacher education, educational research and school educational reform could be established for co-reform through a symbiotic partnership. According to Goodlad, the provision of good school education depends on good teachers. In order to solve the problem of ineffective education, the reform should simultaneously happen in schools and teacher education institutions. The concept of a centre of pedagogy aims to bring the school districts, school, college or department of education and departments of the arts and sciences into a collaborative centre (Goodlad, 1994:10).

Osguthorpe, R. Harris, Black, Cutler & M. Harris (1995: 3) explain that 'for a school-university partnership to effect lasting change, a structure must be created in which all partners have equal status'. They identify two broad general goals: to strengthen the preparation of teachers and to renew K-12 education. In order to advance these goals, four basic areas of partnership, all aiming at increasing student learning can be designated. Figure 2 quoted from Osguthorpe et. al. (1995:5) illustrates the interrelationships of these goals and of the participants in partner schools. The goals of the collaboration between partners are to:

- *ensure that those entering the education profession are prepared to serve all students effectively;*
- *provide opportunities for teachers to strengthen their ability to contribute to the students they serve;*

- ⑤ *improve the education and school experience of all students;*
- ⑥ *raise questions and conduct research that will promote educational renewal at both the school and the university.*

Figure 2: Partner School Relationships



Source: Osguthorpe, R. T, Harris, R. C. Black, S., Cutler, B. R, & Harris, M. F. (1995). Introduction: Understanding school-university partnerships. In R.T. Osguthorpe, R. C. Harris, M. F. Harris, & S. Black (Eds.), *Partner schools: Centers for educational renewal* (p.5). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Although the models of school-university partnership of Goodlad and Osguthorpe are more profound and visionary than the Holmes Group, they are more difficult in implementation and evaluation. Dickens (2000:27) comments that most literature on school-university partnership lacks a strong theoretical background on discussing the development of relationship between the parties. Such unclear relationship will lead to misunderstanding on the nature of the cooperation and when problems and difficulties

arise, the relationship will wither and will lead to a big gap in expectation of both parties. Though Smedley (2001:189), in his study of literature leading to enhancement of school-university links, concludes that partnerships are desirable, achievable and sustainable, the impediments like institutional inertia, restructured and expanding workloads of teachers and lecturers and availability of suitable staff and various financial and political pressures are obstacles to successful partnerships.

### **Success and failure**

Bringing the two cultures of university and school together is no simple task. Su (1999:47) comments that 'although all participants believed that the partnership had achieved some remarkable successes, they identified the lack of commitment from the university faculty and the absence of effective communication as the major obstacles to the further development of a true and equal partnership'. Bracey (1990:65) also says, 'most people in school buildings perceive the work of universities as irrelevant and not useful in their daily professional lives'. Researchers traditionally viewed schools as 'sources of data' or as 'tools to carry out the university agenda'. The collaboration, if not established well, is a very shaky one.

The review of literature on research on school-university partnership is mainly on professional development schools, emphasizing development of both in-service and pre-service teachers. Frankes, Valli and Cooper (1998:70) review research in PDSs using the primary goals proposed by the Holmes Group, namely, teacher as researcher, as decision maker, as teacher educator and as political activist. They conclude that there has been more research-related effort, more empowerment and leadership initiatives, more curriculum programs but little evidence of bringing greater social justice to schools. Frankes et al. (1998:80) conclude that PDSs show great promise, yet face many challenges.

The PDS concept was severely criticised by Cuban and Pinar. Cuban (1987:351)



calls the assumptions that the Holmes Group made about education reform, the 'rhetoric of pleading', and contends that it was naïve to call for changes in state certification, university practices, and working conditions in school systems without mobilizing large partisan coalitions to address state legislatures, governors, and state superintendents. Pinar (1989:11) also questions the efficacy of the structural changes called for by the Holmes Group, and advises the colleagues in schools of education to 'maintain a respectful distance' from those in schools in order to serve as objective advisors.

Campoy (2000:13), in reviewing the literature on PDSs, concludes that for many reform-minded educators, the PDS seems a commonsense approach to education reform. The difficulty for educators engaged in PDS partnerships work is that they "must overcome the barriers of differing pedagogy and reward systems, changes in roles, and the cultural barriers that present significant obstacles when attempting to change the educational system". Day (1998) conducted an independent evaluation of an innovative cluster of seven partnership projects between teachers, schools, researchers and teacher educators in a university in Sweden and concluded that differentiated strategic partnerships are necessary in order to meet the different, ideological, generative and capacity building needs of schools and teachers.

The above literature review gives us an overall impression that partnership and collaboration may enhance school improvement in different aspects, but its success depends very much on the interaction of the two parties, and the professional and practical advice given to schools. All this collaboration work requires time, effort and mutual trust. Johnson, Duvernoy, McGill & Will(1996: 177) comment that "while school/university partnerships are being developed as part of educational reform nationwide, universities and colleges do not often reward the supervisor who spends time in the field talking to teachers. Public schools do not provide time for this kind of work either". In an article written by Noffke, Clark, Palmeri-Santiago, Sadler & Shujaa (1996), the conflicts and challenges of a school-university partnership project were

vividly voiced when different teachers described the tensions when they got involved in the project. They reviewed the facts that they did not have time to write up journals, they were skeptical of the value of research projects, and they did not want to face the comments and the grading of the university people (Noffke et.al. 1996:169).

The project of university-school partnership studied by the researcher is innovative in Hong Kong. Partnerships between schools and universities in Hong Kong do exist, but usually in the following models, either i) the Faculty of the university will send student-teachers for teaching practice in schools, and the experienced teachers will serve as mentors or teacher-advisers; or ii) the schools will work with the University faculty members by providing opportunities for the latter to conduct educational research, and in return, findings are reviewed to the schools. A large-scale collaboration involving from at least one-fifth to almost all of the staff in each school was uncommon. Like teachers in any other places, they are more concerned with the practical teaching work, and think that the educational theories are not practical and the collaboration work can only help the academics to publish. In Hong Kong, the primary school teachers do respect very much the university people, but the exchange of professional discourse is a problem. This inspires the researcher to view the partnership scheme undertaken as one which can deal with real problems the school is facing, and thus transform the teachers' culture within the school. Valli (1999:63) reminds us that the success and problems of school-university partnerships rest on the transformed cultures of the parties involved, not on individualized initiatives by people of good will. Nonetheless, the cooperation between university and school, if treated superficially, may fall into the trap of working on the surface in order to maintain a good relationship; or the partnership project is not a complete or comprehensive model, influencing only a very small group of teaching staff.

The researcher in the Hong Kong case study is interested in how a school-university partnership can enhance school improvement through a collaborative

mechanism, especially when the school improvement is large-scale, comprehensive, organic, but unique in the sense that it is school-based.

Robinson & Darling-Hammond (1994:209) list ten characteristics of successful collaboration:

- *mutual self-interest and common goals*
- *mutual trust and respect*
- *shared decision making*
- *clear focus*
- *manageable agenda*
- *commitment from top leadership*
- *fiscal support*
- *long-term commitment*
- *dynamic nature*
- *information sharing and communication*

A few other studies have identified factors that have the potential to lead to successful school-university partnerships. These factors include building trust among members, common goals focusing on a single issue, sharing responsibility, sharing or equalizing power, changing partnership goals, strong commitment to collaboration, ongoing communication among members, and rethinking traditional roles (Lewison and Holliday, 1997:106). Erskine-Cullen (1995:192) concludes that school-university partnerships have met with mixed success in facilitating change in education. As there is a growing number of these partnership schemes, they are easy to establish but more difficult to maintain as viable and workable entities. Reflecting on her experience and on that of the other colleagues in the Learning Consortium, a partnership between six organisations (two Universities and four school districts in Canada) established in 1988, a number of factors were attributed to the success of the partnership. These include long term commitment, the effect of early successes, stable finances, credibility of the

university faculty and the collegial model of managing activities, and decision-making. In particular, three trends can be noted in the pattern of change implementation in organizations learned from the implementation of the Learning Consortium. Consortium activities have mobilized a critical mass to implement change; the joint activities have tended to build on and develop previous activities to become organic extensions rather than ad hoc programs; the partners have used Consortium initiatives as starting points for system change.

In a more recent study of partnership projects, Firestone & Fisler (2002:449) reviewed 8 years of the history of one school-university partnership and implemented a detailed field study for three years. They claim that although much attention has been given to the advantages and disadvantages of working across the cultural boundaries between schools and universities, the study should focus more narrowly on school improvement and in-service teacher development than those broader definitions require. Hence, they argue that the partnership study should:

- *adopt a micropolitical perspective in viewing such partnerships;*
- *explore the possibility of creating professional communities; and*
- *study the impact of leadership which may play a critical role in bringing about professional communities in politicized situations.*

### **3.2 Implications for the study**

The above review of literature reflects some of the critical features in a partnership or collaborative project, no matter how confusing or clear the terms being used:

- *Cooperation is not just a technical process, instead both partners should come to agree on the vision, missions and objectives of the collaborative project;*
- *Values, roles and strategies should be understood and clearly stated;*
- *Both parties should have equal status and be mutually beneficial;*
- *Both parties should commit themselves to effort and involvement;*

Secondly, from the literature reviewed, it seems that there are two approaches in promoting teacher education and quality of learning and teaching; one is more task-oriented, the other places more emphasis on 'human' politics. The task-oriented approach argues for education becoming more accountable, seeing the development of better indicators and the establishment of management mechanisms as essential. The other approach emphasizes more the human factors, developing the capacity of the teachers and the leaders, empowering the other stakeholders so as to help promote quality education. Ideally, the above two approaches could supplement each other. As referred to the school improvement project implemented in Hong Kong, emphasis is more on raising teachers' capacity so that the schools can be turned into learning organisations (Senge, 1990) by developing a positive school culture, and by promoting the internal capacity of the teachers through external support in the form of university-school partnership.

Thirdly, though the literature reviewed above covered both the professional development in schools and partnership projects like the Learning Consortium, the distinction between the specific or the primary objectives, according to the researcher, should be made between the PDS and the Consortium. The former aims at the professional development of teachers, especially the pre-service or new teachers through the cooperation of the university faculty and the schools; whereas the latter is concerned more with the promotion of quality education in schools through multiple strategies. The researcher's study is more inclined to the latter kind of partnership.

As a matter of fact, the usual approach to the delivery of educational or curriculum strategies in Hong Kong is a top-down approach, like the Target Oriented Curriculum mentioned in the first chapter. Usually, the reform is initiated by the government officials in the Education Department, probably after an overseas visit or study in the United States or United Kingdom, and the recommendations will first be discussed in consultative committees like the Education Commission or Curriculum Development

Council. As most committee members are appointed, there will not be major objections on the implementation. The curriculum initiatives will then be disseminated either through workshops, seminars and/or lectures provided by the government officials like the Inspectors or Curriculum Officers; or contracted out to the academic institutions for the delivery. Seldom will there be curriculum reform initiated by individual schools. The case study the researcher is undertaking is a university initiated school improvement project, and the schools join the project purely on voluntary basis, without any coercion either from the government or from the school management boards of the sponsoring bodies. In this transitional period of political and education change, the study is interesting and has implications. In view of the customary role and traditions of power in primary schools of Hong Kong, this is a bold attempt to introduce the concept of mutual partnership and empowerment. A case study conducted by the researcher, may review more of the attitudes of the practitioners in collaborating with the university people, the process of decision-making by teachers, the ways of empowering people, the acquisition of professional experience and the transformation of all these experiences into teaching and learning, as reflected in curriculum changes in the school.

### **3.3 Summary**

This chapter starts by reviewing the professional development of schools, with the emphasis on teacher education. The Holmes Report and Goodlad's work are extremely important in providing a clear understanding of collaboration and partnership in different organisations. The latter is more concerned with the factors and reasons for school-university partnerships to be successful.

The literature reviewed for these two chapters provide a sound theoretical basis for the case study of a school improvement programme through school-university partnership in Hong Kong. The framework of the improvement programme and the work conducted in the study case will be portrayed in the coming chapter.

## **Chapter Four: The Project and The School**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The case study of the primary school in this school improvement project, the Hong Kong Accelerated Schools for Quality Education (ASQE), is one of the twenty-six primary schools voluntarily joining the project. The ASQE was launched by the Faculty of Education of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), implemented by the Centre for University & School Partnership, CUHK, and funded by the Quality Education Fund of the Hong Kong Government. The project had its origin in the school restructuring model, Accelerated Schools Project (ASP), founded by Professor Henry Levin at Stanford University in 1986. The Hong Kong Project adopts the essence of Levin's project, transforms its strategies and applies it to the situation in Hong Kong, with some modification. A brief account of the Accelerated Schools Project in U.S.A., of the HKASQE and its theoretical framework, and of the Partner School (the case study) will be introduced in this chapter.

### **4.2 Background & History of Accelerated Schools Project (ASP)**

The Accelerated Schools Project launched at Stanford University by Professor Henry Levin was a comprehensive approach to school change, designed to improve schooling for children in at-risk communities. It started in two pilot elementary schools in 1986, and was extended to the middle schools in 1990 (Hopfenberg, Levin & Associates 1993). The Accelerated Schools Project network has now expanded to more than 1000 elementary and middle schools across U.S.A. The approach was developed in the belief that at-risk students should have the same rich curriculum and instruction typically reserved for the 'gifted and talented'. The model is not a set instructional or curriculum 'package', but a philosophy about children and learning accompanied by a

process of change. It is designed as a comprehensive transformation process including the governance structure, curriculum inquiry, teaching and learning strategies in the context of powerful learning (basically adopting the philosophy of John Dewey and Constructivist concepts of learning), and community and parental support.

The philosophy of ASP is grounded in three principles: i) unity of purpose, which means that all the stakeholders including parents, teachers, students and administrators strive towards a common set of goals; ii) empowerment coupled with responsibility meaning that all members of the school community are encouraged to share responsibility for making and implementing decisions, and are accountable for the results; iii) building on strengths, which means that the schools should draw on the expertise and experience of everyone involved in the school community (Hopfenberg, Levin & Associates 1993, Finnan et al., 1996).

In year one, the Accelerated School has to go through a systematic process involving five stages, namely, taking stock of the school, developing a vision, setting priorities, creating governing structures and beginning the inquiry process. This is termed the 'big wheel' change, referring to the formal process of making long term systematic changes. Other individual innovations and changes in teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices that may bring about new ideas and strategies in the classroom are referred to as 'little wheel' changes (Finnan 1996). As each school in the ASP is different, so are the results of each school's journey towards acceleration. But the essence of the project is to embrace the same high expectations for their students, rich or poor, under-privileged or advantaged. From year two onward, emphasis is put on planning the powerful learning units and the 'train the trainers' workshops.

### **4.3 Accelerated Schools for Quality of Education in Hong Kong (ASQE)**



**(a) History and rationale**

Started as a pilot study in two primary and one middle schools in April, 1997, the number of schools participating in ASQE suddenly surged up to 50 in September 1998, mainly because of the establishment of the 5000 million Hong Kong dollars Quality Education Fund announced in the policy speech of the Chief Executive in October, 1997. ASQE aims to enhance quality school education through an innovative and dynamic university school partnership model of comprehensive school change (Lee & Chiu, 1999). Chiu (1998) comments that the implementation of ASQE is like dreaming an impossible dream, as it involves not only a cultural change in the school system involving the organic interaction of school management, curriculum reform and community and parental involvement, but also 'paradigm shifts' in concepts of effective teaching and learning. In Hong Kong, the major provider of education is the public sector, though there are a very limited number of international schools and low-status private schools. In the past, the danger of the schools being closed down in the public sector was not common, especially the primary schools, as there are still AM and PM bi-sessional schools existing now. The bi-sessional schools which are housed in the same building usually split into two whole-day schools and one has to move to a new location. There is a time-table for all primary schools in Hong Kong to become whole-day schools in year 2007. As a result, the risk of job losses was not severe, especially in the period between 1998 to 2001 when the project was in implementation. Secondly, the Chinese culture encourages mutual respect between teachers; seldom is there strong opposition or advocacy in educational philosophies; nor are there critical comments on learning strategies between stakeholders. Teachers were not familiar with discourse like 'empowerment', 'critical friends' and 'school as a learning organisation'. However, the situation may be changing

in recent years as the birth rate has dropped sharply in certain districts in Hong Kong, including the district in which the case school is situated.

Apart from the time spent in the logistic arrangements for the improvement project, the duration of the project was about two and a half years. The time frame, the attitude of teachers towards collaboration, the understanding of school improvement and their entrenched practice of teaching and learning and the quality of inputs of the university faculty members all contributed to the successes and failures of an experimental project of such magnitude. Fortunately, the collaboration was on a voluntary basis (although objectives of participating and forms of opinion-seeking in joining the project were various and those joining might not have a clear understanding of the strategies of the partnership project), and was launched in a period of time when change was the talk of the town and benefited from the good reputation of the university.

To conclude, on one hand, it was an innovative but risky attempt to intrude into the regular running of standardized and traditional schools in the Chinese culture for an extended period of more than two years; on the other, the project was launched at an 'appropriate' time when the policy makers were extremely eager to initiate changes in the educational sector.

Originated from ASP, ASQE also adopted the three cardinal principles of ASP, and placed the schools at the focal point of change. Engaging all the stakeholders in the process of school-growth planning and building collaborative cultures within schools were some of the major objectives. ASP concentrated on establishing a set of cadres that included a steering committee and work groups focused on particular areas of reform. For example, implementing 'powerful learning' and 'train the trainers' were important strategies (See chapter 5, 5.2 for definition of terms and chapter 7, 7.4a for description of the strategies). ASQE borrowed most of the ideas from ASP, but a lot of adaptations were made. Some of the major differences were:

- a) ASQE aimed to establish trust and confidence between the two parties in the beginning stage of the collaboration; the staff development workshops conducted by the school development officers from the university were seen as essential;
- b) The stock-taking exercise was conducted by the university staff in order to provide academic advice. A kind of ‘expert-led growth’ approach was taken at first, in which data and findings were explained but left for further exploration to the school teachers, whereas the staff of ASP schools in USA had to conduct all stock-takings themselves;
- c) Teachers in USA are more familiar and accustomed to develop and design powerful learning curriculum according to the philosophies of constructivism, but the university staff in ASQE understood that the teaching staff in Hong Kong were uncomfortable and inexperienced in designing curriculum all on their own. Therefore, a ‘pragmatic’ kind of constructivist approach was adopted in designing learning experiences, e.g. some of the textbooks and curriculum materials teachers often use were also made use of. They also worked more closely with teachers in the design and delivery of teaching, giving appropriate guidance, advice and even demonstration.

**(b) The ASQE team of the university faculty**

The development team of the improvement project of the university faculty comprised eleven professional staff, including one programme coordinator and ten school development officers, and six supporting administrative staff. The researcher in this study was the programme coordinator responsible for overseeing the implementation of a project involving 24 middle schools and 26 primary

schools, monitoring the school coaching system and mentoring the school development officers. The school development officers possessed vast experience in different subject disciplines. They were either previous lecturers in faculty or colleges of education, trainers in the field of management, curriculum developers or senior teachers in primary and secondary schools. They worked in teams of 2 to 3 members and covered all schools in the project. The aim of the school development officers was to guide the school community in the transformation process in school improvement. Some of the major tasks were:

- ⊗ *to liaise with the partner school, build school capacity for change and take stock for schools;*
- ⊗ *to train the school community to internalize the systematic self-improvement process of accelerated schools;*
- ⊗ *to conduct staff development workshops;*
- ⊗ *to facilitate the teaching and learning strategies;*
- ⊗ *to meet regularly with members of the partner schools;*
- ⊗ *to provide an on-site trouble-shooting service and telephone assistance whenever necessary.*

(Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong Accelerated Schools Project Bulletin Vol. 1-3, 1999, 2000)

On the whole, the development team of the university faculty were involved in all disciplines in the school improvement process. This was different from the ASP in the United States where emphasis was put on ‘training the trainers’ by facilitating the development of external and internal coaches (practitioners) nominated by the schools. The comprehensive, organic and dynamic nature of the ASQE can be read from the summary of the school journal kept by the school development officer of the university faculty in the case being studied (Appendix 1).

#### 4.4 The Framework of the School Improvement Project

Reviewing the literature on school improvement reflects the difficulties in reaching consensus on what school improvement is and how improvement projects can be evaluated as effective. The literature review on school-university partnership shows universities and public schools have different interests and work in different fields historically. In particular, the position of the university is traditionally privileged in relation to schools (Little, 1993). Relating the findings of US research to the cultural background of schools in Hong Kong, three questions have to be addressed in implementing the improvement projects:

- *What model of school improvement is appropriate for each school in the project? Are there any general principles for school improvement generated from the case studies?*
- *Could confidence and trust be established, so that the improvement project will be beneficial to the partner schools? How acceptable are the academic advice and judgement, and the staff development workshops in developing a professional community and the innovative curriculum programmes introduced into the school?*
- *What will be the impact of the project on the school management, the teaching curriculum and strategies and especially, the educational outcomes of the students?*

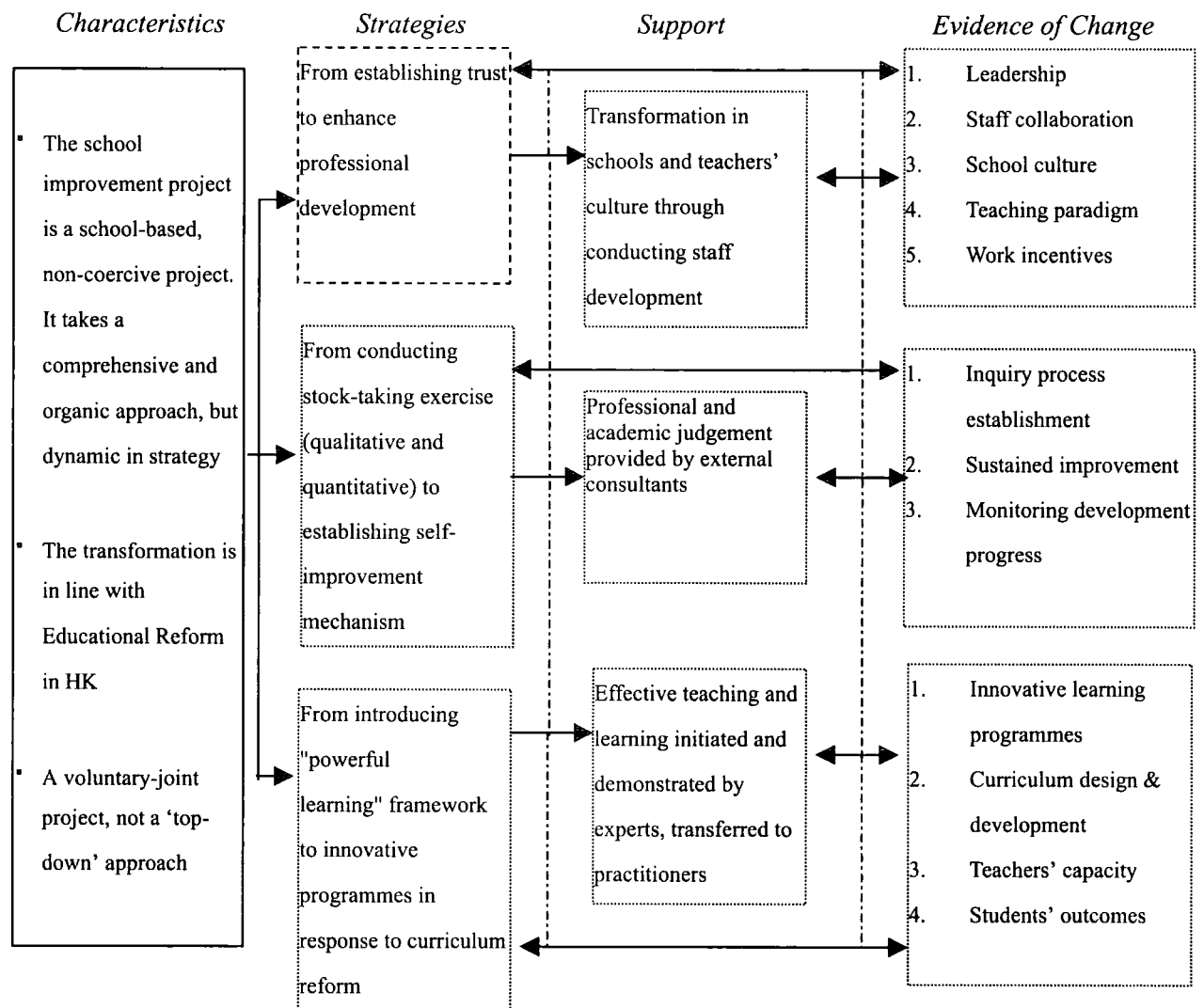
Figure 3 shows the framework of the improvement project drawn by the project coordinator. The framework was used for all schools in the project. The framework presents a clear picture of the improvement project by listing the characteristics, the strategies, the support of the faculty members and the changes expected in the collaborative partner school. Trust had to be built on the sincerity of the school development officers, the professionalism demonstrated and the effectiveness of the

interactive staff development workshops. Confidence had to be established through academic advice and judgement with strong knowledge-based evidence. Demonstration and introduction of effective teaching and learning programmes aimed to win the respect and appreciation of the teachers. Subsequently, it was hoped that the teachers' capacity would grow and the students would benefit as the teaching force became more competent. The improvement model emphasizes strongly the mutual trust and understanding of both parties, and the arrows in Figure 3 represent the interactiveness of the programmes and the responses, effects and evaluation in the process. In a way, the strategies of the school improvement project resemble those in the school university partnership scheme of the Learning Consortium in Canada. Erskine-Cullen (1995:192) reveals that the programmes of the learning Consortium 'have been designed around professional growth, classroom strategies, leadership development, as well as system planning'.

Figure 3 is an overview of the project. Some strategies were clearly explained to the case school before the school decided to join the project, like the stock-taking exercise (in which data would be collected from both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews on stakeholders), anxieties could be generated in the staff force, if the data reflected the weaknesses in the school and the staff. Initial staff development workshops aiming at establishing mutual trust and confidence were also explained, but the small-wheel action programmes like the powerful learning activities were implemented only after the school development officers had established trust in the partnership project, and/or built on the results of the initial study in the stock-taking exercise. Hence, the success or failure of the project in each school would presumably depend on the personnel from the university and in the case study school, the trust and confidence built and the effectiveness of the actions introduced and implemented in the school. The conditions of the successful implementation of the school improvement project, the impact on the perception and attitude of the school practitioners, as well as

the changes in curriculum are the expected findings in the case study.

**Figure 3: Framework of a school improvement project through University-school partnership in Hong Kong**



## 4.5 The School for the case study

### (a) Ecology

The School, Chai Wan Primary School (PM) (the name of the school is made-up for the sake of confidentiality, school code 006 in Table 2), is a well-established Christian primary school in the Eastern District on Hong Kong Island. It is in its 43rd year of operation at 2001. The school adopts a system of half-day operation which was introduced as a temporary measure in 1954 to meet the enormous increase in the primary school population during the postwar period when capital resources and school space were limited (ECR 4, 1990). The School has been located in the present site for 24 years. The school building is sub-standard with insufficient space and room for organising extra-curricular activities or any other innovative teaching and learning programmes. There are many public housing estates nearby and the majority of the pupils come from lower-middle class families and most pupils are not well-supported by their families academically. Over the past five years, the Eastern District of Hong Kong has been undergoing rapid development into a new town – old public housing estates have been re-developed and infrastructure is being enhanced to support the new development. There are many new whole-day schools in the neighbourhood, which are considered as competitors for ‘good’ pupils. The whole-day schools are more popular with the parents, other criteria being equal.

At the time when the partnership project was introduced, Hong Kong had around 850 primary schools, most of which were still bi-sessional, and an enrolment of 450,000 students. The poor resources and the general lack of space in Hong Kong constrain curriculum innovation. The choice of Chai Wan Primary School (PM) as the case school is a good representation of the situation of primary schools in Hong Kong. Table 2 showed some of the characteristics of the 26



primary schools involved in the school improvement project ASQE. The size of the case school, its history, the bi-sessional system, the influence and the significance of the sponsoring bodies (though managed by the school board from the sponsoring bodies, all the expenses of the schools are funded by public money from the government) were very common characteristics of the primary schools in Hong Kong. Schools with Christian background are generally welcomed by the parents in Hong Kong. With relatively 'poorer' intake of students and very basic facilities, the school can be considered to be in an 'at risk' situation, when taking into account the staff strength, the social economic status of the students, the facilities and the resources of the sponsoring body. Such a situation coincides with the main objective of helping the 'at risk schools' of the accelerated schools project in the United States.

A measure of the sense of the teachers' organizational commitment in the third month of the partnership project indicated that the mean value of the above variable (4.46) was exactly the same as the average of the other 25 primary schools. The instrument was adopted and translated from Mowday et. al. (1979) and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. The above were the reasons for the researcher to choose the case school for further research.

**Table 2: The characteristics of the 26 primary schools involved in the school improvement project ASQE**

School Code	Year Start	Academic Year	School Size (regular classes)							Sponsoring Bodies
			P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Total	
001	1964	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Welfare Association (District)
002	1986	2001/2002	4	3	3	5	5	4	24	Welfare Association (Village Origin)
003	1962	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Catholic Church
004	1962	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Catholic Church
005	1963	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Confucian Association
006	1958	2001/2002	3	3	3	3	3	3	18	Christian Church
007	1989	2001/2002	4	4	5	4	4	4	25	Buddhism
008	1960	2001/2002	2	2	2	2	2	2	12	Workers' Union
009	1987	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Charity Association
010	1982	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Taoist Association
011	1982	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Taoist Association
012	1984	2001/2002	2	2	3	4	4	4	19	Taoist Association
013	1984	2001/2002	3	4	4	4	4	4	23	Taoist Association
014	1961	2001/2002	2	2	4	3	4	3	18	Christian Church
015	1971	2001/2002	3	3	5	5	5	6	27	Christian Church
016	1982	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Catholic Church
017	1991	2001/2002	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	Christian Church
018	1991	2001/2002	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	Christian Church
019	1983	2001/2002	2	2	2	2	2	2	12	Christian Church
020	1983	2001/2002	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	Christian Church
021	1906	2001/2002	3	3	3	3	3	3	18	Christian Church
022	1951	2001/2002	2	2	2	2	2	2	12	Christian Church
023	1957	2001/2002	2	2	2	2	2	2	12	Catholic Church
024	1932	2001/2002	3	4	4	4	4	5	24	Welfare Association (District)
025	1985	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Charity Association
026	1959	2001/2002	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	Government

On the whole, the school under the study is a 'typical' bi-sessional school in Hong Kong, with a slightly doubtful future, as the birth rate in this particular district is declining. The teachers were aware of the school's problems, though they had no risk of job loss even if the school were to shrink as a result of smaller and smaller 'intake' of students. They would be re-deployed to other schools.

**(b) The staff and the students**

There are altogether 46 staff members, of whom 31 are professional teaching staff including the principal. At the time of joining the collaborative improvement project in 1998, 84% of the staff were accredited, holders of Teachers Certificate or Diploma in Teacher Education. Table 3 shows the teaching experience of the

professional staff.

**Table 3: Teaching Experience of teachers in the school**

number of teachers	years of experience
8	0-5
5	6-10
2	11-15
3	16-20
4	21-25
3	26-30
6	30 or above

The teaching staff is composed of the principal and vice-principal, four senior teachers (responsible for functional committees), 23 frontline teachers, 1 teacher-librarian and 1 'student-guidance' teacher.

There are altogether 21 classes (18 regular and 3 remedial classes) with a total of 628 students (317 male and 311 female). The above information is extracted from the 1998 school report of Chai Wan Primary School (PM).

**(c) Tasks accomplished in the school**

Though the improvement project started in the September of 1998, not many activities were conducted in the school in the first six months except the stock-taking exercise (two days of interviews conducted with various stakeholders ranging from the headmaster, the teachers, the pupils, the parents and other supporting staff) and one workshop. Time was needed to establish trust and confidence. With reference to the improvement framework in Figure 3, Table 4 is a summary of the major tasks accomplished in the schools. A detailed account of the tasks can be extracted from the journal of the school development officer in Appendix 1.

**Table 4: Summary of the major tasks of the improvement project in the school**

Nature of work	Objectives/themes	Targets	Impact/Outcomes
Staff Development workshops (Jan. 1999 to June, 1999)	Transformation in school and teachers' culture – workshops on themes like school change, vision building, priorities setting and school plans	All teachers	Evaluation of the effectiveness of the workshops collected, conditions of the school team and the working culture identified, a continuous reflection of the needs of the school
Conducting stock-taking exercise (Oct. 1998 to Jan. 1999)	Qualitative interviews with various stakeholders and questionnaires issued to both teachers and students for quantitative analysis	All teachers and all primary 4 to 6 students	Initial Stock-taking report was produced, for formative evaluation of the school and for development purpose only
Conducting powerful learning programmes and innovative curriculum activities (Sept. 1999 to June 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff development workshops on powerful learning</li> <li>● Organising powerful learning activities for all P.4 students</li> <li>● Conducting powerful learning activities including lesson demonstrations, learning and assessment days</li> <li>● Two powerful learning activities were conducted in P.2 and P.4</li> <li>● Thinking skills programmes in the subject of mathematics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All teachers</li> <li>● ASQE core group teachers and all P4 teachers</li> <li>● All P.4 teachers and students</li> <li>● All P.2 and P.4 teachers, students and some parents</li> <li>● All Maths teachers in P.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The appreciation and understanding of learner-centred approach of learning (constructivism)</li> <li>● Understanding of the instructional design and internalising the philosophies of the learning initiatives</li> <li>● Students' and teachers feedback were recorded</li> <li>● The learning activities for P.2 were designed and conducted by the teaching staff themselves, parents were invited and trained to help in the learning process</li> <li>● Voluntarily innovative programmes from the maths teachers</li> </ul>
<p>Other major activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Study tours to Shanghai (April 1999) and Taipei (Dec. 2000)</li> <li>● Numerous meetings and contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Widening the perspectives of core teachers on curriculum reform and effective teaching strategies</li> <li>● Establishing good relationship, trust and collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Head-master and three core group teachers</li> <li>● Head-master, core group teachers and subject teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthening the capacity of core teachers and better alignment of school vision</li> <li>● Academic judgement and professional input were recognised</li> </ul>

## Chapter Five: Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

This research is a case study in connection with a school improvement project under the operation of a school-university partnership initiative. As stated in the first chapter, the purpose of the study is to explore the impact of the above project in a primary school in Hong Kong through studying the school teachers' reactions to such partnership. Three major questions have guided the research:

- 1) Under what conditions has the school improvement initiative contributed to the improvement of the school?
- 2) What sorts of professional experience have been acquired in relation to the reform initiative and how have they affected teachers' perceptions of their roles as reflective practitioners, their learning capacity and their attitude towards school improvement through school-university partnership?
- 3) How have these experiences affected their conceptions of teaching and learning, and what is the impact of their conceptions on curriculum change in their school?

The researcher would like to re-iterate that the project did not adopt a prescriptive approach in teaching and learning. Students' attainments in the form of subject assessment scores were not recorded and the improvement in academic scores, if there were any, could not be directly attributed to the improvement initiative, as explained in Chapter one (p. 6) and Chapter Two (p. 22-23). The impacts may be seen in the professional development of colleagues in the case schools, the change in management or leadership and the adoption of innovative curriculum, under some favourable conditions or factors, such as the input of professional guidance from an academic institution, trust and confidence in the external consultant, and the evolution into a

learning organisation. Evidence of enhancement of teachers' capacity may be seen in widening perspectives, practice of new teaching strategies, adoption of an innovative curriculum, and the students benefiting by enjoying powerful learning experiences and improvement in generic skills associated with newly designed learning activities.

This chapter describes the theoretical basis for the methodology chosen, methods and procedures of the study, including the setting, methods of data collection, and data analysis. Terms will be defined in the appropriate paragraphs.

## **5.2 Definition of Terms**

To ensure that certain terms employed in this study can be fully understood, the terms are used with the associated meanings stated below.

*"Big wheel" processes are systematic processes to help schools to determine their goals and objectives in relation to the three principles of ASQE. The processes are taking stock, building vision, setting priorities, establishing governance structures and adopting the inquiry process.*

*"Buy in" is the process for a school to join the school improvement project (ASQE). Members of the Project Team from the University will give a brief introduction of the philosophies, rationale and expected tasks to the school staff. The school may then decide to join the collaborative project.*

*Cadres are working groups established in schools, include a steering committee and working groups focused on a particular area of reform, e.g. powerful learning cadre, home-school relationship cadre.*

*Internal capacity is 'the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing student learning' (Stoll, 1999: 506). The term 'learning capacity' in the guiding research question refers to the internal capacity.*

*"Inquiry process" aims to explore the areas of challenge areas existing in the school. After determining the cause of the problem, solutions are sought and action plans and strategies developed. The implementation plan is evaluated and then reassessed.*

*Powerful learning is the teaching and learning approach adopted by ASP, an approach which is constructivist and integrative. Powerful learning situations aim to incorporate the values of acceleration: equity, communication and collaboration, participation, community spirit, school as a centre of expertise, risk-taking, reflection, experimentation and discovery, and trust.*

*School Development Officers (SDOs) are members of the university faculty. They provide consultancy services, conduct staff development workshops and stock-taking exercise, give advice on all work related to the improvement of the schools. They are referred to as external consultants by the school teachers.*

*School improvement initiative or the school improvement programme refers to the collaborative project between the university and the school, it is sometimes referred to as Accelerated Schools for Quality Education (ASQE) or for convenience sake, the interviewees may refer to the ASP (Accelerated Schools Project) in the dialogue.*

*School-university partnership is an arrangement between the members of the university faculty and the school teachers (including the head teacher) to join together on different aspects of school improvement programme. The partnership is based on voluntary participation with mutual agreement.*

*“Small wheel” processes are various innovations associated with improving teaching and learning, a major aspect of which is to create “powerful learning” experiences and raising students performance.*

### **5.3 Theoretical Basis for Methodology**

This study is a case study employing a holistic approach and a descriptive research design. It ‘evolves around the in-depth study of a single event or a series of linked cases over a defined period of time’ (Hitchcock & Hughes 1995). As Yin (1994:19) has argued, case study is a preferred methodology for examining contemporary events, as direct observation and systematic interviewing can be used. Yin (1994) also technically defines a case study as an empirical inquiry which:

- *investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when*

- ⊖ *the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which*
- ⊖ *multiple sources of evidence are used.*

This study is a design with a combination of both description and interpretation and it fits the five characteristics outlined by Bogdan & Biklen (1998) for a qualitative study.

- *Most of the faculty members and teachers were interviewed in their natural settings at universities and schools;*
- *The data resulting from the interviews is descriptive and mostly narrative in form;*
- *The goal was to follow the process of the interviewee's learning and subsequent use of their learning;*
- *The interview data was analysed inductively; direction and theory came from the collected data;*
- *The participants' perspectives, their reflections and explanations regarding the learning process they have experienced, were the focus of the study.*

*(Bogdan & Biklen 1998)*

The researcher noted the limitations and the concerns of using the case study strategies, for example, the lack of rigor, the biased views and the limited basis for scientific generalization. The researcher worked hard to collect the data from multiple sources, apart from the major source of interviews, triangulate to assess their validity, and to interpret and present them in an impartial way. Secondly, the purpose of the case study is to expand and generalize theories in an analytical way, and generate implications, rather than making generalizations based on statistical analysis.

The case study of the researcher should not be considered an action research project as defined by Elliott (1981), namely the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it, or practitioners seeking to improve their



understanding of events, situations and problems so as to increase the effectiveness of their practice. The present case study differs from action research as it involves the direct involvement of an outside body, the university's Faculty of Education, with the aim of achieving improvements. The research was done on site with the school practitioners, but it should not be classified as practitioner research which is described by Mckernan (1988:178) as 'a form of self-reflective problem-solving which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings'. It should be thought of as a case study of a comprehensive school improvement model, a formal collection of evidence presented as an interpretive position of a unique case. The data, detail and evidence are comparatively rich due to the position of the researcher as programme coordinator who is an 'outsider' with access to an insider's knowledge and understanding. This added depth and breadth to the study of the case school. Anderson, Herr & Nihlen (1994:2) also argue that the 'insider' research done by practitioners using their own site as the focus of study is 'a reflective process, but is different from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken, and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertions', and this kind of research is best done in collaboration with other educational outsiders like university faculty members.

## **5.4 Methods and Procedures for the study**

### **(a) Setting**

The Chai Wan Primary School PM serves as the case for the study. It can be seen as a phenomenon occurring in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman 1994:25). The setting of the school and the reasons for choosing the school for a case study were described in the last chapter.

A request to carry out the study had been made to the staff of the whole

school; all were interested and agreed to participate in the research. A list of potential interviewees was developed, maintaining anonymity. They were selected with the following principles:

- a) Though all the staff had experienced several staff development workshops conducted by the SDOs and attended meetings for all staff concerning the collaboration project, the interviewees should at least get involved in some other activities related to the small-wheel changes;
- b) The level of involvement in the interviewees in the collaborative project should range from high, medium to low;
- c) There should be a good spread of age distribution, teaching experience and ranks (head teacher, senior teachers who are called Assistant Master/Mistress in Hong Kong primary schools, and frontline teachers who are called Certified Masters/Mistresses);
- d) There should be interviewees of various attitudes towards changes, some were committed to the innovated project, but one or two resisted changes when the project was first launched.

Nine individuals categorised into five groups were selected as interviewees, namely, i) the principals (P1 and P2); ii) the core group of teachers responsible for the partnership project (C1 and C2), C1 was the teacher leader and internal coach in this project; iii) the middle-management group of senior teachers (S1 and S2); iv) a teacher from one of the curriculum development cadres (D1); v) teachers from the group of frontline practitioners (T1 and T2). Profiles of interviewees are listed in Table 7. They were selected because of their potential in illustrating the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1990). All the interviews of the school teachers were conducted in the school. All participants were guaranteed that they would not suffer from any discomfort as a result of the research, and were assured protection of 'informant confidentiality' (Merriam, 1988, 1998).

The university participating in this project is located approximately 18 miles from the school and can be reached in less than half-an-hour drive. Two school development officers were university faculty members. They were interviewed in the university. One was the chief contact, giving intensive guidance and consultative services, and was responsible for all activities in the collaborative work of the project (SDO1). The other was responsible for the introduction and adoption of an innovative learning programme brought to the 'cadre in the teaching of Mathematics' of the school (SDO2).

Other sources of data were collected during the collaborative period of the school improvement programme, without any coercion.

**(b) Data collection and procedure**

Data collection from multiple sources was used in an effort to obtain in-depth information and to provide a basis for triangulation of information. Table 5 below provides an outline of data used in this study. Data collected specifically for this study were mainly gathered in the year 2001. In addition, selected documents and some other supplementary quantitative data were collected during the collaborative period of the project (Sept. 1998 to August 2001). Procedures for collection of data are explained below.

Though multiple sources of data were collected and discussed, the descriptive interview remained the major source of data and most significant in the analysis of results.

**Table 5: Data Collection Procedures**

<b>Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>Sources/Group</b>	<b>Time Frame for Collection</b>
<b>Interviews</b>		
Summative	school teachers	July-Sept. 2001
	university faculty members: SDOs	July-Sept. 2001
<b>Selected Documents</b>		
School Plans	partner school	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001
School Reports	partner school	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001
Newsletters	partner school	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001
Teaching programmes & lesson plans	school teachers	Dec. 1999 - May 2001
Students' learning logs	students	March 1999 - May 2001
Meeting minutes	school teachers	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001
<b>Tapes</b>		
Programmes video	partner school university faculty	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001
<b>Questionnaires</b>		
Stock-taking	university faculty	Oct. 1998 - Nov. 2000
Evaluation Reports	focus group of partner school	May 2001
<b>Log</b>		
School development journals & log books Minutes of regular meetings of the school development team	University school development officers	Sept. 1998 - Aug. 2001

**Interview framework**

All the interviews were taken individually, lasting approximately one hour to one and a half hour each for the staff in the school, and two hours for the responsible SDOs from the university. Throughout the interview, dialogue was encouraged. With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for inductive analysis. The interviews were conducted in the Chinese dialect of Cantonese and the transcriptions were translated into English. The transcriptions were read by two other school development officers in the

project team, one was a major in English Language and the other in Chinese Language and Translation. Both agreed that the transcriptions in English were the original meanings in the conversation.

Four interview domains, including knowledge and vision of school improvement, impact of the school improvement project as a whole, impact of individual teaching and learning activities and their long term effect, were constructed along the guiding research questions as stipulated at the beginning of this chapter.

Descriptors of the four domains were developed from the framework of the project, discussed and agreed with the other school development officers, and then the first set of interview questions was listed. Table 6 lists the domains, the sub-categories and the guiding questions in the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, yet not without focus, for the dialogue was moving along the domains specified in the table.

The head teacher/principal and the chief SDO were the first two to be interviewed, so that the relatively rich data can be preliminarily coded into different categories. The coding scheme was then revised to fit the data for more interviews. Some of the questions for subsequent interviews were slightly amended after the experience gained in the principal's interview. In interviewing the other subjects, emphases were put on selected domains based on the subject's interests, expertise and relevance.

### **Interview questions**

The first set of questions asked the respondents about their knowledge of educational change, the improvement projects and their involvement with the partnership projects. Most interviewees answered by describing their understanding of the project, how they were involved, their attitude and

expectation, and how the project and their responsibility and roles evolved.

The second set dug into the impact of the school improvement project on the school as a whole. Teachers responded by describing the changes in the school and the impact on different cadres and their changing roles in particular, from which conditions for the progress and the success of the project could be drawn.

The third set of questions asked the interviewees if their experiences of this kind of partnership with the university had influenced their teaching, through which evidence of changes in teaching and learning programmes could be collected to see how external consultants worked in enhancing such changes.

The last set were rounding up questions aiming at identifying the sustainability of the improvement project and allowed the interviewees to make other comments about their experiences.

Table 7 shows more information on the description, characteristics, and involvement of each individual interviewee.

**Table 6: Interview framework**

Domain	Descriptors of the domain	Guiding interview questions
Domain A Knowledge and vision on School Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊕ attitude towards change and reform</li> <li>⊕ responses to education reform</li> <li>⊕ attitude towards external support</li> <li>⊕ self-evaluation on ability</li> <li>⊕ attitude and evaluation of internal capacity</li> <li>⊕ evaluation of school improvement project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊕ Could you give a brief historical account of the school with reference to some specific years and incidences?</li> <li>⊕ What is your educational philosophy and how is it related to the educational reform?</li> <li>⊕ How do the reform policies influence your school?</li> <li>⊕ What measures have you identified to face such changes? What are they? Please describe.</li> <li>⊕ How do you evaluate the professional development of the teacher staff in these few years?</li> <li>⊕ What are the principles of the school improvement project?</li> </ul>
Domain B Impact of school improvement project as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● impact on personal growth, knowledge, attitude, belief, confidence, and management skills</li> <li>● impact on different cadres: core group, middle management, action groups and frontline practitioners, describe some of the tangible changes in these groups</li> <li>● impact on the students, parents and other supporting staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do you see the learning outcomes of the students in these few years? Any improvement? In what areas?</li> <li>● Are the teachers motivated in these years? What are the contributing factors in the process?</li> <li>● What sorts of collaborative work have you identified in your school for the past few years?</li> <li>● How do you see the effect of the staff development activities brought in? Are they being challenged?</li> <li>● What is the attitude of the teachers towards the collaboration project?</li> <li>● What are the major influences of the project on the school, the teachers and the students?</li> </ul>
Domain C Impact of individual teaching and learning activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● effect on teachers, students and parents in teaching and learning paradigm</li> <li>● the effect on teaching and learning strategies</li> <li>● the sustainability of the activities</li> <li>● the degree of internal capacity built</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are the responses of the core members and the frontline teachers? Were there any changes in teaching and learning programmes after the staff development workshops? Name some.</li> <li>● How can the learning programmes be consolidated in the process?</li> <li>● How do you see the collaborative effort of external consultants and internal staff capacity?</li> </ul>
Domain D The long-term effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Future plans influenced by the school improvement project in mind</li> <li>● opinion on the long term effect of the project and in the educational circle of Hong Kong</li> <li>● the conditions/factors important in contributing to a successful school improvement project</li> <li>● follow-up improvement schemes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What influences on the schools can you foresee after experiencing the changes brought by the project?</li> <li>● What have you learned and how will you use the experience you gained in these last few years?</li> <li>● Name the biggest influence brought to your school.</li> <li>● How do you foresee the future of the school after joining the partnership project? Any critical incidence happening that you may or may not get hold of?</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Profiles of interviewees**

<b>Groups/ Roles</b>	<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Tasks involved</b>	<b>Level of Involvement in the project</b>
Principal (P1)	6 years as principal, working over 20 years in the same school as teacher, senior teacher and vice-principal	Attended all staff development workshops and most core group meetings	High - chief leader of the school change, introduction of the collaborative project to the school colleagues
Vice-principal (P2)	28 years of teaching experience in the same school, responsible for the general administrative work, arranging timetable and workload of the staff	Attended all staff development workshops and was responsible for arranging all kinds of logistics for the project	medium - clear understanding of the running of the project, but not professionally mature to understand the philosophies
Senior teacher (S1) - Assistant Mistress	25 years of teaching experience in the same school, mainly responsible for curriculum development	Attended all staff development workshops, not involved in the design and teaching of "powerful learning"	Medium - understanding of the project in relation to her curriculum work, not committed to changes and will show discontent
Senior teacher (S2) – Assistant Mistress	16 years of teaching experience in the same school, responsible for behaviour discipline of students	Attended all staff development workshops, not involved in powerful learning, but offer help in that programme	Medium - slightly higher than the group of frontline practitioners not involved in the designed learning experiences
Core group teacher (C1) – Assistant Mistress	13 years of teaching experience, 6 years in this school, core member and leader in the collaborative project	Attended all staff development workshops, all core group meetings and responsible for all contacts with the university staff	High - understood and involved in all activities conducted, a bit hesitant in conveying messages to other more experienced teachers if workload involved
Core group teacher (C2) – Certified Mistress	Six years of teaching experience in the same school	Attended all staff development workshops and core group meetings	High - understood and involved in all activities conducted
Teacher from curriculum development cadre (D1) – Certified Master	Six years of teaching experience in the same school, responsible for mathematics teaching	Attended all staff development work-shops and meetings concerning the thinking skills programme	Medium to low - involved in activities concerning teaching of his own subject
Frontline teacher (T1) – Certified Mistress	Frontline experienced teacher in English language, returned after migration and taught in this school for three years	Attended all staff development workshops and some core meetings	Medium - involved in most activities concerning the collaborative work
Frontline teacher (T2) – Certified Mistress	Music teacher, four years of teaching experience in the same school	Attended all staff development workshops	Low - only concerned with activities conducted by oneself



<b>Groups/ Roles</b>	<b>Experiences</b>	<b>Tasks involved</b>	<b>Level of Involvement in the project</b>
University staff (school development officer SDO1)	Over 10 years of experience in management training	Conducted most staff development workshops, gave advice, guidance and attended all core group meetings	High - knew what was happening in the school inside-out
University staff (school development officer SDO2)	Very capable and experienced school teacher seconded to the university for the project	Conducted one of the innovative learning programmes for the school staff	Medium - as far as involvement in this particular school was concerned

**(c) Other sources of data**

**Documents**

Documents provide another source of information for the study. Annual school plans, annual school evaluation reports, minutes of meetings, teaching and learning programmes, and quarterly newsletter to parents were collected. The documents not assigned for collection by the researcher were considered important as they were independent of a research agenda and unaffected by the research process (Merriam, 1988:109). Three reports issued to the schools by the university were also sources of information in this case study, ranging from the first year's stock-taking report, the second year's intermediate report and the final report in the last year.

**Log**

Students' learning logs recording their attitudes and achievements in attending the learning programmes, like the "powerful learning" programmes (see Table 11 in chapter 7) and the thinking skill programmes, were collected and studied. Journals and reflective logs of school development officers and school teachers were transcribed and studied. Some were comments, reflections, concerns and

conversation from the partners. Notes from regular meetings of the school development team of the university were also studied, especially those concerning the case school.

### Questionnaires

The results of a set of questionnaires issued to the school staff in this case study were analysed and reported. The set of three questionnaires was issued to the entire teaching staff (31 in total) at three time points ( in November 1998, 1999 and 2000), collecting descriptive quantitative data on three dimensions, namely, a) values and culture of school organisation, b) empowerment of teachers and c) teachers' involvement. The first set of questionnaires on organisational culture and school values inventory (SVI) came from the Inventory developed by Pang, (1996, 1998). Teacher empowerment (TE) was measured by an adapted version of the School Participant Empowerment Scale developed by Short & Rinehart, (1992) and Klecker & Loadman (1996); and the teachers' sense of organisational commitment (TC) was measured by the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire originated from Mowday et al. (1979).

The original School Values Inventory measures 10 subscales in organisation values. In this study, only 4 subscales which posited to have closer linkage with teacher empowerment were employed. The Cronbach's alphas for the sub-scales are: .92 for Participation and Collaboration (7 items); .87 for Collegiality (6 items); .92 for Communication and Consensus (10 items); and .90 for Teacher Autonomy (7 items).

23 representative items in five subscales were used in Teacher Empowerment Questionnaire (TE) in this study. The Cronbach's alphas for the subscales were: .77 for Personal Growth (5 items); .79 for Decision Making (4 items); .66 for Self

Efficacy (4 items); .88 for Impact (5 items); and .81 for Autonomy (5 items).

11 items were used as measurement of Teacher's organisational commitment (TC). The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .92. The background to the instruments is further explained in Appendix 2. All the three sets of questionnaires were translated into Chinese, and 180 serving teachers attended the pilot test of the Chinese version, with reliability index 0.95, 0.92 & 0.91 for the three questionnaires mentioned above.

The data from the questionnaires will only be treated as the background information for the main part of the research, i.e. the qualitative findings.

#### **(d) Data analysis**

As described above and summarized in Table 4, the data for this study were collected from multiple sources through multiple methods. Multiple perspectives were sought from different 'categories' of participants of the school and the university in this partnership project. The major data source in responding to the three guiding research questions came from the interviews, journals and meeting notes. The interview transcripts were descriptive and in narrative form. Interviews were coded by numbers and alphabetical letters. The interviews were read and re-read so as to determine the emerging themes in the categories. Themes naturally surfaced and arose from the data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). After identification of tentative themes, the data were re-studied and recorded to determine the significant emerging themes by counting the number of interviewees referring to the specific themes and the quantity of the referrals. Clustering by grouping similar items together was also used so that higher levels of abstractions could be reached by analysing and sifting through the clusters themselves (Merriam, 1988).

Other sources of data were used as back-up information to collaborate and

add clarity to the findings from the in-depth interviews. Multiple perspectives and multiple methods of data collection provided triangulation which could be used to verify and corroborate the evidence obtained from each data source and to provide a variety of evidence for inductive analysis.

Nonetheless, the most difficult aspect of the process of data analysis concerned the ability of the researcher in understanding his own biases and assumptions, and in not allowing judgemental information to emerge from the data.

## **5.5 Summary**

A case study design was used to describe how the school members and the university faculty members, in a school improvement partnership project, determined the impact of the scheme on the development of the school. Three research questions guided the study, seeking information about the conditions which might contribute to the successful implementation of the partnership project, the sorts of professional experience acquired and the effect of these experiences on future implementation of learning programmes in the school. Qualitative data from interviews of different categories of participants were used, together with other sources of data like school documents, and logs kept by school development officers, school teachers and students. The analysis was supplemented by quantitative data collected from stock taking exercise and focus group evaluation. Data collection, coding and analysis occurred throughout the study.

## Chapter Six: Results 1 – analysis of supplementary quantitative data

### 6.1 Introduction

The university-school partnership project is a comprehensive school improving project focusing on educational change and aiming to facilitate school reform. Data were collected from various sources to gauge the shifts in school culture and teachers' capacity, as well as the impact and outcomes on the stakeholders. To understand the context of the school and the changes that took place during the implementation years of the project, longitudinal survey data through questionnaires were collected between years. The data and the analysis of the administered questionnaires were used to compile baseline knowledge for school improvement purposes in the Project. The changes in the school were so complicated and comprehensive that, as the Project implementation progressed, it was not legitimate to conclude that the factors identified in the questionnaires had been mainly responsible for the change. Hence, quantitative data were used to supplement the qualitative case study and were for illustrative and heuristic purposes rather than comprehensive analysis.

The following set of quantitative data is reported in this chapter.

The set of quantitative data was collected three times, in November, 1998, 1999 and 2000. Teachers' perceptions of three domains, namely, School Values Inventory (SVI, both ideal and actual), Teacher Empowerment (TE) and Teacher's Sense of Organisational Commitment (TC), were assessed and compared.

### 6.2 Teachers' perception on organisational values, empowerment and commitment

**(a) Administration of the questionnaire survey**

The instruments used in the survey were adapted from previous studies, of known reliability and were explained in Chapter 5, p.68. Discussion of the constructs investigated in the quantitative survey is found in Appendix 2. The same questionnaires were used for three consecutive years and all teachers including the principals had to complete the questionnaires at three different time points, Nov. 1998, Nov. 1999 and Nov. 2000. All the 31 teaching staff of the case school had completed and returned the questionnaires, a response rate of 100%. The same questionnaires were also completed by all the teaching staff in the other 25 primary schools, a total of 930 respondents. An individual envelope was given to each teacher after completion of the questionnaire to guarantee a high degree of confidentiality. It was not possible to trace the changes reported by individual teachers, but the overall changes of teachers in the case study were recorded.

There were altogether 64 questions in the questionnaire, comprising the three domains of measurement. Part one of the questionnaires was on the status and background of teachers (13 questions).

**School values inventory (SVI) (ideal and actual)**

The SVI contains four variables and each variable is sub-divided into the perceived ideal values and the actual espoused values in the school. The distribution of variables can be seen in Table 8.

**Table 8: Variables in the School Values Inventory**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of questions</b>	<b>Examples of questions</b>
Participation and collaboration	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers should have participation in decision making</li><li>• Both teachers and principals should be partners, rather than super-ordinates and sub-ordinates, who work together.</li></ul>
Collegiality	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers should meet together to share knowledge and experience</li><li>• Teachers and administrators should regularly provide constructive feedback to each other</li></ul>
Teacher autonomy	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers should have the right to object or disagree with the principal</li><li>• The organisational structure should give considerable autonomy to the departments within schools</li></ul>
Communication and staff consensus	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The school should adopt an 'open-door policy' and welcome discussion on teaching and classroom problems by the teachers.</li><li>• Teachers should be kept well-informed on matters of importance to them</li></ul>

The questions were translated in Chinese and pilot test was run. For each statement, teachers were asked to indicate the degree of similarity between the values described in each statement and the teachers' values; and the degree of similarity between the values described in each statement and those values espoused by the school in the daily managerial practices, on a 7-point scale, from very similar (7) to very dissimilar (1).

### **Teacher empowerment (TE)**

Five variables are classified under TE as shown in Table 9.

**Table 9: Variables in the domain of Teacher Empowerment**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of questions</b>	<b>Examples of questions</b>
Professional growth	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am treated professionally in school</li><li>• I have the opportunity of engaging in professional development</li></ul>
Decision making	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am empowered by the school to manage different programmes</li><li>• I am involved in the process of selecting new teachers</li></ul>
Self efficacy	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I notice that I have the opportunity to influence others</li><li>• I notice that I am initiating change</li></ul>
Impact	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The principal and other teachers listen to my opinion</li><li>• I have the opportunity to bring innovative ideas to other colleagues</li></ul>
Autonomy	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have the freedom to decide the teaching content</li><li>• I can decide the progress of my work</li></ul>

There are altogether 23 statements in this domain and the teachers were asked to indicate their choice on a five-point scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

### **Teachers' sense of organisational commitment (TC)**

There are altogether 11 statements in this domain which only constitute one single variable, as in Table 10. A seven-point scale from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1).

**Table 10: Variable in the domain of TC**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of questions</b>	<b>Example of questions</b>
Teacher commitment	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am proud to tell others I am part of the school</li><li>• I care for the fate of the school</li></ul>

### **(b) Analysis of questionnaire data: Teachers' perceptions**

In the data analysis, descriptive statistics of mean, mode and standard deviation were run and the researcher did not carry out any further statistical



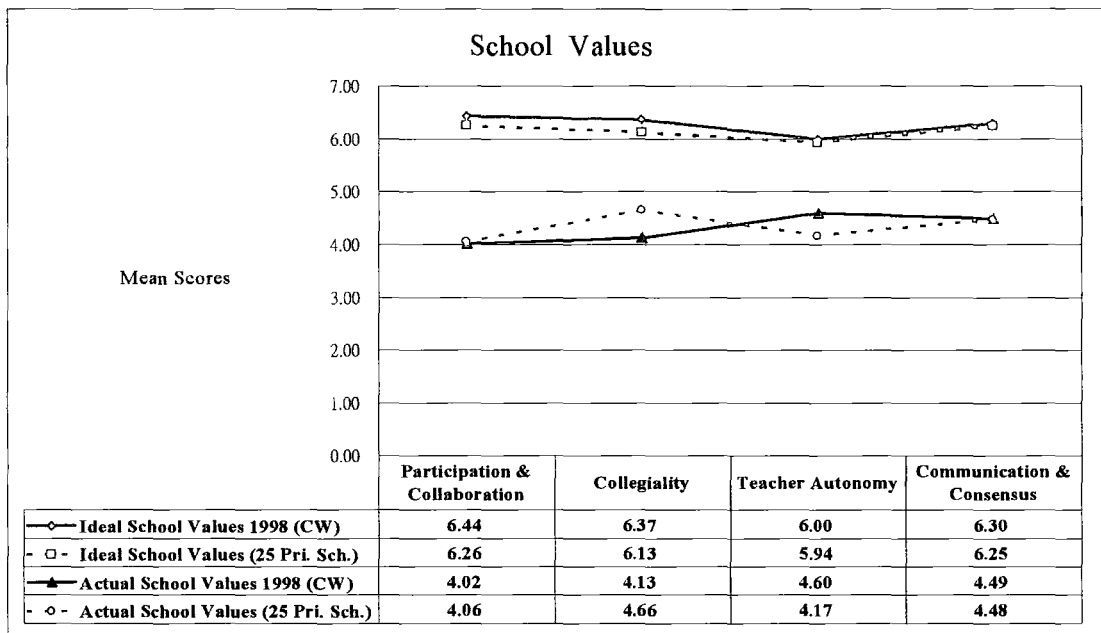
analysis like confirmatory principal components to check the factor structure. This is because the aim of the analysis was firstly, to show that the case study school, namely Chai Wan Primary School (CW) was reasonably representative of the other 25 schools in the project. Hence the first year's (Nov. 1998) data of the case study school were compared with that of the other 25 primary schools involved in the partnership project. The first year's data were taken in November 1998, where there had been no input of action plans of any kind in any of the schools in the collaborative project. Secondly, the basic descriptive data collected in each of the subsequent years in the case school will be reported although the differences in the data cannot be attributed in a definitive way to the impact of the collaborative project. The objective was simply to collect teachers' opinions at three time points. The results can only, at best, show an overall small and consistent improvement in the questionnaire ratings over the years. The statistical analysis will be very brief and the results discussed in this chapter only provide background information and help to supplement the qualitative analysis in the next chapter.

### **The comparison in the first year**

Referring to the school values inventory (the background of the instrument is reported in appendix 2), only the subscales of Participation & Collaboration (PC), Collegiality (C), Teacher Autonomy (TA) and Communication and Consensus (CC) were used, and they were congruent with Bryk & Camburn's (1999) essential features of a professional community. The term professional community here refers to schools in which interaction among teachers is frequent and teacher's actions are governed by shared norms focused on the practice and improvement of teaching and learning (Bryk & Camburn 1999:753). The comparison of the mean of the teachers' personal values (ideal) and the schools' espoused values (actual) can be

seen in Fig. 4.

**Fig. 4 The mean values on school value inventory in 1998**



As expected, the personal ideal values on all the four factors were much higher than the espoused values of the schools, both in the case school and in all other schools. Generally, the data showed that there was not much difference between the case school and the norm of 25 primary schools as far as ideal values were concerned. For the actual values, the mean scores of the four subscales (PC, C, TA, CC) were 4.02, 4.13, 4.60 and 4.49 respectively, on a 7-point scale. The value of the factor 'Collegiality' was lower than that of the average of the 25 primary schools (4.13 and 4.66). The findings provided information that the teachers were not satisfied with cooperative attitudes among colleagues. On the other hand, the mean score in 'Teacher Autonomy' was slightly higher than the norm of the 25 primary schools (4.60 and 4.17).

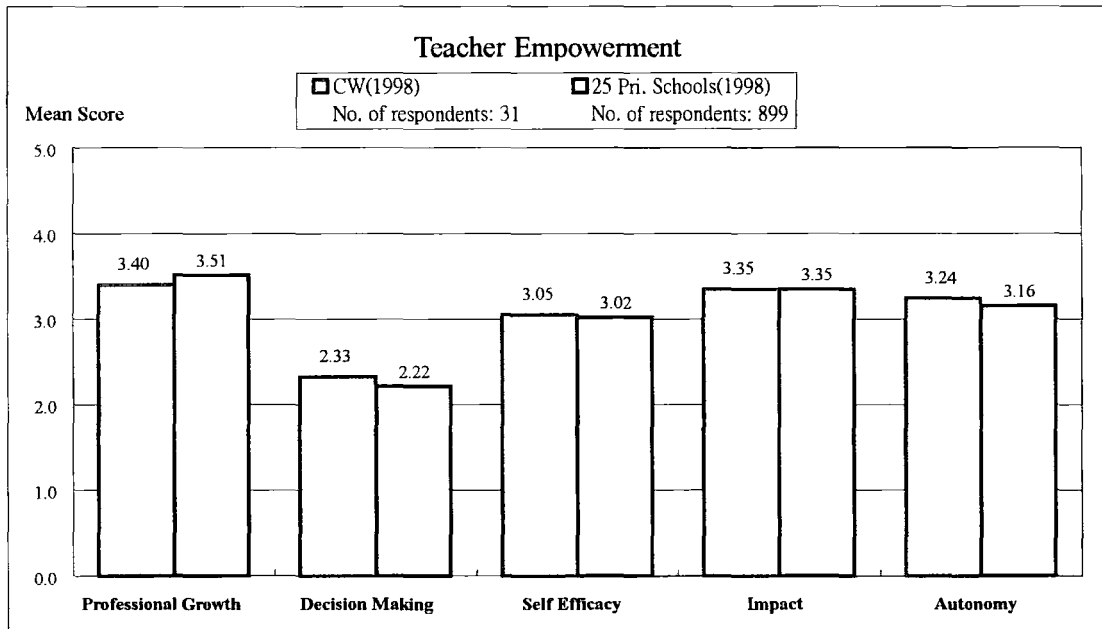
The second set of data was on 'Teacher Empowerment'. The five grouped variables from Rinehart et al. (1998) were:

- *Decision-making: the level of involvement of teachers in decisions that directly affect their work;*

- *Professional growth: teachers' perceptions that the school in which they work provides them with opportunities to grow and develop, to learn continuously, and to expand their own skills through the work life of the school;*
- *Self-efficacy: teachers' perceptions that they have the skills and ability to help students learn, are competent in building effective programmes for students, and can effect changes in students' learning;*
- *Autonomy: teachers' perceptions that they can control certain aspects of their work life; and*
- *Impact: teachers' perceptions that they have an effect and influence in school life.*

The results can be read in Fig. 5.

**Fig. 5 The mean values on Teacher Empowerment in 1998**

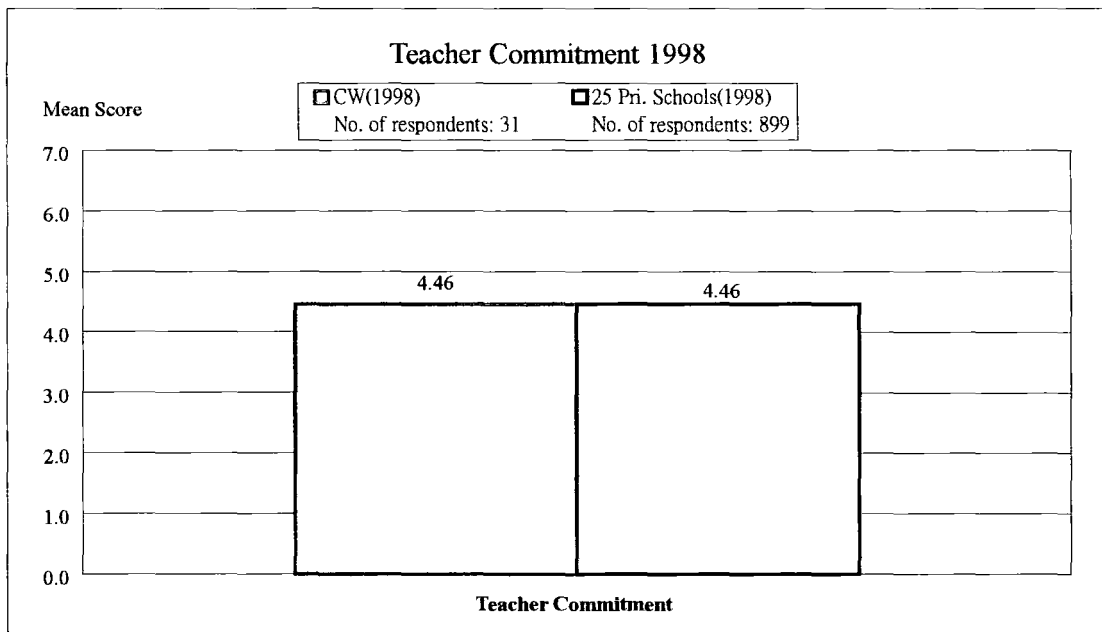


On all the five subscales, the differences between the case study school and the 25 primary schools were minimal, showing that the case study school was representative of the primary schools in the project. At the very beginning when the school joined the partnership project, the mean value of the factor Professional

Growth was slightly lower than the norm (3.40 and 3.51). Once again, this is the evidence showing that the professional collaboration was not strong at the initial stage in the case study school.

Cheng (1990) found that organisational commitment can be characterised by at least the following factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of organisational goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organisation. Fig. 6 shows the teachers' sense of organisational commitment as perceived by the teaching staff in the school. The mean value of this variable was 4.46 which was above average on a seven-point scale. The score was exactly the same as the average score of all the primary schools in the partnership project.

**Fig. 6 The mean values on Teacher Commitment in 1998**



In short, the baseline data collected at the outset showed that the teachers' perceptions of the organisational values, empowerment and commitment was on equal par with the other schools, indicating that it was a good representation of the situation in the partnership project.

### **The changes in three years**

The data reported here refers to the case study school, i.e. Chai Wan Primary School (CW) only. Figures 7-9 show a general tendency for means of scales in teacher perceptions of actual school values, teacher empowerment and teacher commitment to increase in each of the three years.

Fig. 7: Change in teachers' perception of actual school values inventory from 1998-2000

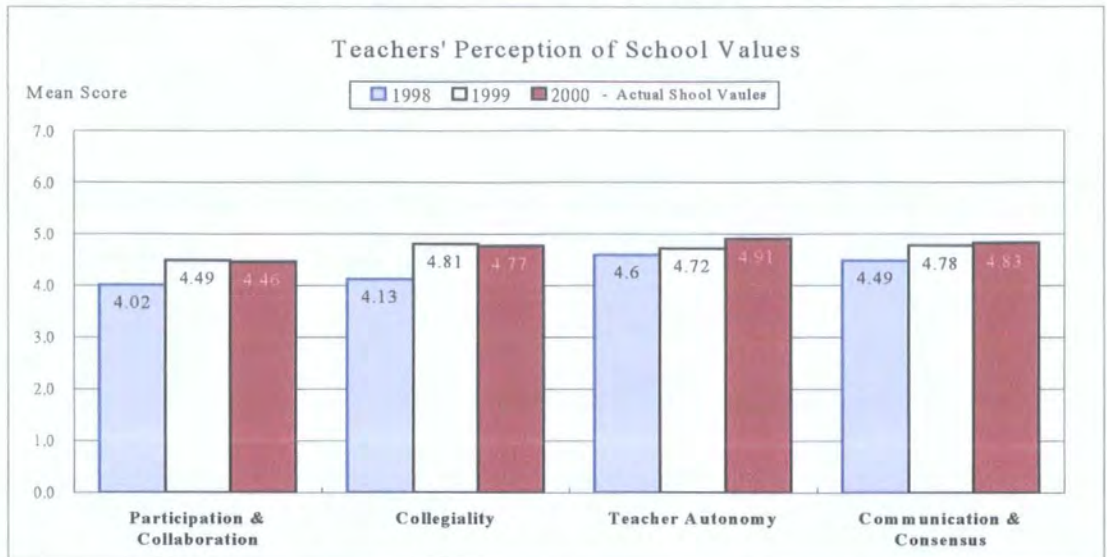


Fig. 8: Change in teachers' perception of teacher empowerment from 1998-2000

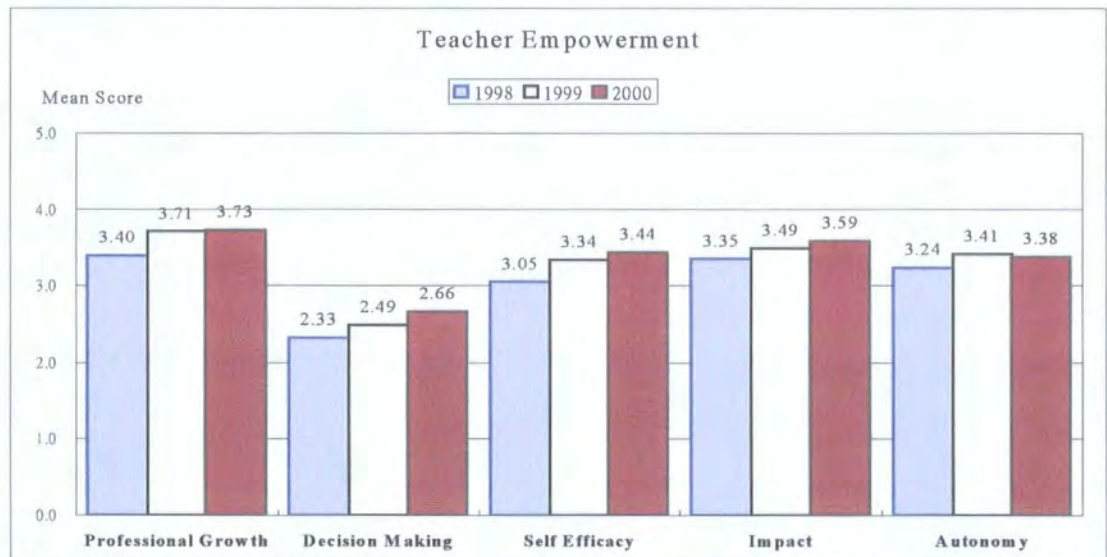
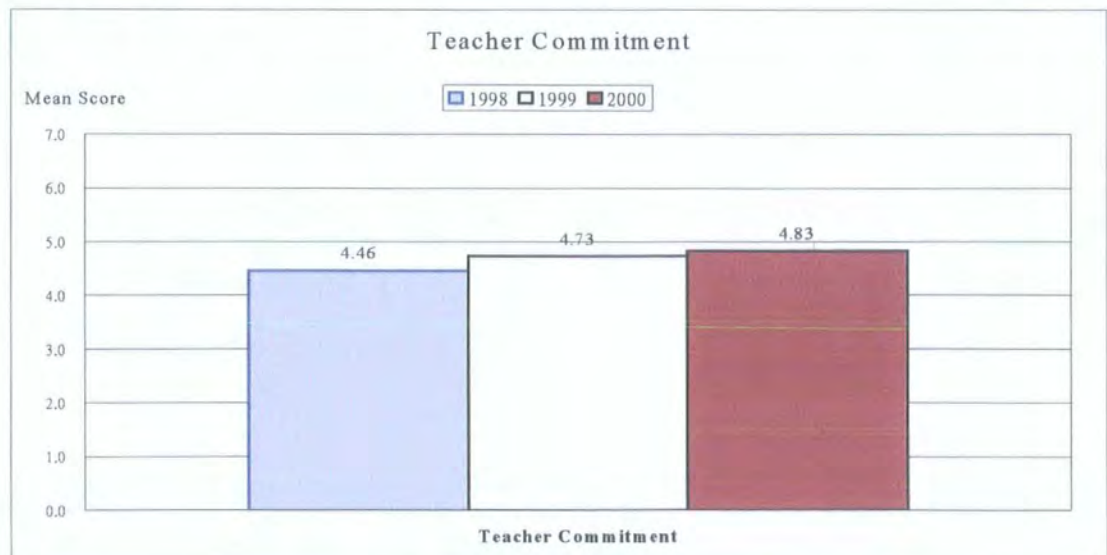


Fig. 9: Change in teachers' perception of teacher's sense of organisational commitment from 1998-2000



For the school values inventory (SVI), the mean values of the two variables 'Teacher Autonomy' and 'Communication & Consensus' increased year by year (4.6, 4.72, 4.91 and 4.49, 4.78, 4.83 respectively). For the other two variables, 'Participation & Collaboration' and 'Collegiality', the mean values of the 1998 and 1999 were also increasing and stayed almost the same in the third year (4.02, 4.49, 4.46 and 4.13, 4.81 and 4.77 respectively). The increasing trend was even more obvious for the set of data on Teacher Empowerment. All the mean values of the five variables steadily went up in the three years, indicating that the teachers felt better professionally equipped, empowered to make decisions and more confident in relating innovative ideas to colleagues. The survey findings echoed the conclusions in the interviews with teachers reported in the last chapter. The mean values of 'Teacher sense of organisational commitment' slowly climbed in the three years from 4.46, 4.73 to 4.83. As most teachers in the interviews revealed the fact that their workload had increased to a great extent, the gradual increase in mean value in teachers' perception of commitment to the school was a very positive indicator of organisational improvement.

### **6.3 Summary**

As mentioned in the above text, the changes in the quantitative data were not sufficient to indicate the impact of the collaborative project. The results showed that the school was a good representation of the other schools in the project, and indicated a modest but consistent improvement in teachers' attitude: in the perception of school values, teacher empowerment and sense of organisational commitment. It could be concluded that professional development was taking place. Hence, the process of professional development and the enhancement of teachers' capacity could only be elucidated through a detailed qualitative case study. Qualitative data from interviews,

journals, observations, documents, video-recorded materials and other archives were analysed. The results are reported in the next chapter.



## Chapter Seven: Results 2 – analysis of qualitative data on interviews, journals, observations and other documents

### 7.1 Introduction

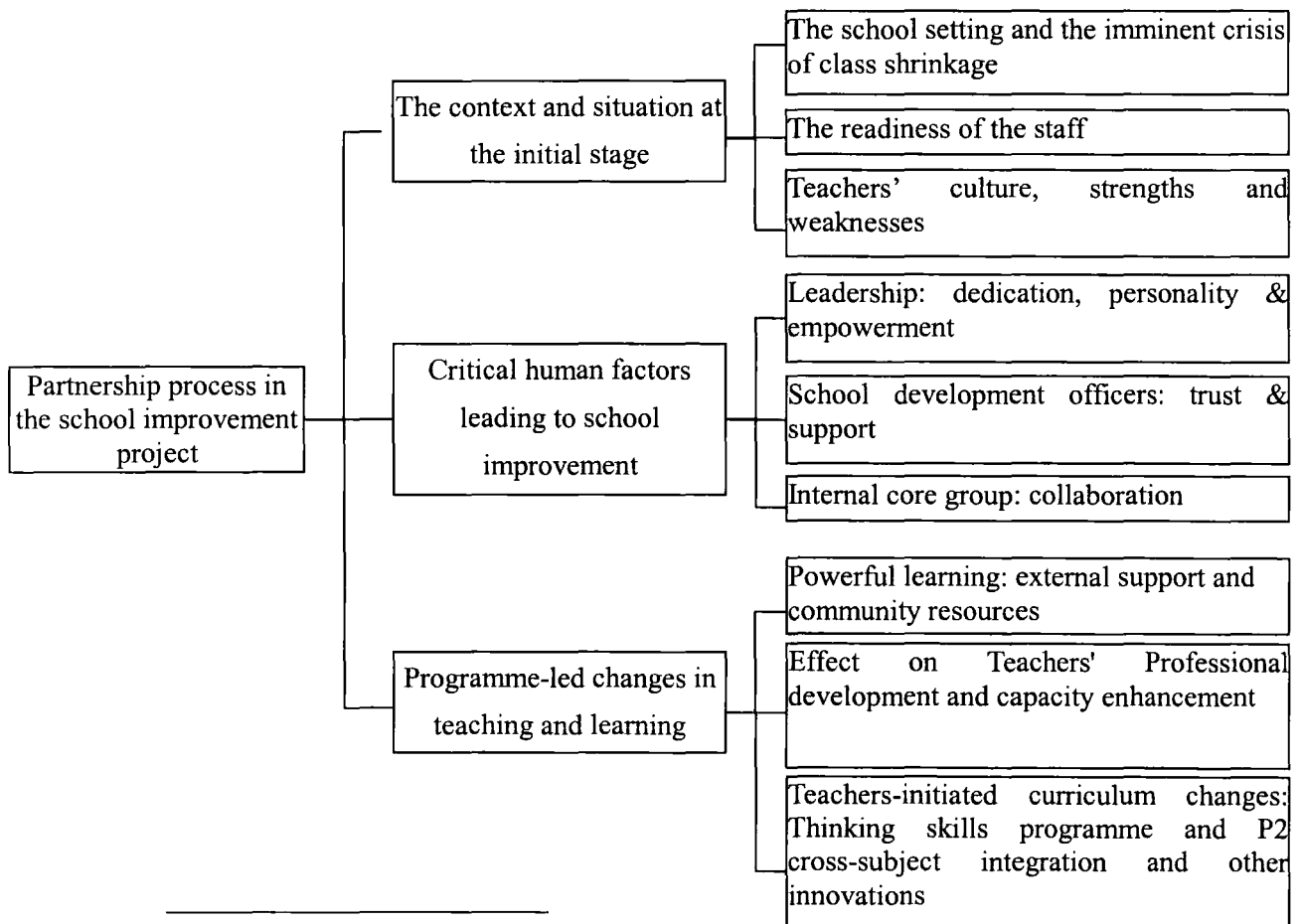
A triangulation approach is employed in this case study of a school participating in the partnership improvement project. The use of multiple methods of data collection is a more appropriate strategy for a single case qualitative study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The results of the analysis are drawn from interviews, journals, field notes, informal observations and documents such as minutes of the working groups. The English syntax and idiom in extracts from field notes and interviews are not totally correct. This is because the spoken Chinese Language does not have the same grammatically correct forms as written English Language. Data collection took place in the teachers' own language: Chinese. Data were subsequently transcribed into English and the transcriptions were read by experts in English and Chinese Languages to make sure that they represented the original meanings in the conversations, as explained in Chapter 5, p. 62. Being the programme coordinator of the partnership project, the researcher had the chance of getting involved in the school development work of the other 25 participating primary schools in the same project. Some analyses drawn from the wider experience and knowledge of the coordinator are used for comparison purpose.

The researcher aims to investigate the conditions under which the school improvement initiative might contribute to the improvement of the school, the changes in teachers' perceptions and capacity after the 'intervention' of the university partner and whether there was any impact on curriculum change in the school. The duration of the project was about three years (from September 1998 to August 2001) and activities of all kinds took place, including staff development workshops, committee meetings,

learning activities in and outside schools, experience-sharing sessions and even workshops for parents. All these are recorded in Appendix 1.

Content analysis to answer the research questions posed for this study reveals three dominating domains. Under each domain, there are emerging themes encompassing the data. They are: 1) the contextual factors at the initial stage: the school setting and the crisis facing the school, the readiness of the staff, and the teachers' culture; 2) critical human factors leading to the change: leadership, external support, internal core group of teachers, other stakeholders; and 3) teaching and learning programmes leading to the enhancement of teachers' capacity: the implementation of powerful learning<sup>3</sup>, innovative teaching and learning programmes in thinking skills, the effect on teachers' professional development and the effect on school curriculum planning. A categorization of domains and the impact is summarized in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: A categorisation of domains emerging in the partnership process**



<sup>3</sup> Powerful learning is defined in Chapter 5, p.57. The schedule and content of the powerful learning programme in the case school can be read in Table 11, p.124.

## **7.2 The context and situation at the initial stage**

In order to provide a logical sequence for understanding the findings, the researcher will start reviewing the themes by exposing the situation and context of the participating school at the initial stage. The discussion of the context is extremely important since different schools have different starting points for school improvement. Hopkins (2001:186) concludes that one of the lessons from the research on authentic school improvement is to pay attention to the context of the school so that school improvement programmes fit their own particular situation; he warns that 'one size does not fit all'. The researcher thinks that the degree of value-addedness gained in the course of the school improvement process is much more important than the final outcomes. The sub-themes under this category include the buy-in process, the teachers' readiness, their working culture, their consciousness of crisis, and policy directives.

### **(a) The school setting and the imminent crisis of class shrinkage**

A brief description of the buy-in process may help explain the situation. The buy-in process began in July, 1998. An introductory letter was sent to the principal of every school in Hong Kong explaining the intention of the university in initiating a partnership project. The interested principals then attended a two-hour talk by the Project's Executive Director and the Coordinator. The Director and/or the Coordinator visited the schools that indicated further interest afterwards and gave a brief introduction to the core group or the entire staff. Around 70 schools were shortlisted, from which 50 would finally be selected to join the project. The briefing given by the university staff did not really convey any message that the partnership would be a guaranteed success, as there were no local experiences or examples of success. The most frequently asked question during the buy-in process was, 'Could you cite any successful examples or research findings that support

your project?’ Hence, the schools’ initial understanding of the Accelerated Schools for Quality Education Project was very limited. In most cases, the decision about joining the partnership project stemmed from the principals’ personal interest and their confidence in the Faculty of Education of the University as a source of external support.

Concerning the school setting and the first impression of the case school at the initial stage, extracts from the coordinator’s journal notes revealed the condition:

*The school building was very small and a bit shabby, the matchbox styles of primary school premises built thirty years ago. It was six-storey high, the classrooms were facing each other with a long corridor in between. There wasn’t a school hall, no proper playground. It was crowded with students, very noisy and smelly. It was physically a very ‘weak’ school. I wasn’t comfortable and a bit annoyed, thinking of the lovely students in such a poor environment. Why couldn’t the government give them more resources since they were already at such a disadvantaged state when compared with the Y2K primary schools? What’s the point of giving the same unit cost per school as the hard ware was already so different.*

*(field notes, July 15, 1998; Coordinator)*

The school development officer (SDO1) who was assigned to be the major contact person recalled her impression in the interview:

*I lived in the same district and often travelled past this school. My first impression of the school was not good, it is physically sub-standard. The school still operates on a bi-session system, not a whole-day school. All these disadvantages badly affect the use of time and space. I felt that it would be very difficult to start work in the school, it being in such an impoverished state.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

Though the physical condition of the school was not appealing, the principal

was very proud of his efforts; he commented, “After being assigned the principalship in Sept. 1995, I tried my best to develop the school, which was at its peak in 1999, with a total of 23 classes (the normal number of classes should be 18). As a PM school, we are in a disadvantaged position, but the achievements of our graduates are very good, more than 30% of them are allocated to Band 1 secondary schools (on average, the students were divided into 5 equal bands, with 20% each), it is much higher than most schools, bearing in mind that our school is situated amidst low-cost housing estates with poor socio-economic background.”

While listening to the principal’s description of the performance of the students, the researcher could sense the principal’s deep anxiety - whether the school could attract more parents to send their children there depended on the results of the allocation of secondary school places. This was echoed by the remarks of the SDO2, “Having served both the AM and the PM sessions, he is very sensitive to the disadvantageous position of the PM session in a bi-sessional school. Compared to the frontline teachers, he has a much stronger sense of crisis. He often re-iterates and conveys the message to his staff that making continuous improvement is the only way to survive the threat of elimination.” The crisis of fewer classes and more redundant teachers was not explicitly noted in the interviews with teachers except one (C2), who commented on the principal with a critical tone, “ [the principal] wants to do a lot of things, but without macro-perspective ..... we have to face the crisis of less classes ..... most teachers do not share the crisis.” She believed that solving the crisis immediately was something more important and urgent than any other improvement plans.

Up to the present moment, primary school teachers who become redundant due to a shortage of students being allocated to a school, no matter what are the reasons behind it, are deployed to other primary schools with the help of the Hong Kong Education Department. Probably a guaranteed teaching place elsewhere in

the educational circle softens the sense of crisis.

**(b) The readiness of the staff**

A university-school partnership project of such intensity was something new to the teachers. It was anticipated that some open-minded teachers might think that the project came at the right moment to assist the school to deal with recent reform measures in Hong Kong. Others might consider that any kind of changes would cause a hard time for them, especially as primary school teachers had just experienced the hectic days of implementing the Target Oriented Curriculum, a large-scale top-down curriculum reform in Hong Kong (Morris et al, 1996).

The Coordinator wrote the following field notes:

*The meeting was arranged in one of the classrooms. When I first met the whole teaching staff, I almost made up my mind not to recruit the school to the partnership project. I bet more than half of the teaching staff had taught there over 15 years, I didn't think they really understand the rationale of the project or the professional language I articulated. But the staff was very friendly and polite, probably showing respect for a person from the university. The principal was extremely enthusiastic, I thought he did his homework and read some articles. The buy-in process lasted for about an hour and I could read from their faces that the resistance was not strong, though they didn't understand much, maybe I was lucky to find two of my ex-students in the College of Education working there. I was still in hesitation recruiting the school. It was not until I had a frank talk with the principal afterwards which enabled me to have a deeper understanding of his vision and quest, the characteristics including the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, did I make up my mind to join hand with the school. I got to admit that there was some sort of personal judgement when the principal told me that though the staff was not smart but very hardworking, and the most important of all, they loved their students very much. I did feel their affection when I saw them hurrying down to take care of the students after the meeting. I was particularly impressed by their smiling faces and patience whenever they talked to the students and handled their problems during recess. I loved the students as well, they were well mannered, cute and full of curiosity. I was a bit surprised*

*to see the attitude and the behaviour of the students who come from the nearby low-cost housing estates. I shouldn't be biased by my pre-conception.*

*(field notes, July 15, 1998 Coordinator)*

The conversation with the principal in the interview showed that he was very optimistic about joining the project:

*I think school improvement should be initiated from external strength, which may bring new thinking to the staff and can ignite the changes.*

*It is lucky that I heard about the project, especially the philosophy behind, the three principles of the project are what I want to do, what I need.*

*(Interview, P1)*

The following was written in the first page of the coordinator's field notes.

*In the school's initial adoption of the Project, the leadership of the principal stood out strongly, in the determination of joining, but not in leadership style.*

*(field notes, July 15, 1998, coordinator)*

The principal could casually cite the core values of the Project when asked by the interviewer, showing that he had carefully considered how the project could help him lead the change. An experienced teacher (S1) in the school thought differently, "I doubt very much [the project] in the beginning, I don't know what's going on. Why do we need the project?" Another younger teacher who was appointed as the core member in the project team held different opinion, "Undoubtedly, the intervention of the ASQE gave us a clear picture; in times of confusion, [they] can lead us. It is an opportunity." (Interview, C2) The other two teachers also expressed their understanding of the project at the initial stage; one said (S2), "I understand that ASQE is a school-based project which matches the

needs of the students and school development and gives us ample support.” Another one (C1), also a core member of the project, commented, “I don’t know what ASQE is, the principal said it could help us to make better the structure of the whole school, more support. But I want to do the work [as core member], though it seems that everything is in a mess.” One of the most experienced teachers (25 year, S1) admitted in the interviews that there were a lot of worries and doubts among the teachers. The previous curriculum change in Hong Kong arising from the Target Oriented Curriculum might have scared many teachers off.

It could be concluded that the teachers’ understanding of the project was rather unclear and indefinite at the initial stage. A major common concern was definitely the uncertainty about the increase in workload and the resultant pressure. As A. Hargreaves (2000:1) comments in the first issue of the *Journal of Educational Change* : ‘Change puts some people in the spotlight and others in the dark ..... Change can be novel, original, unique; it can also retread well-worn patterns of the past’. From further observations and understanding of the responses of the principals and the teachers in other schools of the project, the researcher noticed that the motives for joining the partnership project varied. Some needed external support; some feared the imminent crisis arising from the official promulgation of education reform; some wanted to get prepared for the Quality Assurance Inspection from the Education Department; and some wanted assessment by external institutions in analysing strengths and weaknesses.

**(c) Teachers’ culture, strengths and weaknesses**

The following quotations from a number of teachers accurately reflected the teachers’ culture in this rather traditional and conventional primary school in Hong Kong.



*I have worked under three principals ..... Before, we just followed the instruction from 'above', we wouldn't go first, see how the wind blew, did the work only when absolutely necessary.*

*(interview, S1)*

*In my 28 years of teaching career in this school, the ex-principals all worked according to the instruction of the Education Department, like TOC, we worked according to rules and guidelines, there was no breakthrough. The teaching was very routine, not active. But we worked very hard, fulfilled our responsibilities and covered the textbooks and syllabus. We were more concerned with the dignity of the teachers, we taught our students to be polite, when the teachers or the elder said 'one', you should not argue back and said 'two'.*

*(interview, P2)*

*I worked here for 8 years, [the school/the staff] was very old, no movement, no activities.*

*(interview, C1)*

The principal also commented that the team spirit was very bad at the time when he took up the principalship. Peer relationships between teachers were rather bad; the teachers would shout loudly, argue back and quarrel with each other in the staff room. Another school development officer (SDO2) recalled the first time he went into the school and talked about the learning programme for the students; the response was rather cold and the teachers were not very cooperative in the first meeting. The teacher (T1), who had experience teaching in other schools and had returned from abroad, said, "I was a new comer in 1998, I didn't find any difference of the attitude of the teachers now and years ago. Before I emigrated, I had the chance of teaching in a few schools, I think the teachers here are OK, they work hard, you know, teaching is a sort of 'conscience' work. The attitude of the teachers here is just normal, as expected, a lot of grumble, kept saying more and

more work to do. Everywhere is the same.”

A study of the documents (school reports and school plans) confirmed the inactive conditions of the school. The three years of school plans and reports (from 1996 to 1998) were almost the same: same size, same structure and same kind of activities, the only changes were the date, the ‘in-and-out’ of school staff, and the number of prizes the students had gained in the competitions of extra-curricular activities.

**(d) Summary of discussion on domain 1: contextual factors**

To conclude, the greatest disturbance to the teaching life of the primary school teachers in Hong Kong in the previous twenty years had been the implementation of the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC), which was the most comprehensive attempt to date to reform the curriculum (Morris & Lo, 2000:1). The teachers had been professionally advised by the government officials (EDHK, 1989) that the highly centralised curriculum, together with a perception of declining standards of language proficiency, lack of clear objectives and targets for learning, and dissatisfaction with didactic teaching styles, etc, needed to be reformed. Unfortunately, the extremely bad implementation and the ‘top-down’ approach caused strong resentment from the teachers. According to Watkins’ (2000) study of learning and teaching from a cross-cultural perspective, some teaching strategies based on educational psychology in the West may not be applicable to the Chinese students. Chinese educators tend to see both acquiring creativity and understanding as slow processes requiring much effort, repetition, and attention rather than relatively rapid, insightful processes (Watkins, 2000:164-166). Some Chinese teachers were probably not convinced by the so called ‘innovative teaching and learning strategies’ introduced by the TOC. Hence, this may not have been the best moment for the introduction of a school improvement project with new teaching

strategies into the school through the university partnership project.

On the other hand, the education and curriculum reform advocated fervently by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after July, 1997 exerted heavy pressure on the schools and the teachers. To the younger teachers, the situation was not as bleak. When a relatively young teacher (D1) was asked whether personal change was due to education reform happening, he answered with a positive and affirmative voice, “absolutely yes, as a teacher, we cannot evade from the outside situation like education reform”. The vice-principal (P2) also agreed that some changes were necessary for the professional development of the teachers in response to external demands.

In a nutshell, at the initial stage where the school improvement project was brought in, the contextual situation, the readiness of the school and/or the staff and the teachers’ culture were not at all favourable. It was difficult to start, though the crisis (the shrinking of classes) and the principal’s determination were the two driving forces for school improvement.

### **7.3 Critical human factors leading to school improvement**

#### **(a) Leadership**

##### **Principal’s dedication and personality**

Numerous research findings from a variety of countries and school systems have concluded that the principal or headteacher’s leadership is important in school development and change processes (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996; Stoll & Fink, 1996a; Jackson, 2000).

For any improvement achieved in this school, credit should first be given to the dedication and drive of the principal. The following are representative of the quotations from the teachers:

*The development of our school is very rapid these years. I think the critical factor is when the new Principal took charge in 1995. The school has the drive to develop. [The principal] gives 100% effort ..... He has his ideals and aspirations, working for the 'good' of the students.*

*(interview, S2)*

*He has ideals, strong vision, but wanted to do too many things.*

*(interview, C1)*

*Definitely some of the changes in the schools were due to the leadership of the new principal since 1995.....[He] has a deeper understanding of educational development.*

*(interview, P2)*

SDO1 recalled her acquaintance with the principal, "I came to know the principal when I was working as a trainer in the Education Department conducting training programme for the newly-appointed school principals in 1995. From my faint memory, he was hardworking and very dedicated to his work."

*I heard the teachers saying that he was the first one to reach the school in the morning, even earlier than the colleagues in the AM session (around 7:00am), and the second last to leave the school (7:45pm).*

*The principal was always the first one to make a move, he enjoyed the activities, no matter what kind [of activities] we designed for the staff..... Being one of the members in the core group, he attended almost every meeting, participated in discussions about how staff development programmes should be run, preparation for powerful learning, or any other activities.*

*I was fortunate to work with him. I thought his positive attitude was extremely important for a school to grow.*

*(journal notes, SDO1)*

*He is a very people-oriented person, he values highly his relationship with teachers and pupils. Teacher-pupil relationship is generally very good. The teachers are caring but firm at the same time. The cultivation of a humanistic and caring culture is successful.*

*(Interview, SDO1)*

The following is how the principal describes his own leadership:

*The way I lead the school is in line with my educational beliefs. The children have multiple intelligences and abilities, we should not only focus on academic achievements. When the documents on education reform and curriculum were released, I supported the philosophies behind them wholeheartedly. Children should be treated as individuals, and given ample chances to develop. I will work for the benefits of the children, work on the long neglected curriculum dimensions like musical and physical development.*

*(interview, P1)*

From experience of numerous visits to the school, the coordinator highly appreciated the efforts of the principal, and was deeply moved by the attitude and the desire of the principal to improve the school. Almost every time the coordinator visited the school, the principal was smiling, greeting and talking to the students in the corridor, the playground or at the entrance. One of the teachers told me, with a smile, that she envied the principal as he got the greatest number of Christmas Cards from the students at Christmas. Judged by the conversations in the interviews, the principal was merely a diligent, dedicated or even visionary person, but to the coordinator, the impression of a loving and caring principal was much more vivid. Another teacher told me in a grand dinner banquet hosted by the principal for the teaching, clerical and janitor staff that he was the most generous person she had ever met in her life. In discussing what an authentic leader is, Evans (2001:302) comments that 'the highly personal nature of vision is central to success, but the value of a vision is not just to clarify goals and plot a strategy but

to inspire followers'. The principal in this case possessed the personal qualities characteristic of an effective leader: not just advocating the vision, but doing it with self-commitment, directly involved in and exemplifying the change. The staff was 'moved'. Building on Murphy's suggestion (1991) that leadership falls into a number of phases linking leader behaviour with organisation culture, West, Jackson, Harris & Hopkins (2000:32) broadly clarify the first phase as 'the initial interest in the personal qualities and characteristics of "successful" leaders which result in personality or trait theories of leadership'. The importance of the personality of the leader in the initial stage of the school improvement process is genuinely reflected in this case study.

### **Trust, support and empowerment**

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school and looking for suitable support and appropriate resources are important for the principal to develop and improve the school.

The principal confided that the most impressive and marked improvement in the school was the team spirit of the staff. He gave a lot of credit to the external support from the university. He said, "The most influential external factor is the cooperation with the ASQE of the Chinese University of Hong Kong; it is lucky that I had the chance of hearing the philosophies and principles of the project. The three principles: unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility and building on strengths, are what I intend to do but could not accomplish because of lack of resources and know-how. The principles are not slogans, we need some bodies to guide us and tell us the strategies to achieve them, through workshops, demonstrations, discussions and reflections. The staff has to be 'touched'". The researcher believed that the principal had internalised the principles of the Project

as the jargon and explanations instantly flowed out when he was suddenly asked to list them in the interview.

The more experienced teachers really felt the changes in the few years the project was taking place.

*The principal introduced to us some new concepts and methodologies, he never forced us to follow what to do, but the staff felt that it was more demanding than before, we had to work harder and tried something new, but when we saw the achievements of the students, we tasted the sweetness of teaching.*

*(interview, P2)*

*For these few years, the pace of working was much faster, different working groups will develop their strategies in teaching, mutual support is around.*

*(interview, S1)*

*The principal initiated a lot of action plans and started a number of teaching and learning activities. He gave us support and most important of all was to join the university partnership project, the largest scale of all changes.*

*(interview, S2)*

*He is everywhere, always asking us how he can help.*

*(interview, C1)*

The principal himself was very aware of the worries of the staff and often comforted them. He often talked openly and frequently with teachers about the instructional strategies, skills and resources. The vice principal told me that in order to provide more students with chances of access to the computer, the principal bought 20 sets of computers for use from his own purse.

*When the teachers have worries and difficulties, e.g. in curriculum planning like designing integrated curriculum, I will sit in their meeting and work with them, I promise them I can rearrange the timetable to suit their needs.....*

*The younger teachers are more ready to accept new ideas, but they still need my support, sometimes I found that they rely on my suggestions too much, but my expectation is that they can initiate new plan on their own..... Oh, I think something has changed this year, some innovative curriculum changes are initiated by them.*

*(interview, P1)*

The school development officer from the university had a high regard for the principal as she revealed some of the praise of the teachers for the principal.

*The teachers trust him because he walks the talk..... He always tries his best and finds different ways to support and facilitate the teachers' work.*

*He knows that some teachers have high regard for him. He cares about maintaining good relationship with his staff. At the early stage, I thought he only cared about relationship and lacked principles, but I misjudged him. What matters most is not his competence but rather his sense of purpose. He would work hard to learn and share his learning with his colleagues.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

The above findings under the theme 'trust and support of leadership' remind the researcher of Mel West's remarks in the 'Moving Schools' project, a group of IQEA schools selected for study. West (2000:50) says, 'In the educational marketplace of the 1990s headteachers seem to spend increasing amount of time out of the school, and it would be a major limitation to developments if continuous personal involvement of the headteacher was seen as necessary. This picture of headship, ensuring that policies are in place rather than drawing them up, spreading leadership throughout the school organisation, seeking to empower teachers in relation to their own accountabilities and capabilities, sits more comfortably with school improvement approaches.' Hence, without strong commitment and personal involvement of the principal, school improvement would not have taken place.



## **Discussion on leadership**

From the researcher's experience of meeting and discussing with many principals in the project, I rate the principal in this case study as the one who is generally more successful in leading the change and improvement of a primary school. But the search for a general theory of leadership to describe the case is much more difficult. Who are we looking for in the school improvement process - a purposeful and strong character who can lead the school, or a warm and caring person who can empower the staff, or some other qualities?

In school effectiveness research, models of instructional leadership dominate as an ideal form, but Leithwood & Leonard's further research (1998) adds to the evidence on the contribution of transformational leadership practices to organisational learning and supports the claim that transformational conceptions of leadership are well matched to the context of a school restructuring agenda. Drawing on the headteacher's experience in Sharnbrook Upper School in the IQEA project, Jackson (2000:69) concludes that the leadership model should be 'a more dispersed one which is opportunistic, flexible, responsive and context-specific, rather than prescribed by roles, inflexible, hierarchical and status-driven'. In other words, it is a model that encourages and provides support for a broadly based leadership approach.

Though the above academics have their own conclusions and findings on the relationship between leaders and school change, the researcher agrees with the study of Leithwood et al. (1996) that the search for a general theory of leadership is doomed to fail. West (2000:50) suggests that 'headteachers may have a more complex view of leadership than is apparent either from studies of schools or from autobiographical accounts'. Principals leading a school should be conscious of a

range of possible leadership styles. A number of core issues from the research project *Effective Leadership in a Time of Change* (Riley & MacBeath, 1998) concerning school leadership are:

- *That there is no package for school leadership*
- *That school leadership is beyond the heroic undertakings of one individual*
- *That school leadership is not static*

Riley's study (2000:47) found that the paradigm of school leadership was one of mobility and fragility, and constantly changing to cope with the external context. There was also variation in how the principal's leadership styles meshed with the demands of the reform in Datnow & Costellano's study (2001) on the project *Success for All*.

In the case study, the principal possessed a mixture of each: transactional (in allocation workload and resources); instructional (in planning curriculum with the core teachers); transformational (in empowering the less experienced); and even what Sergiovanni (2000) described as 'Stewardship'. In this particular case the researcher judges that the leadership style of the principal is one based on a transformational style, with love, care and ethical components. Having said that, the researcher is reluctant to label a 'transformational leader' as the necessary or the most important condition for improvement in this case study. The evidence from teachers suggests that change can be attributed to multiple leadership styles, corresponding to the culture and history of the school, the professional knowledge of the teachers, the socio-economic-status of the students' families, and some other related factors. While the leadership of the principal is a necessary factor in school improvement, it remains insufficient for sustained school improvement. The other qualities of leadership such as shared leadership roles and responsibilities at other levels within the schools have been shown to be just as important (Harris, 1999b).

## **(b) School development officers: Trust and support**

### **The beginning**

The success of a partnership project of school improvement can be attributed to a number of factors. Erskine-Cullen (1995), based on her research and development experience in The Learning Consortium Project in Ontario, says the first factor for change is the ability to create a 'critical mass' for change. The critical mass of change includes the administrator, the core implementers and the personnel from external support. In this case study, the researcher found the contribution of the school development officers from the university team critically important in the process of change.

There were altogether 11 professional staff members from the university (one programme coordinator and 10 school development officers), taking care of 50 schools (24 secondary and 26 primary schools). The team of SDOs was a rich pool of expertise drawn from the fields of education and human resources development. They were either teacher trainers, school administrators, curriculum developers, experienced teachers or human resources development consultants before they joined the university team. Some of the tasks they conducted were similar to those conducted by the school coaches in the Accelerated Schools Project in the United States, or as facilitators in Success For All Project. To enhance team capacity and to make full use of the expertise of the members to meet the needs of individual schools, on most occasions members worked in pairs or as small teams to conduct school development activities in schools. In this case study, one of the SDOs (SDO1) served as the main contact, attended most of the meetings in schools and was responsible for the overall design and planning of development activities. For



activities grouped as “big wheel” processes<sup>4</sup>, usually SDO1, another SDO and the coordinator would form the action team. For small wheel<sup>5</sup> activities, other ad-hoc action teams were formed, but SDO1 was present on almost all occasions.

At the very initial stage of the partnership project, both parties were very careful in building the relationship. It was not smooth in the beginning, especially when the first SDO assigned to the school left the project after 6 months. SDO1 expressed her concern in the interview:

*I took over in April, in the middle of the second term of the first school year. The original SDO left the project in March. From the record that she left behind, I learnt that one staff development workshop had been conducted; the result of the stock-take report had been released and explained to the teaching staff.*

*I guessed in the first year she was not sure how to initiate any development work with this school. Since she had not done much, there wasn't any need to follow-up. I believed she left the team because she got better offer from another organisation. Perhaps because she knew that she would be leaving the project soon, that's why she hadn't started any work other than conducting the initial stock-taking exercise and one staff development workshop on the theme of 'Change'. When I took over, I could only rely on the stock-taking report and the workshop report to find out how much development work had been carried out. The stock-taking report did not contain much data and the analysis was rather simple and superficial.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

The teacher in the core group overtly said:

*In the first year, er... I didn't find it very useful in the first year, not much organised activities, er... stock-take... workshops... change... team building... my expectation was much more.*

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<sup>4</sup> They were systematic processes to help schools determine their own goals and directions in relation to the three principles of ASQE. The processes were taking stock, building a shared vision, setting priorities, establishing relevant governance structures, and adopting the Inquiry Process.

<sup>5</sup> Innovations associated with improving teaching and learning, like powerful learning, thinking skills programmes, curriculum integration activities and project learning.

(interview C1)

Another teacher (S2) told the interviewer that she could not recall much of the activities in the first year and said it was only after the implementation of the powerful learning that the staff was stirred up.

### The turning point

The abilities and the attitude of the school development officers did change the whole scene, but it was tough in the beginning even after SDO1 took over. One of the ways of developing mutual trust and establishing the SDOs' credibility was through a carefully planned staff development workshop. The theme of that particular workshop was purposely designed for the school after a careful study of the data in the stock-taking exercise. It aimed to address such issues as acceptance of change, team building, vision building, and work strategies. The application of constructivist learning theories in the design of the workshop inspired the frontline practitioners and they enjoyed the workshop very much. De-briefs of the activities were extremely important and useful for the development of trust. SDO1 was very experienced in conducting this sort of experiential learning programme. But she admitted that the situation was much more delicate than she had expected.

*The second meeting was a staff development workshop. The purpose of the first meeting was to discuss the theme and content of the workshop. In the first meeting, I also explained the change of personnel. The workshop was conducted in April, the first time that I met all the teaching staff. It was approaching the end of the school year and I felt uncomfortable for having done so little in the first year.*

(journal notes, SDO1)

*There was a post-activity discussion session within the workshop. I found that the quality of their discussion was very low. They worked very hard, but not*

*very smart. They lost track easily and their reflective power was very weak. The overall impression was that they were very traditional and lagged behind. When I debriefed, I commented on their inefficiency and I immediately noted their resentment. Although they did not respond to my comments verbally, I could sense their resentment from their body language.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

The principal shared the worries as well.

*The de-briefing of the SDO after the simulation games and activities was very precise, but I think the teachers may find it difficult to accept as they have never encountered such criticisms in the past.*

*(interview, P1)*

*As soon as the workshop was over, I said to my colleague who co-conducted the workshop with me, that I felt we had done something inappropriate and damaging. I felt that they were not that playful and noted that they lacked the open-mindedness. They probably felt that we were nobody and therefore did not have the right to criticize them.*

*I reflected a lot on this incident later on and regretted very much for criticising them prematurely. It was really unwise of us to give any arbitrary comments before we could solicit trust from the teachers. We decided that we need to seek help from the programme co-ordinator. I suggested that he should go to chair the next meeting, to test the water and to make right of what I had done wrong. He did go to the next meeting and succeeded in soothing the teachers' sentiment as planned. From then on, I was convinced about the importance of building mutual trust.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

The prompt 'rescuing' of the damaged relationship by the programme coordinator seemed timely and appropriate, perhaps due partly to luck.

*My colleagues told me that they might have made some mistakes when de-briefing to the teachers what they felt after the teachers were not smart and not doing well in the simulation games on tackling problems during the staff*

*development workshop. They said they might be too frank and too critical when de-briefed. They asked me to go and reconcile the situation. I had to support them though I was not 100% confident that I could turn the clock round.*

*(journal notes, April 16, 1999, coordinator)*

*The day came, I went with my colleagues to the school to meet the teaching staff again. That was another workshop, I helped them to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT); and how to map the goals of the school with the actions they did (Goals and Action Mapping Exercise GAME); and how to evaluate and inquire the action plans and programmes they had done so far. On the course of the analysis, I told them my observation of their attitude towards the students and my appreciation of their effort, that wasn't bluffing, I really thought they deserved it. Probably, my enthusiasm or my persuasive power was very strong, we were very comfortable when we left as most of the staff treated us very well. We knew that we won their trust and the obstacle for our work was temporarily removed.*

*(field notes, May, 20, 1999, coordinator)*

### **The development**

The pressure on the university team was temporarily relieved but no more mistakes could be afforded. We observed the teachers from a different angle and found that they were very dedicated to their work and showed great concern for their pupils, though in a very inefficient, traditional way.

The principal played an important role at this moment.

*Soon after the workshop for the whole staff, the principal introduced the core group to me in a meeting to discuss the way forward. In the workshop there were about 34 staff, half of them were not very happy, some were indifferent. The members of the core group were picked by the principal. They were young and comparatively progressive. We discussed about how to follow-up the workshop and enquired about the teachers' response. Their reply confirmed my judgment and I immediately extended my apology for causing the*

*emotional disturbance.*

*(journal notes, May 20, 1999, SDO1)*

*The principal affirmed that comments from ASP would help the teachers see their blind spots. He felt that in order to improve, there was the need to strike a balance between maintaining good relationship and soliciting advice from outside bodies.*

*I think the principal is open-minded and he is very eager to learn. He developed his trust on us and the Project quickly. He strongly believed that change is inevitable and desirable. The teachers must learn fast and catch up. The urgency of the need to catch up is always on his mind.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

From then on, the cooperation was much smoother and the core group responsible for liaison and development work was established. Building a good working relationship is a pre-requisite for a partnership project of this kind. The workshops and the programmes designed for the teachers or other stakeholders of the schools had moved from the big wheel process to the small wheel activities on teaching and learning. The introduction and the implementation of powerful learning was also a critical and transitional point for the school improvement project. The condition coincides with what David Hopkins thinks, that school improvement efforts should drive down to the 'classroom learning level' (Hopkins 2000:136). More concrete evidence concerning the support and assistance of the school development officers will be discussed in the next section when we talk about the enhancement of teachers' capacity through conducting small wheel processes like powerful learning.

The principal described the relationship between the SDOs and the school teachers, "At first, my teaching staff are like outsiders, not very involved. But upon the instruction and guidance of the SDOs, they really change,



maybe ....er....because of the series of workshops, they change from cool to passionate. Now, the SDOs and some of the staff become old pals, they just ring the SDO up when necessary, and all of them have no negative feeling on the 'intrusion' of the SDOs." The vice-principal, who was deeply impressed by the partnership project, always gave supportive comments, "All the workshops are beneficial to the teachers and most objectives achieved. The SDO is excellent, very positive, extremely good attitude and really wants to help us."

Some other comments from the teachers were quoted below:

*[They provide] support, definitely yes, in resources, consultation, reference materials.....With the external support, I can work better in all aspects, and at the same time, the learning of the students is greatly enhanced.*

*(interview, S1)*

*The SDO brought in new teaching strategies. We were enlightened.*

*(interview, C1)*

*The coaches (SDOs) are very important, I am not flattering you people, but it is true. We were all very scared in the beginning, but we feel the support and appreciate the way you guide us. Authority is very important as well, if we ask our colleagues to do such and such, we are on equal par, the pushing effect is not as strong as the people from the university. They [the school teachers] think that you are very professional, with good persuasive power.*

*(interview, T1)*

*I was really impressed by the attitude of the university staff towards us. Knowing that I rushed to the university for the cross-schools middle-management training course conducted by other SDOs without taking lunch, the staff bought me a packet of sandwich immediately.....Oh, the course was very impressive.*

*(interview, S1)*

S1 had been considered a 'headache' by the principal and the relatively younger teachers (C1 and C2) in the core group and had opposed to any new ideas

introduced in the past.

From their perspective, the school development officers also valued the mutual relationship and appreciated the ways the school staff treated them.

*I feel that they consider us very professional, and not forceful or threatening, we share the responsibility and work with them. They could see that we are full of enthusiasm and energy, these are the qualities of the SDOs that impress them.*

*I saw our relationship as partners, 30% as expert and 70% as partner.*

*(interview, SDO2)*

*Almost everyone knows me, greets me and shows appreciation. I love to visit the school.*

*(journal notes, SDO1)*

### **Discussion on external support: school development officers**

From the data collected, the school development officers, as the major source of external support, were of utmost importance in the partnership project. The SDOs have to play different roles in the encounter, as a 'salesperson', a 'doctor', a 'model teacher', an 'expert', a 'facilitator' in order to be able to secure trust, to provide support, to release tension, to mediate and to collaborate with the teachers. The teacher from the core group (C1) also echoed these comments, "Sometimes, the SDO is like a middle-man, arbitrator between the principal and the teachers, and among the teachers." The data cited above reflect well on the establishment of trust and confidence between the two parties of the university and the school, but the professional development of the teachers could only be enhanced if they practised, reflected and implemented the learning and teaching programmes introduced in the project. Nevertheless, the SDOs were not all-round experts who could satisfy all the various needs of the school. The optimal size and critical mass

of a school development team should be further investigated.

Experiences of other school improvement projects reveal similar findings. Datnow & Castellano (2001:235) even comment that in the project 'Success For All', the facilitators were critical of successful implementation, arguably more critical than the principal.

Some of the roles played by the facilitator found in Datnow & Castellano's research include:

- *The facilitator's job was complex and expansive and on any given day involved issuing and organizing materials, observing in classrooms, monitoring tutors, meeting with teachers, meeting with the principal, attending a family support-team meeting, training teachers, calling the SFA trainers, and assessing and regrouping students.*
- *The facilitators remained very committed to their jobs and felt that the success of the reform hinged to a large degree on their function as the facilitator.*
- *The facilitators needed to engender the trust and collegiality of the teachers, some of whom viewed them as administrators.*
- *The facilitators had to delicately establish new working relationships with principals, who themselves were unaccustomed to negotiating leadership responsibilities with a teacher leader.*

*(Datnow & Castellano, 2001: 237-242; Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002:81-87)*

In summary, the SDOs' job, like the job of SFA facilitators, involves considerable negotiation. There exists much ambiguity, and tension with regard to their roles and relationships with principals and teachers. This is due in part to the structures and cultures existing in the schools. Ainscow and Southworth (1996:239) report the teachers' view of the consultants of the IQEA project

attached to their schools. The impacts left by the consultants were grouped into five categories: 1) pushing thinking forward; 2) framing the issues; 3) encouraging partnerships; 4) providing incentives; and 5) modeling ways of working.

Without a thorough understanding of the condition and the needs of the school, a mismatch between the SDO and the school staff will be fatal for school improvement. The often-heard comments from the principals in some other schools in the project were, “The school development officer really makes a difference” or “Could I have (Ms. XX) as my school development officer next year?” The coordinator was often puzzled by the problem of finding the best people as the school development officers.

**(c) Internal core group of teachers (cadre)**

**The trigger (setting the scene)**

Leadership in high-performance learning organizations is decentralized, facilitative, and exercised fully at all levels in the organization (Marks & Louis, 1999:713). The selection of the core group of teachers or cadre to act as the critical mass in the change process is one of the critical success factors. Credit should be given to the principal for his trust and prompt response to the ‘rescue’ workshop by the coordinator. The coordinator recalled the incident in the journal:

*We conducted a workshop on the evaluation of programmes done in school last year, the Goals and Action Mapping Exercise (GAME); the principal trusted us and accepted our suggestion and proceeded to carry out the evaluation exercise without hesitation. Probably, there was an urgent need as the school had to formulate the school plan at this time of the year. Perhaps our advice came along at the right moment.*

*At that particular point in time, we were experimenting with Powerful Learning in another primary school. We invited many schools to send representatives to visit this school and observe the process. When we invited*

*the principal to visit the two schools that were willing to try Powerful Learning, he went with the entire core group to both events. After the visits, they immediately discussed about the possibility of launching similar programme in their own school because they felt that they would be just as capable.*

*(journal notes, May 30, 1999 coordinator)*

The SDO1 was delighted that the core group (cadre) on teaching and learning had been established. This was seen as a possible trigger point for our 'genuine' cooperation on teaching and learning which was so important in the school improvement process. We often stressed that the ultimate aim of our project was to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

*The first ASP core group meeting was convened by the principal in early May, 1999. The membership of the core group was an important factor. The members were carefully chosen by the principal and the mix was the result of his strategic planning.*

*First, we have the vice-principal who is a hardworking and responsible 'butler' and takes care of everything personally and most important of all, she maintains very good relationship with all her colleagues. Another member is an experienced English teacher who returned from Canada after emigrating there for a number of years. Because she had been exposed to the education system in another country, she is considered to be more receptive to innovation. There are two relatively young teachers who are pursuing further studies at the moment. The principal presumed that because of their access to the latest development in education reform, they should also be more receptive to new ideas. So the principal considered the membership an appropriate mix of talents.*

*In addition to this composition, the principal deliberately drew in a senior teacher who's in charge of activity approaches teaching and learning. She was identified to be a major source of resistance to change. The principal believed that if we could 'convert' this teacher we could 'convert' the entire school.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

The progress achieved so far was very encouraging. It seemed that everything was coming together neatly and timely. The core group seemed to be excited to such a point that they looked forward to some action. The effect and impact of the powerful learning programme and other new practices will be described in the next section.

### **The development (empowerment and relationship) phase**

The study of Ainscow & Southworth (1996:229) has confirmed the importance of a small group of teachers who have taken on leadership roles in schools and have been successful in bringing about improvements in their work. Empowering the core group of teachers and winning their support is particularly crucial for sustaining improvement. This critical mass in school will bring multiple effects in school change. As mentioned in the journal of the school development officer, the core team was a combination of the 'experienced' and the 'young', the 'love to try' and the 'obstacle', the 'visionary leader' and the 'butler'.

We could assess the attitude of the core members from the interviews:

*I try to understand the partnership project. I am very positive, I read from books, journal articles and newsletters mentioning the project.*

*(interview, C1)*

*I believe that education should help students develop their multiple potentials..... There are a lot of dimensions ASQE can provide, I choose to work more on curriculum work.*

*(interview, C2)*

*From 1998 till now, the front cart of the train led your way, you cannot go back. Change is accepted without noticing it.*

*(interview, T1)*

*Powerful learning is new to me, to the other teachers and to the students.....  
but I am more concerned with the logistics and the time management.*

*(interview, C1)*

*We have the confidence and are willing to work.*

*(interview, P2)*

*In the beginning, I have much doubt about the project, too much work to do. I  
am already the coordinator of the activity approach and responsible for all  
computer records in schools.*

*(interview, S1)*

*We had a lot of meetings, my involvement was not as great as the core group.  
After all, we had to start the task from zero; to me, it was challenging and  
complicated.*

*(interview, T2)*

Without experiencing the joy and pain, the ups and downs, the process and the product of a collaborative task, the professional abilities of the core group could not be enhanced. Without witnessing the achievement of the students after the hard work, the teachers will not value the worth of the effort made. The major impact of the powerful learning programme will be discussed in the next section. Only some of the evidence of change in the core group is quoted. Below is a comment from the most resistant teacher:

*The first large-scale collaborative activity was powerful learning. No matter  
you want it or not, you have to do it. But we did give our opinion and vote, the  
number of 'agree to try' was more than 'not to try'. We started from  
formulating the learning theme.....that was a great challenge to me, but later  
everything was getting smoother. The relationship of the colleagues became  
better and the mutual support grew stronger.*

*At first, I also doubted the effect of the powerful learning programme, but  
when the visitors [parents, teachers and principals from other schools,  
officials from Education Department] came to observe and appreciated our*

*effort, I was confident. I felt that the performance and the achievement of the students, our teachers and the parents were great.*

*(interview, S1)*

The principal also praised the two relatively younger teachers on their effort to coordinate the large-scale programme, he said, “I know that it is difficult for them, but there is marked improvement in the team spirit, I worry about the older teachers. They may have difficulties to adapt... but it is OK now.”

SDO1 stated the delicate relationship in the interview, “there might be a lot of complaints from other teachers, but the core group did not complain at all, they were actually those who committed most. The core group received all the pressure from other teachers, the feeling was more intense than just complaining about increased workload, because the other teachers thought the idea came from them.”

The internal conflicts, though not always intense, are always there. Two of the core members of the school were relatively young members, with eight and five years of teaching experiences respectively, but their academic qualifications were higher than the experienced teachers who were in the middle management group. Such hierarchical structure poses difficulties in a traditional and established school in terms of fostering collegiality, as the more-experienced non-graduate teachers are reluctant and uncomfortable at being led by teachers with degrees<sup>6</sup>. From numerous observations in other schools, the facilitators often encounter similar obstacles due to the power relationships existing in the schools.

Though the members of the core group were very enthusiastic, they were reluctant to face the difficulties of dealing with difficult colleagues.

*I felt uneasy asking my colleagues to do the work, [they are] older and more*

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<sup>6</sup> There are two streams of career ladder in Hong Kong, the ‘non-graduate’ and the ‘graduate’. It is because in the past, the primary school teachers graduated in the ex-Colleges of Education (not universities) were awarded Teachers’ Certificate only, they are in the ‘non-graduate’ stream.



*experienced than me. The structure was strange, they were promoted a number of years ago in the non-graduate stream, I was newly promoted and in the graduate stream, the structure itself created a lot of conflicts.*

*(interview, C1)*

*The members of the Core Group expressed their frustration about their role in this partnership project. After clarification, they got to understand the guiding principles and the process of ASQE better.*

*(Minutes of the 1st meeting with the core group on 3-5-1999)*

To avoid direct conflict, the core teachers always asked the SDO to voice their opinion on their behalf. Tact and interpersonal skills were required in handling the relationship between the external facilitators and the internal core teachers, and among the other internal staff, and in enhancing trust and support. The SDO wrote in her journal:

*I could see that the senior teacher labelled as the major resistance among the staff could be converted to my advantage. I treasured her presence, purposely directed some questions to her, listened to her advice and respected her opinion, and I think the most important of all, I praised what she had done as the activity-approach coordinator and worked with her to improve the worksheets she designed. She was delighted.*

*(journal notes, SDO1)*

Muncey and McQuillan's (1996) ethnography of the Coalition of Essential Schools records some relevant insights on the role ambiguity of teachers who served as reform coordinators. The coordinators found it difficult to be educational leaders due to the uncertainty about how aggressively they could or should promote change, and at the other end, the teachers also saw the coordinators as occupying an ill-defined role that constituted a 'no-man's land' between teachers and administrators (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996:59). Though the teachers of the

core group in the case study may not carry the big name of reform coordinators, the successful initiation of school change depends very much on their abilities. In studying the facilitating factors and organizational consequences in the professional community in Chicago Elementary Schools, Bryk & Camburn (1999:744) comment, 'In some settings, teachers who do not want to disturb the status quo may actively oppose change, and school leadership may remain ineffective. In another setting, a significant segment of the faculty will embrace these ideas, be supported by their principal, and over time be able to influence other colleagues to join them in reflective discussions and collaborative work.'

#### **Discussion on internal strength: core teachers**

As an initiator of school change, the core group accomplished an important task, but the researcher found that the group was not as strong in professional knowledge and interpersonal skills. For a traditional small school with its existing human resources, the principal had already done his best to encourage change. Ainscow & Southworth's (1996:223) IQEA study shows that the roles of leading teachers in schools fall into five categories: 1) dealing with people; 2) taking a whole school view; 3) keeping up momentum; 4) monitoring developments; and 5) establishing a climate. That was too tough for the limited number of core group teachers in the case study.

#### **(d) Summary of discussion on domain 2: critical human factors**

The establishment and maintenance of a good relationship between the university and the school staff was essential for school change. A university-school partnership project should be built on mutual trust and respect. Members of both parties should treat each other as equals and work together as partners. Whether

such a relationship can be established depends on a number of conditions, but the attitude (enthusiasm, patience, human relationship) of the SDOs, the readiness and willingness of the school staff and the leadership of the principal are the most important. In this particular case, the change of SDO certainly makes a marked difference and the early intervention of the project coordinator to reinstall the confidence and trust of the school teachers are the critical factors for successfully igniting the improvement process. SDO1 voiced the essential qualities of an expert consultant in the interview:

*The best way is to become one of them, so that you could feel how they feel, only then your tone would be entirely different. I always remember the painful lesson that I learnt from the first workshop. When I criticized them, I was talking as an outsider, comparing their performance with that of other teachers. Of course, they should be unhappy. Who was I to criticize them, knowing nothing about them, we were not friends then..... But as the frequency of my visit increased, their perception gradually changed especially when I volunteered to take up some work that they disliked or feared. I even went into the classroom to teach. Gradually I won their trust and I also developed some special liking for the school, the pupils and the teachers. A sense of belonging also emerged as a result of close contact and collaboration. You cared about the well-being of the school and you felt being liked and welcomed by the people in the school. That really made you feel so good! When you become a member of the school, you wouldn't complain. If you alienate yourself, the feeling would be different.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

As far as professional capacity of the teachers is concerned, the case school was not strong. A study of a sample of lesson plans showed that there was little variety in teaching strategies; most teachers took the didactic approach. In the staff development workshop conducted by the SDOs, the teachers were not familiar with the professional discourse used.

*The principal and some of the middle management team were very impressed*

*by the workshop on evaluating schools goals. Some other teachers enjoyed and involved in the workshop, but the discussion focused on problems confined to micro-operational level and logistic arrangement.*

*(evaluation notes of workshops on 20-5-1999, SDO1)*

Byrk & Camburn (1999:753) identify some of the essential features that characterised a professional community, 'reflective dialogue among teachers about instructional practices and student learning; a deprivatization of practice in which teachers observe each others' practices and joint problem solving is modal, and peer collaboration in which teachers engaged in actual shared work. Undergirding these practices are shared norms focused on student learning and collective responsibility for school operations and improvement.' Most of these characteristics were not initially found in the case school. On the contrary, from the observations of the project coordinator and the SDOs, the meetings for administrative purpose were not very efficient; the curriculum design and lesson planning were not of top quality; professional dialogue between teachers was scarce. As one of the teachers (T1) commented, "Sometimes the meetings are not efficient, the discussion is not professional, most time is spent on the nitty-gritty things."

#### **7.4 Enhancement of teachers' capacity and professional development through programme-led changes in teaching and learning**

In the research literature on school improvement, it is evident that the maximum impetus is gained when the focus is linked directly to teaching and learning outcomes. One of the objectives for the university in launching the school improvement programme was to enhance the teacher' capacity in teaching and learning. Capacity for organization learning was therefore the major theme of the school improvement project

of the partnership. Though Marks & Louis (1999:781) comment that the definition of organizational learning is generally elusive, with lack of consistency among authors, it can be looked upon as 'a process, the outcome of which is new knowledge, skills, or tools for increasing learning'.

As discussed in the project team's weekly meeting, the SDO decided that the entry point for introducing an innovative teaching and learning programme to the school was the implementation of powerful learning. If the school agreed to try the programme, the opportunity had to be handled carefully and professionally. The coordinator was very alert on how powerful learning could be implemented and disseminated.

*We were experimenting with Powerful Learning in one of the primary school. We should invite as many schools as possible to send representatives to visit this school and observe the process. We should be mindful about not giving the impression that we were selling one 'best' way to teach and learn. The strategy is to ask the teachers to see more for themselves. Whatever they think is suitable for their own school, we would help them customize.*

*(journal notes, May 3, 1999 coordinator)*

*The school principal accepted the invitation to observe a Powerful Learning event organised by another ASQE school.*

*(Minutes of 1st meeting with the ASQE core group on 3-5-1999)*

*The school principal and some core group members, having observed the Powerful Learning event organised by another ASP school, expressed their interest in trying out similar activity in the next school year.*

*(Minutes of 2nd meeting with the ASQE core group on 13-5-1999)*

Hence, the enhancement of teachers' capacity, started off in the powerful learning programme, was to be followed by innovative teaching and learning programmes in different subject areas.

## **(a) Powerful Learning**

### **The Philosophy**

As in the Accelerated Schools Project in United States, there was no standard formula on how powerful learning should be implemented. Only the philosophy was outlined: children are assumed to be gifted; more learning situations should be created to nurture children's talents; students' interest in learning should be stimulated; students should be enabled to see meaning in lessons; students should be helped to perceive connections between school activity and real life; students should be able to learn actively and learn in ways that build on his or her own strengths (Hopfenberg, Levin et al., 1993: 161-3). The activities of Powerful Learning aimed to be authentic, relevant, interactive, continuous and inclusive. Learning experience was seen as composed of three interrelated dimensions of the 'what, how and context'. 'What' refers to the specific content or curricular knowledge, skills or experiences the students acquire. 'How' includes learning opportunities and forms of instruction and 'Context' comprises all learning resources. The above ideas are not at all foreign to Western countries, as Hopkins (2001:72) comments, 'The teacher's task is not simply to teach, but to create powerful contexts for learning.' Joyce et al. (1997:7) also express the idea of teaching and learning as 'learning experiences composed of content, process and social climate'. Teachers in most primary schools in Hong Kong seldom have the experience of designing 'What' to teach as most teachers just teach according to the standardized textbooks and centrally controlled syllabus.

### **The Preparation**

*Members of the core group expressed concern about the dissemination of the philosophy and design of Powerful Learning among the teaching staff, so it was decided that a staff development workshop must be organised as soon as possible.*

*(Minutes of 3rd meeting with the ASQE core group on 21-9-1999)*

The ASQE core group and the SDO jointly decided that in order to show the teachers what was meant by Powerful Learning, the preparation should begin with a staff development workshop on powerful learning. Thus, the teachers had the chance to experience the activities based on the constructivist concept designed by the SDOs themselves. The teachers enjoyed the workshop very much. The feedback from the evaluation of the workshop was 100% positive. Below were some of the comments:

- *the arrangement is excellent, not boring, can promote colleagues' relationship;*
- *can learn through involving in activities;*
- *like to learn from games and simulations;*
- *I have not been treated as primary students for a long time, it is wonderful, I like the activities and the learning, thank you;*
- *No bluffing, it is powerful;*
- *The activities can be adapted to teaching writing;*
- *I am exhausted, time is short;*
- *Happy, satisfied, cooperative, support, sense of belonging, love, swift;*
- *Can make use of multi-sensory approaches to assist teaching;*
- *The first time I heard about constructivism, it can be applied.*

*(Comments collected after the powerful learning workshop on 21-12-1999)*

*The teachers experienced their first taste of "Powerful Learning". As shown by their written feedback, they did not only enjoy the workshop but also began to appreciate the learner-centred approach of learning. An initial framework of the upcoming Powerful Learning event scheduled for April was also established.*

*(SDO's report in the weekly meeting in January, 2000)*

The Powerful Learning programme in the case study involved cross-curricular thematic learning for primary four students. Altogether seven meetings were convened to work out the logistics and the details of the instructional design. It was a new endeavour to all the teachers and particularly to the ASQE core group members who played the coordinator role. Naturally, the focus of their initial discussion was mainly on the logistics so as to minimize complaints about 'unfair' distribution of workload and disruption of the original teaching schedule.

*The school principal has also made significant efforts to reshuffle the timetable and workload of individual teachers to facilitate the planning and implementation of the Powerful Learning event.*

*(Minutes of 3rd meeting with the ASQE core group on 21-9-1999)*

*I have to play a rather dominant role in the process of discussion in order to redirect the focus of the teachers from the logistics to the purpose of launching a Powerful Learning event. Initial decision about the following were reached:*

- *Theme*
- *Subjects to be included*
- *Teachers to be involved*

*(SDO's report in the weekly meeting in October, 1999)*

The Unit theme was 'Hong Kong is my home' and the sub-topic was 'A little tourist guide of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region'. The objectives and design of the programme were discussed and designed in the cadre's meeting. The objectives were multiple:

- *promote students' sense of belonging towards the community and the city*
- *raise the students' expressive and communicative abilities (read, write,*



*speak and listen)so that they become bi-literate and trilingual<sup>7</sup>*

- *ignite students' intrinsic motivation through multiple teaching strategies*
- *help students apply the learned knowledge (cognitive, affective and skills) to introduce and promote Hong Kong*
- *help students establish the spirit of collaboration and peer learning*

The learning programme was not a one-off activity; instead, it lasted for two to three months. The detailed programme of powerful learning can be seen in Table 11. In the course of designing the lesson plans, SDO consciously played an active role to change the teachers' habit of just focussing on the logistics.

*The teachers' habit of focussing mostly on the logistics is difficult to change, so I have to set an example of shifting this focus by writing the minutes of meeting myself. In addition to the logistics, the philosophy underlying the instructional design for each session must be thoroughly discussed and subject to continuous refinement.*

*(SDO's report in the weekly meeting in February, 2000)*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Bi-literate' refers to proficiency both in English and Chinese Language and 'trilingual' means fluency in speaking English and two Chinese dialects, Putonghua and Cantonese. The saying is the slogan and the objective of the HKSAR government in education.

Table 11: The Schedule and Content of the Powerful Learning programme

Date (in 2000)	Learning Activities	Characteristics
Jan-Mar.	Preparation: whole learning programme designed, discussed and revised	Teachers were very active, positive involvement, reflective, sharing
10/3 powerful learning day	All the students went to visit Law Uk Folk Museum, as tourists. The upper six secondary school students (who had received leadership training from SDO) in the same district served as tour guides and demonstrated to the primary school kids how to be a competent tour guide. The students learn about the changing land use, the past and the historical development of the area through observation, interview and studying the exhibits in the museum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● peer learning and cascade learning</li> <li>● secondary school students serve as role models</li> <li>● interface between secondary and primary schools</li> <li>● community involvement</li> <li>● parents' involvement and assistance in learning</li> </ul>
17-31/3	Instructional design of classroom teaching in different subjects concerning the central theme were developed : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In the Chinese Language class, the students reflect on the qualities required of a competent guide. They also learn to design name cards and itinerary, taking into account the characteristics of different places.</li> <li>● Data collected from the interviews would be processed in the Mathematics lessons. Learn to sing songs around the theme of Hong Kong in Music lessons</li> <li>● Learn to make souvenirs in Art and Craft lessons</li> <li>● Learn to introduce the scenic spots in English and Putonghua in language lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teachers had to collaborate well, willing to contribute some of the lessons for collective use and for integration of learning</li> <li>● Teachers learned to be patient and applied the values of powerful learning, high expectation on students</li> <li>● Students had a lot of self-practice, much more creative work, became active learners</li> </ul>
31/3 powerful learning day	Final training-sessions for students (parents, teachers and other stakeholders were invited to observe) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Time tunnel (Mathematics and social studies)</li> <li>● Welcome to Hong Kong (English)</li> <li>● Why is Hong Kong full of Fun (Putonghua)</li> <li>● How much do you know about the itinerary (Chinese Language)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An integrated learning day to capitalize on the students' multiple abilities and intelligences</li> <li>● A wide range of learning activities: games, observations, role plays, small group discussions, data analysis, application of information technology</li> </ul>
1/4 powerful learning assessment	Practical session of a little tour guide (3 parts): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Small group quiz on what had been learnt</li> <li>● Acting as little trilingual tour guides</li> <li>● The visitors from other schools, the parents and the secondary school students would act as tourists and assessed their performance</li> <li>● Extending from a study of the past and present, students are led to discuss the future e.g. in the areas of land use and design of housing. 'Create the future' activities led by the secondary school students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A totally new attempt for the students, they were anxious, eager and nervous, they also loved to perform well</li> <li>● Communicative skills and the sense of 'I can do it' were stressed</li> </ul>

### **The Powerful Learning Programme**

The powerful learning programme implemented jointly between both parties was a distinctive example of organizational learning. The programme lasted for three months. More than 2/3 of the teaching staff was involved in the teaching and learning programme. Stakeholders including teaching staff, facilitators from the university, community members including museum staff, government officials, teachers and students from neighbouring schools, students and their parents, were all involved. Hopkins & Harris (1997:402) estimate that one of the conditions which underpin improvement effort is the practical efforts to involve staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions. The researcher adds that the involvement of all stakeholders in the students' learning can produce an even more significant result.

### **The Programme's Effect on Teachers' Professional Development and Capacity Enhancement**

For the teachers to make 'genuine' change in their teaching paradigm, they would need to observe changes in their students in the form of powerful learning. Some good teachers are accustomed to the 'traditional' way of teaching because they believe those are good for their students. Such views are grounded in hundreds of years of Chinese philosophical thought. The teachers look upon themselves as a model both of knowledge and morality, and learning is a moral duty and studying hard (boring, didactic, rote learning) is a responsibility to the family (Lee, 1996).

Although everybody was exhausted at the conclusion of the powerful learning event. The ASQE core group managed to conduct a comprehensive review right

after the final activity and solicited views from different stakeholders: teachers and parents. The overall evaluation was very positive. The teachers' views, both from the evaluation meeting and the later interview showed signs of paradigm shift as they assessed the programme's effect on their own belief and practice as well as its effect on students' learning.

**Teaching strategy:**

- *There is certainly a need to change the traditional teaching strategies;*
- *From visiting Law Uk Folk Museum to the practice day, the students changed a lot, we can see the importance of the teaching objectives and strategies;*
- *We have to accept new philosophies, there was no direction in the beginning, through gradual exploration and improvement, we can design a satisfactory programme;*

*(evaluation meeting notes from teaching staff on 1<sup>st</sup> of April)*

**Effect on teachers' collaboration culture:**

*In fact, there is paradigm shift in teachers. They don't know it. At first, everybody was scared of powerful learning and found the work difficult and troublesome, but they learned how to compromise and work together now.*

*(interview, T1)*

**Beliefs about students' learning:**

- *Before teaching, we under-estimate the abilities (creative) and cooperativeness of the students. To support and trust the students is important;*
- *Students were happy in the activities, so they put effort, and in return, derived more satisfaction, we can see the effectiveness;*

*(evaluation meeting notes from teaching staff on 1<sup>st</sup> of April)*

In the video series of “curriculum innovations in Hong Kong” produced by Education Television, Radio Hong Kong (RTHK), this powerful learning event (a little tourist guide) was recorded, and shown on television on 5-5-2000. We could read the smiles, the eagerness and the involvement of the energetic parents. One of the interviewed parents in the film admitted that she was fascinated by the potential, the curiosity and the creativity of the students. “They have a lot of questions about the museum, and the questions are sensible and challenging,” The parent said.

**Understanding of 'good' teaching:**

- *Time, space and resources are what good teaching needs;*
- *Visitors responses were very good, good teaching was not confined to classroom ;*
- *The preparation period was very labouring, but the response was very good;*
- *The related learning activities could be extended.*

*(evaluation meeting notes from teaching staff on 1<sup>st</sup> of April)*

**Reflection on their own practice:**

*The most impressive work was the visit to the museum, one of the activities in powerful learning, because I really went there and learnt outside the classroom.*

*The children were extremely happy. In the process of the journey, the parents helped. The arrangement was smooth and the children did learn. They had been to the Law Uk Folk Museum before, but the visit was different this time, [they] had learning objectives. Before we just asked them to look at the statues or the other things, and recorded what they saw, the effect was not that good. There were objectives and other assisting materials like worksheets,*

*discussions, reviews and evaluation. I learned much deeper myself.*

*(interview, S1)*

*I have very personal feeling on the project. I do not have much new ideas in teaching. When I saw that the project introduced the games and activities to raise the learning interests, it was very encouraging. And now I always think what kind of games and activities can be used for this or that lesson to consolidate learning.*

*(interview, P2)*

*Powerful learning changed my teaching paradigm, using games and activities to teach. Maybe I am a new teacher, so I absorb and learn.*

*I was very satisfied after the powerful learning and didn't want to leave it. There was sort of satisfaction and encouragement. The effect was rather good, some parents praised us and I found that I had some contribution in the whole event. I want to try the powerful learning in the second year.*

*(interview, T2)*

*The children were very excited in the powerful learning, whether the effect can last or not depend very much on the teachers. If the teachers expected better outcomes, they will try hard and the achievement will be better.*

*(interview, T1)*

### **Effect on students' learning:**

*The children wrote weekly journals after the visits, they wrote a lot more than usual. They wrote down the process of the visit and their emotion in great details. In the past, they found it very difficult to think about the content of the journal, but this time [it] was much easier and relaxed.*

*(interview, S1)*

*The students were very involved, especially in the oral speaking in English, they might be wrong in grammar, but ready to speak was a good start.*

*(interview, P2)*

*The most impressive activity was the powerful learning. In the interaction of*

*the learning activities, the teachers were very involved and enjoyed the communication with the students very much. In the process, the students learned a lot in the process, including hands-on experiments, information gathering and communication skills.*

*(interview, S2)*

In the same documentary film by Education Television, RTHK (see p.127), one of the students said, *“I learn a lot, use three kinds of languages to lead the tourists to visit Hong Kong. They [the visitors] give me good grades. I like this kind of learning.”* Another student said, *“I am not quite satisfied with my performance, there are a lot of er...er....er... in my speaking, I will improve and do much better next time.”*

Not all the interviews or the evaluation showed positive comments. One of the teachers worried about whether the effect could last long. She (C1) said, *“The impact on students is difficult to follow, it is very effective on the powerful learning activities, but I don’t know whether the learning atmosphere can be extended ...I can’t observe their lessons afterwards.”* Another core group member (C2) in the cadre of powerful learning shared a similar view:

*[We] do not have systematic evaluation on the effect or impact on students. From [my] observation, the students really enjoyed the period of powerful learning. But I don’t know once the teachers go back into the classroom, will they teach like before. I think this must be a long long road [to change].*

*(interview, C2)*

#### **Effect on home-school cooperation:**

All of the teachers being interviewed admitted that powerful learning had some effect on the parents. The teachers were a little surprised when they heard the comments from parents who seemed to appreciate more the teachers' and the

students' efforts:

- *Some students were not active enough. This was normal because they did not have ample opportunities to develop confidence. In the learning process, the students were improving, so we have to build up their confidence, encourage them;*
- *We could see that the students lack confidence, the activities improved their self-confidence and enhanced their motivation;*
- *The activities were effective, the students were eager to practise their English and Putonghua, they asked their parents to listen to them;*
- *The parents learned as well, the observations, the collection of materials, the skills;*
- *For the students, teachers and the parents, this activity was a very good experience;*

*(evaluation meeting notes from parents on 1<sup>st</sup> of April)*

The dedicated parents came and helped in preparing teaching aids and conducting students' activities. The parents knew the school better and their sense of belonging was raised. One parent worried that if the school adopted the powerful learning philosophies in teaching, would it mean that the students would have less opportunities for writing characters and reciting paragraphs. Perhaps the observation of the principal is fair in assessing this:

*The students liked the powerful learning very much, they were much happier in the learning process, but it was difficult to measure the effectiveness. Most parents liked the innovative powerful learning, but some might have contrasting views.*

*(interview, P1)*

The responsible SDO was more cautious about the changes in the teachers not



directly involved in the teaching process of powerful learning.

*Not everyone appreciated our effort, I guessed the principal and the core group, and may be some senior teachers appreciated more because individual frontline teachers didn't need to demonstrate their competence as an individual teacher. I felt it was a matter of ownership.*

*(interview, SDO1)*

### **Effect on confidence**

To reinforce the teachers' sense of achievement, several occasions were arranged for the core group to present their work and share their experiences with other schools. "I enjoyed sharing my experience with teachers in other schools, I am more confident, after learning from Mr. Lau (one of the SDOs, with expertise in mathematics teaching in primary school). He called us 'confident teacher' and wanted us to work in collaboration and share with other schools", the Mathematics teacher (D1) said in the interview. In exhibiting and presenting what they had done for the students to the teachers of the other schools, they simultaneously taught and learned. The teachers were also excited when the powerful learning programme was recorded in the first issue of the Bulletin "Teaching and Learning Update" published by the Advisory Inspectorate Division, Education Department, Hong Kong (Education Department, 2000 pp. 6-11). The principal and the staff felt honoured and became more confident.

### **Effect on the school's curriculum development**

To cope with the change in teaching paradigm, the teachers revisited and studied the existing curriculum and designed new programmes afterwards. Some structural factors such as timetable and teachers' workload were altered and rearranged accordingly.

The support of the principal was prompt and ready.

*Right after the powerful learning, we had a thorough discussion on next year's school plan, a few cadres were established, each led by a member of the core group in powerful learning. We had focused learning programmes for each level, powerful learning for P.4, thinking skills for P.3, subject integration for P.2, project learning for P.5 & P.6, and whole language learning for P.1.*

*(interview, P1)*

*We had a menu for curriculum innovation for the coming year. It is very complicated and we have to rearrange the time-table to accommodate the curriculum integration in primary two, the thinking skills in primary three, the powerful learning in primary four and the project learning in primary five and six.*

*(interview, S2)*

*Even though we have no similar support as in last year, we will try to continue and draw in community resources to help us. Even if we have no resources, we will evaluate what is useful and beneficial in the activities, what are the problems, how can we learn through the experience and make better the future outside-classroom learning.*

*(interview, S1)*

*Personally, I want you people around, I don't have enough skills and techniques to design and implement the innovative curriculum. The principal wants the support as well. He has established a new cadre called curriculum development group and hope that the effect of ASQE can be extended.*

*(interview, T1)*

Even with the above quotes, the effect of the powerful learning programme may still be seen as a special programme for the student to enjoy at a certain period of time. A study of the annual school plans may provide some more evidence<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The school plan has six chapters: 1) school aims and objectives, 2) organisational structure, 3) Members of School Board and Staff list, 4) framework of allocation of school actions, 5) Action plans of different academic and functional committees, 6) Budget.

More and more self-initiated action plans on curriculum innovation were found in the three issues of school plans (1998-1999, 1999-2000 and 2000-2001), like the 'whole language writing', 'comprehensive and high effective learning' in Chinese language learning, the thinking skills and high speed training in Mathematics learning. These increased the pages of the three school plans from 81, to 108 and 123 respectively. The principal had also restructured the organisation pattern. The ASQE team of the school was transformed into the school curriculum development team. The following comments were extracted from the school report 2000-2001.

*Before, some of the teachers considered the innovative teaching and learning activities like powerful learning as a new extra-curricular program outside classroom teaching, without motivation to change the paradigm of teaching and did not try to transfer the learning to normal classroom teaching. But in this year, the concepts and the practices have been extended and deepened in other classes and in different subjects.*

*(2000-2001 school report p.90)*

### **Summary of the effect of the powerful learning programme on teachers' professional development**

The implementation of powerful learning was an important step forward for the university- school partnership project. It stirred up the entire staff. Even those teachers who did not engage in either the preparation or the actual cooperative teaching were very eager to help the practice of 'little tour guides' on the powerful learning day. To conclude, the programme had its effects on the following:

- 1) Teachers' professional discourse became more focused. For a few months, the discussion among the involved teachers centred around the 'what', 'how' and 'context' of the learning programme. The cost-effectiveness analysis of the programme was similar to the inquiry process of an action plan. With proper support, action research on a number of teaching strategies could be formulated.

- 2) A platform for curriculum innovation was established. The evaluation of the programme afterwards demonstrated the desire of the staff in transferring and adapting the programme to 'normal' classroom teaching and learning.
- 3) Peer observation and collaborative teaching were promoted in disguise. For a traditional primary school like the case school, peer observation in teaching had never been practiced before. The powerful learning programme provided chances for teachers to observe, discuss, reflect and revise the lesson plan as well as the delivery methods. Team teaching and mutual support were therefore practiced in an unintentional way.
- 4) To face the challenge, team spirit and the ideas about collaborative working were gradually built up; this was essential for the growth of a learning organization. The powerful learning lessons were observed by the university staff, colleagues, teachers of other schools, supervisors and parents. Hence, the collaboration and cooperation of teachers was essential.
- 5) Networking of all stakeholders of the school included the school supervisors, the principal, the different levels or groups of teachers, the secretarial and janitor staff; the external professional support; and the teachers & students of neighbouring schools was made possible. Community resources were drawn in as well.

#### **(b) Teachers-initiated curriculum innovation – thinking skills in Mathematics**

##### **The adaptation**

The experience of powerful learning and the effect of the collaborative work would soon wither without any extended teaching and learning activities. Teacher empowerment and capacity for organizational learning have to be enhanced in order to sustain long-term school improvement. Without developing a sense of ownership in the teaching and learning programme, the teachers will look upon the

innovative implementation as an isolated event, no matter how grand or effective it is. Marks & Louis (1999:708) state clearly that 'knowledge and skills' are one of the constituent dimensions in creating school capacity for organizational learning, emphasizing that learning cannot take place without a knowledge base and access to new ideas. These knowledge and skills come from: 1) individual knowledge that is brought by both professionals, parents, students, and community members; 2) knowledge that is 'imported' from experts and the experience of the other schools; and 3) knowledge that is created by members of the school community to address specific questions or problems. Adapting and disseminating the philosophies and values of powerful learning into classroom teaching is crucial in developing the capacity for organizational learning. Building on the success experience of the collaborative work of the powerful learning programme, another cadre of teachers tried an innovative programme of thinking skills in Mathematics for primary three students. The team comprised three Mathematics teachers responsible for P.3, and two SDOs (SDO2 and another expert in mathematics teaching) from the university worked with them, gave advice and provided support. The programme on thinking skills was self-initiated.

*This year, we adapt the powerful learning experience and put it back into normal lessons, like developing thinking skills in mathematics. It is very helpful to the teachers, because it can be focused, extended and followed.*

*(interview, C1)*

*For the past two to three years, I got involved in different roles, from practical demonstration in teaching, designing thematic learning in powerful learning, supporting my colleagues in delivering powerful learning, taking students out for outside-classroom learning, planning Mathematics curriculum, and learning teaching skills from the SDOs.*

*The most important and impressive action plan I got involved in was the Mathematics thinking skills programme. It started in October 2000 and*

*lasted almost a year.*

*(interview, D1)*

Though initiated by the teachers, the challenges and pressure were still there.

SDO2 recalled in the interview:

*They had done the powerful learning before, the effect was rather good, but the thinking skills programme was directly related to classroom teaching, so the teachers may have some pressure. Their performance would be observed and to a certain extent, be criticised.*

*(interview, SDO2)*

The beginning was difficult.

*We identified the problems in teaching mathematics first. We observed their lessons. The lessons were very plain, the teaching was very routine and there were almost no varieties of activities or problem solving stuffs in the lesson, most of the activities in the lesson were just rote learning, not to mention the objective of enhancing thinking skills. We started to design the lessons, using multi-sensory learning activities first, just to arouse the interest of the students, adding in the techniques of asking questions, lateral and horizontal thinking, high order thinking, and cooperative learning.*

*(journal notes, SDO2)*

### **The development**

The researcher recorded the story narrated by one of the core members (D1) in the thinking skills programme. The narration was important as the feelings, the gratefulness and the enthusiasm were exposed in the way the teacher described the incident.

#### **(i) The beginning**

*I taught Mathematics for six years, I worried about whether the new methods*

*suggested could bring any effect, our students didn't understand even if you explained and explained. My worries lasted quite a long time, until the two coaches (the two SDOs) conducted two demonstration lessons which were very different from my teaching style, their methods were rather special. From my point of view, I didn't think the students can handle the tasks, but later I found out that they could do it, e.g. some memorizing techniques through visual images and hand-on tasks. Strangely enough, something which I expected that could not be effectively done for students could be achieved now.*

(ii) The action

*In the beginning, the two coaches and the Mathematics cadre (3 persons) defined the teaching content; there were altogether ten lessons. Frankly speaking, I didn't know what would happen in the lessons. The first two lessons were constructed and delivered by the coaches, we observed in the classroom and assisted in small group activities and discussions of the students if needed. Our contribution was rather minimal. After the lessons, we immediately did evaluation and review. We [the coaches and the teachers] shared our views. For the next two lessons, sort of cooperative lessons emerged, the coaches did the first half of the lessons and then we took over. We reviewed and evaluated again after the lessons. The roles gradually changed and we took charge of the lessons more. For the last four lessons, the design and implementation of the teaching were totally done by the three of us. The two coaches observed our performance and discussed afterwards. They always encouraged us to try, gave us advice, and asked us to rotate our designated tasks. They told us to see the teaching as learning opportunities, more diversification, and didn't treat it as text-teaching.*

*My usual teaching is to demonstrate the calculation on the blackboard, some calculation activities, like asking the students to come out and do the sum in front of the class or give them worksheets. Their teaching was much different, they asked the students to think of different ways of measurement, sometimes they made use of the students' bodies to measure the room. The students lied down one after another, a lot of fun, laughs, involvement, and motivation. It was amazing, I myself enjoyed the lesson very much. They made use of human senses to collect the information, visual images, real objects, but sometimes they just asked the students to close the eyes and memorize by heart. The activities were intermingled, multi-sensory, practical and abstract, sometimes kept them busy and interested, sometimes abstract and challenging ideas poured out. The ideas of multiple intelligences were applied.*

*The learning atmosphere was totally different, the students kept asking: when would the two coaches from the university come? Was it 'thinking skills' lesson? Those who were not 'outstanding' students, performed very well. Those who had no chances of demonstrating their learning before had the opportunities to exhibit their potentials, e.g. they could estimate better than the students who were always correct in calculation. In a way, their confidence was heightened.*

(iii) The paradigm shift

*I was very excited and enjoyed trying the new 'thinking skill' programme. It did affect my workload, if I spent more time discussing with my colleagues on how to teach, I could not mark the exercises that would pile up like hills. I didn't notice the improvement on academic achievement yet, if the examination is still 'yes' or 'no' answers on a piece of paper. But if I want 'genuine' teaching, I have to put aside those previously ineffective ways.*

*I won't use solely the students' marks achieved in the school examination to evaluate my professional abilities now. I consider my professional level of teaching promoted after joining the partnership project. A teacher has to face changes. I am satisfied at that stage. Before joining the project, the achievement of my students in the examination was already quite good and I was contented, and kept using the original ways of teaching. I have new way of thinking now In fact, a teacher needs to learn a lot of things and methodologies, for use in different units, at different times and for different students. This year, I teach a class of 'the weakest academic achievement' students, if I use the 'same and only' teaching method, I don't think they can learn.*

*Teachers in the modern times are different. At the time when I first taught, if the students maintained good discipline and you worked hard, the principal thought you were a good teacher, but now, we have to face more changes and challenges.*

*My confidence is being built up, and the two coaches are very experienced, they boost up my confidence.*

*And now, the support isn't there, but my colleagues and I continue to carry out the program. We are pleased to be called 'confident teachers' in the school, and we do a lot of demonstrations to teachers of other subjects. I owe so much to the two coaches, they are so experienced and my morale is boosted a lot.*



(iv) The cooperation

*We did much more work in the team teaching of the thinking skills programme; the feeling was good and our relationship improved a lot. Before, we worked on our own, but now three of us work and think together. Because the SDOs are very experienced and have reputation, we do not want to be behind, so we spend a lot of effort preparing the lessons. We help each other, there are more interactive discussions. I do enjoy the relationship and the cooperation, though I am not very sure how my colleagues feel. I will definitely help promote what I gain from the programme to other colleagues.*

*The thing I appreciate most is that the university staff doesn't just ask us to do on our own, they help us, listen to us, the relationship improves a lot when I know this. In the beginning, I guess they will ask us to work more, and I will ask them to show me the proven research results and effectiveness of their project. For example, in powerful learning, I worry whether they just keep enjoying and playing in the activities and learn nothing, I change my pre-conceptions when I find out that the students do learn some statistical techniques through involvement in the activities from life experience during the powerful learning programme. In the second year, I think I have grown up and so I initiate the new programme of mathematics thinking skills. I will continue the thinking skills programme, even not in the mathematics discipline, I will try different activities in other subject disciplines, like social studies. Having said that, I have to see what future roles I will be assigned by the principal before I can really consider what I should do.*

*(interview, D1)*

The sense of achievement of D1 was shared by other colleagues as well.

*I observed the ten lessons in thinking skills, the SDO worked together with the teachers, did some demonstrations and led discussions and reviews after the lessons, like mentoring, it worked well.*

*(interview, C1)*

*[We] change our teaching strategies, no more indoctrination, but more interaction, more involvement. When we ask question, [we] demand not simple answers, but a lot of thinking to do, even [ask the students] take the questions home and think. Our self-initiation and creativity have been*

*enhanced.*

*(interview, S2)*

Though the programme was originally initiated by the teachers, they had no concrete ideas about how to start. The collaborative effort helped ease their anxiety. SDO2 said, “ the first thing is to ease their mind, make them comfortable. We talk with them, see the whole thing as a trial, and then we demonstrate, gradually we pass on the responsibility to them.” But without seeing the achievement of the students and enjoying the positive feedback from the students, the teachers will not be impressed and there will not be any paradigm shift in teaching. The SDO cited the crucial point in the interview:

*In the process, they felt the response of the students, particularly when those who were labelled as poor performers did something that impressed the teachers, the latter will be shocked and they would have a lot of reflection. That was exactly what was happening in the thinking skills learning programme.*

*(interview, SDO2)*

### **Discussion on self-initiated learning programme: thinking skills**

For a school to improve and change, the teachers have to change and learn first. The paradigm shift of the teachers in the programme was the outcome of their own learning. The collective effort and experience of the ‘thinking skills in Mathematics’ cadre shows that shared commitment and collaborative activity are essential for organizational learning, which requires a process in which knowledge sources are shared and adapted in the school community (Marks & Louis, 1999: 711). It is our belief that capacity enhancement would in turn lead to improvement of students’ achievements, but when this will be observed remains to be seen. SDO1, though highly praised by the teachers involved, commented, “As far as the

impact on the students is concerned, we could not measure the effectiveness right away, a lot of structural factors and traditional teaching approaches have to be resolved before the effects emerge. But I am very sure the teachers are changing, and in such a short period of time.”

Regardless of the kind of school improvement models, the first and the most critical point is to motivate the teachers and ‘touch’ their hearts. Most teachers want to be effective and will become effective if they own the teaching and learning; if they can generate satisfaction from teaching; and if they can acquire the appropriate teaching strategies and know-how.

**(c) Summary of discussion on professional development and enhancement of teachers’ capacity**

A detailed study of the interview transcripts shows that most interviewees gave positive comments on the partnership project. The researcher acknowledges that the respondents are from a Chinese culture, and therefore they tend to be polite, but he could also read their gratitude from their eyes, words, actions and gestures. Some of the future improvement activities in this school were very substantial and concrete.

The analysis of the interview data shows that teachers’ professional development progressed from working as an individual to working as a group.

*Before, the teachers mind their own business, they just teach their ‘own’ students (my class), they don’t care what is happening in other classes, now they prepare the lessons together and discuss the pros and cons in the teaching.*

*(interview, P2)*

*Before, everyone did their own work, without any collaboration and there was no discussion on how to improve teaching qualities, the sharing of teaching*

*experience was minimal. With the assistance of the university in conducting a number of workshops, they know how to cooperate and discuss the action plans. Before, we relied on one person to plan the teaching progress, the responsible staff did not have to approach anybody, the other teachers just followed the instruction in the plan. But now, they know how to cooperate and some teachers even start collaborative teaching.*

*(interview, P1)*

*There are a lot of cooperation afterwards, more discussions and more collaborative work and working together becomes more natural, accepting each other, like starting whole-language teaching in level one.*

*(interview, C1)*

The teachers are more ready to try and transform new ideas into teaching. The vice- principal had the following comments:

*The experiences so far are important for professional development, we cannot have collaborative lesson planning all the time as we cannot afford the time and resources, but the good teaching ideas and material can be accumulated.*

*(interview, P2)*

*Last year was a large-scale project, but this year the teaching and learning approaches were transformed into small-scale curriculum designed by the teachers.*

*(interview, S2)*

In the SDO's journal, it was recorded that:

*Everyone became more relaxed in the second year of the programme. Another batch of teachers would conduct the programme for another group of students. This was deliberately planned by the principal because he wanted every teacher to go through the experience.*

*(journal notes, SDO1)*

The principal also agreed that the greatest impact was on the teachers' capacity, he said, "If there is no ASQE, I don't think the teachers will try different teaching and learning models, or will inquire about the effectiveness of their own teaching."

*Involvement in the project helps teachers to change themselves, not to teach according to books, but how to teach well and how to help students to learn effectively.*

*(interview, P1)*

When the confidence of the teachers is established, the magnitude of change is much greater. The vice-principal revealed the following:

*Yesterday a teacher was interviewed by a reporter from the press, the reporter stayed to see the whole lesson without prior notice to the teacher, but the teacher made use of the games and role plays to teach thinking skills, he had internalised the philosophies learned in the partnership project.*

*(interview, P2)*

The relatively inexperienced teacher proudly told the interviewer:

*I sometimes talked to my classmates in my diploma class (diploma in teacher education) what the project had done for us, and gave them advice on how to start similar programmes in their school.*

*(interview, T2)*

Two teachers agreed that the change in teachers had deepened.

*There are a lot of academic and functional groups in the school, after we join in the groups, the colleagues are very positive in giving suggestions, and work cooperatively. There were quite some noises before, saying that there were too much work, but not now; they think that they should do it.*

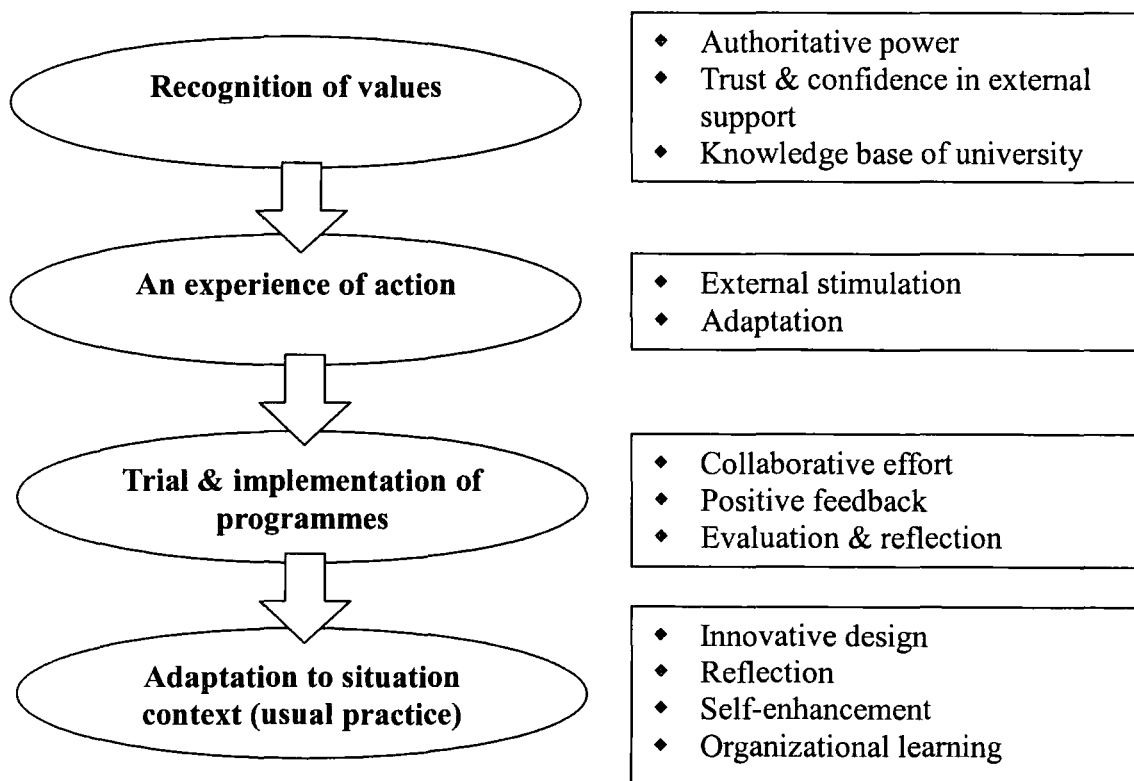
*(interview, S2)*

*I should say that it has a great impact on teacher development; the project makes the initiation and we follow, but later we will do our own. I have to agree that we won't develop that fast or that big if we do it ourselves, the staff involvement in the school development is more comprehensive and much deeper with your presence.*

*(interview, D1)*

Fullan (1995) says that if a school wants to become a learning organization, teachers need to expand their notion of teaching within the context of capacity building and action enquiry. Based on the experience gained from the collaborative learning programmes in the case study, the researcher formulates a model of teachers' capacity building in teaching and learning in Figure 11.

Figure 11: A model of teachers' capacity building in teaching & learning



In the first place, the philosophies and values of the designed learning have to be recognised and adopted by the staff in the organisation. The recognition is a mixture of top-down approach with a bit of authoritative power or drive; trust in external support or even a self-initiated project. The knowledge base from the academics helps consolidate the belief. The signal for 'ready to go' is hoisted.

Without guidance on 'what-to-do', the teachers are much more hesitant in taking action. The observation of learning programmes in another school and the sharing of experience with other teachers are essential and important external stimulation in preparing for the first step. An adaptation of any external programme is necessary as the innovative programme should be built on internal strengths and resources.

The implementation of the new action should be a product of collaborative effort. Only if failure or success is a collective responsibility, does morale improve. The group dynamic helps the inquiry process to run smoothly and to ensure the product is of a certain quality. Positive feedback from the students and other stakeholders keep the staff moving. Evaluation and reflection afterwards set the foundation for a 'further go'.

After reflection and cost-effectiveness analysis, the experience will be adapted to the local contextual situation, for example in normal classroom practice, and another innovative design is born. Reflection, self-enhancement and enrichment are internalised in teachers and capacity is concretely built. The school becomes a learning organisation as more and more innovative teaching and learning cadres are formed and more teachers are involved.

The partnership project has to link academic research findings, professional knowledge and practical experience together; this is a challenging task. The university staff and the school teachers have to work on the same platform; tolerance and patience are needed. Hopkins (2001:95) comments that 'the

disjuncture between the language of research and the language of teachers is a major barrier to innovation and development in schools. Unless a school improvement strategy reflects the implicit theories of practitioners, then it is doomed to fail'.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter aims to analyse the themes evolving from the qualitative data and attempts to explain the conditions for school improvement and extrapolate to the impact of the partnership project on the school and the teaching staff. First, the research reveals the contextual situation of the school and the readiness of the staff in the initial stage of the process. Then the conditions and critical factors comprising leadership, external support and internal cadre are discussed. It is followed by detailed descriptions of the small-wheel action programmes where teachers' capacity in pedagogic knowledge is significantly enhanced, as well as the confidence to make the bold move to initiate and implement innovative learning programmes for the students. The last section describes at length the trust-building process between the partners, the strong impact on the professional development of the teachers and the subsequent improvement work in the curriculum. As everywhere in the world, difficulties often occur for both individual teachers and the school when initially embarking on improvement. Teachers may need to acquire new teaching skills or master new curriculum materials, and the school may need to adopt new ways of working that are incompatible with existing organization structures (Hopkins, 2001:96). Two to three years are not long enough to cover the entire process of school improvement, but the case study does provide some important findings for the school improvement field in Hong Kong.



## **Chapter Eight: Lessons and Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher draws together the findings, lessons, and insights that have emerged from the case study of the university-school partnership.

In the literature review of chapter two, some weaknesses of school improvement programmes, especially large-scale ones, were explained. Conditions like importance of school context and school-based improvement, instead of reinventing the same wheel from others, and classroom level improvement concentrating on teaching and learning of students and sustainable staff development in the work place, are important for authentic school improvement (Reynolds, 1998; Calhoun & Joyce, 1998; Fullan, 2000; Hopkins, 2001). In chapter three, the literature also showed that successful university-school partnership should not fall into the trap of working on the surface, a relationship of respect or pseudo-commitment, nor of emphasizing technical process in bringing in new improvement programmes (Valli, 1999; Firestone & Fisler, 2002). A genuine and effective collaborative project for school improvement should be based on the commitment and involvement of both parties in enhancing teachers' capacity, as well as the establishment of professional communities.

The findings of the case study added new understanding and knowledge to the school improvement field in Asian countries like Hong Kong where the implementation of most improvement programmes has taken a top-down approach. The results confirmed some of the conditions for successful implementation of school improvement, and at the same time, showed how a true and equal partnership could be established. Though the learning outcomes in form of the academic performance of the students were not recorded to demonstrate the impact of the collaborative project, the approach of enhancing teachers' capacity through a joint-venture in teaching and learning was

interesting and effective. The ripple effect of the improvement of a small teaching and learning cadre, to the other teachers in the same school, to the teachers in the participating schools of the school improvement project and then to other schools showed that good practices should start small and expand only after a lot of experiments, inquiries and reflections. An interesting finding of the study was the impact of a team of external academic consultants, facilitators and teacher trainers. We could seldom find similar accounts of the multiple roles of facilitators in other improvement programmes in the west. This may add new knowledge on how experienced teachers in schools should be trained and developed, not just by attending lectures and courses as revision, but by getting involved in designing and implementing practical and innovative learning programmes for their students, with inputs from academics, and with collaborative effort from other colleagues. This was particularly inspiring at a time when life-long teacher development was an important issue in Hong Kong. Besides, the education authority should seriously consider the professional roles of their education officials in supporting school based improvement.

The conclusion is organized into four sections. In the first section, the findings of the case study school are summarized. The second section outlines the key points identified and the lessons learnt for improving primary schools in Hong Kong. In the third section, the implications of the case study for educational policy and research in Hong Kong are highlighted. In the fourth and the final section, the overall conclusions are presented.

## **8.2 Summary of the findings of the case school**

The research questions aimed to explore the possibilities of school improvement through a university-school partnership; through investigating:

- 1) Under what conditions has the school improvement project actually contributed

to school improvement?

- 2) What sort of professional experience has been acquired?
- 3) How have these experiences affected the teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, and changes in curriculum?

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in the previous two chapters, and the following major points are submitted for further discussion.

- 1) The quantitative analysis showed that there was modest but consistent improvement in professional development in the case study, as shown by the slight and gradual increase in the mean values of teachers' perceptions of organisational values, empowerment and commitment.
- 2) The interview data reviewed that though the teaching staff was not at all positive at the initial stage, a combination of external policy directives, the dedication of the leader, the core group of teachers and the external support succeeded in changing their attitudes. Therefore, school improvement efforts in a school should not be attributed to simple technical and linear considerations. One context is connected with another context, and actions taken in one context may generate the actions for the next context. This was particularly true in this case study as staff development workshops gave rise to the first powerful learning programmes, and subsequently to thinking skills programmes and changes in classroom teaching. Nonetheless, the worries about the shrinking of classes and how to face challenges from education reform were also the driving forces for school improvement.
- 3) Thanks and appreciation expressed by the school practitioners towards the external helpers indicated the importance of mutual trust and relationship between partners, but the genuine change could only be seen when the collaborative learning programmes and activities were in place. The emerging learning outcomes of the innovative programmes, though not in the usual form

of academic subject scores, urged the teachers to move on.

- 4) All the change agents including the school development officers from the university, the principal, the ASQE core group teachers and the teaching and learning cadres contributed to the school improvement in the sense of continuing professional enhancement. Each agent was part of a complex dynamic, interwoven with the others, under the constraints of the school culture.
- 5) The role of the school development officers in providing external support was crucial. Once trust and confidence were established, the advice was taken and the suggested actions were implemented. The appreciation felt by the principal, teachers, non-teaching staff and parents towards the SDOs was very clear to the researcher. These findings were similar to those in the ISEP project when the research team (Doherty, MacBeath, Jardine, Smith & McCall, 2001:149) concluded that the comments of the “critical friends” attached to the participating schools had been very favourable in the effective improvement project. It was interesting to note that at different stages of intervention, the critical friends faced similar situations to those reported by school development officers in the case study school in Hong Kong. According to Doherty et al (2001:140): ‘in the initial stage, it was important for the critical friend to be aware of the power of first impression... This requires a delicate balancing act between headteachers and senior staff’. In the next stages, strategic moves such as proactive suggestions for development of teaching and learning and emphasis on teachers’ capacity building followed a similar course. One of the constraints on the work of the school development officers was the difficulty of matching their own available time with that of the school staff especially when the latter were fully occupied by contact lessons. The study showed that a team of dedicated and sensitive school development officers was essential for the success. Their multiple talents, their sharp and prompt responses, their

collegiality and the commitment to providing good education were required for forming an effective team with the school staff.

- 6) The relationship of the school development officers (facilitators) with the principal and the teachers was nevertheless very delicate. Invariably, reform facilitators encounter some obstacles due to the power and peer relations existing in the school. Facilitators have to establish themselves as a trusted authority. In the project "Success for All", the facilitator and the principal or the teacher leader were in a one-to-one relationship. The success or failure depended very much on the facilitator assigned to the school (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002:84). In this case study, the relationship between the principal or the teachers and the facilitators were multiple. The ASQE team could try to establish connections through different SDOs, with various teachers; at the same time, the principal could easily get in touch with the SDOs and the project coordinator, to voice opinions and requests. An important finding for school improvement is that the university staff should work in a group, with multiple contacts and providing multiple forms of assistance. The critical mass for an improvement team in a university school collaborative project should be explored in further project of this kind.
- 7) The Principal's leadership was certainly a crucial factor for school improvement in the case study school. Being a single case, it was impossible to generalise the findings to other cases. The researcher agreed that searching for a general theory of leadership for school improvement was doomed to fail (Leithwood et al., 1996). It might be unusual to have as dedicated a principal as the case study school.
- 8) The teachers in the core group served as teacher leader and internal coordinator. They occupied an important position in the successful implementation of school improvement. The core teachers in the case study were sometimes reluctant to

challenge the norms that characterized the professional lives of teachers because of their positional power. They were anxious about antagonising older colleagues and tried not to alienate them. The heavy workload and the tensions related to role ambiguity reduced the effectiveness of the leadership of the core teachers.

9) Communication among teachers in the case school generally improved and changes in teachers' understanding and attitudes to powerful learning were recorded. There was more collegial and collaborative work. The qualitative data also showed that there had been changes in the school's professional culture throughout the course of the project. The staff focused more on the processes of teaching and learning, with more professional discourse about the effectiveness of learning. The practices of shared work, peer support and classroom observations became more natural and common. Though the concept of professional community received markedly increased attention as teachers tried to promote improvements in instruction and students' learning, the principal and the university staff felt that there was still a long way to go before the school would become a genuine professional community. Only a few of the elements embedded in a learning organization, like collaborative effort, distributive knowledge, learning from each other, could be found in the case school. an exception was the starting and continuation of mathematics programme. Overall, though, the evidence indicated limitations: on one hand, in the short timeline for learning organisation to flourish, and on the other, in the high level of professionalism needed for members in a learning organisation.

10) The greatest impact on the case school was certainly the teaching and learning activities introduced to the staff. Both the teaching paradigms (understanding students' attitude towards learning) and the techniques in conducting lessons changed. An impact on classroom practice in the form of adoption of new

practices or improvements in the operation of existing practices was slowly established. The introduction of new practices at each level in the school brought changes in classroom practice, though it had to be admitted that an effective measure of students' academic achievements in quantitative terms was not obtained. Hopkins (2001:7) also explains that 'one cannot be over optimistic about whether current reform initiatives will lead to dramatically enhanced levels of achievement. The improvement is directed at simultaneous change at both classroom and school levels within a principled strategic and systemic policy context.' Nevertheless, the powerful learning programme provided a platform for the staff to work together for the good of the students, to have lively discussion in the staff room, to try out new ideas and methods, to identify the strengths and different abilities of students, and to accept and acknowledge the assistance of parents in learning.

- 11) The interviews with frontline practitioners indicated a positive change in both their personal and interpersonal capacity. They talked about the development of personal attributes such as self-confidence and a sense of re-invigoration and fresh commitment, as in Frost & Durrant's (2002:152) study.

### **8.3 Lessons learnt on improving primary schools in Hong Kong**

- 1) The curriculum reform in Hong Kong primary schools must be school-based, knowledge-based and inquiry-based. The experience gained from the case school shows that change efforts have to be mobilised at the level of the whole organisation in order to improve school performance. The effect of a school improvement project should not only be seen at the school management level, but also in the outcomes of teaching and learning. It is important to start the 'big and small wheels' changes (ASQE's strategies) together in a school. On one hand,

innovative ideas in teaching and learning can be introduced and, on the other, the data on the conditions in the 'changing' school, such as its strengths and weaknesses, have to be supplied. It is important to re-iterate Morris, Lo & Adamson's (2002:259) comments that 'many educational innovations and reforms have been unsuccessful in changing classroom practice in Hong Kong because there was not enough consideration of the social conditions of schooling and the constraints of the classroom situation'. The importance of a systemic perspective in educational or curriculum reform is clear from this study.

- 2) The powerful learning programme clearly indicates that any strategy to promote student learning needs should engage students and parents as active participants, and expand the teaching and learning repertoires of teachers and students respectively. Morris, Lo & Adamson (2000:259) also agree that 'attempts to develop teachers often fail if they only adopt a technical perspective in which teachers are regarded merely as instruments for the reform' in their evaluation of the Target Oriented Curriculum reform in Hong Kong.
- 3) More intensive external support as a school improvement strategy is crucial at the beginning of the project. The focus on teaching and learning, rather than other distant factors like school management strategies, organisational development, external inspection or teacher appraisal, is more appropriate as it appeals more to the immediate concern of the teachers. Research evidence on both IQEA and MSIP illustrate quite clearly the fact that school improvement is unlikely to progress very far without the influence of 'external and internal' agency (Harris & Young, 2000:38).

- ♦ *The external 'critical friends' or agents not only provide an important source of pressure of action but also ensure that schools acknowledge and deal with any barriers to change. Internal and external agency is necessary to ensure that pressure for development is sustained within*



*schools, even in the most difficult circumstances.*

- ◇ *A focus upon specific teaching and learning goals. It is well established that teacher development is central to school development and change.*

*(Harris & Young 2000:39)*

Southworth & Lincoln (2000:191) warn that it is important to strike a balance between schools taking control of their improvement efforts, with support from institutions, and the danger of creating a dependency culture.

- 4) Research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership on processes related to school effectiveness and improvement (Hopkins et al. 1994; Ainscow et al. 1994, Stoll & Fink 1996). Undoubtedly, the leadership of principal in the case school plays an important role in improving the school, as could be illustrated in the interview data. In a study of the effects of transformational leadership on teachers' commitment to change in Hong Kong, Yu, Leithwood & Jantzi (2002) find that the pattern of transformational leadership effects is similar in both North America and Hong Kong, and that it has weak but significant effects on teachers' commitment to change. Though a transformational form of leadership is often advocated by academics (Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999), it may not be entirely applicable to the situation of primary schools in Hong Kong, taking into account that most teachers are still rather too conservative and receptive to didactic teaching. The long tradition of the hierarchical structure in an eastern culture philosophy slows down the rate of democratic transformation in schools. Hence, leadership styles should vary according to the stages of growth in schools. At the same time, while the leadership of the principal is a necessary ingredient in the school improvement process, it remains insufficient on its own to sustain long-term and continuous school improvement. The quality of leadership at other levels with

shared leadership roles and responsibilities within the schools has been shown to be just as important (Harris 1999).

- 5) The kind of relationship developed between the university and the core group of the school staff in the case study is in line with the research study of Firestone & Fisler (2002). A micropolitical perspective is a useful way to view such partnerships; the professional community ideal is more feasible for subunits within partnerships than for whole partnerships (Firestone & Fisler, 2002: 450). Since the case school is a relatively small one, the 3-year partnership could be established by both formal but relaxed meetings (like interactive staff development workshops through simulated activities) and informal encounters (like study trips). The partnership gradually became more relaxed and friendly and the exchange between university staff and the core group also became more frank. The idea that the professional community should focus on the development of shared beliefs and strong interpersonal communication, thus creating more consensus, is shared by both studies.

#### **8.4 Implications for educational policy and research in Hong Kong**

- 1) The recognition and adoption of the innovative programme of powerful learning and thinking skills reminded the researcher of the failure of the 1994 large scale curriculum reform (TOC) in Hong Kong. In order to force all primary schools to implement this centrally controlled curriculum, the policy-makers and the government officials contrasted the pre and post implementation of TOC as the extreme ends of a continuum : the 'black and the white', 'the worst and the best', 'the passive teaching and the active learning', portraying only the inadequacy of some teachers and causing negative effects in schools. This strategy of radical criticism employed by the government in education and curriculum reform was

presumably modelled on the UK. It caused problems there and was also ineffective in Hong Kong. In contrast, collaboratively devising new learning and teaching programmes under the umbrella of a university and school partnership may be more appealing and acceptable to teachers in schools.

- 2) School change should be comprehensive and interactive. Cultural renewal within the school lies at the heart of school improvement. The IQEA work has demonstrated that without an equal emphasis on the development capacity and internal conditions of the school, innovative work quickly becomes marginalised (Harris & Hopkins, 2000:9). Though change efforts have to be mobilised at all levels of the organisation, teaching and learning should be emphasized and focused. Based on a substantial body of school improvement research, Hopkins & Harris (1997:401) suggest that different improvement strategies and types of intervention are needed for schools at different stages of growth.
- 3) Allocation of resources to schools should be based on professional knowledge and research evidence, rather than on the equity principle alone. For those schools situated in areas with a lot of students with poor family background, a policy of positive discrimination should be employed. More resources should be provided for the under-privileged, but resources ought to be spent on providing effective learning and teaching programmes, under the guidance and assistance of professionals from academic institutions. University-school partnership projects may serve the purpose of bringing together research findings, professional knowledge and practical experiences.
- 4) Ongoing development for teachers, including training of internal school coaches to enhance capacity building, training of school principals to become effective and transformational leaders and training of curriculum leaders to foster effectiveness in teaching and learning is needed.
- 5) Further research should focus on:

- ⊕ The effect of external support on classroom level;
- More fine-grained analytical case studies on selected schools in the project;
- ⊖ Longitudinal studies on the life cycles of improving schools;
- The sustainability of school improvement after the exit of external support;
- Effectiveness of different aspects of university-school collaboration projects in school improvement.

## 8.5 Conclusion and reflection

### (a) Conclusion

Harris & Young (2000:31) comment that “the process of school improvement, still remains something of a ‘black box’. While there are ample descriptions of different approaches to school improvement, there is less analysis of what works and why. Clearly, this is a difficult area to traverse as there are no universals, no recipes for success.” Working in the school improvement field for a few years in Hong Kong, the researcher could only aim that his case study should contribute to knowledge and understanding of school improvement at a time of major reform. It aimed to:

- Establish an evidence-based approach to improvement;
- Provide strong external support based on trust, confidence, professional knowledge and practical experience;
- Offer leadership based on genuine care and concern for the school, its teachers and its pupils;
- ⊖ Empower the core group of teachers to handle school improvement tasks;
- Focus on teaching and learning;
- Work with a small unit first;
- Enable the staff to plan together, to develop consensus, to agree on

policies, priorities, values and vision;

- Allow process time and implementation dip;
- Involve parents, exhibit evidence of learning and teaching, and celebrate success;
- Maintain a high professional, moral and ethical standard.
- Establish a learning organisation and transform teachers' and school culture through the above.

The conclusion is consistent with West's study of the 'Moving Schools' project, that while the school improvement field has begun at least to delineate the key areas for support, the understanding of how support 'works' remains partial (West 2000:43); and Hatch & White's (2002:117) comment that the knowledge needed for successful school reform goes far beyond what is currently available and accessible. All in all, the researcher is not concluding that the school improvement process was outstandingly successful in the case study school. As MacBeath & Mortimore (2001:17) comment: 'school improvement is a slow process because it is about maturation'. Yet evidence from the case study school did reveal a difference in terms of teachers' capacity and their shift in teaching and learning paradigm. Student outcomes in the form of achievement indicators could not realistically be monitored. To achieve comprehensive change that is reflected in students' progress requires a longer period of time (Hopkins, 2001; Morris, Lo & Adams, 2002).

## **(b) Limitations**

- 1) However rich, the data and findings based on a single case study cannot justify a conclusion that other school improvement projects in Hong Kong should follow the lessons learnt.

2) The time frame for the project was only three years. This meant that some students' outcomes could not be measured, and it was often hard to distinguish evidence of real change (e.g. changes in students' achievement and teaching paradigm) from first-order or procedural change (e.g. borrowed practices or 'cosmetic' programmes).

**(c) Personal reflection**

The researcher was involved in the school improvement project for more than four years in Hong Kong (as programme coordinator in ASQE from 9/98 to 8/01 and as executive project director for a similar two year project to ASQE, called the Quality Schools Project). From a low knowledge base in Hong Kong initially, contributions in the field of school improvement in Hong Kong are now becoming recognised. Nevertheless, the process is laborious and challenging. Viewing school improvement as something much more profound than measuring the students' academic achievement in certain core subjects, it is very difficult to convince and demonstrate to the school heads, the teachers and the parents that the programmes we offer do 'real good' to the students in long term. There are similar difficulties in UK and in other countries: the cultural context of schools is characterized by two contemporary forces, managerialism and a drive to raise standards in schools (McMahon 2001:130), and politicians are desperately seeking simple and rapid solutions to overcome complex challenges (Hopkins 2000:136). Adding to the challenges is the deep-rooted acceptance of the examination system for selection purposes in traditional Chinese culture. Maybe, going back to the basic values of education is the key to school improvement: a dedicated teaching force with love and enthusiasm, building a 'school with a heart'. In such a school, teachers commit themselves to the learning of the students. They have high expectations and the

core values of school education are often articulated.

With experience gained while working on the thesis, both from the literature and from heavy involvement in school improvement projects in Hong Kong, the researcher finds that as he learns more, the horizon of knowledge constantly moves further away. This gives him the motivation to build on the results of the research reported in this thesis, by continuing his search for a better understanding of the school improvement process in Hong Kong.

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## Appendix 1: Summary of School Improvement work carried out with the case school

September 1998 – July 1999

Nature of Work	Date / Objectives	Targets	Impact / Outcome
Staff Development Workshop	27-1-1999 Workshop on Change – the purpose was to familiarise the teachers with the guiding principles and core values of ASP	All teachers	➤ As reflected by their very positive comments, the teachers enjoyed the activities very much
Staff Development Workshop	12-4-1999 Workshop on Vision Building – the purpose was to reiterate the three guiding principles of ASP, namely Unity of Purpose, Empowerment coupled with responsibility, Building on strengths. And to highlight Vision Building as the initial step of the ASP process.	All teachers	➤ Some experienced teachers were not happy when the facilitators pointed out some weaknesses spotted during the process of the activities, e.g. inefficiency in communication
Study tour	Easter holidays Trip to Shanghai to visit some primary schools	2 representatives from each ASQE school	2 ASQE Core Group members represented the school. The tour was an eye-opening experience.
Meeting	3-5-1999 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting with ASQE core group to draw up the terms of reference of the core group and define their role in this partnership project.	ASQE core group	The members of the Core Group expressed their frustration about their role in this partnership project. After clarification, they got to understand the guiding principles and the process of ASP better. The school principal accepted the invitation to observe a Powerful Learning event organised by another ASQE school.
Meeting	13-5-1999 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting with ASQE core group – to report on their observation of a Powerful Learning event in another ASQE school and to solicit SDO's comments on their draft school plan for the coming school year.	ASQE core group	The school principle and some core group members, having observed the Powerful Learning event organised by another ASQE school, expressed their interest in trying out similar activity in the next school year. It was agreed that SDO would introduce a tool or a model to help the school evaluate its work over the current year.

<b>Nature of Work</b>	<b>Date / Objectives</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Impact / Outcome</b>
Staff Development Workshop	20-5-1999 Workshop on Goal and Action Mapping Exercise (GAME model) – the purpose was to evaluate the matching between school goals and programmes conducted over the past school year, the results would also be served as guidelines for drafting the school plan for the coming year. A Keep, Improve, Start, Stop (KISS) plan was also introduced in the workshop.	All teachers	The GAME model and the KISS plan gave the teachers a chance to express their concern. The process was much more important than the end results. The exercise appealed more to the Management than to individual front-line teachers as the latter's views were often confined to the micro operation level.
Meeting	29-5-1999 Follow-up meeting with all teachers on results of GAME	All teachers	Based on the teachers' views, the school plan was further refined. The school principal and the ASQE core group also took the opportunity to sound out the introduction of some innovation learning design in the coming school year.

### August 1999 – July 2000

<b>Nature of Work</b>	<b>Date / Objectives</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Impact / Outcome</b>
ASQE Core Group Meeting	21-9-1999 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting with ASQE Core Group to discuss the theme of the coming staff development workshop in December which was meant to prepare the teachers for the Powerful Learning event scheduled for March/April 2000	ASQE Core Group members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Members of the core group expressed concern about the dissemination of the philosophy and design of Powerful Learning among the teaching staff, so it was decided that a staff development workshop must be organised as soon as possible.</li> <li>➤ The school principal has also made significant efforts to reshuffle the time table and workload of individual teachers to facilitate the planning and implementation of the Powerful Learning event.</li> </ul>
ASQE Core Group Meeting	16-11-1999 2nd meeting with ASQE Core Group to discuss the details of the Powerful Learning event scheduled for March/April 2000.	ASQE Core Group members	<p>Initial decision about the following were reached:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Theme</li> <li>➤ Subjects to be included</li> <li>➤ Teachers to be involved</li> </ul>

Nature of Work	Date / Objectives	Targets	Impact / Outcome
Staff Development Workshop	December 1999 Workshop on Powerful Learning	All teachers	The teachers experienced their first taste of "Powerful Learning". They did not only enjoy the workshop but also began to appreciate the learner-centred approach of learning. A initial framework of the upcoming Powerful Learning event scheduled for April was also established.
Organising Committee Meeting	Altogether 7 meeting were conducted to work out the logistics and the details of the instructional design. Dates of meeting : 17 & 24-1-2000 15, 22 & 28-2-2000 6 & 13-3-2000	ASQE Core Group members + all P4 teachers	The logistics and details of the instructional design for each session were thoroughly discussed and subject to continuous refinement.
Visit	10-3-2000 Visit to Law Uk Folk Museum	P4 pupils	
Lesson Demonstration	17-3-2000 SDO follow up on the visit to Law Uk Folk Museum, mainly to consolidate the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of a tour guide.	P4 pupils	
Rehearsal	24-3-2000	All teachers	Very open and sincere exchange of ideas among teachers.
Lesson Demonstration	27-3-2000	P4 pupils	
Powerful Learning Day	31-3-2000	P4 pupils	Pupils enjoyed the learning process very much. All teachers committed fully and showed readiness to help even when they were observing colleagues at work.
Powerful Learning - assessment	1-4-2000	P4 pupils	Pupils' performance was very good in terms of the eagerness to express and exhibit what they had learnt. Very much praised by guests and parents.
ASQE Core Group Meeting	2-6-2000 Post Powerful Learning evaluation meeting	ASQE Core Group members	Despite the hardwork and the amount of planning required, the ASQE core group still found it a worthwhile attempt to launch the Powerful Learning event. It was agreed that it should be repeated and disseminated to other classes if resources permit in the coming school year.
ASQE Core Group Meeting	8 & 19-6-2000	ASQE Core Group members	Draft school plan incorporated experiences and lessons learned from the Powerful Learning event.

## August 2000 – July 2001

Nature of Work	Date / Objectives	Targets	Impact / Outcome
ASQE Core group meeting	18-8-2000 Meeting with ASQE Core Group to review initial school plan for the school year 2000/2001	ASQE Core group members	
ASQE Core group meeting	29-8-2000 Meeting with ASQE Core Group to finalise school plan for the school year 2000/2001	ASQE Core group members	In addition to the Powerful Learning event which would be repeated for the P4 pupils, a small scale subject integration project would be attempted by the P2 teachers.  A one-year Thinking Skills programme would be designed by maths teachers in collaboration with SDO for P3 pupils. Programme to be incorporated in the maths class. Periodic evaluation would be conducted. Lessons to be conducted bi-weekly from November 2000 to June 2001. Dates : 15-11-2000 6-12-2000 17-1-2001 7 & 21-2-2001 14 -3-2001 11 & 25-4-2001 9 & 23-5-2001
Study tour	18 to 21-12-2000 Trip to Taiwan to visit 4 primary schools	2 representatives from each ASQE school	The school principal and 1 core group member represented the school to participate in this study tour. It was an eye-opening experience. It widened their exposure and further enhance networking with other ASQE schools
Meeting	15-2-2001 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting of Organising Committee for Powerful Learning	ASQE Core Group members + P4 teachers	The logistics and the details of the instructional design were finetuned.
Meeting	1-3-2001 2nd meeting of Organising Committee for Powerful Learning	ASQE Core Group members + P4 teachers	The logistics and the details of the instructional design were finetuned.

Nature of Work	Date / Objectives	Targets	Impact / Outcome
Briefing meeting	1-3-2001 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting with parents who volunteered to help run the Powerful Learning event	About 10 parents	The parents were not confident enough to take up the role of teaching assistant. Most of them are housewives with relatively little knowledge of education reform. Generally feel that they would be only capable enough to handle manual labour work such as helping teachers to prepare teaching aids.
Meeting	7-3-2001 Meeting with P4 Chinese subject teachers to discuss logistics for the visit to Chai Wan Park scheduled for 12 & 13 March	P4 Chinese subject teachers	The main worry of the teachers was about the logistics. They were impressed by the preparation work done by the school development officer. Also welcome the assistance rendered by the parents.
Visit	12 & 13 -3-2001 Briefing to parents who served as volunteer helpers before leading 2 classes of P4 pupils to visit the Chai Wan Park on each day	P4 pupils and parents	A brief introduction about the park visit was included to sensitise the teachers, the parents as well as the pupils to the purpose of the visit. Worksheets were distributed and tasks explained before setting off. It was observed and later reported by teachers and parents that the pupils enjoyed the guided visit. The parents remarked that they found the experience novel and educational. But teachers lack the motivation to follow-up the pupils' assignments. The quality of the pupils' work reflected that they were not used to this kind of exploratory self-study. But the senior teacher who was in charge of activity-based learning was impressed enough that she claimed she would consider repeating the exercise next year.
Meeting	28-3-2001 3rd meeting of Organising Committee for Powerful Learning	ASQE Core Group members + P4 teachers	
Visit	12-4-2001 Visit to Law Uk Folk Museum	P4 pupils, student leaders & parents	
Meeting	19-3-2001 4 <sup>th</sup> meeting of Organising Committee for Powerful Learning	ASQE Core Group members + P4 teachers	
Rehearsal	27-4-2001 All P4 teachers take turn to present their Powerful Learning sessions to the rest of the teaching staff	All teachers	

Nature of Work	Date / Objectives	Targets	Impact / Outcome
Powerful Learning Day	4-5-2001	P4 pupils	The logistics was very smooth.
Powerful Learning - assessment	5-5-2001	P4 pupils	Time allowed for each pupil to apply what they had learned greatly increased. Pupils' performance praised by guests, teachers and parents.
Meeting	29-5-2001 At the invitation of the school principal, SDO sit in meeting with the Senior Assistant Director from the Education Department	Principal + senior teachers, panel heads and ASQE Core Group	
Thinking Skills Programme	6-6-2001 11th lesson	P3 pupils	
Meeting	12-6-2001 Meeting with senior teacher who is responsible for activity-based learning, to discuss logistics for the visit to Hong Kong Park scheduled for 21 June	One senior teacher	
Thinking Skills Programme	14-6-2001 Meeting to review the entire programme	School principal and all P3 Maths teachers	
Visit	21-6-2001	P1 & P2 pupils	
Dinner	9-7-2001 ASQE development team was invited to attend the end-of-term staff gathering hosted by the school principal.	All staff	



## Appendix 2: Instruments for measuring teachers' perception

The measurement instruments were adapted and selected from various sources.

Three domains on teachers' perception were constructed:

- (1) organisational culture and school values inventory (SVI)
- (2) teacher empowerment (TE)
- (3) teacher's sense of organisational commitment (TE)

### Background to instruments

#### (1) Organisational culture and School Values Inventory (SVI)

The school values inventory (SVI) was developed by Pang (1996) and is based on Schein's (1985) models of organisational culture, Sathe's (1983) interpretation of organisational culture and Getzels and Guba's (1957) model of organisational behaviour. The SVI has two profiles, teachers' personal values and schools' espoused values and ten subscales:

- *formality;*
- *bureaucratic control;*
- *rationality;*
- *achievement orientation;*
- *participation and collaboration;*
- *collegiality;*
- *goal orientation;*
- *communication and consensus;*
- *professional orientation; and*
- *teacher autonomy.*

The subscales of SVI for primary schools in Hong Kong have reliability

coefficients ranging from 0.73 to 0.92 (Pang 1998). Pang's (1998) study of 839 teachers from 60 primary schools showed that teachers tended to have greater preferences for rationality, achievement orientation, participation and collaboration, collegiality, goal orientation, communication and consensus, professional orientation and teacher autonomy but lower preferences for formality and bureaucratic control in school management. The profiles also revealed there was a greater divergence in participation and collaboration, communication and consensus, and teacher autonomy between teachers' personal values and schools' espoused values.

The questionnaire is made up of three domains and it is very lengthy and time-consuming to complete. For this project, only subscales on participation and collaboration, collegiality, teacher autonomy and communication and consensus were selected. According to Pang, these sub-scales are more related to the Hong Kong situation, and had the highest reliabilities.

## (2) Teacher empowerment (TE)

The Chinese version of questions on this domain was translated from Short and Rinehart (1992) & Klecker & Loadman (1996). Short and Rinehart (1992) suggest that there are six dimensions underlying the construct of teacher empowerment (Rinehart et al.,1998: 635):

- *Decision-making*
- *Professional growth*
- *Status*
- *Self-efficacy*
- *Autonomy*
- *Impact*

The Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability for the total scale was 0.94 whilst those for the subscales ranged from 0.66 to 0.88.

To keep the questionnaire to a reasonable length, only 5 subscales were selected; the one with the lowest reliability was deleted.

### (3) Teachers' sense of organisational commitment (TC)

The Chinese version of questionnaires was translated from an instrument known as Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday et al (1979). The OCQ consisted of 15 items; reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha) reported by Mowday et al., and by previous studies ranged from 0.82 – 0.93 while the reliability for a study in Hong Kong was 0.90 (Cheng 1990). Only 11 items were selected to measure the organisational commitment of the teachers in the case study.

## **Pilot test results**

One pilot test was conducted for teacher questionnaires. There were 180 teachers responding to the pilot test. The reliabilities of the teacher questionnaires for the 26 primary schools on SVI, TE and TC were 0.95, 0.92 and 0.91 respectively.

## **The Questionnaires**

### **Table 8: Organisational Values - School Values Inventory (Chapter 6, page 74)**

There are 30 statements and the questionnaires were completed on a 7-point Likert scale, from very similar (7) to very dissimilar (1).

- (1) Teachers should have participation in decision-making.
- (2) Administrators and teachers should exchange opinions frequently.
- (3) All teachers should plan for the school's future together.
- (4) Teachers should be encouraged to participate enthusiastically in meetings and express their opinions more often.
- (5) Both teachers and principal should be partners, rather than supervisor and subordinates, who work together.

- (6) In the beginning of a school year, all teachers should participate in the drawing up of the school goal.
- (7) The school should care about the needs of the teachers.
- (8) Teachers should always share and learn together.
- (9) The school should adopt a democratic management system.
- (10) Teachers should meet together to share knowledge and experience.
- (11) The school should consult teachers on what need to be improved.
- (12) Colleagues should treat each other as equals regardless of their ranks.
- (13) The school should not overload teachers with administrative tasks.
- (14) Teachers should have the right to object to or disagree with the school principal.
- (15) The school should adopt an open-door policy which welcomes teachers to discuss matters concerning teaching anytime they wish.
- (16) The organisational structure should give considerable autonomy to the departments within schools.
- (17) When teachers show excellent performance in teaching, they should be praised.
- (18) New initiatives should not be implemented without first seeking teachers' general consent or acceptance.
- (19) The school should listen and consider opinions and criticism expressed by teachers, either as an individual or as a group.
- (20) The school should give teachers autonomy without administrative supervision.
- (21) Teachers should be encouraged to innovate.
- (22) The school should explain clearly why an important decision has been made especially when prior consultation is not carried out.
- (23) If condition permits, the school should give considerable autonomy to teachers.
- (24) The school should give due recognition and praise to teachers who contribute to the school.
- (25) The school should give teachers autonomy to decide how to carry out their daily

work.

- (26) The administrators should keep frequent contact with other staff.
- (27) If consensus cannot be achieved, the school should resort to voting as a means of decision-making.
- (28) Teachers have the right to work in a free teaching and learning environment.
- (29) Teachers have the right to be informed of the important matters about the school.
- (30) Teachers should enjoy the right of deciding how to teach in the classrooms.

**Table 9: Teacher Empowerment** (Chapter 6, page 75)

There are 23 statements and the questionnaires were completed on a five-point scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

- (1) I am treated professionally in school.
- (2) I can choose my own teaching material.
- (3) I participate in the recruitment and selection of new teachers.
- (4) I am involved in deciding whether the school should implement any new programme.
- (5) I am given the opportunity to develop professionally.
- (6) I have the freedom to decide what to teach.
- (7) I can participate in teacher development activities.
- (8) I believe I have influence over my work.
- (9) I work amidst a professional environment.
- (10) I have the opportunity to disseminate innovative ideas to my colleagues.
- (11) I sense that I am leading change.
- (12) I have the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues.
- (13) I sense that I have the opportunity to influence others.
- (14) I can participate in the decision-making process concerning curriculum matters.
- (15) Other people are willing to listen to my opinion.
- (16) I can plan the progress of my own work.

- (17) All my colleagues including the school principal listen to my opinion.
- (18) I can decide my own work progress.
- (19) I have the opportunity of furthering my study.
- (20) I have the opportunity to coach other teachers.
- (21) I sense that I have influence over other teachers and students.
- (22) I am empowered to manage some programmes.
- (23) I am involved in the decision-making concerning financial matters.

**Table 10: Teachers' Commitment** (Chapter 6, page 75)

There are 11 statements and the questionnaires were completed on a seven-point scale from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1).

- (1) I think the teachers of this school are willing to try their very best for the success of the school.
- (2) I can proudly tell my friends that this school is worth working for.
- (3) I discover that my own values align with those of the school.
- (4) I can proudly tell others that I belong to this school.
- (5) Given that the work nature is similar, I would consider transferring to another school.
- (6) This school allows me to show my strengths.
- (7) It is fortunate that I chose to work in this school but not the other schools.
- (8) In the long run, I would not gain much working in this school.
- (9) I care about the destiny and well-being of this school.
- (10) To me, this is probably the best school I can choose to work for.
- (11) Choosing to work in this school is a wrong decision.

