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ANNOTATION

Kwok Pak Keung, Peter. "Principals' Perception of Quality and Accountability: A Case Study of Lasallian Schools in Hong Kong." Ed.D. dissertation, University of Leicester, 2011, 249 pp.

This study examines the contemporary reality of the Lasallian schools in Hong Kong and the way principals are managing change and development in response to major educational reform programs mandated by the government. (191) The author "aims to investigate how the ten principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong perceive education quality and accountability and how this perception is shaped by the unique context in Hong Kong and their relationship to different stakeholders to whom they are accountable." (174)

Since 1991, the government "turned its attention to improving the quality of education with two main initiatives, structural reform and changes in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment." (39) This shift led to a variety of new proposals to overhaul the curriculum (39-44), including changes in the role of the Education Department "from a controlling to a supportive advisory function" (46) and establishing segregated "bands" of schools in line with specific characteristics. All of these changes had an effect on educational quality and on the roles of principals and teachers.

The research of the study was conducted at the school level, focusing on the way principals were managing change and development in response to these government-mandated reform programs. The literature base for the study covers management theory, school effectiveness and improvement, and teacher effectiveness. The study's excellent review of the literature includes a comprehensive look at educational quality (71-81), school improvement models (81-87), school culture (89-91), systems of accountability (96-105), and the role of the principal vis-à-vis accountability to various stakeholders (105-139).

The main research questions concentrate on how principals perceive educational quality, perceive how other stakeholders view educational quality, perceive how educational quality can be achieved, managed, or improved, and perceive that they are accountable to different stakeholders for the achievement of educational quality. (139) These four main questions are further developed into twelve sub-questions (145), and those sub-questions provide the basis for the interviews with the ten principals of Lasallian schools in Hong Kong. The author subsequently presents a very detailed and comprehensive description of the interview results, highlighting similarities and contrasts among the principals and incorporating their specific circumstances (113-173).

In summary, the demands of government programs in Hong Kong since the 1990s, with responsibility for implementation shifting to principals of individual schools through a government accountability framework (24), along with the reduced influence and number of De La Salle Brothers, have led to the need for a renewed partnership among the various stakeholders

of Lasallian schools (36) and the need for an articulation of a consensus view on educational quality and accountability (191).

The research shows that a consensus view of educational quality that would appeal to all stakeholders should focus on the maintenance of Lasallian values, curricular diversity within a holistic education, a student-centered approach, and helping students “learn how to learn.” Recommended strategies for achieving such ends, based on the interviews, include building distributive leadership, a culture of ongoing school and professional improvement, and increasing parent-school partnerships. It is recognized that Lasallian priorities of providing an education that is inclusive for all student abilities, that focuses on personal development, and that fosters caring staff-student relationships within a holistic curricular experience, often conflict with outside expectations that highlight academic achievement and test results. (28)

The author concludes that “significant changes are required to the culture, personnel and organization structure of the Lasallian schools and the Institute of Lasallian Brothers.” (190) He recommends a community-wide consultation in order to agree on the best way forward, with representatives from the Brothers, Lasallian principals, alumni from Lasallian schools and other stakeholder groups participating. The study ends with recognition of the importance of the development of lay leadership within Lasallian schools, a process actively endorsed and supported by the Brothers in Hong Kong, and an example of the distributive leadership recommended by the study. (193)