

# Article Title Page

## Managing teacher balkanization in times of implementing change

### Author Details:

Shun-wing NG  
Department of Educational Policy and Administration  
Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Corresponding author: Shun-wing Ng

[swng@ied.edu.hk](mailto:swng@ied.edu.hk)

### Structured Abstract:

#### Purpose

The purpose of this article is to report an exploratory study designed to illuminate how school cultures and teachers' value orientations are impacted by the educational change of parental involvement.

#### Design/methodology/Approach

The qualitative research that informs this paper is conceptualized within the interpretive paradigm. Two schools were selected purposefully for the study. In-depth interviews with 12 teachers and their principal were conducted in each school where observation took place for half a year. Eventually themes and dimensions of teachers' value demarcations emerged in times of change.

#### Findings

The study demonstrates that three balkanized factions of teachers were wrestling at school. The first balkanized teacher group welcomed the innovation of parental involvement. The second faction of teachers who disbelieved such innovation was found diffident and conservative, and demonstrated resistance to change. The third type of teachers was of majority who might or might not take part in implementing change. However, once incentives were imposed from the management, they would probably be assimilated.

#### Research Limitations/implications

The study aims at illuminating teachers' responses to change. It does not attempt to make generalization.

#### Originality/Value

The study reveals that managing teacher balkanization in times of change, school leaders' personal beliefs and their early intervention are of paramount importance.

**Keywords:** educational change, school innovation, school culture, parental involvement

**Article Classification:** Research Article

---

*For internal production use only*

**Running Heads:**



## **Managing teacher balkanization in times of implementing change**

### **Introduction**

Globalization has exerted a significant impact on educational change for future developments (Arnové and Torres, 2007; Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002, Duan, 2009). For the last two decades, the education sector has been changing quickly in Hong Kong. In the West, neo-liberalism has directed reforms to fill achievement gaps among students with diverse backgrounds and abilities and to measure performance of schools and teachers given market demands for accountability (Luke, 2004; Skerrett and Hargreaves, 2008). Cheng (2007) conceptualizes the period of 1990s focusing on the second wave of education reforms in response to the concerns about school accountability to various stakeholders. Empowering parents to play a role in the self-management of schools is one of the most important recent innovations in helping achieve school effectiveness (Caldwell, 2004; Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989). However, educational change entails many challenges (Duke, 2004). In Hong Kong, with the implementation of school-based management (SBM), important aspects of governance are delegated to parents, principals and teachers. They face new challenges as a result of their changing roles and responsibilities. Research in the West demonstrates that parental involvement in schools can help enhance positive development of children's self-concepts and can make contribution to the long term development of school effectiveness (Amatea, 2007; Berns, 2007; Epstein, 2001; Hornby, 2000). Encouraged by the positive evidence of getting parents involved, the Hong Kong government has initiated measures to gradually involve parents at different levels of school education (Ng, 2007a).

According to Pang (2004), parents are currently participating actively at different

levels of school education with reference to Epstein's (1995) model of parent-school partnerships. Ng (2007b) argues that parents are now partners of the school who are involved in children's education from communication with teachers to being elected to help govern the school. However, many teaching professionals have serious doubts as to whether parental involvement will facilitate or impede school operations. Implementing educational change by involving parents signifies that 'power given to a subordinate group is consequently lost by the former power-holder' (Vincent, 1996, p.7). The purposes of this article are (1) to report on an exploratory study designed to illuminate how school cultures are impacted by the innovation of increased parental involvement under SBM; (2) to examine the perceptions of primary-school principals and teachers on parental involvement; and (3) to find out the dynamic relations between teachers' value orientations and educational change. The research that informs this article begins with a brief historical snapshot of the evolving roles of parents in the implementation of SBM in Hong Kong and a review of literature on teachers' responses to change.

### **The evolving role of parents in school-based management in Hong Kong**

In Hong Kong, the Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department (1991) released an influential report, the 'School Management Initiatives (SMI)'. The SMI laid out in very strident terms a view of Hong Kong school principals as 'little emperors' with 'dictatorial power' to manage schools (Walker, 2004, p.75). When the government reviewed the Education Ordinance and Regulations and the Code of Aid, greater participation of teachers, parents and alumni in the school decision-making process was recommended. The SMI document stated thus:

*Recommendation 10* School management frameworks should allow for participation in

decision making, according to formal procedures, by all concerned parties including: all teaching staff; the Principal; the SMC (school management committee); and (to an appropriate degree) parents and students ( p.37).

Yu (2005) envisaged that the recommendation was a significant step towards the development of SBM in Hong Kong. To promote and strengthen family-school relationships, the Education Department established the Home-School Cooperation Committee in 1993. However, a territory wide survey conducted by the Committee in 1994 found that parents, teachers and principals were not prepared for cooperation at the management level (Education Department, 1994; Ng, 2002). Shen (1995) pointed out that schools did not have a genuine intention to invite parents to take part in school operation and the lack of transparency of school policies discouraged parent participation. On the other hand, parents did not understand the meaning of their involvement in school. Three years later, the Committee then encouraged schools to set up Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) so as to increase contacts between parents and teachers. The policy that parents are to be involved in managing schools has become mandatory in the Education Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1997). In 2000, the Advisory Committee on School-based Management (2000) consulted the public for the number of parent representatives to be included in the School Board. Parental involvement in school governance has then been introduced to school as an educational innovation. The government proposed in the Education Bill 2002 (Amendment) that two parent representatives were included as the parent governors in the School Board. After a serious debate between the school sponsoring bodies and the government within a two-year consultation period, the bill was then amended and became the Education Ordinance at the Legislative Council in July 2004. The Ordinance stipulates that all schools in Hong Kong should establish an Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) in five years in which one parent governor and one alternate parent governor should be included in the IMC (Pang, 2008). Since 1997,

parents' rights of participating in children's education have been recognized. They have been consulted and invited to participate in PTAs, organize student activities, assist in school functions and manage the school.

### **Educational change and school culture**

The studies of many scholars (e.g. Davies, 2005; Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves 2007; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005) have found that perspectives of leadership, teachers' commitment and school culture are the key factors affecting a change or a reform. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) define school cultures as the guiding beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates and the product of beliefs, values and characteristics of teachers and students. Change imposed from outside will lead to internal change eventually. In other words, imposed change implicates existing school cultures (Conley and Cooper, 1991). It challenges its old meaning and it renders the possibility of using a new definition of what is and what ought to be in the school context (Rossman, Corbett and Firestone, 1988).

In Hong Kong, SBM requires a new professionalism from teachers, enhanced leadership from principals and deeper commitment from parents and community (Education Department, 2000). Some aspects of school cultures are conducive to the implementation of SBM such as shared school missions and values, collaborative team work, and co-planning and sharing of professional experiences and pedagogical innovations (Yu, 2005). However, research findings shows that some teachers are worried about the negative effects of the implementation of SBM on the school culture (Lam, 2006). The issues encountered by principals and teachers concern balancing the interests of various stakeholders, accountability to parents and school sponsoring

bodies and developing a shared vision. Some are constrained by excessive time demands and working under great pressure (Yu, 2005).

On the other hand, one of the purposes of implementing SBM is to restructure school governance through the purposeful redistribution of power in Hong Kong schools. In this connection, the school culture has to transform from one of the control to that which values autonomy and empowerment so as to take advantage of the change (Lam, 2006). This arrangement, aimed at increasing parental involvement and usurping the power of principals and teachers, runs contrary to the 'deep structures' of school culture underpinning how schools are ordered (Walker, 2004, p. 76). Chinese cultural values such as contribution to collectivity, harmony and order of an organization are stored in deep structures. Research evidence indicates that parents are reluctant to actively engage in shared decision making under SBM because they accept substantial power differentials based on position and status in Chinese tradition (Leung and Chan, 2001). They think that education is the responsibility of the professional educators and they still keep the idea that the relation between teachers and parents is that of a professional and client (Katyal and Evers, 2007). As Manzon (2004) points out, East Asian parents tend to expend considerable resources to ensure that their children do well. They, thus, avoid confronting their children's teachers.

### **Principals and frontline teachers as change agents**

The extent of impacts of change on school cultures depends on the responsiveness of teachers and principals to change (Goodlad, 1994). Thus, both principals and teachers are the best frontline agents to implement change. First, the principal always stands at the centre of school level reform (Walker, 2002). In the actual implementation of SBM in Hong Kong, the principals play a vital role so as to better meet the

challenges of the reform. They should be good role models and be capable of seeking the support of stakeholders, maintaining harmonious relationships with their colleagues, members of IMCs and parents, and caring about their students (Lam, 2006). Numerous authors have highlighted principal leadership as a driving force for change during education reform. (e.g. Begley and Zaretsky, 2004; Roffey, 2007). In view of the changing ecology of school education, school leadership is found no longer confined to the practice of principals. School success is now attributed to the efforts of different school members who create and sustain particular objective factors to enhance teaching and learning in different contexts (Cheng, 2003).

Second, teachers are the best agents to facilitate change (Fullan, 2003). Fullan has identified four types of core capacities of change agents. They are 'vision building', 'inquiry', 'mastery' and 'collaboration'. He perceives them as supporting forces 'required as a generative foundation for building greater change capacity' (p.12). In other words, to carry out a planned change, it is of vital importance to see how many teaching professionals are equipped with these change qualities that facilitate them to be receptive rather than resistant to change and how flexible they are. Hargreaves (1997, p.3) highlights that it is important to make schools into the types of venues that encourage and support teachers to make changes themselves as a new approach to educational change. He adds that 'the central task in creating culture of educational change is how to develop more collaborative working relationships between principals and teachers, and among teachers themselves' because teachers' professional communities can easily become incestuous and protectionist ones. Moreover, Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) argue that both teachers and principals could combat what they experience as negative trends by bonding together in collaborative work cultures.

### **Teachers' resistance to educational change**

In understanding how education reform is implemented, one set of literature examines how stakeholders', especially teachers' values, practices and beliefs shape the outcomes of implementation (Blasé, 2005; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006; Sannino, 2010). For example, while principles of reform are welcome, there seems to be not much change in the mode of teaching and learning due to lack of training and resources (Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008; Ma, Lam and Wong, 2006, Yu, 2005). Student-centered learning in particular has been found difficult to implement given the traditional status of teachers being contested (Ryan, Kang, Mitchell and Erickson, 2009). When it is contested or called for change, teacher resistance occurs. The study of Katyal and Evers (2007), however, indicates that Hong Kong teachers prefer a 'professional-client' relationship to a 'partnership' with parents.

Resistance to change is both a psychological and a cognitive state which seems to be a necessary part of professional learning process (Musanti and Pence, 2010). In facing reform demands, teachers were found to react differently due to differences in dispositions, interpretations of the challenges and abilities to respond to them (Day and Smethem, 2009). Many teachers resisted change due to fear of the unknown, threats to status and power, reluctance to experiment and custom bound (Plan, 1987). Going to an extreme, they withdraw from any activities about the innovation (Fullan, 1999). Fink and Stoll (2005) argue that some schools behave remarkably untouched because the quest for stability has become an excuse for immobility. Besides these individual characteristics, policy context, organizational culture, school leadership and material affordance were found to be mediating teacher practice (McCully, 2006). For resistance to education reform, some contextual forces as bondages to the thinking and practice of key stakeholder have been identified. For example, while the examination-oriented

education system, the One-Child Policy and the leaping economy sustain parents' focus on the academic success rather than the whole-person development of their child (Li and Li 2010), parent resistance and organizational norms stymie initiatives from principals and teachers to put reform demands into practice (Johnson, Møller, Jacobson and Wong, 2008). As in Hong Kong, the fact that teachers were less receptive to reform demands than did principals (Ng, 2009; Wong and Cheung, 2009) may derail any leadership effort to implement the reform.

The literature review highlighted above demonstrates that teachers and principals are the key change agents in times of change but there may be conflicts in terms of values and interests in the process of implementation.

## **Methodology**

The qualitative research that informs this paper is conceptualized within the interpretive paradigm since it aims to understand the thoughts of teachers and principals in times of implementing parental involvement in Hong Kong. This interpretive paradigm emphasizes naturalistic methods of inquiry. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry is appropriate for handling data 'where there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically' (p.37). The perceptions of two groups of teachers and two principals in two schools on issues concerning parental involvement constitute 'multiple constructed realities'. The author recognized the need to adopt 'theoretical sampling' (Strauss, 1987, p.38) to ensure maximum variation to the analysis could best be achieved through illuminating the teachers' perceptions in these schools. In this qualitative research, the author employed the case study and ethnographic methods. Creswell (1998) reiterates that ethnographic work facilitates interviews, conversations and participant observations to occur over a

period and the researcher can study the meanings of behavior, language and interactions of the culture sharing group. With consent from the principals, teachers and chairpersons of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to conduct the study, the author had engaged in extensive work of data collection for half a year in each case study school. In addition to in-depth interviews with the teachers and principals, an intense participant and non-participant observation took place. The author, as an investigator, had taken part in many activities such as parent days, parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings during which field-notes were recorded.

Two primary schools, Tai Sang and Lai Mei, not real names, were purposefully selected for the study according to two principles. First, the school had already started inviting parents to help operate the school at different levels. Second, students came from different socio-economic family backgrounds. Both schools were situated between private housing estates with mostly middle class students and public housing areas where students were of the working class background. The ratio of students from middle class and working class families was about 40% to 60% at Lai Mei School whereas it was 50% to 50% in Tai Sang School. In each school, the principal and twelve teachers involved in organizing parent activities or working with parents were selected for in-depth interviews. In Lai Mei School, six teachers interviewed had only one to three years of teaching experience. Two had been working there for 18 years and the other four samples had been teaching for about 10 years. At Tai Sang School, five of the selected samples had two to five years of teaching experience. Four teachers had been working there for more than 18 years and the other three samples had eight years of experience. After analyzing the transcript of the first interview, another teacher was chosen for a follow-up interview. Subsequently their views should be different from the previous ones. An *aide-memoire* (Burgess, 1985) was used to focus the interviews on

the major research issue concerning the impact of implementing parental involvement on teachers' values and beliefs. Probes were used to encourage the interviewees to describe their perceptions and experiences in detail and to seek clarification constantly of their words. The interviews were tape-recorded and the transcribed data were analyzed using open and axial coding methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). To design questions for collecting data through observations and in-depth interviews, the author took into account both Ng's (1999) and Epstein's (1995) models as basic references. However, the author did not adopt any fixed types of models as framework of the study because the contexts of interpretive research are natural and must be taken as they are discovered.

## **Findings**

The following themes emerged from the data obtained through interviews and observations. They described both principals' and teachers' responses to the educational change of inviting parents to be involved in school. The names of both principals were pseudonymous.

### ***Personal beliefs of two principals in parental involvement***

Tai Sang Primary School had been in existence for thirty years. It was a Catholic school situated at a housing estate. The school was composed of students from both middle-class and working class families. Understanding that parental involvement was one of the irresistible reforms under SBM in this globalized era, Miss Mok, the principal of Tai Sang School, went to Australia to learn the knowledge and skills of including parents. She had a school development plan by which parents were regarded as partners in the school. She believed that when implementing change, there should be consensus among her teachers. She therefore arranged a number of professional development workshops on communicating and working with parents for them. She

said:

Decentralization of power to parents and teachers is a trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The world is changing rapidly. Teachers have to change too. I believe that regular contact with parents at different levels can help better develop parent-teacher relationships. A year ago, I went to Australia and found that parents were encouraged to be volunteers at school. They can even be elected to be school governors. To make my teachers familiarized with skills of working with parents, I have invited some experts to conduct workshops so that they can be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills. (Principal, Tai Sang School)

Miss Mok had good relationships with parents. Every morning, she could be found standing at the school gate, greeting and chatting with parents. Here is what I observed:

At the school gate, Miss Mok spoke to parents with a smiling face when they passed by. Parents looked happy to meet her and some stopped there to chat with her. They felt satisfied with what they were told. (Observation field note, Tai Sang School).

Due to Miss Mok's deep belief in parents as valued resources, when being told by the Education Bureau to implement change, she immediately organized a preparatory committee for the setting up of a PTA at Tai Sang. The principal believed that parent participation was a milestone in school activities. Moreover, an elected representative would become the member of the school board. In fact, Miss Mok envisaged involving parents as one of her strategic policies. She expressed this point in the following way:

There is no denying that nowadays parents are all educated. They have duties and responsibilities in their children's education. Parents are our invaluable resources. I expect that parent members in the PTA will help communicate with other parents. (Principal, Tai Sang School)

Lai Mei Primary School was built in the 1980s. It was located in a narrow street in a satellite town. A vegetable wholesale market was situated next to the school. The school was old with well-established traditions and welcomed by many parents. Many students from Lai Mei School were allocated to a number of famous secondary schools. Mr. Wong, the principal, having established the PTA half a year ago, seemed not to agree with the innovation in his school. He said:

Innovation! Reform! Change! I have heard these words many times for many years. I do not think the Education Bureau has a thorough plan for our education. Remember the lesson they learnt from implementing Target Related Assessment. Now, nobody mentions about it. They have just borrowed ideas from the West without considering contextualizing the change. I think it is beyond parents' ability to manage my school. They should become volunteers first. They need to be trained and assisted by my teachers in the PTA Committee. (Principal, Lai Mei School)

Mr. Wong had strong reservations concerning parental involvement in the school. The PTA was intended to be a bridge for enhancing parent-school communication. Nevertheless, teacher members did not turn up at parent events such as the talent show organized by the PTA. One of the teacher informants who took charge of managing the PTA attributed teachers' apathy towards parent activities to the principal's leadership capacity. He said:

No one from the school administration finds attending PTA meetings important. For the last two committee meetings, many teacher representatives have been absent. They are appointed to be officio members but it seems that they have no interest in working with parents. The senior management does not say anything and no one is blamed eventually. (Teacher informant 1, Lai Mei School)

Speaking overall, it can be concluded that the personal philosophy of Miss Mok on working with parents is different from that of Mr. Wong. Miss Mok's welcoming attitude could serve as the impetus for implementing parental involvement in her schools whereas Mr Wong did not have any parent policy in mind and was not convinced of the importance of parent involvement in school.

### ***Teacher balkanization 1: Working with a vision***

The interview and observational data demonstrated that teachers were balkanised into different cliques with different ideological demarcations when parental involvement was introduced as educational change in these two schools. The first faction of teachers was those who were generally receptive to the innovation of parental involvement. They took initiatives to formulate strategies in order to increase contact with parents. They worked with a vision of developing good relationships between

parents and the school. At Tai Sang School, at least seven teachers interviewed expressed a strong commitment to working with parents whereas only two out of twelve interviewed at Lai Mei had such positive orientations. They treated parents as partners and invaluable resources. The following was remarked in the interviews:

It is my duty to serve the students and their parents. The more we communicate, the better students get benefited. (Teacher informant 5, Tai Sang School)

I believe that home and school are partners. If this relationship develops, a sense of belongings among parents will also develop. Hence, many activities such as fund raising, seminars and student talent show will be easily implemented. They will assist us in many ways. (Teacher informant 11, Lai Mei School)

On some occasions, I invite some parents to be 'tutors' to help those students with learning difficulties. We talk about everything related to helping their children. Gradually, we develop consensus and relationship. (Teacher informant 6, Tai Sang School)

At Tai Sang School, some teachers interviewed enjoyed the atmosphere of collaboration. In order to realize the vision of parent-school partnerships, they demonstrated collegiality by working together for formulating appropriate measures of cooperation with parents. Two teachers had the following remarks:

I have taught in some schools. I think colleagues are supportive and cooperative here. We have always arranged meetings to exchange ideas about working with parents. We sometimes involve our principal when something cannot be resolved. (Teacher informant 9, Tai Sang School)

We work on a team basis. I don't mind working extra if parent-school relations can be improved. (Teacher informant 2, Tai Sang School)

The culture of collaboration can be reflected in my observation field notes describing how teachers prepared for a talent show the next day:

There would not be anyone left at school after 6 pm usually. However, there were at least twelve of them working together for the talent show to be held tomorrow. They exchanged ideas and decorated the school hall with several parent volunteers. (Observation field note, Tai Sang School)

According to Nias (1999), many teachers entering the teaching field are motivated by the pursuit of altruism. With these striving attitudes mentioned above, most teachers

at Tai Sang and a few at Lai Mei interviewed welcomed parent participation. They were committed to ensuring that parents participate in school events so as to increase opportunities of communicating and developing good relationships with parents.

***Teacher balkanization 2: Resisting change***

In response to the innovation of parental involvement, some teachers tended to be isolation-oriented. They were conservative and kept themselves away from the imposed innovation (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996). They lacked confidence and were suspicious of opportunities arising from reform initiatives. To play safe, they would rather adopt non-risk-taking pedagogy and yet, it does not contribute to school improvement. This kind of value orientation was apparent at Lai Mei School. One of the informants expressed in this way:

I don't care how parents are involved. It is of no use. (Teacher informant 8, Lai Mei School)

This teacher was not receptive to educational change and hesitant to know more about parents. He did not take initiatives to go beyond what confined him. As a result, he was inclined to separate himself from the school ethos. Such ideological inclinations were very obvious at Lai Mei School. At least six teachers informants interviewed expressed self protective attitudes. There was one teacher interviewed at Tai Sang who responded in a similar way. She was forced to work in the PTA committee with parents. She said:

I am forced to be the PTA members. It's mandatory. If there was a choice, I would rather stay away from them. They always complain. (Teacher informant 7, Tai Sang School)

This faction of teachers did not develop a vision of working collaboratively with parents and colleagues. They feared that parents' criticism would affect their career prospects. Worst of all, they were frightened that parents' participation would interfere

with their daily classroom teaching. They were threatened by parent intrusion into their territory. The word 'intrusion' suggests a lack of willingness and readiness (Grimmett and Crehan, 1992). Here it refers to those teachers who were not psychologically prepared to share part of their power with parents (Ng, 2002). The following were some of the words expressed by this balkanized group in these two schools.

I'm not afraid of parents' complaints, but I am afraid that it'll affect my career prospect. (Teacher informant 12, Lai Mei School)

The time is not ripe for parents to share the power of decision-making with us. Parental involvement implemented at this moment will cause conflicts between teachers and parents. The lay parents do not know the complexity of running a school. (Teacher informant 3, Lai Mei School)

I find that parents really want to be involved but there is one barrier. In fact, to a certain extent, they are intruding our turf. (Teacher informant 3, Tai Sang School)

Do you know that how much time we have spent on parents? I am not trying to object to parental involvement but what turns out is what we have done is at the expense of our time, our family days and our privacy. You see, our school is now a place for parent gatherings. (Teacher informant 8, Lai Mei School)

In conclusion, some teachers filled with fear were reticent about parental involvement. It was easy for them to display scepticism about implementing change as experiences told them that they have seen it all before. Whenever any innovations are externally imposed, some teachers present a certain reticence concerning the possibilities of success. It then becomes a potential resistance to change (Grimmett and Crehan, 1992). Evaluating the cost in terms of input of time, effort and foreseeable troubles such as increases in conflicts with parents and extra workload, some teachers became hesitant to participate in the reform. They were fenced in by the pre-conception that parents were trouble-makers. A number of teacher informants at Lai Mei School and a few at Tai Sang School did not come with consensus to include parents.

***Teacher balkanization 3: Lacking knowledge and skills for change.***

In addition to these two types of value demarcations identified among the teacher informants, the last balkanised teacher group emerging from the data was composed of those who supported parental involvement but lacked the necessary skills and knowledge. For example, lack of communicative skills would reinforce teachers to avoid arranging conferences with parents. A teacher informant remarked:

I know they are my partners but many are more experienced and older than I. When I try to tell them what to do, they start speaking down to me a lot. Therefore, I contact them when there need arises. (Teacher informant 10, Lai Mei School)

Lacking necessary skills prevented them from contacting parents as they feared confrontation with them. Diffident teachers might also avoid participating in any parent events. Those avoidance behaviours may be owing to their feelings of being inferior to parents in terms of educational background or professional knowledge. They expressed in a sense of low self-esteem especially with regard to the conferences in which many parents are of middle-class backgrounds. In the interview, a teacher of less than five year teaching experiences at Tai Sang School hoped to have professional training on skills of teacher-parent communication described:

I sometimes feel frightened when I meet middle-class parents. They are highly educated. They demand so much and always suggest what to do. I need to have more professional training on skills of parent-teacher conferences. (Teacher informant 12, Tai Sang School)

The teacher, who was responsible for managing the PTA at Lai Mei School, expressed a special concern on teacher balkanization during the time when parental involvement was being implemented:

The novice teachers dare not to make parents angry. However, they can be trained and eventually understand the essence of parental involvement. Some experienced teachers near the age of retirement do not care about what home-school cooperation is. They withdraw from parent activities even though it is mandatory. These two types of teachers are not in a good position to enhance home-school relations. Those who have about five to ten years of experiences make attempts to adopt new ideas for change. (Teacher informant 1, Lai Mei School)

The above quotations demonstrate that teachers' passivity towards parental involvement was attributed to shyness, fear and lack of self-confidence when meeting parents. Such feelings might trigger avoidance of change and reinforce teachers'

unwelcome attitudes towards parent participation. This balkanized faction of teachers did not initially withdraw from change. Many of them were novice teachers who performed differently from those aged and experienced colleagues. Those experienced ones had no interest in parent participation. By contrast, these novice teachers would like to be involved while they were provided with incentives such as opportunities for professional development.

### ***Input of school leaders in managing change***

With reference to the emerging themes depicted above, it can be assumed that not all teachers have positive attitudes or commitments to parental involvement in school. This reform initiative depends on their school culture. As envisaged above, more teacher informants supported educational change at Tai Sang, as less did so at Lai Mei. There existed factions of teachers that turned out to be facilitating or restraining forces of change. In addition to these two factions, there were still a significant number of teachers who neither supported nor resisted change. Their values and attitudes towards parental involvement were not clearly and evidently defined in these two schools. They can be incorporated into supporting change with the appropriate support of school leaders. On the contrary, if the management does nothing and teachers are left to their own devices to respond to change, this unconstructive situation will be detrimental to school improvement. Miss Mok of Tai Sang School knew the importance of motivating those unprepared for parental involvement. She had organized a series of workshops conducted by experts from tertiary institutions:

They are not prepared yet for parents' participation. Professional development programmes are necessarily to be organized so that they are equipped with knowledge of home-school cooperation and skills of communication. (Principal, Tai Sang School)

Miss Mok also encouraged her teachers to receive professional training after

school by subsidizing part of the course fee. One of the teacher informants admitted that the subsidy was an incentive for him to attend a refresher training course on parental involvement. He said:

I need to upgrade myself in the rapidly changing educational context so I choose to learn more on Saturdays. Thanks to Miss Mok granting us allowances for the course. (Teacher informant 6, Tai Sang School)

As seen at Tai Sang School, though teachers' capacities of responsiveness to change were dichotomized into balkanized groups, a dominant collaborative culture was eventually developed due to the fact that many diffident teachers were given opportunities to equip themselves through professional development. Moreover, they are supported by those colleagues who were devoted to working with parents.

Balkanization easily causes conflicts among teachers and exerts a negative impact on school cultures. Moreover, at Lai Mei School, the principal had no intention to conduct any professional development courses for his teachers although some teacher informants demanded such opportunities. Without positive input made by school leaders in times of change, some teachers will tend to be isolation-oriented. Lack of leadership probably reinforces teachers' inclinations to separating themselves from the spirit of educational change.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This interpretive study concludes that the process of including parents to participate in school, aiming at achieving the institutional goal of partnership, emerges as a far more complicated process than expected. Parental involvement is a dynamic process. It involves the principle of give-and-take among teachers and parents. It requires mutual trust and respect. To conclude, the externally imposed innovation of parental involvement did indeed exert influence on teachers' value orientations in the

case study schools, creating a significant impact on school cultures. The study has confirmed what Ball (1987) and Sikes (1992) have discovered with regard to teachers' ideological orientations in times of change. Three balkanised groups of teachers with different ideological orientations were identified among teachers. The first group consisted of those who supported and welcomed parental involvement whereas the second one was composed of those who showed resistance to change and would eventually isolate themselves from this imposed innovation. The third group of teachers, a majority, did not withdraw from change and needed to be provided with incentives and support for implementation of change. Teacher balkanisation is detrimental to implementation of change as it may lead to poor communication and coordination among teachers (Ball, 1987). At Lai Mei School, many of the teachers demonstrated unwillingness to participate in parent events. Only a few were devoted to working with parents. When more teachers are fearful and reticent, and seclude themselves from interacting with parents, the crisis of unsuccessful promotion of parental involvement occurs. This means that the efforts of only a few teachers with positive attitudes towards parental involvement cannot help fill the gap. Unless the group demonstrating positive orientation forms a significant mass supporting educational change in the school, the change is likely to be abandoned.

To manage teacher balkanization in times of change, it is worth reiterating here that the school leaders' personal beliefs and their early intervention strategies are of paramount importance. Data from interviews and observations suggested that whether parental involvement could be effectively implemented depended on the result of the 'wrestling' process arising from demarcation of teachers' ideological orientations within a school. The notion of 'wrestling' refers to the assimilation process in which teachers' various ideological orientations are mutually influencing or contradicting

one another in the school context. Due to the effect of assimilation, a dominant value which will facilitate or impede educational change will eventually appear. Here in the case study schools, three balkanised factions of teachers with different ideological orientations were wrestling at school. At Tai Sang School, some of those not committed to welcoming parents were eventually assimilated by Miss Mok, the principal, as well as those teachers supporting the innovation. The attitude of welcoming parents gradually became the dominant culture of the school. It helped facilitate smooth implementation of parental involvement. As Lieberman and Miller (1984) point out, collegiality can help teachers learn and share with one another. These are the necessary qualities required of a change agent (Fullan, 2003). On the contrary, a collaborative culture was barely seen at Lai Mei School. Though the teacher responsible for managing the PTA possessed supporting attitudes towards parental involvement, many teachers held negative value-orientations toward change. Furthermore, Mr. Wong, the principal, had not provided his teachers with incentives for change. As Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) argue, teachers isolated from change will sustain educational individualism and conservatism.

The principal of Tai Sang School had already developed a school mission of including parents. She had deep beliefs about parents as invaluable resources and partners of the school. She had foreseen that early intervention strategies could ensure her teachers to be psychologically prepared for collaboration with parents.

In conclusion, to ensure better management of balkanised teacher groups in implementing change, school leaders need to take into account why some teachers will resist innovations. One reason is lack of skills and beliefs in one's ability to collaborating with parents. Prior to initiating change, teachers should be provided with

sufficient professional development training in specific areas. To enhance teachers' understanding and build capacities, it is not the quantity of professional development programmes that matters. Rather, what is important is the focus and quality of such programmes designed to help teachers address the innovation directly and effectively.

If teachers are enabled to participate in a reform of sharing the power of decision making with parents, efforts must be made to overcome a balkanized school culture. Needless to say, the innovation demands teachers to become change agents who play a critical role in the implementing parental involvement. Strengthening professional development programmes and building teachers' capacities are the first and foremost things that the senior management should consider to ensure that the change is a success.

## References

- Advisory Committee on School-Based Management. (2000), *Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Government Printer.
- Amatea, E. (2007), (Ed.) *Building culturally responsive family-school relationships*, N.J., Pearson Education/Allyn and Bacon.
- Arnové, R. F. and Torres, C. (Eds.) (2007), *Comparative education: The dialectic of the local and global*, Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ball, S. J. (1987), *Micropolitics of the school: Towards a theory of school organization*, London, Methuen.
- Beare, H., Caldwell, B. J. and Millikan, R. H. (1989), *Creating an excellent school*, London, Routledge.
- Begley, P.T. and Zaretsky, L. (2004), "Democratic school leadership in Canada's public school systems: Professional value and social ethic", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 42 No. 6, pp. 640-655.
- Berns, R. M. (2007), *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support*, Calif, Thompson Higher Education.
- Blasé, J. (2005), "The micropolitics of educational change", in Hargreaves, A. (Ed.) *International handbook of educational change: Extending educational change*, The Netherlands, Springer, pp. 264-277
- Burgess, R. G. (Ed.) (1985), *Strategies of Educational Research: Qualitative methods*, Lewes, Falmer Press.
- Caldwell, B. J. (2004), *Re-imagining the self managing school*, London, Specialist Schools Trust.

- Carnoy, M. and Rhoten, D. (2002), "What does globalization mean for educational change? A comparative approach", *Comparative Educational Review*, Vol. 46 No.1, pp. 1-9.
- Cheng, Y. C. (2003), "School leadership and three waves of education reforms", *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 417-439.
- Cheng, Y. C. (2007), "Future developments of educational research in the Asia-Pacific Region: Paradigm shifts, reforms and practice", *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, No. 6, pp. 71-85.
- Chisholm, L, and Leyendecker, R. (2008), "Curriculum reform in sub-saharan Africa: When local meets global", *International Handbook of Comparative Education*, pp. 685-702
- Conley, S.C. and Cooper, B.C. (1991), *The school as a work environment: Implication for reform*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998), *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five tradition*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daun, H. (2009), "Globalized educational governance decentralization and grassroots responses", *Comparative Education and Policy Research*, Vol. 8 Part 1, pp. 23-51.
- Davies, B. (2005), *The essentials of school leadership*, London, SAGE Publications.
- Day, C. and Smethem, L. (2009), "The effects of reform: Have teachers really lost their sense of professionalism?", *Journal of Educational Change*. Vol. 10, pp. 141-157.
- Duke, D. (2004), *The challenges of educational change*, Boston, Pearson.
- Education Commission (1997), *Education Commission Report No. 7*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Government Printer.
- Education Department (1994), *Home-school cooperation research report*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Printer.
- Education Department (2000), *Transforming school into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities: School-based management consultative document*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Government Printer.
- Education & Manpower Branch and Education Department (1991), *The school management initiatives: Setting the framework for quality in Hong Kong School*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Government Printer.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995), "School\family\community partnership" *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 701-712.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001), *School, family and community partnerships: preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, Colo, Westview Press.
- Fink, D. and Stoll, L. (2005), "Educational change: Easier said than done", in Hargreaves, A. (Ed.) *International handbook of educational change: Extending educational change*, The Netherlands, Springer, pp. 17-41.
- Fullan, M. (1999), *Change forces: The sequel*, London, Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (2003), *Change forces with a vengeance*, London, Routledge Falmer.
- Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1996), *What's worth fighting for in your school?* New York, Teachers College Press.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1994), *Educational renewal: Better teachers, better schools*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Grimmett, P. P. and Crehan, E. P. (1992), "The nature of collegiality in teacher development: The case of clinical supervision", in Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (Eds.) *Teacher Development and Educational Change*, London, Falmer Press, pp.56-85
- Hargreaves, A. (1997), "Rethinking educational change", in Fullan, M. (Eds.), *The challenge of school change*, London, Routledge Falmer, pp. 3-32.

- Hargreaves, A. (2007), "Sustainable leadership and development in education: Creating the future, conserving the past", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 68-82.
- Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. (1998), *What is worth fighting for in education?* Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Hargreaves, A. and Goodson, I. (2006), "Educational change over time? The sustainability and non-sustainability of three decades of secondary school change and community", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 313-324.
- Hornby, G. (2000), *Improving parental involvement*, London, Cassell.
- Johnson, L., Møller, J., Jacobson, S.L. and Wong, K.L. (2008), "Cross-national comparisons in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP): The USA, Norway and China", *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. Vol 52 No. 4, pp. 407-422.
- Katyal, K. R. and Evers, C. W. (2007), "Parents-partners or clients? A reconceptualization of home-school interactions", *Teaching Education*, Vol.18 No. 1, pp. 61-76.
- Lam, Y. Y. K. (2006), "Local responses to school-based management in Hong Kong", *Education Studies*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 171-185.
- Leung, J. Y. H. and Chan, H. M. (2001), "The school management reform in Hong Kong: Administrative control in a new cloak of managerialism", in B. L. Cheung and J. C. Y. Lee (Eds.), *Public sector reform in Hong Kong into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Hong Kong, Chinese University Press, pp. 229-260..
- Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2005), "Transformational leadership", in B. Davies B (Eds.) *The essentials of school leadership*, London, SAGE publication, pp. 8-34
- Li, W. and Li, Y. (2010), "An analysis on social and cultural background of the resistance for China's education reform and academic pressure", *International Education Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 211-215.
- Lieberman, A. and Miller, L. (1984), *Teacher, their world and their work: Implications for school improvement*, Alexandria, VA, ASCD.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*, London, Sage.
- Luke, A. (2004), "Teaching after the market: From commodity to cosmopolitan", *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 106 No. 7, pp. 1422-1443.
- Ma, Y., Lam, C. and Wong, N. (2006), "Chinese primary school mathematics teachers working in a centralized curriculum system: A case study of two primary schools in North-East China", *British Association for International and Comparative Education*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 197-212.
- Manzon, M. (2004), *Building alliances: Schools, parents and communities in Hong Kong and Singapore*, Hong Kong, Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.
- McCully, A. (2006), "Practitioner perceptions of their role in facilitating the handling of controversial issues in contested societies: A Northern Irish Experience", *Educational Review*, Vol. 58 No.1, pp. 51-65.
- Musanti, S. I. and Pence, L. (2010), "Collaboration and teacher development: Unpacking resistance, constructing knowledge, and navigating identities", *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Winter, pp. 73-89.
- Ng, S. W. (1999), "Home-school relations in Hong Kong: Separation or partnership", *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 551-560.
- Ng, S. W. (2002), "Parent-Teacher Interaction: Are parents and teachers in Hong Kong

- ready for cooperation?" *Journal of Southeast Asian Education*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 115-139.
- Ng, S. W. (2007a), "Development of parent-school partnerships in times of educational reform in Hong Kong", *International Journal of Educational Reform*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 411-436.
- Ng, S. W. (2007b), "The chronological development of parent empowerment in children's education in Hong Kong", *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 487-499.
- Ng, S.W. (2009), "Why did principals and teachers respond differently to curriculum reform?", *Teacher Development*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 187-203.
- Nias, J. (1999), "Primary teaching as a culture of care", in J. Prosser (Eds.) *School Culture*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd, pp.66-81.
- Pang, I, W. (2004), "School-family-community partnership in Hong Kong: Perspectives and challenges", *Education Research for Policy and Practice*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 109-125.
- Pang, I, W. (2008), "School-based management in Hong Kong: Centralizing or decentralizing", *Education Research for Policy and Practice*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 17-33.
- Plan, R. (1987), *Managing change and making it stick*, London, Fontana/Collins.
- Roffey, S. (2007), "Transformation and emotional literacy: The role of school leaders in developing a caring community", *Leading & Managing*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 16-30.
- Rossman, G. B., Corbett, H. D. and Firestone, W.A. (1988), *Change and effectiveness in school: A cultural perspective*, Albany, State University of New York Press.
- Ryan, J., Kang, C., Mitchell, I, and Erickson, G. (2009). "China's basic education reform: an account of an international collaborative research and development project", *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 427-441.
- Sannino, A. (2010), "Teachers' talk of experiencing: Conflict, resistance and agency", *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 26, pp. 838-844.
- Shen, S. M. (1995), "The pattern and development of home school cooperation in Hong Kong (in Chinese)", *Education Journal*, Vol. 23 No.1, pp. 55-66.
- Sikes, P. J. (1992), Imposed change and the experienced teacher, in Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (Eds.), *Teacher Development and Educational Change*, London, Falmer Press, pp.36-55
- Skerrett, A. and Hargreaves, A. (2008), "Student diversity and secondary school change in a context of increasingly standardized reform", *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 913-945.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987), *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press.
- Strauss, A. L. and Corbin, J. (1998), *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), London, Sage.
- Vincent, C. (1996), *Parent and teachers: Power and participation*, London, Falmer.
- Walker, A. (2002), "School-based management reform: Leadership challenges", *Journal of Basic Education*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 119-136.
- Walker, A. (2004), "Constitution and culture: Exploring the deep leadership structures of Hong Kong schools", *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 94.
- Wong, P. M. and Cheung, A. C. (2009), "Managing the process of an educational change: A study of school heads' support for Hong Kong's curriculum reform", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 87-106.

Yu, H. (2005), "Implementation of school-based management in Hong Kong: Recent development and future challenges", *Journal of Educational Change*, Vol. 6, 253-275.