Developing adaptivity through curriculum innovation to enhance teacher capacities

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Adaptivity, which is characterized by flexibility, reflexivity and innovativeness (Hung, Lim, Chen, & Koh, 2008; Tan & Ponnusamy, 2014), is one of the key dispositions shown by research to be essential in meeting the demands of a fast-changing global environment in the twenty-first century. As a key player in preparing our young for the future, schools need to be able to develop an adaptive school environment that can positively influence teacher learning and promote learner capacities. The effectiveness of making such a change depends on the school’s change-capacities (Hopkins, 1996), of which the interventions of the school leader, the internal and external support, and the teachers are important factors. This study, involving three schools, employed a multiple-case design evolved from a single case study with embedded cases in a previous study, and focuses on the findings from the qualitative data collected from interviews with school leaders, middle management, teachers and students. The study seeks to show how school leaders can intervene and make use of the sociocultural leverages brought about by curriculum innovations to build adaptive capacity and enhance the quality of teachers’ learning experiences. The five sociocultural leverages that foster the development of adaptivity are: (a) conceptualizing a curriculum vision, (b) using metalanguage, (c) activating teachers’ agentic behaviours, (d) embracing possibility thinking, and (e) building a culture for risk-taking. These strategic sociocultural leverages allow school leaders to build adaptive capacity in schools, which in turn give rise to the following: (a) deliberative spaces that allow for teacher dialogue and experimentation, (b) a re-thinking of curriculum as a process, and (c) the development of a fluid curriculum. These conditions help to facilitate teacher learning and propel curriculum and pedagogical change because teachers, as agents of change, are key players in any school improvement effort, and their improvement is essential to school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1992). In fact, teachers are the ones who determine the quality of the school (Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996). Teacher learning should therefore feature strongly in school development. The findings suggest that with curriculum innovations, leaders are able to build adaptive capacity through the use of sociocultural leverages, and curriculum innovations become a mechanism through which teacher learning takes place, mainly because of the learning opportunities that arise in the process of planning and implementing of a curriculum innovation. As teacher learning becomes contextualised within the scope of the their work, teachers are encouraged to learn further when they observe changes in student learning outcomes and experiences (Guskey, 1986). Such learning sharpens teacher knowledge and expertise, which in turn promotes greater professionalism among teachers, thus enhancing their capacities.

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