Leadership style and organizational learning in Chinese elementary schools

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether principals can have an impact on organizational learning. Systematic empirical evidence of the relationship between leadership style and organizational learning in elementary schools is limited. The study aims to explore the influence of principals' transformational leadership on school organizational learning mechanisms, using teacher trust as a mediator.

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical model employed in this study was built on findings from prior research conducted on leadership and organizational learning (OL).

OL has been widely acknowledged as a critical component of school effectiveness (Louis, 1994; Kruse, 2003). In this study, OL was conceptualized through the conceptual framework of organizational learning mechanisms (OLMs). OLMs are institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements for collecting, disseminating, analyzing, storing, retrieving, and using information that is relevant to the performance of the organization and its member (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998, 2000; Schechter, 2008). It is important for a school to have a commitment to help people "embrace change" (e.g., Senge et al., 1994), but it does not happen automatically. A fundamental issue concerns how to motivate and support OL.

Enabling teachers to learn collectively requires a shift in the principal's role. Considerable evidence suggests that transformational leadership contributes to the development of schools as learning organizations (Leithwood et al., 1998; Silins et al., 2002). Increasingly, research on transformational leadership has sought to illuminate the 'paths' or means by which school leaders support teacher collective learning.

One of the 'paths' through which principals influence organizational learning lies in the trust relationship. A small but growing number of researchers have documented the positive impact of teacher trust on teacher motivation, willingness to engage in professional learning, school improvement etc (e.g., Hallinger & Lu, 2014).

**Method**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the model of transformational leadership and OLMs above.

OLMs was measured by the learning mechanisms questionnaire (Schechter, 2008). Principals’ leadership style was measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio et al., 1999).

In order to measure Teacher Trust, we drew on items from scales developed by Tschannen Moran (2009).

**Data source**

The data were collected from 528 teachers at 23 elementary schools in 3 provinces in
China, and aggregated to the school level.

Results
Mediating regression analysis demonstrated that trust was a significant predictor of school organizational learning and functioned as a partial mediator between principals' transformational leadership style and organizational learning mechanism. Moreover, the principals' transformational leadership style predicted trust and organizational learning mechanism in Chinese elementary schools.

Educational importance
Theoretically, the current study sought to add to the literature by examining OLMs in Chinese elementary schools and how school principals support OLMs through fostering trust relationships among teachers.

In practice, firstly, OLM provide schools with an opportunity to define their own space and time of collective information processing to eventually improve school effectiveness. Secondly, the research results can enlighten principals to conduct leadership practices to motivate and sustain OL in their schools.

Connection to the conference theme
The current study sought to cultivate OLMs in elementary schools to achieve school effectiveness and school innovation.

Reference