

## Teacher Leadership in Singapore: The Next Wave of Effective Leadership

Salleh Hairon

National Institute of Education,  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

### Abstract

*This article provides the practical and theoretical justifications for the growth of teacher leadership, in the Singapore education context. It argues that since 2001, the importance of teacher leadership has been growing, and more significantly in the last five years, which is due to several factors. First, the race towards attaining 21st century competencies in students, yet maintaining academic rigour in terms of outcomes. Second, the growing complexity of education contexts. These conditions had caused schools to invest their resources in strengthening classroom instruction through building teacher capacity and competency, and the leadership that support it. However, for the latter, what is becoming evident in schools and education systems is the distribution of instructional leadership. This article provides the practical and theoretical discussions on the growing importance of teacher leadership using the Singapore education context as an illustrative case, and discusses implications for school leaders.*

### Article Info

#### Article History:

*Received*  
March 17, 2017

*Revision received*  
June 4, 2017

*Accepted*  
June 5, 2017

#### Keywords:

*Teacher leadership,  
Effective leadership,  
Singapore*

### Cite as:

Hairon, S. (2017). Teacher leadership in Singapore: the next wave of effective leadership. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 2 (2), 170-194.



## Introduction

The birth of teacher leadership has its roots at the turn of the 21st century when the then education minister made known the revision to the education career structure with the creation of three career tracks: Leadership, Teaching and Senior Specialist (Teo, 2001). This new career structure seeks to enhance career choice and advancement within the education profession. This would then enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Educators who joined the teaching force have the choice to specialize as teachers, leaders or senior specialists. Within each track, an educator can then attain progressive positions which commensurate with appropriate salary grades. In the Leadership track, an educator in a school context can progressively advance to become Subject Head, Head of Department, Vice-Principal, and Principal. An educator can also choose to become a specialist in specific fields of education (e.g., curriculum, psychology, testing, research) with similar progressive positions in the Senior Specialist track but residing at the Headquarters. In the Teaching track, an educator in the school context can progressively advance to become Senior Teachers (STs) and Lead Teachers (LTs). The primary core roles of STs and LTs are to develop teachers in their respective schools through deepening of their pedagogical knowledge impacting on classroom teaching and learning. The importance of teacher leaders received renewed emphasis in the establishment of the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) in 2010, especially with the call for professionalizing the teaching profession through teacher-led collaborative professional development (Ho, 2009). Since then, the Teaching track has been gradually strengthened. Teacher leaders can now progress from ST to LT positions within the school context, and then to become Master Teachers (MTTs) and then Principal Master Teachers (PMTTs), which is the pinnacle position of a teacher leader that is considered on par with school principals in terms of salary grade.

This article centrally argues that teacher leadership is the next step forward towards building the capacity of schools to improve, albeit using the Singapore education context. It first provides the justification for the growing importance of teacher leadership in the practice realm. It then provides the theoretical support to the growing importance of teacher leadership using relevant literature. Finally, the article discusses the practical implications for school leaders in terms of supporting teacher leadership in schools.

### **Growing Importance of Teacher Leadership in Singapore**

The introduction of a major policy initiative in the Singapore education system coined as 'Teach Less, Learn More' (TLLM) (Tharman, 2005) in 2005 marks a significant shift in emphasis from academic achievement to holistic student outcomes (e.g., 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies). This, however, does not imply the dilution of the former. Rather, schools now have to invest in the pursuit of holistic outcomes of education without diluting the longstanding academic rigour that schools in Singapore have consistently maintained (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). The TLLM policy initiative also marks the growing recognition that schools need to be given increasing autonomy to craft its school curriculum in order to fulfill the broad education policies stipulated by the education ministry. This is understandable bearing in mind that schools are to work within their unique contextual affordances in order to implement education initiatives and policies. Furthermore, schools are expected to focus on specific holistic student outcomes which are consistent with its vision, mission, and objectives in view of limited resources. In fact, schools in Singapore are strongly encouraged to adopt two forms of school niches - Learning for Life Programme (LLP) and Applied Learning Programme (ALP). This serves to help schools provide curricula that support students to learn beyond the pursuit of academic achievements. The autonomy to craft emerging and innovative curricula is thus a necessity in order to attain the vision of the TLLM. However, autonomy within the school context needs to reach down



to the level of teachers teaching in classroom. They are the ones who will be the final implementers of education policies. The success of education policies thus lies in the hands of classroom teachers, and they must therefore be accorded the autonomy, albeit within the scope of the school's overall school curriculum framework. The importance of teachers being the final link between education policies and students was explicitly expressed by the then education minister (Tharman, 2005).

The need for greater autonomy at the school level - including that of teachers in matters of teaching and learning, is also increasingly perceived as important because of the growing complexity in the education contexts. Education contexts are getting increasingly complex insofar as the changes taking place within these contexts are characterized by growing intensity, rapidity, fluidity and uncertainty. Concomitantly, schools are expected to satisfy the needs of multiple school stakeholders which are increasingly getting more demanding and complex - outside school (e.g., social media, parental groups, private and government organizations) and within school (e.g., teachers, students). School leaders thus have to mobilize and optimize physical and human resources towards shared organizational goals in increasingly complex educational contexts. In an increasingly complex environment, it is no surprise that much of the decision-making power is devolved to school leaders and teachers who are able to respond to day-to-day demands and issues in a quick and appropriate manner and sensitive to schools' contextual uniqueness. Policy implementation must truly indeed be left to schools to operationalize, and hence the need to give greater autonomy to schools. The increasing complexity in the education contexts is consistent with the broader and more universal phenomenon of globalisation, which is now becoming more volatile, disruptive and even treacherous (e.g., computer hacking, or terror threats). This explains why the term VUCA has been used to describe the current state of world affairs - as being volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

There are two possible reasons for the rising complexity in education contexts. First, the general weakening of classifications in social relationships and boundaries, and the second, the departure from organized social structure to network culture (Hartley, 2007). An example of the former is the general rise in parental demands, expectations and intrusions into teachers' professional practice. Another example is parents using social media platforms to assert their voice and influence, instead of the formal communication channels. An example of the latter is the general rise in partnerships between schools and external organizations - having the common belief that synergistic collaborations would bring about greater output in contrast to the sum of individual work. For example, there are increasing opportunities for school leaders and teachers in Singapore to collaborate with others outside their own schools whom they can connect and collaborate. It has been observed that contemporary reforms in the public service demand greater 'joined-up' or 'network' regime of governance – a societal culture wherein all categories and classifications are weakened and rendered increasingly permeable (a flexible 'liquid modern' view of space and time), and the new work order consistent with the knowledge economy (where individuals work and learn beyond bureaucratic enclosures using their loose spatial and temporal codes) (Hartley, 2007). Technological advances in communication have also aided significantly in the weakening of classifications in social structure and growth of the network culture (Castells, 1996). The idea of the rising complexity in society is not new, but has been a focus of study by complexity theorists (e.g., Bar-Yam, 1997). It has been observed that the history of human civilization reflects a progressive increase in complexity. Bar-Yam (1997) postulates that when complexity of collective behaviours increases beyond that of an individual human being then hierarchical controls become ineffective, and must then yield to networked systems. It is also argued that the magnitude of networked systems will grow to become large scale network systems due to human societies having increasing resources to support large



scale complexities in order to satisfy ever growing needs of societies in globalised nation states. The movement towards complexity in human societies is therefore expected.

It is therefore understandable that contemporary school leaders expend more time and energy in managing increasingly complex cross-boundary relationships. It is also therefore not surprising that school leaders resort to distributed forms of leadership where decisions are delegated and shared to other staff members beyond the purview of school principals. In the Singapore context, delegation or sharing of leadership decisions to middle managers such as department heads (HODs) or subject heads (SHs) has been a common place for more than two decades, especially that pertaining to instruction. In this sense, distributed leadership is closely tied to instructional leadership insofar as distributed leadership affords instructional leadership practices to be delegated, dispersed, shared or distributed to other staff members beyond the school principals or vice-principals. The link between instructional leadership and distributed leadership has in fact been well observed (Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Spillane & Louis, 2002; Timperley, 2005; Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012). In this sense, instructional leadership practices become more dispersed across the school organization, making it more effective to bring about enhancements in teaching and learning.

However, over the last decade, leadership decisions pertaining to instruction have been further distributed to teacher leaders - formal and informal, in response to the increasing complexities in education contexts. This is a result of the growing demands placed on schools so much so that administrative decisions have to be passed on from senior to middle leaders, which result to middle leaders distributing their decisions on instructional matters to teacher leaders. In schools, these teacher leaders include formal ones such as STs and LTs, and informal ones such as Subject and Level Representatives/Coordinators, and Professional Learning Community (PLC) Team Leaders – all of which are involved in making leadership decisions on instruction. The primary role of STs

is to mentor beginning teachers and teachers with teaching issues, and support the school's overall effort at developing teachers through professional conversations and role-modeling on teaching and learning. The role of LTs includes that of STs plus leading and supporting teacher development within a school cluster (or district). The STs and LTs usually coordinate their work with the School Staff Developers (SSDs) in their respective schools. The SSDs, however, are subsumed in the Leadership track (i.e., a management position) and is part of the Senior Management Team of the school. The SSDs' primary role is to oversee the overall schools' training and development needs and goals. Outside schools, formal teacher leaders include MTTs and PMTs. The MTT's role focuses on developing the pedagogical development in their respective specific subject areas (such as, Mathematics, Science and English Language) and developing the competency of teachers teaching in their specific subject areas. The PMT's role may include the role of MTs, as well as mentoring and grooming STs, LTs and MTTs to grow as teacher leaders. Both MTTs and PMTTs resides at the headquarters of the education ministry (AST). While formal teacher leaders have designations that are formally given by the education ministry and are pegged to specific substantive salary grades, informal leaders are designations given informally by the respective schools and are not pegged to specific substantive salary grades. The formal teacher leadership positions are also located within the 'Teaching' career track, or Teaching Track for short, whereby a teacher can progress to higher positions – ST, LT, MMT and PMTT. This stands in contrast to the Leadership track (e.g., Subject Heads, Heads of Department, Vice-Principal, Principal) and Senior Specialist track, who are curriculum specialists in the respect subject domains (Refer to <https://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teach/career-information>).

With regard to informal leadership roles, Subject Representatives or Coordinators focus on planning, coordinating, implementing and reviewing of the curriculum within the specific subject areas in their respective schools. They work directly with the department heads in



their respective subject areas to assist the coordination of the implementation and review of the curriculum. Another group of teachers that may be appointed in the informal leadership role are the Level Representatives or Coordinators. Their primary role is to coordinate the planning, coordinating, implementing and reviewing of the curriculum within the specific grade levels (e.g., Grade 1 or Grade 2), and student development matters (e.g., discipline, counselling) in their respective schools. They work directly with the Year Heads to ensure that the curriculum aimed at the grade level learning activities are planned, coordinated, implemented and reviewed according to the school goals.

The recent boost to strengthen the Teaching track by increasing the pool of teacher leaders (Heng, 2014) only attests to the need to effectively address the growing demands placed on schools to provide more diverse teaching approaches and learning outcomes. STs, LTs, MTTs, and PMTTs have grown to be recognized as pedagogical leaders who can potentially aid in the effective translation of educational policies to classroom teaching and learning. They therefore play a crucial role in supporting the respective department heads in the effective delivery of the curriculum, and the growing demands placed on schools to implement teaching strategies that meet the 21st century learning needs of students. The effectiveness of distributed leadership to enhance instruction is therefore dependent on how well instructional leadership is distributed to middle leaders and teacher leaders.

### **From Instructional to Distributed to Teacher Leadership**

The links between leadership and successful schools, or successful organization or institution, has been well established. For centuries – as demonstrated in the writings of Plato, Caesar and Plutarch (Bass, 1981), it has been assumed that leadership is critical to the success of any human endeavor (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Marzano et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of 70 empirical studies highlighted that



the average effect size of school leadership (e.g., building a sense of community, establishing school routines, providing teachers with necessary resources, and advocating for school stakeholders) on student achievement is approximately 0.25. Robinson et al.'s (2008) analysis of 12 studies identified five leadership dimensions in which instructional leadership significantly affected student outcomes. These leadership practices include establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning and coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. It is therefore no wonder that Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) assert that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning. This conclusion is logically persuasive taking into consideration that teachers and their classroom teaching has the closest and direct impact on student learning within the school context. It is also logically persuasive to consider that school leadership comes in second because school leaders' effects in supporting classroom teaching is all encompassing (e.g., teaching resources, physical spaces and school climate or culture), albeit indirect most of the time. It is therefore understandable that Leithwood et al. (2006) assert that school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. As the main business of schools remain to be on teaching and learning, leadership that supports teaching and learning will remain to be salient. This explains why the importance of instructional leadership for school effectiveness and improvement never had waned over the decades since 1970s (Hallinger, 2005).

Instructional leadership, which has been expounded by many scholars (e.g., Hallinger, 2005, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1987, 1988), albeit conceptualized primarily within the domain of the school principal. In spite of the absence of an explicit definition of instructional leadership (King, 2002), a generally held view amongst



proponents is that instructional leadership entails school leaders guiding teachers as they engage in activities directly influencing the learning and growth of students (c.f., Davidson, 1992; Duke, 1987; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Leithwood et al., 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; O'Donnell & White, 2005; Smith & Andrews, 1989). In terms of the scope of its operationalization, Hallinger and his colleagues (e.g., Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) developed a framework consisting of three broad aspects of leadership practices. These include: 1) defining the school mission, 2) managing the instructional program, and 3) promoting the school climate. Building on these ideas, Hallinger and Heck (1998, pp. 162-163) explored the relationship between leadership and student achievement, and developed a three-fold classification of principal effects of instructional leadership:

1. **Direct effects** – where the principal's action influence school outcomes.
2. **Mediated effects** – where principal actions affect outcomes indirectly through other variables (such as teacher commitment, instructional practices or school culture).
3. **Reciprocal effects** – where the principal affects teachers and teachers affect the principal and through these processes outcomes are affected.

Of the three types of effects, Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that the mediated effects yielded more consistent findings stating that principals exercise “a measurable, though indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement” (p. 186). This is consistent with Ylimaki's (2007) observation that much of the literature on direct instructional leadership approaches were in the 1980s, but more recent literature advises principals to share instructional leadership in ways that build capacity for school transformation, and ultimately, improvement in student learning.

The indirect instructional leadership practices by school principals suggest that the more direct instructional leadership practices are

transferred to other school staff members such as middle leaders (e.g., department heads) and teacher leaders (e.g., senior teachers). The role of middle leaders' work are now increasingly focused on managing the curriculum (or the instructional programme) such as supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, promoting professional development and maintaining high visibility. They can also be considered as sharing the work of instructional leadership of school principals. However, increasingly over time teacher leaders (i.e., informal or formal non-management positions) are also increasingly roped in to coordinate the curriculum, develop staff members, and monitor teachers' teaching practices. It is thus not surprising that distributed leadership involves four key practices (Hairon & Goh, 2015). First, relinquishing of authority to staff members but within certain bounded limits (*bounded empowerment*). Second, develop leadership in staff members to make appropriate decisions that positively impact on student learning outcomes (*developing leadership*). Third, share decisions on instruction and curriculum with staff members (*shared decisions*). Fourth, promote collective engagement among staff members (*collective engagement*).

It makes sense therefore to closely tie instructional leadership to distributed leadership whether obliquely or directly - as in using the term 'distributed instructional leadership' (Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Spillane & Louis, 2002; Timperley, 2005; Klar, 2012a, 2012b; Blitze & Modeste, 2015; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Ng & Ho, 2012; David, 2009; Halverson, Kelley & Shaw, 2014; Brauckmann, Geißler, Feldhoff, & Pashiardis, 2016). Nevertheless, empirical studies supporting this link has still room for further theory building. In this regard, the notion of a 'distributed instructional leadership' needs to be questioned. First and foremost, is there a substantive construct of 'distributed instructional leadership'? Or is it merely a tight association of two substantive constructs? Surely, the path towards another form of 'adjectival' leadership as cautioned by Mulford (2008) , whereby one creates a form of leadership by adding any



adjective to the word 'leadership' and gets away without actually defining and operationalizing the construct, needs to be avoided. Second, although Leithwood et al. (2006) had argued that distributed leadership has been identified as one of the six claims on successful school leadership, they did not draw sufficient empirical studies to tie together the two substantive constructs. While some have empirically attempted to tie these two constructs together (e.g., Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012; Hairon & Gopinathan, 2015; Klar, 2012a, 2012b; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Halverson, Kelley & Shaw, 2014), more empirical studies are still needed especially in distinguishing the two constructs apart, and in determining if or if not the construct on 'distributed instructional leadership' is a substantive construct that is uniquely different to the two. Notwithstanding ongoing work at combining or integrating these two constructs, what remains to be compelling is the close association between them. The fact that school principals improve teaching and learning indirectly (Leithwood et al., 2006) and that the effects of instructional leadership are indirect suggest that instructional leadership's dependency or interdependency with distributed leadership is persuasively credible.

The rise in distributed leadership will inevitably result to a rise in teacher leadership. As discussed earlier, a key operationalization of distributed leadership is the relinquishing of decision-making power to others, albeit within certain boundaries according to the context where leadership operates (Hairon & Goh, 2015). Besides distributing instructional leadership practices to middle leaders (e.g., department heads), there is a further need to distribute instructional leadership practices to teachers who can lead closer to the ground level (e.g., senior teachers). As argued earlier, this is because middle leaders are increasingly taking on more administrative tasks so much so that some key instructional leadership tasks need to be distributed further down to teachers who can lead others in matters of instruction. In the Singapore context, they are known as teacher leaders. Although it can be argued that middle leaders such as department heads can generally be considered as teacher leaders, in the Singapore context,

the identity of middle leaders is predominantly management. They have lesser teaching hours and spend most of their time in administrative and management matters. Furthermore, they are key members of the senior management committee along with the principal and vice-principal in making significant school level decisions. They are also highly involved in the appraisal of teachers across the school. Their primary source of influence and thus their power cannot escape the appraisal factor. These conditions make them to be less of teacher leaders. As defined by York-Barr and Duke (2004), teacher leadership is the “process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (pp. 287–288). Hairon et al. (2015) defined teacher leadership as the enactment of influence by teachers, individually or collectively, on school stakeholders but primarily fellow teachers towards shared goals pertaining to improvements in teaching and learning. From these two definitions, one distinct feature of teacher leaders is that they are first and foremost teachers, and secondly, leading fellow teachers. What defines the identity of teachers is not the given job title, rather the day-to-day practices of what teachers are preoccupied with. This explains - at least in the Singapore context, the difficulty in considering middle leaders as teacher leaders.

Moving beyond the question “Who are teacher leaders?” is the question “What do teacher leaders do?”. Drawing from key literature and case study findings on teacher leadership, Hairon et al. (2015) highlighted three teacher leadership practice dimensions: (1) building collegial and collaborative culture, (2) promoting teacher development and learning, and (3) enabling change in teachers’ teaching practices. They have also highlighted the importance of intentional influence in the enactment of teacher leadership practices. These three teacher leadership practices dimensions clearly serves to impact on teaching practices, albeit with varying directness. The teacher leadership practice which potentially has the most direct



impact on teaching and learning is enabling change in teachers' teaching practices. These could include lesson feedback on lesson observations, providing teaching and learning materials, identification gaps in student learning from analysis of students' test results, and monitoring the completion of specific teaching strategies. The next teacher leadership practice which can potentially impact on teaching and learning is promoting teacher development and learning. This impact is less direct than practices on enabling teachers' teaching practices. This could include discussions between mentor and mentee on how to improve classroom teaching, providing workshops to teachers on using specific teaching strategies and resources, and helping teachers build personal professional development plans. The next teacher leadership practice is building collegial and collaborative culture. This has potentially furthest impact in relation to the first two. Building a culture that is collegial and collaborative provides the social milieu in which teachers can learn from one another and work with one another to improve teaching and learning. The examples on the operations of these three teacher leadership practices obviously indicate that teacher leadership practices are instructional in nature. Hence, it is fair to say that teacher leadership practices are essentially instructional leadership practices. These are outcomes of the distribution of instructional leadership practices which middle leaders used to enact in the past. Drawing from the Hallinger and his colleagues' early conceptions of principal's instructional leadership framework (e.g., Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), principals still do retain the dimension on 'defining the school mission', and middle leaders (e.g., department heads) still retain the primary role of 'managing the instructional program'. However, teacher leaders (e.g., senior teachers) assist in managing the instructional programmes at the different grade levels. They have also taken more instructional leadership practices that are considered 'promoting the school climate'. They now play - at least in the Singapore education context, an increasing role in supporting the building of school

culture, promoting teacher development and learning, and monitoring students' learning. They do these through platforms such as mentoring, professional learning communities (e.g., action research, lesson study), school-based workshops, coordinating and monitoring the usage of teaching and learning materials, and monitoring and resolving student conceptual gaps.

The role of teacher leaders will set to grow as demands on schools in terms of student learning outcomes increase and the complexity of education contexts continues to be on the rise. In such situations, the demands on teachers to increase their teaching capacity will rise, as well as the leadership support for this. In contemporary times, leadership truly cannot be in the hand of solo heroic leaders, but needs to be distributed not only to middle leaders, but all the way to teacher leaders, who are truly working side-by-side with teachers. This reality then attests to Robinson's et al.'s (2008) claim that leadership is most effective when they are closest to the classroom. This, however, do not necessarily suggest that principals are to be closest to the classroom - as argued that most instructional leadership practices of school principals are indirect. Rather than the principal, the practices of instructional leadership can be closest to classroom teaching, but enacted by teacher leaders. This explanation would then resolve the seeming contradiction between proponents of instructional leadership being direct (e.g., Robinson et al., 2008) and indirect (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

### Implications

The need to extend the distribution of instructional leadership from senior leaders to middle leaders, and finally to teacher leaders have several implications to practitioners, which are closely related to the four dimensions of distributed leadership proposed by Hairon and Goh (2015): *bounded empowerment*, *developing leadership*, *shared decision* and *collection engagement*. First and foremost, clarity of roles of teacher leaders. Teacher leaders need to know the scope or



boundary of their influence, and thus the specific tasks that they are to commit and engage. This is closely tied to the dimension on bounded empowerment, whereby school leaders - senior or middle leaders - relinquished specific, but not all, decision-making power to others. Without this clarity of roles, teacher leaders' confidence can potentially be undermined. Without this role clarity, teachers might be uncertain which leadership directions they should follow. As espoused by Hairon et al. (2015), the three dimensions or aspects of teacher leadership are *building collegial and collaborative relations*, *promoting teacher development and learning*, and *enabling change in teachers' teaching practice*. These are consistent with the education ministry's role framework on teacher leadership which includes *professional collaboration*, *mentoring*, *teaching and learning*, and *professional ethos* (communications with Academy of Singapore Teachers officers, 15 Dec 2016). The aspect on *professional ethos* can be subsumed under the first three teacher leadership dimensions. When teacher leaders enact the first three dimensions, they are inevitably and concomitantly role-modeling the outcomes of *professional ethos*. Even though the term *professional ethos* could be about more specific professional values such as passion, integrity, and excellence, they are manifested in specific enactments which teacher leaders engage, including the three dimensions stated above. Notwithstanding the relevance of the teacher leadership framework provided by the education ministry, four aspects in the framework are still broad. School leaders still need to operationalize each of these aspects or each of the three dimensions (Hairon et al., 2015) in ways that meet the school vision, mission and objectives. School leaders do need to know which specific teacher leadership tasks which can be taken away from middle leaders' work so that middle leaders' instructional leadership tasks do not overlap with teacher leaders' instructional leadership tasks.

The second implication has to do with the capacity and competency of teacher leaders, and hence the development of teacher leaders. Once the roles of teacher leaders have been clearly



operationalized, their capacity and competency in carrying out the roles along with its specific tasks or practices need to be built. In the Singapore school setting, formal teacher leaders such as STs and LTs are required to take part in executive programmes that develop leaders in the Teaching track. While STs are required to complete a 10-week full-time programme as part of building their teacher leadership knowledge, skills and attitude, LTs they are required to complete another 10-week full-time programme. However, school leaders cannot solely rely on these 10-week programmes. In other words, a 10-week, albeit full-time, still cannot completely prepare a teacher leader to function effectively for the next 10 or more years in his or her roles. There need to be continuous professional development opportunities for teacher leaders to continually sharpen their teacher leadership capacity and competency. These could take the form of school-based or district-based learning communities among teacher leaders, mentoring of STs by LTs, and mentoring of LTs by MTTs. The need to develop teacher leadership capacity and competency is consistent with the dimension of *developing leadership* (Hairon & Goh, 2015). However, the developing of leadership capacity and competency should also include developing teachers' knowledge and skills in their respective subject areas. Doing this would strengthen their source of influence while leading others. Without the development of teacher leadership capacity and competency, school senior and middle leaders will not be willing to distribute or delegate their instructional leadership roles and tasks to teacher leaders. Senior and middle leaders would be more willing to relinquish decision-making power to teachers whom they can trust to do the needed roles and tasks.

The third implication has to do with shared decision. School leaders need to establish the code of practice that teacher leaders' decisions on teaching and learning are not theirs alone. As teacher leadership practices are distributed from middle leaders, the decisions that they make on teaching and learning are shared with middle leaders. In other words, while middle leaders have



relinquished certain instructional leadership decision-making power to teacher leaders, they must be in the know to these decisions, and thus are not immune from being accountable to the outcomes of these decisions. In other words, besides sharing the decisions of teacher leaders, middle leaders also have shared accountability with the outcomes resulting from decisions made by teacher leaders. Furthermore, as teacher leaders' source of influence is not based on formal relationship of power to appraise others, rather one of collegial relationships among equals, teacher leaders would tend to make decisions on teaching and learning through consensual means. The decision-making process in such decision-making process would be more shared among their fellow colleagues. This form of decision-making process, which is more shared and consensual, is mutually appropriate for both teacher leaders and their colleagues. Teachers would be comfortable to be led by teacher leaders who do not employ formal, positional, hierarchical and appraisal power. Teacher leaders, likewise, would share the same sentiment. Furthermore, it would not be surprising to see teacher leaders allowing others to take the lead on specific decision-making processes on teaching and learning. This is also another form of shared decision insofar as teacher leaders give away their leadership to other colleagues in the decision-making process on teaching and learning. This has direct implication to the fourth implication.

The fourth implication has to do with collective engagement. This is the fourth dimension of the distributed leadership construct (Hairon & Goh, 2015). In order to promote the effective distribution of instructional leadership practices from middle leaders to teacher leaders, school leaders need to provide time and space for teachers to work collaboratively together. This include any platforms that support teachers coming together to learn and work collaboratively so as to improve teaching and learning (e.g., professional learning communities, mentoring, and online discussions). The creation of time and space for teachers to collectively engage with one another is essential for shared decisions to take place. As discussed earlier, as

teacher leaders' source of influence is not formal, positional and hierarchical, their influence would then depend on the relationship of bond and trust in order to get the commitment and motivation of their fellow teachers. The time and space for teachers to interact with one another would build bonds and trusting relationships. The notion of collective engagement is also consistent with assertion made that distributed leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of enmeshed interactions between leaders and followers (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2004; Spillane et al., 2001). The need to promote time and space for teachers to collectively engage with one another to support teaching and learning would also mean that school leaders need to coordinate the flow of decisions pertaining teaching and learning. As argued earlier, the distribution of decisions to others within the school organization does not mean devoid of knowledge nor accountability to these decisions that have been relinquished. School leaders thus need to know how decisions emanating from the various instructional leadership roles are coordinated in terms of alignment and synergy.

### **Conclusion**

The attention given to the development of the Teaching track is a move in the right direction. This is because the expansion of the pool of teacher leaders means the expansion and distribution of instructional leaders to provide the needed leadership support in response to the increasing demands placed on teaching and learning. Leadership is second to teaching in terms of school level effects on student learning outcomes. In the Singapore education system, teacher leaders - specifically, those with formal roles (STs, LTs, MTTs, PMTTs), are considered to be pedagogical leaders who will lead the teaching force towards excellence in their teaching profession. This vision, however, depends to a large extent on how leaders at the system, district and school levels synergize their efforts at providing clarity to the teacher leader role, which would have a range of positive ripple effects such as career choice, recognition and



aspiration, development of competencies, commitment and confidence, and job satisfaction. The attention and investment on these matters would determine the pace of development of teacher leaders in the years ahead.

### References

- Bass, B.M. (1981). *Stodgill's handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: Free Press.
- Bar-Yam, Y. (2002). Complexity rising: From human beings to human civilization, a complexity profile. *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*. Oxford, UK: EOLSS, UNESCO Publishers.
- Blitze, M.H., & Modeste, M. (2015). The differences across distributed leadership practices by school position according to the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL). *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 14*(3), 341-379.
- Brauckmann, S., Geißler, G., Feldhoff, T., & Pashiardis, P. (2016). Instructional leadership in Germany: An evolutionary perspective. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 44*(2), 5-20.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society. The information age: Economy, society and culture, Vol. I*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- David, J.L. (2009). Learning communities for administrators. *Educational Leadership, 67*(2), 88-89.
- Davidson, G. (1992). Beyond direct instruction: Educational leadership in the elementary school classroom. *Journal of School Leadership, 2*(3), 280-288.
- Duke, D.L. (1987). *School leadership and instructional improvement*. Random House, New York.
- Gronn, P. (2000). Distributed properties: A new architecture for leadership. *Educational Management & Administration, 28*(3), 317-338.
- Hairon, S., & Dimmock, C. (2012). Singapore schools and professional learning communities: Teacher professional development and

- school leadership in an Asian hierarchical system. *Educational Review*, 64(4), 405-424.
- Hairon, S., & Goh, J.W.P. (2015). Pursuing the elusive construct of distributed leadership: Is the search over? *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 43(5), 693-718.
- Hairon, S., Goh, J.W.P., & Chua, C.S.K. (2015). Teacher leadership enactment in PLC contexts: Towards a better understanding of the phenomenon. *School Leadership and Management*, 35(2), 163-182.
- Hairon, S., & Gopinathan, S. (2015). Predictors of instructional leadership in Singapore school system: Reflections on preliminary findings in the context of Asian knowledge building. *In Asia Leadership Roundtable* (pp. 17). Hong Kong, Hong Kong (China): Asia Pacific Centre for Leadership and Change, Hong Kong Institute of Education & Chulalongkorn University.
- Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(3), 221-239.
- Hallinger, P. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 30(2), 95-110.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R.H. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(2), 157-191.
- Hallinger, P., & McCary, C.E. (1990). Developing the strategic thinking of instructional leaders. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(2), 89-108.
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), 217-47.
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1987). Assessing and developing principal instructional leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 45(1), 54-61.



- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1988). Characteristics of instructionally effective school districts. *Journal of Education Research*, 81(3), 175-181.
- Halverson, R., & Clifford, M. (2013). Distributed instructional leadership in high schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(2), 389-419.
- Halverson, R., Kelley, C., & Shaw, J. (2014). A CALL for improved school leadership. *Kappan*, 95(6), 57-60.
- Hartley, D. (2007). The emergence of distributed leadership in education: Why now?" *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(2), 202-214.
- Heng, S.W. (2014). *Keynote address by Mr Heng Swee Keat, Minister for Education, at the Ministry of Education Work Plan Seminar 2014, on Tuesday, 23 September 2014 at 9:15am at Ngee Ann Polytechnic Convention Centre*. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/speeches/keynote-address-by-mr-heng-swee-keat--minister-for-education--at-the-ministry-of-education-work-plan-seminar-2014--on-tuesday--23-september-2014-at-9-15am-at-ngee-ann-polytechnic-convention-centre>.
- Ho, P. (2009). *Address by Ms Ho Peng, Director-General of Education, at the Teachers' Mass Lecture, Singapore Expo Hall 2, Wednesday 26 August, 2:30 p.m.* Retrieved from [Http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2009/08/26/address-by-ms-ho-peng-at-the-t.php](http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2009/08/26/address-by-ms-ho-peng-at-the-t.php).
- King, D. (2002). Beyond instructional leadership: The changing shape of leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 61-63.
- Klar, H.W. (2012a). Fostering distributed instructional leadership: A sociocultural perspective of leadership development in urban high schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11(4), 365-390.
- Klar, H.W. (2012b). Fostering department chair instructional leadership capacity: Laying the groundwork for distributed instructional leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 15(20), 175-197.

- Lee, M., Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2012). A distributed perspective on instructional leadership in International Baccalaureat (IB) schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 664-698.
- Leithwood, K., & Duke, D.L. (1998). Mapping the conceptual terrain of leadership: A critical point of departure for cross-cultural studies. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73(2), 31-50.
- Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. Nottingham: NCSL/DfES). Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/ECB/97/seven-claims-to-success.pdf>.
- Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. Open University Press, Buckingham: UK.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2011). The starting point for professional learning is in schools and classrooms. *Journal of Staff Development*, 32(4), 16-20.
- Marks, H.M., & Printy, S.M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.
- Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B.A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From Research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Mulford, B. (2008). *The leadership challenge: Improving learning in schools*. Victoria, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Ng, D., & Ho, J. (2012). Distributed leadership for ICT reform in Singapore. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 87(2), 235-252.
- Teo, C.H. (2001). *Speech by RADM (NS) Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Education and Second Minister for Defence at the Senior Education Officer promotion ceremony 2001 on Saturday, 14 Apr 2001 at 10 a.m. at the Westin Ballroom*. Retrieved from <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view.html?filename=2001041401.htm>.



- Tharman, S. (2005). *Speech by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Education, at the MOE Work Plan Seminar 2004*, Ngee Ann Polytechnic Convention Centre, Thursday 22 September, 10:00 a.m. Retrieved from <Http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2005/sp20050922.htm>.
- O'Donnell, R., & White, G. (2005). Within the accountability era: Principals' instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement. *NASSP Bulletin*, 89(645), 56-71.
- Robinson, V., Lloyd, C., & Rowe, K. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.
- Smith, W.F., & Andrews, R.L. (1989). *Instructional leadership: How principals make a difference*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.
- Spillane, J.P. (2004). Distributed leadership: what's all the hoopla? Working paper, Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research. Retrieved from [Http://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/publications/Spillane\\_DistribLead.pdf](Http://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/publications/Spillane_DistribLead.pdf).
- Spillane J.P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J.B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 23-28.
- Spillane, J.P., & Louis, K.S. (2002). School improvement processes and practices: Professional learning for building instructional capacity. *Yearbook of the national society for the study of education*, 101(1), 83-104.
- Timperley, H.S. (2005). Distributed leadership: Developing theory from practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(4), 395-420.
- Ylimaki, R.M. (2007). Instructional leadership in challenging US schools. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 35(3), 11-19.





**Dr. Salleh Hairon** is Assistant Professor with the Policy and Leadership Studies Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests center on school leadership and teacher learning in communities comprising specifically distributed leadership, teacher leadership, professional learning communities, teacher professional development and action research. E-mail: [hairon.salleh@nie.edu.sg](mailto:hairon.salleh@nie.edu.sg)