

Abstract

Teacher innovation, which is collective introduction and application of novel and useful ideas initiated by teachers, is crucial for inherently rewarding teachers, cultivating creativity in students, sustaining professional learning communities, and differentiating “stuck schools” from “moving schools”. However, despite the well documented merits, open exchange and exploration of creative ideas in schools could entail a risk because other school members, especially school leaders, may interpret and react to the creative ideas and practices differently. Moreover, engagement in deep, integrative dialogue among teachers, which is essential for transforming creative resource inputs into teacher innovation, has been a constant challenge for schools. In contrast to the vast literature on top-down introduction and implementation of innovative projects in schools, little is known about the types of teacher innovation, and even less on how voluntary, bottom-up innovative practices emerge among teachers. Using a two-phase research design, the project team attempts to address three questions: (1) what are the prevalent types of teacher innovation in Hong Kong? (2) how does teacher innovation emerge in schools, and (3) under which conditions are schools more conducive to teacher innovation? Based on extant literature on innovation, a provisional four-type taxonomy of teacher innovation is proposed. The study also draws on the componential theory, the interactional perspective, and school improvement literature, and proposes hypotheses regarding the factors and processes that enable teacher innovation. In the first phase, we will approach innovative primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, and adopt document studies, individual interviews, and focus group interviews to seek a qualitative taxonomy of teacher innovation and an exploratory understanding of factors enabling teacher innovation. The former part of the results will be used to formulate a more sensitive instrument of teacher innovation, and the latter part will be used to refine the hypotheses to be tested in the next phase. In the second phase, the research team will approach approximately 600 teachers from 30 primary schools and 30 secondary schools, and focus on testing a general theoretical model of teacher innovation. This project is expected to generate at least two contributions. First, this project will enable a timely documentation of teacher innovative practices in Hong Kong, which facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the educational achievements as well as challenges in the society. Second, establishing a theoretical model that predicts teacher innovation will lay a useful foundation for future studies on teacher innovation in Hong Kong and elsewhere.