Abstract

There is common neglect of contexts in research and policymaking, while the significance of contextual variations has become increasingly salient. Despite the accumulation of substantial and convincing findings in research, practitioners often find that these findings fail to form practical knowledge with immediate relevance to their schools because researchers strip away context specificity in their discourse. Similarly, a well-intended education policy, such as establishing new professional standards in Hong Kong for local practitioners, could be perceived negatively as accountability measures to force teachers and schools to improve. This study seeks to characterise how teachers and schools manage to tackle contextual challenges professionally by examining a novel theoretical model with nine propositions: 1) Exceptional teachers and schools succeed in their approach to overcome contextual complexity. 2) Quality leadership, teacher trust and commitment reduce goal conflicts in school governance and the uncertainty in professional learning. 3) Teacher learning networks and distributed leadership promote collective capacities in enacting school policies and initiatives. 4) When teachers and schools minimise risk aversions, they will exploit existing strengths and explore opportunities to innovate. 5) Resilience fluctuates when teachers and the school have incompatible goal-conflicts, but hybrid teacher leadership increases the chances of outstanding professional growth. 6) Resilience is a collective professional quality of teachers in schools succeeded in challenging contexts. 7) Professional growth rises robustly if personal and organisational drivers are compatible. 8) Gradual school changes rely on factors applicable to all schools, but profound and radical changes require charismatic figures and critical incidents to make things happen. 9) Wiser individual and collective professional choices result in vigorous professional identities. This study will employ a mixed-method, two-part design to understand professional growth and trajectories. General teacher/principal profiles will be developed first by latent class analysis from an online territory-wide survey of 400-500 teachers and 80-100 principals. Sixty case studies will be created from semi-structured interviews of teachers/principals purposively selected from the online survey, recipients of the annual Chief Executive Teaching Excellence Award, and recommendations of professional associations of practitioners. Additional case studies of four schools with recognised exceptional professional capacities in overcoming adversities will be built on ethnographic observations and school-stakeholder interviews. Data mining strategies, content analysis, and social network analysis will be employed to triangulate mixed data. The narratives and profiles of teachers and schools succeeded to manage contextual constraints and grow professionally will provide knowledge applicable to teacher and school development and enrich policy discourses on professional standards of Hong Kong and elsewhere.