PRINCIPALS’ AND TEACHER LEADERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE AND INTERACTION UNDER CURRENT CHINESE REFORM: A CASE STUDY IN SHANDONG PROVINCE

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Principal leadership, teacher leadership, roles, micropolitics, education reform, interaction, parallel leadership, case study, Mainland China.
Abstract

This study aims to explore the perceptions of principals and teacher leaders regarding their roles and the interaction between these roles in Chinese urban primary schools at the time of unprecedented curriculum reform. This involves a complexity of factors such as the influence of globalisation, the impact of traditional Chinese cultural attitudes towards education through Confucianism, and the implementation requirements of the current education reforms. All of these wider contextual factors help to shape the leadership practices that are described in the study.

A qualitative exploratory case study approach has been utilised to undertake this investigation. The conceptual framework for this study draws upon scholars’ work from Western countries but has been adapted in order to address three research questions for the study’s focus on the context in Shandong province, Mainland China.

Three research questions were addressed: First, what are principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform? Second, what are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform? And finally, what are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact?

With reference to the principals in the study, the findings confirm Gurr’s (2008) comprehensive leadership model relating to four roles, specifically, learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability. Significantly, some sub-roles that emerge from the data are uniquely Chinese. For example, school culture construction is a very deliberate process in which principals and their staff talked openly about and were involved in creating a positive school climate comprising spiritual, material, and system dimensions. Another finding relates to school feature construction. This refers to the process that principals and staff used to make their schools distinctive and different from other schools and included such features as the school’s philosophy and the school-based curriculum.
In seeking to understand the nature of teacher leadership in Chinese primary schools, this research confirms some findings identified in Western literature. For instance, teacher leaders in Shandong province were involved in decision-making, working with parents and community members, undertaking and planning professional development for staff, and mediating between colleagues (Day & Harris, 2002; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Smylie, 1992). However, some new aspects, such as a heightened awareness of the importance of accountability, emerge from this study. The study’s conceptual framework also draws upon some significant insights from micropolitics and, in particular, two core constructs, namely cooperation and conflict (Blase, 1991), to explore the interactions between principals and teacher leaders. In this study, principals and teacher leaders employed exchange and facilitation as two strategies in cooperative processes; and they adopted enforcement and compromise in conflictive processes.

Finally, the study’s findings indicate that principals and teacher leaders were developing new ways of interacting in response to the requirements of significant education reform. Most principals were exercising their power through (Blase, 1991) their teacher leaders who in turn, were working in alignment with their principals to achieve the desired outcomes in schools. It was significant that this form of ‘parallel leadership’ (Crowther, Ferguson, & Ham, 2009) characterised the teacher leadership roles at this period of change to the curriculum in Mainland China.
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: [Date]
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Many nations in the world, including the People’s Republic of China (the PRC), have experienced on-going education reform in response to the impact of economic, political, and cultural forces (Limerick, Cunnington, & Crowther, 2002; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). With the implementation of education reform in Mainland China, principals and teacher leaders have been confronted with new challenges and responsibilities. A large number of research studies (e.g. Gurr, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Crowther, Ferguson, & Ham, 2009) that focus on principal leadership and teacher leadership have been conducted in Western countries, however, research exploring their interrelationship is still lacking. Further, research on principal leadership, teacher leadership, and their interrelationship at primary and secondary levels is scarce in the PRC. This qualitative case study aims to explore the roles of principals and teacher leaders and the interaction between these roles in ten Shandong province primary schools.

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the fundamental elements that comprise the current study. It begins by providing a discussion of globalisation, international education reform, and Chinese education reform, which set the context for the present study. This is followed by the existing literature relevant to this study, which identifies the research gap for this study to fill. The chapter then states research questions, significance of the study, and definitions of some key terms. The research design adopted is also discussed and an overview of the thesis concludes this chapter.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 The context of globalisation

Globalisation has been recognised as a complex social phenomenon and has been the subject of contentious debate over the past decades (Rizvi, 2004). As a result, there is no consensus on definitions of globalisation in the extant literature. In one definition, Held and McGrew (2005) clarify globalisation as “the way in which instantaneous electronic communication erodes the constraints of distance and time on social organisation and interaction” (p. 3). This is comparable with Giddens’ (1990) interpretation that globalisation is “the intensification of world-wide social relations,
which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p. 64). Globalisation has also been defined as “the tendency for similar policies and practices to spread across political, cultural and geographical boundaries” (Dimmock & Walker, 2000, p. 304). The similarities between these definitions centre on the influence of globalisation so that around the world distance and boundaries have been reduced, leading to a closer world-wide social relationship. However, Dimmock and Walker (2000) stress the significance of politics, culture, and geography in the globalising process and recognise that globalisation has stimulated the current push for education reform on an international scale. There is no exception in Mainland China. Therefore, this study adopts Dimmock and Walker’s (2000) definition of globalisation.

It is widely noted that globalisation profoundly affects most aspects of society. It may encompass economic globalisation, political globalisation, demographic globalisation, cultural globalisation, technological globalisation, American globalisation, linguistic globalisation, and environmental globalisation (Bottery, 2006a). Confirmed by Rizvi and Lingard (2010), the first five forms of globalisation have directly or subtly influenced educational institutions and leadership (Bottery, 2006a), whereas the influence of the others is less apparent. These five perspectives on globalisation will now be discussed.

Economic globalisation has been regarded as the most influential factor of globalisation with far-reaching effects (Bottery, 2006a). It is facilitated by unrestricted movement of finance around the world, free-market agreements, and trans-national companies (Bottery, 2006a). Under these circumstances, knowledge is seen as a force to forge economic growth and, as a consequence, bring about a focus on the role of information, technology, and learning in economic performance (OECD, 1996). Accordingly, the advent of the knowledge-based economy requires a new model of education (The World Bank, 2003). For instance, in order to take a predominant position as a competitor on the international economic market, most governments around the world have made efforts to reform or restructure education as a means of developing human capital to improve economic growth (Spring, 2008). Moreover, increasing economic pressures have pushed schools to seek sponsorship from society with the intent of achieving more competitive and effective outcomes.
Political globalisation is closely connected with economic globalisation. It is forged by the transformation of political power from nation states to supra-national bodies such as the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the North American Freedom Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Bottery, 2006a). Political globalisation can also be explained by the dissemination of political ideas, particularly the democratic governance, anti-colonialism, and environmental and feminist issues (Bottery, 2006b). It is noteworthy that democratic concepts that have emerged within the globalising context have given impetus towards democratic changes and a shift towards decentralisation of power (Sayed, 2002). The impact of this decentralisation of power, such as implementation of school-based management, will be felt at the school level. As a result, principals, teacher leaders, and teachers could be offered more opportunities to undertake responsibilities to implement education reforms. Furthermore, democracy has provided a foundation for the development of equal opportunities in education, which will contribute to the popularisation of education and create more equity in society at large (Bottery, 2006b).

Demographic globalisation refers to the problem of ageing populations both in Western and Asian counties (Bottery, 2006a). This phenomenon may lead to lesser investment in education and other services for the young because if the aging population trend increases, the government will expend more money on the services of the aging population instead of education for the younger generation. Bottery (2006a) has summarised several strategies to resolve this problem, such as maintaining population levels, less relying on state pensions, reducing state benefits, and increasing people’s age of retiring.

Cultural globalisation has been classified into two opposed ways: the globalisation of cultural standardisation and the globalisation of cultural variety (Bottery, 2006a). In particular, cultural globalisation implies that culture in Western countries has expanded around the world (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neil, 2004). It seems that multiculturalism emerges in the globalising process. With the influence of multiculturalism, it has become manifest that the similarities and differences of
leadership coexist worldwide (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). For example, there are common expectations of educational policies on principals’ role towards school-based management in the world (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). However, leadership has different characteristics in terms of its meaning and the ways of practice in different social cultures (Walker & Dimmock, 1999). Therefore, in the current study, there is no disputing the significance of Chinese culture to shape theory, policy, and practice within the globalising educational context. Moreover, it is likely that findings of this study could reveal great similarities with those identified in Western countries but also elements uniquely Chinese.

Technological globalisation has been regarded as the increased ability to access information and communicate across the world through emails, mobile phones, computers and the World Wide Web (Bottery, 2006a). The advanced technologies have removed the restriction of space and time to accelerate the flow of capital, people, and ideas worldwide (Held & McGrew, 2005). However, two consequences may occur in education. While technological development has provided educators with more opportunities to disseminate knowledge and facilitate learning, this advantage is not able to be taken by people who cannot afford it (Bottery, 2006a). The disparity between well-developed regions and less-developed regions in education is likely to grow during this process.

Nevertheless, since the 1960s, education systems worldwide have undergone unprecedented changes triggered by increased globalisation (Ka-Ho, 2004). These have been identified in a number of ways including changes to the aims of education, the curriculum, the administration of education, the modes of financing, and the reforms of structures (Law, 2004). During this process, culture, economics, institutions, and education from the West have been substantially adopted in the PRC and other significant countries. Bottery (2006a) highlights the need for educational leaders to pay more attention to the challenges and changes that arise in the globalising environment. However, as Goh (2009) has argued, it should not be assumed that Western cultural, institutional, and educational practices can be transferred without modification into the Singaporean context, which would also hold true for the PRC.
1.1.2 International education reform

For Fullan (2007), global educational change can be divided into two stages, involving top-down change and bottom-up change. The former is carried out mainly by governments who ignore the efforts of schools and teachers, while the latter focuses on the central role of local forces in the reform process. Similarly, global curriculum reform has followed the same trend—top-down (from the 1960s to early 1970s), bottom-up (from the 1970s to early 1980s) and partnerships (from the 1980s to 1990s) (Macdonald, 2003). As both strategies are characterised by their own advantages and disadvantages, Fullan (2007) proposes a new strategy to achieve successful change for the 2000s which combines both centralised and decentralised forms of governance models. It should be acknowledged, however, that in speaking thus of ‘international education reform’ there remains considerable difference in the degree to which these changes have been adopted in, for example, many less developed parts of the third world.

Since the late 1980s, then, there have been substantial educational changes that have culminated in the latest round of ‘international’ reforms. According to Cheng (2002), these changes include support for social development; utilisation of new management and information techniques; emphasis on educational quality, school accountability and performance; privatisation and marketisation of education; a shift to school-based management; involvement of parents and community in school-based decision-making; and continuous development of schools and staff.

At the school level, principals and teachers have been influenced by these ongoing reforms and the nature, complexity and requirements of their roles have changed dramatically in the last two decades. In response to the pressures of education reform, principals have expanded their roles from traditional managers or administrators to leaders, including instructional leaders, change leaders, transformational leaders, and leaders of a learning community (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Duke, 1999). The quality of leadership reflected in these principal roles is assumed to be a decisive factor in promoting school development (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).
While facing ongoing challenges in their work, the education reform agenda has created new opportunities for teachers to become empowered by exercising initiative and collaborating with principals and other teachers (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers have increasing opportunities to participate in collaboration, decision-making, and development of school goals (Churchill & Williamson, 1999). Thus in the last two decades, they have begun to take on leadership roles which are essential to push forward school reforms (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). When principals and teacher leaders work together, their interaction becomes particularly significant.

### 1.1.3 Chinese education reform

Following the restructuring of the economy, politics and culture in the PRC, a series of Chinese education reforms have been progressively initiated since 1985. In the field of basic public education, there has been a process of transforming universal education to quality education during the last two decades. In this transition, the new curriculum reform has become central to improving educational outcomes in the PRC.

In an effort to respond to the influences of globalisation and to reform an outdated traditional notion of curriculum, new education reforms drawing on the conceptual framework enunciated above were launched in 2001 and thereafter. This agenda is based on two main policies: *Decisions on the Deepening of Education Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality Education* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 1999) and *Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001a) issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE). After three sequential stages—preparation, experiment, and popularisation—a new curriculum system was introduced for students commencing their first year of primary and secondary schools from 2005 (Guan & Meng, 2007).

This curriculum reform calls for ‘quality education’ which refers to the all-round development of students (e.g. moral quality, intellectual ability, and physical fitness), instead of the previous emphasis on “instilling” and “training” (Zhong, 2006, p. 372). As the largest curriculum reform in the educational history of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), this initiative has led to systematic curriculum changes such as the development of new curriculum concepts (e.g. student-centred pedagogy), new
curriculum objectives (e.g. the all-round development of student), and a three-level curriculum management system (i.e. the levels of State, localities, and schools) (Jin, 2003). The combined model of a top-down and bottom-up approach has been adopted to ensure the new curriculum is fully implemented.

Under this new system, executing the orders from the Ministry of Education (Chinese government department) is no longer the main requirement for principals. Principals are now empowered to assume more responsibilities and share that power through decision-making with staff. They are intended to be more active and show initiative in leading their schools in the fields of curriculum development, vision, and school culture to bring about reform (cf. Goh, 2009). In order to adapt to the new curriculum reform, teachers are also expected to become “leaders in curriculum, instruction, school restructuring and professional development” (Chen, 2007, p. III). Therefore, in the current context, the enhancement of principal leadership and teacher leadership has been viewed as a way of enabling effective curriculum reform in the PRC.

1.1.4 Current studies on principal leadership, teacher leadership, and their interaction

Currently, school-level leadership has been considered as crucial to prompting education reform in schools on a worldwide scale. Glatthorn (2000) asserts that effective and powerful leadership executed by principals determines the success of curriculum reform. Additionally, since the mid-1980s, researchers have also gradually emphasised the significance of teacher leadership in improving education reform (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003). However, limited research conducted on the interaction between principal leadership and teacher leadership has been recognised by researchers as key forces for school improvement (e.g. Schmoker, 1999; Silins & Mulford, 2002).

One way of trying to understand the nature of principal leadership in the current context is via the roles principals play. Of the number of research studies on principal leadership roles, two key studies are highlighted here, since one provides a comprehensive model and the other one presents an international overview. After interviewing 10 principals and 30 teachers from Australian government secondary
schools for his doctoral research, Gurr (2008) provides a model with four comprehensive principal leadership roles, namely “learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability” (p. 13). Gurr’s model is comprehensive and includes fourteen themes to illustrate the key principal leadership practices based on his empirical study. Thus this leadership model forms part of the conceptual framework utilised in this study (and discussed in Chapter 3).

Since 2001, the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP) has been carried out to explore successful principal leadership in eight nations, including China. Based on the first-stage results of this project, Day and Leithwood (2007) identify five main themes of successful principal leadership, including “sustaining passionate commitment and personal accountability, maintaining moral purpose and managing tensions and dilemmas, being other-centred and focusing on learning and development, making emotional and rational investment, emphasising the personal and the functional” (p. 171). These themes suggest that principals are undertaking broad and complex roles in changing educational environment.

Because of the increasing workload that principals experience under educational restructuring, it is impossible for one principal to effectively assume all the leadership functions in school (Fullan, 2007). Hence, the quantum of tasks should be completed through distributing more leadership responsibilities among teacher leaders (Barth, 2001). Under these circumstances, more and more researchers are exploring the nature of teacher leadership for the purpose of bringing about education reforms.

The writing and research on teacher leadership has developed over the last two decades. Yet to date, there is no overarching theory (Harris, 2003). There have indeed been many studies undertaken that have focused on the roles of teacher leadership, the effects of teacher leadership, and the development of teacher leadership in Western countries such as the USA, UK and Australia (e.g. Crowther et al., 2009; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Six key roles that have been synthesised from research studies regarding teacher leaders’ roles include participating in decision-making (Muijs & Harris, 2006), parent and community involvement (Lambert, 1998), teachers’ professional development (Silva et al.,
2000), collaboration (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997), support of other teachers (Smylie & Denny, 1990), and connection with other teachers (Day & Harris, 2002). Each of these roles forms a part of the conceptual framework (discussed in Chapter 3). An important message from the research is that teacher leaders are actors who make a very important contribution to teacher development and learning (Harris, 2003).

In addition, some research has demonstrated that it is critical to establish an understanding of how principals and teacher leaders interact and work together to realise school improvement against this background of education reform. For example, Schmoker (1999) has argued that effective school changes will occur when principals and teacher leaders work together in a positive team relationship. Furthermore, it can be argued that student outcomes can be improved, when principals distribute leadership to teacher leaders who are empowered to work in their areas of expertise (Silins & Mulford, 2002). A systematic delineation has been offered by Crowther et al. (2009) who advanced the theory of ‘parallel leadership’ to comprehend the relationship between principals and teacher leaders. This refers to the way teacher leaders work in parallel with principal leaders in a complementary fashion to achieve common goals (Goh, 2009).

It is important to underscore the dynamic nature of the interaction between principals and teacher leaders as a two-way process. In the existing literature, findings indicate that the principal’s role is an essential factor in determining teacher leadership (Crowther et al., 2009; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), including supporting (Daley, 2002) and constraining (Blase, 1993) staff. Similarly, teacher leadership has also been recognised as a fundamental factor in positively influencing principals’ work in schools (Anderson, 2004; Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006; Johnson, 2006). The nature of principal-teacher leader interaction has been increasingly emphasised by the Western academic community. However, it has received limited attention in Mainland China.

### 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Hence, this study seeks to identify and understand the nature of principal leadership roles and teacher leadership roles within the current PRC education system during a period of reform. In particular, it investigates the interdependent relationship
between principal leadership and teacher leadership in order to focus an understanding of ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ they interact with each other in a period of change. The three central research questions for this study are:

1. What are principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform?
2. What are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform?
3. What are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact?

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Given the previous discussion, this study seeks to understand principal leadership, teacher leadership and their interaction in primary schools in Mainland China. The study is significant for three main reasons.

Firstly, as indicated before, the research on principals and teacher leader roles in Mainland China is scarce. In the academic community of the PRC, research on educational leadership such as principal and teacher leadership has been mainly undertaken with small and unrelated studies; hence, thus far there is no comprehensive body of research in this field.

Secondly, research that has explored the interaction between principals and teacher leaders globally and specifically in Mainland China is limited. Although some research studies have been conducted on the interaction of principals and teacher leaders, little is known about the detailed relationship between them. How principals influence teacher leadership roles (Mangin, 2007) and how formal teacher leaders, that is teachers with officially designated positions within the school hierarchy, affect principals’ practices, has yet to be substantially investigated (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Moreover, most research studies have focused on the influence of principal leadership on teacher leadership, yet little evidence has been offered regarding teacher leaders’ effects on principals. Hence, this study aims to address these research gaps by asking both principals and teacher leaders in Mainland China to explore their understandings of their role and their interaction.
Finally, given that educational reforms in China require new roles and relationships for principals and teacher leaders, a study that considers both principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of these new roles is both timely and relevant. It is anticipated that the study’s findings will illuminate the current thinking of principals and formal teacher leaders regarding the nature of their work during a period of unprecedented curriculum reform.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.4.1 Principal leadership

In this study, principal leadership is defined as the process whereby principals influence the attitudes, beliefs, and especially the behaviours of one or more teachers and students to secure commitment, energy and initiatives from them with the purpose of accomplishing school improvement in the changing environment. In the present study, principal leadership consists of four extensive leadership roles: “learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability” (Gurr, 2008, p. 13).

1.4.2 Teacher leadership

In the current study, the basic notion of teacher leadership is grounded in York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) conception, in which teacher leadership is defined as

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. Such leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organisational development. (pp. 287-288)

Furthermore, the definition of teacher leadership that is used in this study is teacher leadership that is ‘formal’ in nature. Based on a synthesis of the relevant research, teacher leadership is said to constitute six roles in this study: participation in decision-making, parents and community involvement, professional development, collaboration, support, and connection.
1.4.3 Teacher leaders

Based on the definition of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), the current study defines teacher leaders as teachers who are formal leaders and experts, who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice. In this research, formal teacher leaders are considered as those who exercise formal teacher leadership in formal teacher leadership positions.

1.4.4 Roles

This study is interested in exploring the notion of role according to the perceptions of both school principals and formal teacher leaders in Mainland China. The term ‘role’ comes from role theory which refers to the study of “characteristic behaviour patterns or roles” (Biddle, 1986, p.67). In this study, the meaning of role refers to a pattern of behaviour that reflects that of people who occupy similar positions (Biddle, 1986). In other words, roles refer to ‘functions’ performed by educators who occupy social positions within particular contexts. In this study, an important assumption is that both principals and teacher leaders occupy social positions of leadership within their respective school communities.

1.4.5 Micropolitics

Micropolitics, which will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3, provide a most useful frame for addressing the interactions between principals and teacher leaders. Its focus is on the way individuals use power and influence to achieve their goals (Blase, 1991). Blase and Anderson (1995) describe the three major means by which this is sought: through coercion and control (power over), facilitation (power through), and empowerment and shared leadership (power with). Another way of viewing these processes is to contrast the usage of cooperative and conflictive processes (Blase, 1991). These strategies frame the daily interactions between principals and teacher leaders.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, a qualitative investigation was undertaken to understand the perceptions of both primary school principals and primary teacher leaders regarding their role. As primary schooling is the basic foundation for education in Mainland
China and it directly influences the development of students, principals and teacher leaders from primary schools only were targeted. Moreover, one province, Shandong province, was the area in Mainland China from which participants were drawn.

An exploratory descriptive case study design (Merriam, 1998) that draws upon both semi-structured interviews and document analysis was used to explore the research questions. A stratified purposeful sample of ten principals and ten formal teacher leaders with different characteristics (e.g., gender, age) from Shandong Province formed part of the sample. All of the questions were translated into Chinese to enable full participation by the Chinese participants, who responded in Chinese. Their responses were translated into English prior to data analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse data so as to identify principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles, and their interaction.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of this research, including the statement of the problem, the research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of terms, research design, and limitations. In order to investigate these research questions, this thesis has been organised into seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the current context of Mainland China under current reform. Chapter 3 presents a literature review, as well as the study’s conceptual framework, relevant to principal leadership, teacher leadership and their relationship. Chapter 4 explains the research design for this study. Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate findings and discussion of principal leadership roles and teacher leadership roles in Chinese schools. Chapter 7 reports the discussion and conclusion of the research study.
Chapter 2: The Context of Mainland China

2.1 OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 explores the broader social and educational context of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). This broader detail is necessary because it is important to recognise the ways in which the past has shaped, limited, or enabled the processes and practices of the present. This means examining the ways in which contemporary reforms are modified or refracted through earlier cultural and institutional assumptions. This chapter begins by discussing some of the salient features of traditional Chinese culture as a means of illuminating the important traditional role of education within Chinese society, and providing significant insights into the concepts and implementation of the recent education reforms in Mainland China. The next part of the chapter provides an overview of contemporary Mainland China, starting with 1949 as the year that marks the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. This discussion provides an important backdrop for considering the nature and far-reaching impact of education reforms that have affected Mainland China since 1985. Several important policies are identified and discussed here, because they provide a relevant context in which to view the changing roles and work undertaken by school principals and teachers.

2.2 TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE AND EDUCATION

China has one of the oldest and most continuous civilisations with a recorded history of approximately 5000 years. In ancient China, its ideological culture which consists of Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, and Buddhism (Zhang, 2004) has provided a foundation for understanding the enduring values of Chinese culture. Since the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.–220 A.D.), Confucianism has been considered as the state orthodoxy and the dominant official influence on the culture and the education approach in the country, which has lasted two millennia (Tu, 1990). Today, although traditional Chinese culture has been challenged by Western culture, Confucianism continues to exert a profound influence on Chinese society, Chinese education, and Chinese people (Lee, 1996) and, for this reason, is discussed here. In order to obtain
a deeper understanding of education in current Mainland China, the following section considers the cultural and educational aspects of traditional China.

2.2.1 Traditional Chinese culture

Confucianism was initially derived from the ethics and philosophy of Confucius (551 B.C.–479 B.C.), the famous Chinese educator, philosopher, and political thinker. There is a complex system of his educational, moral, social, political, and philosophical thoughts recorded in “The Analects of Confucius” (Lun Yu) (Lai, 2008, p. 19). It is a collection of aphorisms presented through dialogues, with the aim of maintaining social solidarity, harmony, and order by “cultivating a sense of human caring in politics and society” (Tu, 1990, p.116). Following Confucius’ thoughts, the core principles of Confucianism in government, family rituals, and social ethics have accumulated during the past 2500 years.

Two prominent ingredients in Confucianism closely related to Chinese education are illustrated here. The first one is known as encouraging individual people to build virtues and then developing a morally binding state. According to Confucianism, there are five virtues (Wu Chang) including benevolence (Ren), righteousness (Yi), ritual (Li), wisdom (Zhi), and integrity (Xin) (Dong, 1989). The principles of the first three virtues tied directly to each other are proposed in The Analects of Confucius. Benevolence (Ren) as the core of Confucianism focuses on “to love all humanity” (Lai, 2008, p. 22), which is regarded as the foundation of being a human being from the moral perspective. To be specific, benevolence has the sense of “empathy or kindness between human beings” (Mou, 2008, p. 121). Thus, harmonious and healthy social relationships are able to be established among people. For Confucius, the virtue of benevolence (Ren) should be particularly adopted by rulers who should govern their subjects by benevolence instead of force.

Righteousness (Yi), linked to the key value of benevolence (Ren), emphasises the need for “holding fast to a developed sense for what is right and respond with flexibility to the situations that present themselves” (Mou, 2008, p. 123). It may simply mean that what is ethically best to do is based on one’s status and role in a certain context, as Confucius did not provide standard rules to guide behaviours
Thus righteousness (Yi) has been considered as the standard of moral behaviours. This virtue lies in contrast to the behaviours such as self-interest.

The concept of ritual (Li) is also closely related to righteousness (Yi) and benevolence (Ren), addressing the appropriate forms of social interaction—paying attention, consideration, and respect towards others in the lived environment (Lai, 2008). As indicated in *The Analects of Confucius*, ritual (Li) is variously understood as “religious ritual”, “the comportment of the cultivated person”, and “behavioural propriety” in people’s communication (Lai, 2008, p. 25). Ritual (Li) builds different hierarchical relationships, such as between “children and parents”, “subject and ruler”, and “prince and minister” (Lai, 2008, p. 25), in which people exhibit appropriate form of behaviours in different standards. Thus one aim of Confucian philosophy is to develop a balanced and hierarchical society through various rituals in which individuals respect their elders and demonstrate filial piety by observing ritual traditions.

Wisdom (Zhi) and trustworthiness (Xin) as the expansion of the first three virtues have been developed by other Confucian scholars in ancient China. According to Confucianism, wisdom or knowledge (Zhi) has been required to develop as the foundation of achieving the other virtues. People cannot be born with Wisdom (Zhi); rather they gain it through continuous learning about things, such as history, poetry, and ritual. For Confucius, wisdom is defined as “know[ing] other people” (Rainey, 2010, p. 31). Thus wisdom can only be properly applied when people know the character of those with whom they are interacting. Integrity (Xin) means that the thought, speech, and actions should be closely linked to each other. It is aligned to honesty which emphasises that people need to tell the truth and keep their promises.

In summary, Confucianism expects every person to become cultivated with good virtues and, as a result, be able to contribute to a morally binding society (Guthrie, 2008; Redding, 1990; Zhi, 2005). Five virtues (Wu Chang) have exerted a great impact on the purpose of education over a long history and are still regarded as the fundamental values needed to cultivate children to be qualified citizens in the modern society. Particularly, moral education emphasised by Confucius is still a core part in the current school education. It refers to teaching students about the right way
of acting as humans. Implementing moral education is a process of forming excellent moral character of students through cultivating the five virtues. Under the current Chinese education reform, school members, to some extent, are influenced by the principles of five virtues (Wu Chang) in the process of communication. For example, principals and teachers are expected to care for colleagues, meet the requirements of their respective role, continuously acquire knowledge, and trust each other in their daily work. These practices are likely to establish a harmonious school environment based on Confucian beliefs.

The other ingredient in Confucianism is called five relationships (Wu Lun) guided by the principles of five virtues (Wu Chang) discussed above. These relationships are a reflection of hierarchical and harmonious social relations between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend (Tu, 1998). Life is subdivided into the five relationships in which a person becomes a member of a family, the state, and the world. Following the explanation of Confucius and related sources, trust and duty are emphasised to establish a proper ruler-subject relationship. Rulers should be benevolent to subjects, while subjects are supposed to conform and be loyal to the governing of the state. In a father-son relationship, there should be kindness in the father, and filial piety in the son. The husband-wife relationship requires a wife to listen to and comply with the wishes of her husband. In the elder brother-younger brother relationship, the elder brother is expected to take care of the younger brother who in turn treats him with respect. The last relationship expresses the spirit of mutuality based on faith in a friendship.

Hierarchy as the dominant theme in Confucian ethics is applicable to the first four relationships which are characterised as dominant-subservient, except for the last one (Wang, 2008). Therefore, people are expected to respect and obey those who hold higher status and those people who are authority figures (Cheng, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Here it is also significant to note that Confucian beliefs in the importance of education and learning by moral example were reinforced by the central examination system. Again, according to Spence (1990, p. 60), “the domination of the examination system by Confucianism and the restriction of the bureaucracy to males meant that women generally received little or no education”.

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This situation remained unchanged until 1949 when Mao introduced universal education (Ayscough, 1975).

Confucius believed that if ritual (Li) was spread through the five relationships, the social order would be ideal (Hopfe & Woodward, 2008). Due to the existence of five relationships (Wu Lun), a collectivist society has been constructed through a morally binding network amongst its social members in China (Redding, 1990). Thus, within a social or organisational context, Confucianism as the dominant philosophical approach to culture has exercised significant influence on the development of Chinese management and leadership practices over its long history. According to traditional Chinese culture, leadership is highly valued in society and exercised by leaders according to strict moral codes (Wong, 2001). Wang and Mao (1996) conclude that there are four enduring values in traditional Chinese culture. These values comprise respect for authority and hierarchy, emphasis on collectivism and harmony, worship of the traditions, and importance of self-cultivating ethics and morality. These aspects of Chinese traditional culture continue to exert an influence on the contemporary practice of educational leadership and management (Bush & Qiang, 2002). In particular, the hierarchical structure in school and the authority of principals may shape the form of interaction between principals and teachers similar to the ruler-subject relationship. The role of education in traditional Chinese culture is now addressed in full detail.

2.2.2 The role of education in traditional Chinese culture

As discussed above, education and knowledge have been highly valued for more than two thousand years in China’s culture (Cleverley, 1991), although the exclusion of women in formal education until recent times must be acknowledged. Most education in Mainland China has been influenced by Confucianism as it is one of the strongest and most significant influences in Chinese culture (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). For Confucius, such education does not only mean knowledge or learning, but the cultivation of individuals. As noted previously, then, to understand recent reforms in education in Mainland China, a more detailed account must be taken of the enduring effects of these influences. Thus what follows provides a brief overview of education in traditional Chinese culture.
Confucius placed much emphasis on the important role of education within society (Feng, 2000). According to Confucius, education was not only important for the development of personal virtues, but also for the political purpose of cultivating individuals to serve the state as officials. In order to achieve the purpose of self-cultivation (i.e. form an excellent character), it is necessary to establish people’s correct ethical and moral values. Each cultivated person, then, endeavours to contribute to the harmonious family and the prosperous state. Therefore, the self-cultivation of each person is the basis of social order which provides the foundation of political stability and universal peace (Tu, 1990).

Regarding the object of education, one of the most famous Confucian proverbs refers to ‘education without distinction’ (You Jiao Wu Lei). It is based on the presumption that every [male] student is educable (Lee, 1996) regardless of their social class, wealth, or intelligence. Thus, a belief was held by Confucius that everyone [i.e. every male] could attain development through education. Confucius is recognised as advocating the openness of education, being the first person to address universal male education for all people, (Rainey, 2010). Confucius himself did not inherently denigrate women; however, he placed them at the lower end of the patriarchal family structure (Ayscough, 1975). Traditionally, only women from wealthy families could be educated if their fathers allowed it. In the late Ming period, women were barred by law from taking the state examinations; those from wealthy families learned to write classical poetry from their fathers or brothers (Ebrey, 2003). Before Christian missionaries arrived in China, no formal system of education existed for girls (Ebrey, 2003). By the 1880s, missionaries established some schools for girls (Ebrey, 2003). Similarly, “the first female students were [only] admitted to Peking University in 1920” (Spence, 1990, p. 311). Widespread changes did not occur on a widespread basis until the Communists won power in 1949. With these caveats, this principle of education is reflected in the concept of educational equality in contemporary society, including popularising compulsory education, supporting children in poor areas to access education, and enlarging university enrolment.

Significantly, Confucianism in ancient China required students to master six basic skills or arts for comprehensive knowledge and full development. It refers to ‘six arts’ (Liu Yi) which consist of ritual (Li), music (Yue), archery (She), charioting (Yu),
writing (Shu), and calculations (Shu) (Hall & Ames, 1987). A person who performs well in these skills is recognised as a perfect ‘gentleman’. The ‘Six arts’ encompass moral education, scientific and technological education, and skill training, in which moral education is placed in the leading position. These are said to contribute to students’ all-round development (i.e., moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetics, and labour development) proposed in the current education reform in Mainland China.

Confucius also developed various teaching methods. For example, he stressed the need to cater for individual differences and he ‘taught students according to their talents, abilities, and interests’ (Yin Cai Shi Jiao). The difference between students was recognised so that each student’s personality could be fully developed. Nowadays, this principle has been applied to the way of both cultivating students’ individuality and strengths and achieving their overall development. During this process, it is likely to strengthen students’ sense of creativity through stimulating their creative desires and motivation.

Moreover, Confucius expected teachers to grasp the best opportunity to help students’ learning. This refers to the principle that a ‘teacher would not inspire students until they thought hard but still could not figure out the questions; [a] teacher would not enlighten students until they wanted to explain but could not explain well’ (Bu Fen Bu Qi, Bu Fei Bu Fa). The concept of heuristic education has been reflected in this teaching process in which Confucius believed that students were able to achieve extensive knowledge through consciously thinking. Arguably, this value is still relevant in current reforms. Students are required to take over the initiative in learning, while teachers can only play a leading role, such as timely inspiring, rather than instilling.

Additionally, teachers occupied a special position in the educational philosophy of Confucianism. The traditional values of ‘respecting teachers’ (Zun Shi) can be traced back to Confucius. According to Confucianism, the role of teachers as knowledge transmitters and as moral role models for children has been deeply implanted into Chinese schooling for thousands of years. The implication of this view is that the teacher-student relationship is hierarchical in nature. Thus, the learner is a passive recipient and required to memorise the content delivered by the teacher (Pratt, 1992).
Such teaching and learning traditions lead teachers to be very formal and serious, and require students to respect the teachers’ authority without question (Su & Su, 1994). While the ongoing Chinese curriculum reform has been carried out to modify such hierarchical conceptions influenced by Confucianism to more democratic principles influenced by Western values in the process of education, it is worth noting that current reforms also continue to reflect much of the underlying assumptions proposed in Confucian thought. Indeed, Confucian philosophical principles, including those on educational leadership, have informed the distinctive character of Chinese education and the mode of organising teaching and learning (Serpell & Hatano, 1997).

2.3 THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) (SINCE 1949)

Despite the principles enunciated above, there have been substantial, indeed at times radical, shifts in educational assumptions and practices since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, for example, that females in China have the right to the same education as males and that the education of women is part of national capacity building. As the roles of principals and teachers are changing in the wider context, a brief history of society and education reform in Mainland China is presented here. Following an introduction to the PRC, the nation’s recent political, economic and cultural contexts are reviewed to provide the necessary larger framework within which educational changes have been situated. Five phases of educational development are reviewed to provide an overview of the context in which primary teachers and principals work today.

2.3.1 A brief introduction to the People’s Republic of China (PRC)

On 1 October 1949, the first leader Mao Zedong formally proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The new government embarked on legislation to address the longstanding inequality of women in Chinese society. For example, the Marriage Law of 1950 guaranteed women equality in marriage, divorce and property ownership, whilst the 1954 Constitution emphasised gender equity (Spence, 1990). Women’s rights to education were guaranteed in 1949 by Mao (Ayscough, 1975).
The PRC is the world’s most populous nation with over 1.3 billion people, approximately a fifth of the world’s population. The capital city is Beijing. As a large united multi-national state, the PRC is composed of 56 ethnic groups, in which Han Chinese account for 91.59% of the overall Chinese population. With such a large and diverse population, the nature and quality of education and its contribution to national unity is clearly significant. While this literature review considers the wider social and educational context of the PRC, for pragmatic reasons, the focus of this study is on Shandong province in the PRC. The term Mainland China is used here to differentiate from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

The PRC is a socialist republic ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under a single-party system. In order to administer the large population in a wide area, there are six administrative levels of government and these are the state, province, prefecture, county, township, and village. The CCP has also organised various agencies at central and local levels to administer the whole country. The highest organisation of state power is the National People's Congress (NPC) which has its provincial/local people’s congresses. The State Council, largely synonymous with the Central People's Government, is the highest executive organ of state power. The Ministry of Education (MOE), renamed from the State Commission of Education (SCE) in 1998, is one of the central government agencies under the State Council responsible for Mainland China’s educational undertakings and language work. Furthermore, there are different educational administration agencies organising schools at each level of regional and local governments.

Since the implementation of market-based economic reforms and open-door policy in 1978, the PRC has achieved rapid economic progress and dramatic social change. Education reform has played a significant role in this process. Currently, the PRC occupies a prominent position as an economic and political force in an increasingly globalised context. Its importance is reflected through its roles as the third largest economic entity internationally, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a member of several multilateral organisations (e.g., WTO, APEC), one of the oldest civilisations, and having the World’s largest standing army. Under these circumstances, education has developed rapidly and become a key force promoting economic development and social progress.
2.3.2 The social and cultural context: economy, politics, and culture in the PRC

Thus, in order to understand education policy and practice in contemporary Mainland China, it is necessary to consider the wider social context of the PRC. The discussion that follows considers some important features of the economic, political and cultural contexts during two significant time-frames: from 1949 to 1976 and from 1977 to present.

2.3.2.1 Chinese society from 1949-1976

Chinese economy from 1949 to 1976

When the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) inherited a ravaged economy after a long period of war. In order to restore economic life and production, Mao Zedong as the leader constructed a centrally planned economic system following the model adopted by the Soviet Union. Under this system, nearly all economic activities were directed and controlled by the central government, such as prices, resources allocation (Morrison, 2007), heavy industry, private economy, and corrective farming (Hsu, 1995). Given the aim of economic self-sufficiency, foreign trade and interaction was limited and grew at an extremely low rate.

Under Mao’s leadership, those strategies adopted with the aim of economic development and social stability, resulted in a devastating disruption to the country’s economy (Lin, 1994) and educational institutions. For example, although the First Five-Year Plan (FYP, 1953-1958) successfully promoted economic growth, the subsequent Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the creation of People’s Communes brought disastrous economic consequences. Furthermore, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was launched to “reinforce the destruction of bourgeois economic and political power by destroying bourgeois influence in the cultural realm” (Pepper, 1991, p. 25) including educational processes and practices. This caused widespread social and political upheaval, and it led to long-term damage for the country’s economic and education system (Riskin, 1987). During this period, the PRC lagged behind Western countries in terms of economic performance and developments in science and technology.
Given its long standing tradition of centralist government, the new focus of government for 1949 in the PRC was dominated by the CCP. Since then CCP has been the sole Chinese political party with consequent extensive control of education, industry, commerce, agriculture, and ministry (Hunter & Sexton, 1999).

As the first leader of the PRC, Mao Zedong stressed the centralisation of state power and adopted a closed-door policy to consolidate the new regime. The keys of political activities were identified as political command and class struggles (Wong & Mok, 1995). Socialist rule, as espoused by Mao, has long been self-legitimated by communist ideology (Perry & Selden, 2003) and characterised as the pursuit of equality and the state intervention in social life (Jiang, 1992), including political and cultural re-education. For instance, in order to achieve the control of the whole society, all places of employment were organised into work units (danwei) in urban areas while all peasants were settled into communes (gongshe) in rural areas (Guthrie, 2008). The activities of the members were reported by their organisations to the authorities so as to achieve control.

Under Mao’s leadership, the centralised political culture dominated nearly all aspects of people’s lives through direct and indirect means. China’s past history was criticised, thus campaigns were conducted to eliminate religions and destroy traditional Confucian values. At this time, Communism and Maoism became the centre of Chinese culture. Feudalism, capitalism and imperialism which were regarded as the threat to the Communist regime were eliminated. Free discussion and liberal thinking were inhibited and, as Qi and Tang (2004) assert, personal dignity and individual interests were not respected. As noted, the Cultural Revolution intensified the height of these cultural campaigns, and over its ten years impacted negatively on Mainland China’s education system. Male and female scholars and teachers were discriminated against and subjected to ‘re-education’ during the cultural revolution (Xi & Gao, 2005).
2.3.2.2 Chinese society from 1977 to present

Chinese economy from 1977 to present

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution in late 1976, a new era in Chinese modern economic history commenced. From 1978, the new leader, Deng Xiaoping, launched an open-door policy and focused on economic development to restructure Chinese society and economy. Dramatic economic reforms were gradually carried out with the overall goal of achieving the Four Modernisations in industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defence. Under these reforms, the PRC underwent a fundamental transformation from a planned economy to a socialist market economy. Some economic control was devolved to provincial and local governments that were encouraged to develop their regional and local economy in the light of free market principles, rather than the commands from central government (Morrison, 2007). Reforms in education would follow.

The open-door policy and economic reforms contributed to a tremendous growth of economy and people’s income over the past three decades (1978–2007) in the PRC. For example, measured in US dollars, the PRC’s GDP increased from $53.6 billion in 1978 to $4.4 trillion in 2007 while its per capita income increased from $190 in 1978 to $2360 in 2007 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008). Since the PRC formally joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, the Chinese economy has reached an unprecedented scale and accelerated integration into the global economy (Tong & Wong, 2008). The PRC has become one of the most important countries in economy in the world. Changes in curriculum and pedagogy are now seen as a necessary concomitant to China’s participation in a globalising economy.

Chinese politics from 1977 to present

Wide-ranging changes in political structures and processes were required to facilitate economic reforms under the new leadership of Deng in the PRC (Mackerras, Taneja, & Young, 1993). The core work of the CCP has shifted from the class struggles of the Mao era to focusing on economic development and modernisation in order to resolve the contradictions between people’s increasing material expectations and cultural needs and the underperforming economy. Since then, subsequent Chinese leaders have insisted on this political strategy to push for the establishment of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ (Deng, 1984).
In order to stimulate local governments’ enthusiasm to promote economic growth, the political system has been transformed from centralisation of state power to more democratic and autonomous regional and local governments (Guan & Meng, 2007). Although the CCP still dominates the administration of the whole country, the decentralisation of state control over daily management has become a central feature of the present Chinese society (Guthrie, 2008). For example, local communities and individuals have been encouraged to assume more responsibilities in the provision of welfare service.

With the development of a market-based economy and a greater openness to the outside world, the single unifying ideology of the state has become relaxed and mixed ideologies have emerged in the PRC. Here, ideology refers to “the ways in which signs, meanings, and values help to reproduce a dominant social power; but it can also denote any significant conjuncture between discourse and political interests” (Eagleton, 1991, p.221). Three major value systems have gradually formed the configuration of post-Mao society, which consists of a mixture of “traditional Confucianism, egalitarian socialism and free market ideology” (Wong & Mok, 1995, p. 8). Meanwhile, since 1978 the influence of ideas about democracy and human rights has gained increasing credibility, perhaps indicating more movement towards the consolidation of civil society and educational reforms.

*Chinese culture from 1977 to present*

Since the opening up policy of the PRC in 1978, some areas of culture and life have been less restricted by state ideological and political control (Louie, 2008). Accordingly, traditional Chinese culture has been revived and some significant aspects of traditional Chinese values have been reintegrated into the national value system to rectify the damage caused by the Cultural Revolution, most notably, in the education system. As the PRC gradually became more open to the outside world, Chinese culture was influenced by Western culture as globalisation increased (Liu, 2004). New Chinese multi-cultures have emerged due to the combination of diverse global and Western cultures, Chinese traditional cultures, and Chinese socialism.
2.3.3 Education in the PRC

As identified above, China has a long-standing tradition of respecting and valuing education. However, it was not until the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, that the education of women and men received equal priority. Furthermore, the new Communist government recognised the significance of education as a core component of national development. In that process, the education of both men and women was considered to be part of national capacity building. During the past five decades, a series of education reforms have been launched in order to provide a solid foundation for economic growth and social progress. Among these reforms have been changes to the roles of principals and teachers in primary schools. Although some problems have emerged as a consequence of the reforms to education, Chinese education has made remarkable achievements. In order to provide an overview of the major education reforms since 1949, five phases have been identified to interpret particular educational policies together with their effects on the changing roles of primary principals and teachers.

2.3.3.1 Phase one: education from 1949 to 1976

In the newly established People’s Republic of China, education was under the strict control of the central state with the political orientation it prescribed (Ngok, 2007). After the indiscriminate application of the previous Soviet Union’s educational model in the 1950s, Mao Zedong decided to establish an education system with Chinese characteristics which also addressed the traditional gender factors that had neglected the education of girls. Until the demise of Mao, the aim of education focused on serving proletarian politics and integrating with productive labour (Mao, 1967). Therefore, the government strengthened political and ideological education, emphasised the connection between farms, factories and schools, as well as added productive labour as part of the curriculum in all the educational institutions. During this phase, although the universalisation of primary school education rapidly increased, educational quality was very poor due to low economic development and insufficient financial support (X. Wang, 2003).

During the decade of the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), class struggle was prevalent in schools at all levels. Teachers were viewed as class enemies and academic knowledge was devalued, thus students were expected to learn from the
wider social movement and productive labour. Throughout this period, all educational institutions were at a standstill and the entrance examinations for secondary schools and universities were cancelled. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese education suffered a great loss on each level (X. Wang, 2003).

2.3.3.2 Phase two: education from 1977 to 1984

After the death of Mao and the collapse of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the dramatic social changes to the economy and in politics and culture brought about rapid change in education. Since 1978, the focus of the Chinese government switched from class struggles to economic reconstruction. Consequently, the emphasis on Chinese education shifted from its previous political orientation during the Mao era to meet the needs of national economic development. Under the new leadership of the CCP, education was now viewed as the foundation for the Four Modernisations.

Since Deng Xiaoping rose to power again in the late 1970s, the Chinese education system has undergone a series of reform measures. For example, in late 1977, the annual National Higher Education Entrance Examination was officially reinstated, and this is regarded as the symbolic restoration of Chinese education. Furthermore, the concept of respecting knowledge and talented people was considered as the foundation for educational development and accepted by the whole society (Du & Liang, 2008).

As education became valued again, the roles of teachers and principals were restored and improved in schools during this phase. The status of teachers and intellectuals was also reinstated and gradually emphasised in society. At this time, the first training regulation relevant to principals, the *Opinions on Strengthening the Training of Educational Administrators* (1982), was issued by the Ministry of Education, and it emphasised the training of principals in primary and secondary schools. As a result, the political awareness and working ability of principals, as well as teaching and management in schools have been promoted with the support of educational administrative departments at all levels. Following this, a series of principal training regulations were issued in the next phases of education reform. However, due to the
centralised educational policy, most principals in Chinese schools still lacked the skills of school-based decision-making (Ye, 2007).

During this period, the focus of basic education was on achieving universal primary education. Giving priority to efficiency was the dominant emphasis of education policy in this era (Chu, 2008). In 1978, the policy *Provisional Regulation on the Work of Whole-Day Primary Schools (Pilot Draft)* (1978) was issued to redefine the basic education system and curriculum of primary schools, and led primary education on a path of development (Du & Liang, 2008). Following this, the central government issued the *Decisions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council on Several Issues in Universalising Primary Education* in 1980. It emphasised primary education as the basis of whole education, and put forward the historical challenge of achieving universal primary education in the 1980s throughout the country (State Council of the PRC, 1980). In order to accelerate this process, a number of key primary schools were also established from 1978 onwards. By the mid-1980s, the basis of the Chinese education system had been re-established and the system was in a more appropriate state for the reforms to the education system that followed.

**2.3.3 Phase three: education from 1985 to 1992**

From 1985 to the early 1990s, emphasis was placed on the reform of educational structure, the adjustment of the educational management systems, and the pursuit of quantitative educational goals. In 1985, the Central Committee of the CCP issued the *Decisions on the Reform of the Educational Structure* which marked a new historical era of Chinese education reform and development. In this document, several major problems in the basic education system were identified, including rigid control over schools, insufficient number of schools, shortage of qualified teachers and physical provision, and weakness of ideological education (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). In order to resolve these problems in basic education, the state established the principle that local governments should be responsible for basic education and lower level governments and schools should be devolved more financial and administrative powers to popularise the nine years of compulsory education. In the following year, the National People’s Congress promulgated the first educational law in the history of the PRC, the *Compulsory Education Law of the*
People’s Republic of China (1986). Thus, universalisation of nine-year compulsory education was placed on a firm legal basis and the educational rights of all school children were protected in a legal framework (National People’s Congress of the PRC, 1986). Since then, Chinese compulsory education has rapidly developed.

At the school level, the roles of principals and teachers were emphasised in the Decisions on the Reform of the Educational Structure. The enactment of the Principal Responsibility System made the role of the principal prominent in primary schools. Principals were to become chief executives who increased their responsibilities for personnel, finance, teaching and instruction. Meanwhile, local school Party organs, whose power was restricted mainly to political and ideological work, were in charge of supervising the work of school principals in accordance with the policies of the CCP (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). Furthermore, the role of teachers was recognised as of great significance in implementing education reform. This policy emphasised the need for a qualified and stable teaching staff that would become the foundation of universalising compulsory education (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). Respecting teachers—a traditional Confucian value—was advocated in the whole society so that teaching would become a most respected profession. As a consequence, principals and teachers were considered vital to delivering the education reform.

Several regulations related to teachers and principals in terms of qualifications and training were also issued during this period. Cultivating primary teachers’ moral qualities, professional knowledge and teaching ability became the focus. The Interim Regulation on Teacher’s Position in Primary Schools (1986) defined the responsibility, qualifications and appraisal of primary teachers (State Education Commission of the PRC, 1986). Additionally, several other regulations emphasised teachers’ credentials, professional code of ethics and training to ensure that they would be capable of teaching. Similarly, Qualifications and Responsibilities for National Primary and Secondary School Principals (1991) which is still used generally prescribes the basic qualifications, major responsibilities and job requirements of principals in primary and secondary schools (State Education Commission of the PRC, 1991). Opinions on Strengthening the Building of Principal Team in Primary and Secondary Schools (1992) introduced policy and procedures
for appointment, training, appraisal, reward and punishment, and remuneration of principals (State Education Commission of the PRC, 1992).

During this period, education reform sought to improve educational efficiency through decentralisation (Chu, 2008). The empowerment of local governments and schools has dramatically increased their autonomy, initiative and enthusiasm in promoting educational development. Although a new educational structure was developed, changes to curriculum and teaching methods gained little attention during this phase of education reform phase.

2.3.3.4 Phase four: education from 1993 to 1998

Since 1992, the establishment of the socialist market economy in the PRC has exerted its influence on education and placed new requirements for implementing a more comprehensive and profound education reform (Li, 2006). Thus in 1993, the CCP Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued the Guidelines for Education Reform and Development in China, clarifying the directions and basic policies for the development of basic education until the early years of the 21st century. One target set up by the Chinese government was the universalisation of basic education and eradication of illiteracy for youth by 2000. This target has been almost achieved. This policy continued the strategy that basic education is a responsibility of the lower level of government and must be carried out by the Principal Responsibility System in schools. Most importantly, this document pointed out that educational development should not only emphasise quantity, but also the quality of education.

Four key measures were put forward to promote the quality of education: the improvement of moral education, revised curricula and pedagogy, the establishment of quality standards and evaluation mechanisms for principals and teachers, and teacher professionalisation through continuing professional development (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party & National People’s Congress of the PRC, 1993). However, while this policy emphasised the development of education, insufficient funding was provided for educational investment as the Chinese government concentrated on promoting economic development (Chu, 2008).
Some regulations issued during this phase promulgated initiatives to manage primary teachers and principals. During this phase, reforms were announced to focus on the professional capabilities of teachers and principals, such as upgrading the quality of teaching and administrative teams in schools, which has become an important goal. The *Guidelines for Education Reform and Development in China* (1993) emphasised pre-service and in-service training for teachers, prescribed the qualifications of teachers and proposed the improvement of teacher salaries (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party & National People’s Congress of the PRC, 1993). In order to provide overall legal support for teachers, the National People’s Congress promulgated *Teacher Law of the People’s Republic of China* (1993), which circumscribed rights and duties, prescribed minimum qualifications, provided various kinds of training, introduced an appraisal system, and stipulated the remuneration of teachers at different levels (National People’s Congress of the PRC, 1993). This was followed by *Regulations on Teachers’ Qualifications* (1995) which aimed to improve the quality of teachers, including classification, prerequisites, examinations and confirmation of teachers’ qualifications (State Council of the PRC, 1995).

With respect to principals, *Regulations on Implementation of Principals’ Credentials in Primary and Secondary Schools* (1997) was issued to require principals of all primary schools to hold ‘Job Training Credential’ qualifications before they were assigned to the principalship position (State Education Commission of the PRC, 1997). However, although the Principal Responsibility System had been widely carried out and provided impetus to the development of basic education, some problems emerged in the process of implementation, such as the ambiguity of principals’ responsibilities and the supervision system.

The most significant achievement of this period of reform was that a sound educational structure had been established and the macro framework of education reform and development had been completed (Chu, 2008). Another important and related feature was emphasis on the quality of education. This signified that the period of education reform had started to impact on the micro-level of curriculum and teaching. Thus a quality-oriented education system would gradually become the focus of the education reform during the next phase.
As mentioned above, the education reforms of the PRC during the four phases were remarkable. For example, the enrolment ratio of primary schools increased from 49.2% in 1952 to 98.9% in 1997 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1998). Additionally, the qualifications of principals and teachers were greatly enhanced. For example, the number of unqualified teachers in primary schools was reduced to 13% in 1994, while the number of trained principals awarded with principalship certificates increased to 80% between 1990 and 1995 (Law, 1998). However, some problems also emerged in the field of basic education, which became the focus of specific education reforms addressed in the next phase. Three of these problems are identified next.

With the universalisation of compulsory education, the first problem to emerge was the inequality of basic education between different regions and different schools within the same region. Educational inequality between regions involves the rural-urban disparity (rural areas and urban cities) and the west-east disparity (west regions and east provinces). During the first four phases of education reforms, the devolution of financial responsibilities to local governments made basic education heavily reliant on local resources. However, because economic disparity among the regions is a perennial problem in Chinese society, urban and eastern coastal areas receive more educational investment and have been able to provide a more resource-rich and developed education than other areas. For instance, three-quarters of the illiterate and semi-literate population reside in rural west and minority regions (Ngok, 2007). Within the same regions, there is also a significant disparity between key schools and regular schools in terms of resource distribution. Key schools exist in every city and enjoy the privilege of receiving the majority of resource allocations. Such schools attract excellent teachers, offer advanced teaching facilities and draw high-quality students. In contrast, regular schools and even poorer schools usually operate with limited resources. Educational inequality has become an obstacle to improving educational quality in the whole country.

The second problem for education reform concerns the quality of educational provision. Although the universalisation rate of nine-year compulsory education has increased year by year, some regional and local governments are confronted with the predicament of an educational resources shortage. Specifically, the acute lack of
teachers, school buildings, teaching facilities, and library materials has become a major problem in many schools (Chen, 2000). As a result, over-sized classes have become commonplace in some areas, so that a large number of students are crowded in a classroom without sufficient support. Hence, it can be argued that the quality of education varies considerably despite the process of education reform.

The third problem relates to the emphasis on examinations as the final outcome for measuring educational outcomes. Teaching and studying for examinations has become a serious phenomenon in Mainland China’s schools (Zheng, 2008). Schools and parents emphasise student examination results as an indicator of quality (Hao, 2006). Consequently, the examination-oriented education system has resulted in rigid and authoritarian teaching methods, outdated teaching contents, and a constrained approach that has limited initiative and creative ability of teachers and students. This problem has become an urgent issue which needs to be resolved in the following quality-oriented education reform.

2.3.3.5 Phase five: education from 1999 to present

In addition to these problems within Mainland China’s education system other factors identified above create pressure for further reforms. Furthermore, the expansion of the knowledge economy, the introduction of information technology, and increasing globalisation has promoted the implementation of education reforms in the PRC (Shi & Zhang, 2008). To adapt to global change and resolve the above problems, reform that focuses on quality teaching and learning has been implemented by the central government since 1999. Curriculum reform has emerged as the centrepiece of this reform in basic education, and continues to be implemented (Feng, 2006). Four main characteristics of the current curriculum reform can be identified, including the new educational concepts (e.g. the all-round development of students), the diversity of curriculum structure, the transformation of instructional strategies, and the decentralisation of curriculum management power (Yu, 2005).

Implementing quality education (Suzhi Jiaoyu) has become the focus of the current education reform. After analysing and learning from the experience of curriculum reform in Western developed countries, such as the USA, UK, Australia, and Canada, a series of policies was issued by the Chinese government. In early 1999, the
State Council ratified the *Action Plan for Educational Vitalisation Facing the 21st Century* formulated by the Ministry of Education, which put forward the cross-century blueprint for Chinese education reform and development. Quality education is the focus and purpose of this action plan in basic education, thus a ‘quality-oriented education project’ was proposed to enhance the quality of the citizens. To achieve this purpose, teachers and principals are required to significantly improve their capabilities. A range of measures has been introduced, which include training and continuing education, consolidation of the principal’s credential system, and establishment of the appointment system (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 1998).

In the same year, the *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* (1999) was jointly promulgated by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council. Since then, quality education has been promoted. Reflecting Confucian principles discussed previously, it emphasises the unification of moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education in all aspects of educational activities. This holistic emphasis differs from the traditional education concepts which focused only on intellectual education. Therefore, this policy maintains that it is crucial to develop high quality and capable teachers and educational administrators, as well as adjust the education system and structure to provide appropriate conditions in implementing a quality education (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party & National People’s Congress of the PRC, 1999). The enactment of the two policies above marks a new period that emphasises enhancing educational quality. In this context, one of the core tasks of school principals in primary and secondary schools is now to implement quality education and curriculum reform (Li, 2005).

Following the promotion of quality education as described above, the *Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* (2001) was issued to solve those problems still prevalent in basic education. This policy prioritised the development of basic education. Other reform initiatives were also put forward in this policy, which embraced transforming the administrative structure, deepening the reform of teaching and learning, and improving the development and administration of teachers and principals by the Education Bureau (State Council of the PRC, 2001). The
enactment of this policy provided favourable conditions for the continued development of education reform.

Since the core of quality-oriented education reform in basic education is planning and carrying out new curriculum reform, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guidelines on the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (Trial version)* (2001) which marked the launch of the most recent curriculum reform in the PRC. Eight components are included in its guidelines. These include the reform’s purpose and objectives, curriculum structure, curriculum standards, teaching and learning processes, development of instructional materials, curriculum evaluation and management, teacher preparation and development, and implementation of curriculum reform (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001b). Since 2005, through facilitating three sequential stages of reform (preparation, experiment and popularisation), this new curriculum system has affected all year levels in primary and secondary schools.

The ultimate goal of this latest curriculum reform policy is to achieve sound and comprehensive development for every student. The specific objectives consist of six major transformations in the curriculum of basic education. These changes include:

- A shift from focusing on imparting knowledge to emphasising active learning;
- Changing from too many subjects to a subject-based curriculum and comprehensive practical activities;
- Transition from outdated curriculum and focus on book knowledge to emphasis on students’ interests as well as connections between students’ real life, modern society and curriculum;
- A departure from stressing transmissive and rote learning to advocating active participation and exploration by students;
- A move from the selective function of curriculum evaluation to promote the development of students and teachers;
- The transformation from centralised curriculum management to management of the curriculum at three levels (state, locality, and school) (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2001a).
This policy which emphasises the new curriculum of basic education for Mainland China’s sound improvement has been the milestone in Chinese curriculum development and the vehicle for reform.

Improving equity in education has also emerged as a focus of Chinese national educational policy since 2002. In basic education, the balanced development of compulsory education has become an essential channel to promote educational equity, which was legitimated in the revised *Compulsory Education Law* in 2006. Meanwhile, educational equity resembles the educational philosophy of Confucius as it stresses education without class distinction. (The policy of educational equity issued in the current Chinese society resembles this point of view.) Consequently, educational equality as implemented through current reforms has become the significant foundation of social equality in the PRC (Hu, 2007).

With reference to the significant role of teachers and principals in implementing quality education, two main regulations in terms of training were issued by the Ministry of Education to improve the competence of principals and teachers. Since the educational degree standards of teachers in compulsory education were implemented, training has shifted to enhance the overall competence of school teachers in the new phase. These two regulations emphasise the continuing education and training of primary teachers, the training of leading teachers, and the construction of teacher-training institutions. In particular, the *Guidelines on Further Strengthening the Teacher Training for New Curriculum of Basic Education* (2004) were issued to promote the competence of teachers so as to push forward the new curriculum reform. Likewise, in order to promote quality education, the *Regulation on the Training of Primary and Secondary Principals* (1999) was issued to improve the overall competence of principals by means of various training. Thus, the professional development of school principals and teachers, as a key requirement for their ongoing growth, has been emphasised in the current education reform.

*The changing roles of teachers and principals*

The implementation of these curriculum reforms in Mainland China that promote new educational concepts and environments require wide-ranging changes in the roles of teachers and principals. The transformation of teachers’ roles in schools has
been identified as a key factor in the success of current curriculum reform (Zhong & Zhao, 2006). Teachers’ roles have broadened to include an emphasis on student development, self-development, curriculum operation, and collaboration. It has become a great challenge for teachers to meet their expectations in terms of educational concepts, teaching methods and their professional knowledge.

The first aspect in changing the roles of teachers is related to student development. Primary teachers are expected to change from being knowledge imparters to guides and promoters of students’ autonomous learning, and to provide opportunities for cooperative learning and inquiry learning (Yan, 2005). Moreover, teachers are expected to develop students’ creative abilities (Huo, 2001), and develop a new emphasis on students’ individualisation (Zhang & Yang, 2003). This change underlines the need for teachers to be flexible in their use of teaching methods and to stimulate students’ motivation in the learning process. Meanwhile, educators are expected to cater for students’ differences, an emphasis that was also evident in the educational principles of Confucius.

The second aspect in the transformation of teachers’ roles emphasises teachers’ self-development, which requires teachers to change from traditional teachers to becoming lifelong learners and researchers about learning and teaching (Zhao, 2004). In order to adapt to the age of knowledge explosion as well as the new concepts, aims, content and strategies of the new curriculum reform, teachers need to be lifelong learners. Accompanying the implementation of quality education, primary teachers are expected to work as experts capable of undertaking research to solve current problems and issues in their teaching practice. This emphasis on teacher self-development was considered to contribute to teachers’ overall quality and practical efficiency.

The third aspect of this transformation of teachers’ roles concerns their change from curriculum implementers to curriculum developers and from executors to decision-makers (He, 2002). For example, the policy of three-level curriculum management encourages teachers as curriculum developers to participate in the design, development and implementation of school-based curriculum. Additionally, the diversity, flexibility, and variation of new curriculum are seen to enable teachers to
become decision makers who need to creatively implement curriculum according to specific contexts. Thus, the new responsibilities in the curriculum encourage teachers to work more actively and creatively.

The fourth aspect focuses on changing teachers’ roles from personal strivers to team collaborators, including collaboration between teachers and students, colleagues, parents and communities (Y. Wang, 2003). The new curriculum reform encourages teachers to collaborate with students based on more equitable and democratic methods, rather than the traditional approach of students as absorbers of knowledge. The notion of collaboration between teachers is assumed to foster teacher capacity to communicate information, exchange experience, and to develop curriculum resources and teaching activities. As well, teachers are expected to involve parents in school educational activities and acquire more resources by collaborating with their parents and local communities. Therefore, effective collaboration has been advocated as an essential way to stimulate the potential of students and educators and to share educational and social resources.

It can be argued that in this context of curriculum reform, expectations about the roles of primary teachers are changing and challenging teachers to shift from their traditional roles. Teachers are faced with increasing demands to lead and manage school affairs successfully and creatively rather than simply execute orders from principals. The new reform agenda advocates that teachers adopt more active roles in the curriculum process and classroom. Hence, the importance of teacher leadership has become urgent in promoting teachers’ development and pushing forward education reform.

Under the current curriculum reform agenda in Mainland China, principals have been given new responsibilities that require considerable changes to their roles as managers and leaders in the school. The Principal Responsibility System together with increasing emphasis on school-based management has increased the power and responsibilities of principals in schools and is at the centre of the new curriculum reform. Consequently, the effective implementation of the new reform largely depends on the understanding, recognition and role played by the principal (Ma & Ma, 2003). Principals are expected to play a pivotal role in supervising learning and
teaching activities, promoting curriculum development, and providing support to learning and teaching activities (Li, 2005). They are required to assume various new roles in order to push forward reform. Principals, like the teachers referred to above, are also required to be curriculum developers, researchers and collaborators. However, there are also some new roles particularly emerging for principals, consisting of them becoming organisers, promoters, and transformers.

First, with reference to principals as the organisers of the new curriculum implementation (Cai, 2005), pressure has been put on principals to strengthen schools’ connection with external communities and families. Second, principals are supposed to promote teacher development (Ren, 2004). Principals are expected to provide various forms of training to teachers according to the needs of the school and teachers. The new curriculum reform also encourages principals to participate in classroom teaching and curriculum development. This assists principals to understand the competence of teachers and assists teachers to identify and solve classroom problems. Thus teachers are provided with support to change educational content, improve their knowledge and teaching ability, and realise opportunities to transform their roles, so that the new curriculum can be implemented effectively into the classrooms. Consequently, principals not only need to have the capability of organisation and management, but also a high level of curriculum theory and teaching practice.

Third, principals are expected to be the transformers of school culture (Ma & Ma, 2003)—that is, transformers of the values, assumptions, and practices taken for granted in schools—as principals play pivotal roles in the development of a school’s culture in terms of fostering learning, inquiry, cooperation, and collaboration. In this culture, principals and teachers can improve their capacity to teach, research and to stimulate teachers’ creativity and enthusiasm. Thus, principals are expected to transform schools into sites of learning for staff and students.

In sum, principals are expected to become leaders for the new curriculum reform in their schools. Thus principal leadership has emerged as being of significance in promoting the quality of principals and in providing impetus to the school improvement process. Furthermore, as the tasks of principals have increased in terms
of implementing reform, teachers themselves are also expected to take more responsibilities in leading. The increased interaction between principals and teachers that is generated in the new reform agenda is highly significant for the effective operation of the schools.

The achievements and problems of curriculum reform

In the fifth phase of education reform in Mainland China, efforts have begun to focus on promoting comprehensive school improvement at the school level for the purpose of improving the quality of education and educational equity. After several years of implementation, some positive outcomes have emerged. These include the development of government support for schools, increased local and school-based curriculum development, an emphasis on teacher development together with an emphasis on and improvement in the teaching and learning process (Feng, 2006).

Moreover, Chinese basic education has also experienced dramatic change during the five phases of curriculum reform. By 2000, the aim of universalising nine-years of compulsory education and eradicating illiteracy for youth had been achieved. With reference to elementary education, 99.5 percent of school-age children were enrolled in primary schools by 2007 (Zhang, 2008). Thus, it can be argued that the development of education in Mainland China has made great achievements in the past 60 years.

However, the implementation of new curriculum reforms has challenged teachers and principals with a number of practical difficulties. These problems generally relate to the constraints of the evaluation system, increasing outside pressures, and internal school problems.

First, it can be argued that the existing system of examination and evaluation is incompatible with the new curriculum reform, and this presents a major constraint to reform implementation (Wang, 2006). At present, the examination-oriented education system, particularly the entrance examinations for secondary schools and universities, still operate. This means that two evaluation systems are operating in Mainland China: an examination-oriented education and the new curriculum that focuses on quality education. Clearly, these contrasting processes have the potential to cause conflicts for students, teachers, and school-level curriculum development.
This is an example of the cultural shift that is required for the education reform agenda to work. For, as indicated in the earlier section in this chapter on Confucianism, the system of central examinations has been part of China’s education system for thousands of years.

Second, some outside pressures collectively hinder the process of curriculum reform. For example, since the effects of this curriculum reform in schools are supervised or evaluated by government, community and family, teachers and principals are under heavy pressure to implement reform. As well, the lack of curriculum resources in schools has become a huge obstacle to implementing new curriculum reform (Ma & Tang, 2002). Teachers and principals not only need the physical resources to provide teaching materials and facilities, but also need the assistance from specialists in the theory and practice of education to make reform worthwhile. This issue is particularly serious in rural and remote areas of Mainland China.

A third problem relates to the complex roles principals have to assume as school managers and leaders. For example, as principals have to spend time on dealing with the daily affairs of schools, they do not have sufficient expertise and time to keep up with learning and research in curriculum matters. Thus, the pressure to update curricular content and processes and the demand for increasing professional knowledge have become urgent tasks for principals to address under the current Chinese education reform. This factor has also been identified in nations such as the USA, UK, and Australia (e.g. Blase & Blase, 2004; Gurr, 2008; Hopkins, 2003).

Similarly, teachers face challenges to be advocates of the curriculum reform process. First, some teachers lack understanding of the new curriculum content and continue to rely on traditional approaches or simple imitations of the new curriculum (Wang, 2006). Some teachers also resist efforts to adapt to the new curriculum. Second, teacher quality is an issue with reference to curriculum knowledge, teaching methods and also levels of educational degrees (Song, 2007). As a result of uneven teacher quality, many teachers are unable to meet the qualifications of teaching the new curriculum, and lack the ability to develop curriculum resources. Third, as Chen (2006) observes, teacher training is also a problem and can impede the process of the curriculum reform. This is due to the low quality of some teacher preparation
programs and instructors, and the gap between theory and practice. As well, teacher workloads have rapidly increased in order to meet the requirements of the reform period, yet teachers have not been empowered enough by principals to help them foster education reform (Song, 2004).

In summary, although teachers and principals are recognised as the core components in implementing the new curriculum reform, their efforts have not been fully harnessed. It is argued here that the development of teacher leadership and principal leadership is an effective way to address the problems highlighted so far. Principal leadership and teacher leadership have to be mobilised if the aims of curriculum reforms are to be realised in schools.

2.4 POLITICS, ECONOMY, CULTURE, AND EDUCATION IN SHANDONG PROVINCE

As the research for this study has been conducted in Shandong province, the following section provides a contextual discussion about this province. Shandong is a coastal province of the eastern People's Republic of China covering 157,800 square kilometres. It is the second most populous province with a population of more than 94 million people and is considered to be one of the cradles of ancient Chinese culture. Shandong has been the home of many great cultural achievements and is the birthplace of Confucius. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the political system of Shandong was structured in a dual party-government system as with all other governing institutions in Mainland China. There are seventeen prefecture-level divisions in Shandong province, which are subdivided into 140 county-level divisions (49 districts, 31 county-level cities, and 60 counties). In recent years, Shandong has enjoyed significant economic development and become one of the richest provinces of the People's Republic of China. In 2008, the nominal GDP for Shandong was US$446 billion, ranking second in the country. However, there is uneven economic development throughout Shandong, and eastern areas and urban areas are more developed than western and rural areas.

Since the implementation of Mainland China’s open-door policy, education in Shandong province has undergone significant changes. As the leading province in the country, Shandong achieved the universalisation of nine-year compulsory
education in 2000. Since 2001, it took the lead in carrying out curriculum reform of basic education in Mainland China through a series of curriculum experiments. Within thirty years, 14,064 primary schools have been built in Shandong province with 6.34 million students and a 99.93% enrolment rate in 2007 (Shandong Provincial Education Department, 2008). However, the unbalanced development of urban and rural education has emerged as the major problem in Shandong’s education system, which is manifested in the coexistence of advanced education in cities and less developed education in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2007). Therefore, Shandong province has placed quality education achievement as the top priority in reforming education.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Traditional Chinese culture, which was largely influenced by Confucianism, continues to exert profound effects on modern society and education in Mainland China. However, since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Mainland China has entered a new period of development in which both genders have the right to education and contribute to China’s progress. During the first three decades, the PRC was under the leadership of Mao Zedong and this period was characterised by political centralisation and a planned economic system. However, after Deng Xiaoping launched the open-door policy in 1978, a series of depoliticised and decentralised reforms were enacted with the direction of the major focus on the PRC’s economic development. Accordingly, the PRC is now characterised by a degree of political decentralisation, a market economy and a mixture of traditional and Western culture; it is a powerful player in global affairs.

Over the past six decades, education reform in Mainland China has played a key role in promoting economic growth and social progress. Remarkable achievements have been made in response to the pressure of the knowledge economy and global competition. Mainland China has experienced five phases of education reform in order to achieve the devolution of power from central government to regional, local states and schools, the universalisation of nine-year compulsory education, and the institutionalisation of education administration. Currently, educational development in Mainland China is driven by a focus on achieving quality education and educational equality. During this period, teachers and principals have been identified
as key forces in pushing forward education reforms. Significantly, the latest phase of curriculum reform has placed increasing pressure on the roles of principals and teachers.

This chapter has set the historical and educational context of the study. The next chapter will introduce the broader literature relevant to teacher leadership, principal leadership and their interaction.
3.1 OVERVIEW

The previous chapter provided an historical overview of major reforms to the education system in China and concluded that significant leadership roles in schools were being reconfigured in response to such change. As this study seeks to identify and understand the nature of, and perceptions about, principal leadership roles and teacher leadership roles during the most recent period of change, this chapter reviews the research and literature from Western countries and Mainland China on principal leadership, teacher leadership and the nature of their interaction. There are four sections in this chapter. The first section provides the definition of principal leadership and a discussion of the related literature about principal leadership roles. The second section defines teacher leadership as well as the roles of teacher leadership. The third section reviews the literature regarding the principal-teacher leader interaction. Here, only a small body of research studies from Mainland China is reviewed due to the limited research in the field. Given that this study is concerned with how principal leadership influences teacher leadership and how teacher leader leadership influences principal leadership, this section of this chapter also utilises some of the Western literature on micropolitics in order to identify some of the strategies that principals and teacher leaders use during their interactions. In the context of this analysis, Crowther et al.’s (2009) notion of parallel leadership is discussed as significant to this study for its emphasis on aligning principal and teacher leadership. Finally, based on the literature, a conceptual framework is created to guide this study and address the research questions.

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a conceptual basis for the study and to establish the need for research to explore the perceptions of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher leadership in primary schools in Mainland China. In particular, it underpins the three research questions proposed in the current study, which are:
Chapter 3: Literature Review

1. What are principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform?
2. What are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform?
3. What are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact?

3.2 PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

3.2.1 The definition of principal leadership

Although there has been much research conducted in the area of principal leadership over past decades, principal leadership is seldom defined directly by researchers. First, some researchers analyse principal leadership in terms of leadership style, leadership behaviours/practices, and leadership capacities/skills. Second, principal leadership is sometimes explained more specifically by the concepts of transformational leadership, transactional leadership and instructional leadership. Last, principal leadership is often illustrated by defining principal and leadership separately in most research studies. In the current study, after comprehending the conception of principal and leadership respectively, principal leadership will be integrally defined to provide overall insights into its meaning.

For the purpose of this study, a principal is defined as the administrative head of the primary school who “has been delegated responsibility” (Messer, 2002, p. 3) and “performs the assigned duties of coordinating, delegating, supervising and administering the instructional and non-instructional activities” (Danielson, 2005, p. 7).

Numerous researchers have attempted to define leadership over the last several decades, and more than 350 definitions of leadership have emerged (Buffie, 2000). However, none has been recognised as a universal definition of this term. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) claimed that “the meaning of leadership remains murky, and its present status is highly dependent on a set of possibly fleeting, modern, Western values” (p. 430). In short, the conception of leadership varies and differs in keeping with the changing environment.
Many definitions of leadership have been utilised in educational research, most of which view leadership as process and influence; however, some differences in details can be identified. For example, Northouse (2007) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). He suggests that a common goal which influences a group needs to be achieved in the process of delivering leadership. Moreover, Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson (2001) not only agree with the notion of Northouse (2007), but also place leadership in a specified situation. They define leadership as “the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation” (p. 79). Additionally, Bolman and Deal (2008) stress mutual influence in leadership and its potential effects by arguing that leadership entails “a subtle process of mutual influence fusing thought, feeling, and action. It produces cooperative effort in the service of purposes embraced by both leader and led” (p. 345). Similarly, Ott, Parkes, and Simpson (2008) also emphasise that the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of some people are influenced in the process of leadership, while Murphy (2004) highlights leadership as the capacity to “secure commitment and energy from others to accomplish a task” (p. 71).

In this study, principal leadership is conceptualised by combining significant elements of previous explanations and is defined as the process whereby principals influence the attitudes, beliefs, and especially the behaviours of teachers and students to secure their commitment, energy and initiatives to accomplish school improvement in the changing environment.

3.2.2 Principal leadership roles

Although there has been much research and writing conducted in the area of principal leadership over past decades, there is still no clear definition of principal leadership roles in the literature (Gurr, 2008). With respect to principal leadership roles, there are several typologies of classification (Henderson, 2009). For example, Kouzes and Posner (2010) designed an instrument called the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to test five leadership practices, which incorporates action to “model the way”, “inspire a shared vision”, “challenge the process”, “enable others to act”, and “encourage the heart” (p. 1). Each of these generic elements has direct applicability to the ways in which principals exercise leadership in schools.
Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) offered a succinct definition of leadership practices in schools. Four key leadership roles were categorised and they comprise “building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the teaching and learning program” (p. 29). Although this concise classification cannot cover all categories of leading a school, core practices of leadership in a principal’s work have been identified.

In accordance with the analysis of 11 studies, Robinson (2007) developed five dimensions which reflect the effects of leadership on student outcomes. They are “establishing goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring the orderly and supportive environment” (p. 8). This definition focuses on the dimensions of principal leadership that may impact on student outcomes, such as teaching and learning.

Furthermore, based on the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP), Day and Leithwood (2007) found that there were five main dimensions of successful principal leadership, including “sustaining passionate commitment and personal accountability, maintaining moral purpose and managing tensions and dilemmas, being other centred and focusing on learning and development, making emotional and rational investment, and emphasising the personal and the functional” (p. 171). It can be argued that successful principals around the world are undertaking broad and complex roles in the changing educational environment. These definitions are all useful in addressing the roles of principal leadership and will be applied variously throughout the review which follows.

However, this study will draw on Gurr’s (2008) research on principal leadership. Three factors inform this approach. First, Gurr and his colleagues have been at the forefront of developing models for analysing effective school-based leadership and management by focussing on the complexity of principals’ leadership roles (see, Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006). Second, whilst situated in an Australian context, and based on interviews with 10 principals and 30 teachers in Australian schools, Gurr’s work has been adapted to Asian cultural contexts, such as Indonesia (Raihani & Gurr, 2006) and more recently in Singapore (Drysdale & Gurr, 2009). Moreover,
it is argued here that Gurr’s focus on principal leadership also occurs within a broader policy environment of increasing school performance accountability that is both local and international, given the wide ranging influence of PISA, TIMMS, and OECD country comparisons. There is considerable interest at the global level in developing successful schools in all contexts notably by exploring the leadership required to facilitate and ensure such success whilst also measuring school outcomes. As noted in Chapter 2, China’s wide ranging education reforms have been influenced by this broad policy context.

Third, Gurr’s model theorises those key leadership practices that resulted from reflections about the nature of principals’ daily work. This analysis of leadership in the school context is grouped into four broad roles with 14 themes to create a model of principal leadership. These roles, derived from Gurr’s empirical research, provide a practical and applicable foundation for this study’s exploration of the status of principal leadership in the Chinese context. Therefore, in the current study, principal leadership roles will be used to explore perceptions about principal leadership and to investigate the nature of principal teacher leader interaction. Notably, Gurr’s (2008, p.13) model of principal leadership informs this study’s approach. It consists of four extensive leadership roles: “learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability”. These roles are discussed more fully as follows.

3.2.2.1 Learning and teaching

In Gurr’s (2008) model, ‘learning and teaching’ is recognised as a significant leadership role that principals play in order to guarantee students’ opportunities in quality learning (cf. Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Silins & Mulford, 2002). It refers to four leadership functions that focus on instruction supervision, teacher support, the wide knowledge of principals, and establishing an effective decision-making process (Gurr, 2008). These four aspects of principal leadership related to learning and teaching are discussed below.

*Instruction focus*

As a significant force in schools, the principal also has a responsibility to establish the standard of instruction and supervise the process of instruction to help teachers improve their learning and teaching (Gurr, 2008). In this field, the tasks of school
principals are to promote quality instruction, supervise and evaluate instruction, monitor student progress, protect and allocate instructional time, and coordinate the curriculum (Gurr, 2008). If the assumption is that supervision can be done well, it will enhance teacher development (Sergiovanni, 2006).

Similar to Gurr’s (2008) view, Southworth (2009) maintains that monitoring associated with learning-centred leadership is an acceptable part of leadership employed by school leaders. With the purpose of promoting students’ learning, monitoring is utilised through analysing student-outcome data, visiting classrooms, observing teachers at work, and providing feedback. Monitoring has been recognised as a crucial role in evaluating teachers’ skills, strengths and craft knowledge. It has been demonstrated that effective monitoring has a strong relationship with high quality of teaching (Ofsted, 2003). This is also consistent with the statement in constructivist leadership (Lambert, 2009) and instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 2004) that principals spend time in classrooms to supervise teachers’ work and offer them feedback.

Teacher support

In addition to assuming the role of supervising instructional activities in schools, principals adopt various approaches to support teachers in their schools with the purpose of improving students’ learning (Blase & Blase, 2004; Gurr, 2008; Hopkins, 2003; Sheppard, 1996). The principal plays a pivotal role in providing teachers with support by means of establishing teacher appraisal systems, promoting teacher professional development, educationally challenging teachers, encouraging teachers to accept new opportunities, offering information to teachers, being available to teachers, protecting teachers from mistakes (Gurr, 2008; cf. Blase & Blase, 1999; Beck & Murphy, 1993; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Day & Leithwood, 2007; DuFour, 2002; Ehrich & Hansford, 2004; Eldredge, 2008; Elliott, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Goldren & Spillane, 2007; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2007; Jonassen, 1995; King & Newmann, 2000; Lambert, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Logan & Dempster, 1992; McDonald & Ingvarson, 1997; Penlington, Kington, & Day, 2008; Roulston, Darby, & Owens, 2003; Southworth, 2009; Sutton, 2002; Troman & Woods, 2000; Yee, 2000). It is assumed that these approaches could help teachers to grow and to
develop in their understanding of teaching, learning and leading, in improving their teaching skills, and in expanding their knowledge. Similar approaches, such as research activities, in the Chinese literature can be found in Qiu (2005) and Xu (2005). (It must be acknowledged, however, that expanding workloads (Starr, 2009) are an increasing challenge to teachers in both settings.)

Similarly, developing people has been identified as one of the highly effective transformational leadership dimensions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). The more specific practices in this category indicate that principals as school leaders provide individualised support, intellectual simulation, and appropriate models to teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). The primary aim of these practices is not only to motivate teachers and other staff to acquire appropriate knowledge and skills, but also to encourage them to persist in applying them. By following this transformational leadership dimension, principals are said to be facilitating the achievement of high performance within the school organisation. Moreover, in light of the ideas of Blase and Blase (2004), one role of the school principal is to create collaborative learning relationships and promote teachers’ capability of teaching and learning in order to achieve school improvement (cf. Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001).

**Wider knowledge**

In Gurr’s (2008) research, principals are accountable for gaining broader knowledge by means of reading and through professional networks (cf. Bush, Glover, & Harris, 2007; Caldwell, Calnin, & Cahill, 2003; Copland, 2003; Davis, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Mulford, 2004; Littky & Schen, 2003). This is equally the case in the Chinese context (Feng, 2003; Wu & Ehrich, 2009; Yu, 2003). Through such professional work, it is possible for principals to ensure that teachers are well-informed, schools develop according to educational trends, and their external communities could provide support to schools (Gurr, 2008). This role prompts principals as school leaders to keep up to date with what is happening in the key areas of the school.

**Decision-making**

Principals are also responsible for constructing effective processes for decision-making that empower teachers and involve them in making decisions (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002). During this process, power has been distributed to teacher leaders and
teachers (Blase & Blase, 2001; Gurr, 2008; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Smylie, 1997). Several strategies are proposed by Gurr (2008) to satisfy this, for example, stating clear goals and directions, ensuring the use of participatory decision-making, and building formal meeting structures to provide opportunities for teachers to know how and when to make decisions. This role is one that encourages teachers and other staff in the school to participate in decision-making so as to achieve the long-term development of schools.

Similarly, Harris’s (2005) notion of distributed leadership highlights the inclusion of teachers in decision-making with the aim of engaging them in leadership practices. Harris (2005) argues that in the latest wave of education reform, teachers are more likely to be empowered in areas of importance to them since it is impossible for principals to make all the decisions in a school. Essentially, this contention suggests that leadership should be distributed among members in schools and therefore contributes to higher student outcomes.

### 3.2.2.2 Symbolic and cultural awareness

In the context of the role of ‘symbolic and cultural awareness’, school and community cultures and symbolism are underscored as significant factors that principals need to be aware of and employ. Therefore this aspect of the principal’s leadership role is concerned with spreading the range of values in the broad school community, focusing on parents and community, and student and teachers. It also relates to the marketing of school and the symbols which signify the intentions of principals (Gurr, 2008).

**Values**

Values exert a range of effects on leadership and school development (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Gurr, 2008; Sergiovanni, 1990; Stoll & Fink, 1996). This is based on an increasing awareness that leadership is a moral endeavour and principals are morally and ethically responsible actors. Indeed, much of the literature on principal leadership emphasises that principals can be viewed as moral actors responsible for the processes of decision-making in their schools (Ehrich, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2009).
Gurr (2008) contends that the values held by principals should be characterised by equity, social justice, empowerment, encouraging participation, commitment to the school, people orientation, fairness, and respecting others (cf. Day et al., 2001; Gurr et al., 2006; Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2003; Novak, 2009). Some other values of principals, such as recognition, trust, and democracy, are also highlighted by researchers (e.g., Beare, 1991; Combs, Miser, & Whitaker, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Harris, 2002; Novak, 2009). Thus leadership which reflects these values focuses on promoting teachers and school development, supporting school members to participate in activities, and being led by fairness and equity. In this leadership role, through their actions, principals transmit their views and values and subtly influence the behaviours of teachers and students (Gurr, 2008).

In the reviewed literature, values have been emphasised as a crucial element in leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1990). In particular, Hopkins (2003) emphasises that defining the values and purposes of the school is one main domain in instructional leadership practices. According to Hopkins (2003), the key concerns of values which infuse effective leadership refer to learning from a broader and deeper view and empowering teachers. This view assumes that values have profound implications for the moral purpose of leadership and also in fostering an environment within the school as a learning community for teachers and students.

**Parent & community focus**

In order to establish a supportive environment, Gurr (2008) highlights the important relationships that parents and members of the community have within a school. Principals are crucial to connecting parents and community members to the school by creating effective communication networks and by establishing a process through which the school can respond to parents and community expectations (Gurr, 2008). Unlike traditional views that focus on the internal operations of a school, this aspect of principal leadership emphasises the principal’s role in involving external networks that are significant for the school.

Research in Western countries has for decades underscored the vital role of parents and community in schooling (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Spry & Graham, 2009; Griffith, 2001; Harris, 2002; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk, & Prescott, 2002).
Similar to the emphasis on parent and community in Gurr’s (2008) model, Leithwood et al. (2008) argued that an important part of the leadership role is to establish productive connections with parents and the community, and bonding the school with its wider community.

**Student & teacher focus**

Gurr (2008) also maintains that principals need to pay close attention to the performance of teachers and students. Thus symbolic actions are utilised by principals, including raising high expectations on teachers and students, establishing positive expectations and standards to encourage their behaviours, placing trust in teachers to fulfil tasks, modelling desired teacher behaviours, using incentives to encourage teacher and student behaviours, and applying bureaucratic mechanisms to stimulate and reinforce change (Gurr, 2008). Principals are expected to be supportive and encouraging to teachers and students so that they will achieve the school’s goals.

Moreover, some researchers have focused on school leaders’ actions on developing trust or modelling the behaviours they expect of teachers (see for example, Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Robinson, 2007; Southworth, 2009). One element that is perceived to be a key factor in securing school improvement is what Robinson (2007) referred to as relational trust between the principal and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers themselves. In Robinson’s (2007) definition, trust is one aspect of the leadership dimension that helps to ensure an orderly and supportive environment which also impacts on student achievements. Here principals are expected to set an example to teachers by ensuring their own words and deeds are consistent (Southworth, 2009) thus building credibility and trust.

**Marketing of school**

Within the complex social context of the school, principals are also expected to play a role in marketing and promoting their schools (Gurr, 2008; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). It becomes increasingly crucial for principals to be involved in establishing public relationships and developing community linkages (Oplatka, Hemsley-Brown, & Foskett, 2002). In this context, schools can provide positive images to the public and be competitive in attracting student enrolments (Gurr, 2008). This emphasis on marketing is increasingly significant as school organisations are expected to survive
in an environment of marketisation and strong competition between schools in the same district for enrolments.

**Symbolism**

Based on his research, Gurr (2008) also noted the significance of symbolic messages that convey various impressions about a school and its impact on the community’s impression of the school. For example, constructive and destructive messages can be sent by principals that stem from school actions and events. Constructive messages refer to the actions that reinforce school values, whilst destructive messages refer to the actions that the principal could take to devalue the work of members in the school (Gurr, 1996).

**3.2.2.3 Future orientation**

In Gurr’s (2008) model, another leadership role namely ‘future orientation’ is related to realising future opportunities with the aim of achieving the school’s sustainable development. It highlights the link between a shared school vision and the responsiveness to changes in the educational environment (Gurr, 2008). These features are elaborated below.

**Vision**

The role of the principal in defending and keeping a shared school vision is considered to be vital to ensure that schools adopt longer term plans (Davies & Davies, 2009; Gurr et al., 2006; Gurr, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The vision held by principals is developed in response to consultation with teachers and school council members, so as to gain consensus on school goals and priorities, and to be formalised in school goals and programs (Gurr, 2008). With specific reference to school restructuring context, there has been an expectation that principals will possess a commitment to building a school vision which promotes both school effectiveness and school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

With reference to transformational leadership, Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) highlight the setting of directions as a key school leadership practice which consists of three aspects. These are establishing a shared vision, developing consensus on school goals, and expressing high performance expectations of teachers. In this way,
teachers are more likely to be motivated and have a sense of identity within their working environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Thus setting directions is a key task for school leaders who need to cultivate a collaborative and shared school community.

**Responsiveness**

As well as vision, principals are also required to have the awareness of the significance of responding to changes following new educational trends (Gurr, 2008). Periods of rapid change and reform requirements present great challenges to schools, so it is important for principals to consider how the process of decision-making can be designed to go beyond the status quo. For example, principals could periodically review school goals and priorities by way of creating a school charter (Gurr, 2008). The need for wider knowledge is also manifest in principals who seek to have the capability of making responses to broader educational, political and social trends.

Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (2002) point out that “challenge the process” (p. 18) is an essential leadership practice which is also available to school leaders. Given the changing environment and challenges faced by schools, principals need to be ready to take actions so as to find new ways to improve the school’s organisation and its goals. These authors suggest that four strategies are available to promote change. These are: (a) “Seize the initiative”, (b) “Make challenge meaningful”, (c) “Innovate and create”, (d) “Look outward for fresh ideas” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 177). By adopting this fourfold approach, principals are able to make a contribution to the creation of new outcomes, processes, services, and systems in the school context.

### 3.2.2.4 Accountability

Gurr (2008) suggested that ‘accountability’ is an important aspect of the principal’s leadership role (cf. Beare, 1991; Chapman, Sackney, & Aspin, 1999; Mulford, Edmunds, Kendall, Kendall, & Bishop, 2008; Smyth, 1993; Stein & Nelson, 2003). It consists of three facets. The first facet underlines the principal’s accountability to the school council and government. The second facet relates to how school leaders make transparent processes to do with the school’s accountability to community and government. The purpose of this accountability may be expressed as to evaluate school programs in terms of utilising a school charter and making resource allocation
decisions. The third facet refers to ensuring that teachers are accountable to the principal. The explicit application of this accountability has accompanied the development of teacher appraisal process and the monitoring of teachers’ delegated tasks (Gurr, 2008). Given that accountability has been identified as a primary means of exercising leadership, it is no surprise that being responsive to the needs of the school council, community, government and themselves emerges as a key factor in the effectiveness of school leaders.

The notion of centralisation and decentralisation operating at the same time and exerting different types of influence over the work of principals has been highlighted in the wider literature (Smyth, 1993). Thus, the results from the Tasmanian Successful School Principals Projects (SSPP) (Mulford et al., 2008) demonstrate that successful school principals are engaged in most areas of accountability which they claim have positive effects on student outcomes. Included here are relatively broad but nevertheless important aspects of accountability, such as “staff appraisal, formal systems and a school culture for student involvement, and public access to results, especially of teaching evaluations” (Mulford et al., 2008, pp. 38-39). The authors describe strategies for accountability effectiveness in a new school structure as well, making reference to using relevant theories and conceptualisation, and fostering school capacities.

Halstead (1994) classified accountability into two different categories: one is a contractual form and the other is a responsive form. In this definition, the contractual form refers to the increased control from governments and the expectation to meet the requirements of particular audiences (Halstead, 1994). Responsive accountability maintains that educators should make decisions that are concerned with the betterment of students and school staff (Eraut, 1993) and consider their interests and wishes (Halstead, 1994).

3.2.2.5 Summary

Educational reconstruction and reform have placed principal leadership as a core component of school development. There have been a number of research studies in Western countries that identify the roles of principal leadership. However, there is a lack of similar studies in the Chinese context. Given the current education reform
climate in Mainland China, there is a critical need to further investigate issues on school leadership through understanding principals’ practices. In the current study, while drawing on aspects of several other studies, the relatively comprehensive leadership model put forward by Gurr (2008) is adopted. This model is utilised as a conceptual frame to explore the principal leadership roles under the Chinese context of culture, society, and education. In this way the research study aims to answer the question: What are principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform? In order to gain a greater understanding of the status of principal leadership in Chinese primary and secondary schools, the following section presents some research studies conducted in Mainland China.

3.2.3 Research studies relevant to principal leadership in Mainland China

In Mainland China there is increasing awareness that the school principal plays a critical role in leading schools in times of change and a growing body of literature has begun to explore issues on aspects of principal leadership. Moreover, this is also in response to the fact that the roles of principals have become more multifaceted and complex over the last two decades. Several empirical studies have been undertaken to investigate leadership roles in practice in Chinese schools, and this section of the chapter reviews the related literature.

In Chen’s (2002) doctoral study, mixed methods were used to examine the leadership roles of secondary school principals in a changing Chinese society. A questionnaire was initially completed by 53 secondary principals, and then interviews were conducted with 15 Chinese principals and 15 Australian principals. The findings revealed that principals are assuming a great number of responsibilities in areas of teaching and learning, managerial focus, and future improvement. To be specific, these roles consist of planning, program development, teacher appraisal, staff professional development, personnel, student affairs, finance, liaison, and daily management. As well, the moral dimensions of leadership, those aspects that relate to the values component of school operations were recognised as a significant characteristic in principal leadership roles in Mainland China. However, Chen (2002) identified a conflict between the existing bureaucratic culture and the emerging democratic culture in Chinese schools. Chen (2002) argued that this clash of culture has resulted in some principals having less authority in their school than others.
Chen’s research thus revealed the constraints and dilemmas that jeopardised some principals’ effective running of schools and how this engendered new tensions as a result of systemic reforms.

Huang’s (2008) investigation of principals’ curriculum leadership roles for his doctoral research relied on in-depth interviews with four principals and ten teachers in five primary schools and a survey to 107 primary principals. The research results suggested four dimensions of leadership. Huang (2008) classified 12 roles in principal curriculum leadership including: (a) the core role in curriculum leadership: designer of school curriculum objective, coordinator of school curriculum system, leader of school-based curriculum development; (b) the traditional role in curriculum management: manager of curriculum implementation, evaluator of teachers and students; (c) the role of influencing teachers: server of teachers, stimulator of teachers, supporter of teachers; and (d) the role of supporting curriculum leadership: perceiver of curriculum development tendency, coordinator of curriculum affairs, promoter of school culture. Huang (2008) also indicated that while principals have spent great energy on curriculum affairs, they have not examined their role in curriculum leadership and have not fully understood this conception.

As one of the eight countries in the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), a study in China was conducted by Wong (2007) who examined the philosophy and practice of principals. He used one-on-one interviews with two successful principals and focus group interviews with teachers and students to collect data in two secondary schools in Shanghai. Findings from the interviews revealed that the words ‘discipline’, ‘obligation’, and ‘responsibility’ were mentioned more frequently than ‘democracy’, ‘trust’, ‘empowerment’, or ‘enabling’ in each principal’s daily practice. Wong (2007) also found that the two principals were both ‘top-down’ managers regarding decision-making, shared the same values, and knew well the schooling system. These findings have demonstrated that principals’ leadership practices in school are influenced by Chinese culture.

To date, there has been a limited body of research that has examined the status of school principals in Mainland China (Ribbins & Zhang, 2004). In particular, there is limited systematic empirical research to investigate principal leadership roles in
primary schools. Most of the literature introduces the research findings and theories in Western countries or presents ideas without empirical evidence to support them. As the current education reform has been carried out since 1999, principals’ roles have experienced dramatic change in Chinese schools. It is essential to pay more attention to the new roles of principal leadership in this changing environment. The current study, then, aims to address the gap in the research by undertaking an empirical investigation to explore the roles of principal leadership in the context of Chinese society, culture and education.

3.3 TEACHER LEADERSHIP

3.3.1 The definition of teacher leadership and teacher leaders

3.3.1.1 The definition of teacher leadership

The research literature reveals that many authors have attempted to define teacher leadership. Yet its numerous definitions continue to overlap, compete (Muijs & Harris, 2003) and lack clarity (Danielson, 2005). The notion of teacher leadership is mainly defined from three perspectives: ability, purpose, and process. For example, Wasley (1991) described teacher leadership as an ability of teacher leaders to influence the activities of colleagues and the success of students, which is “the ability of the teacher leader to engage colleagues in experimentation and then examination of more powerful instructional practices in the service of more engaged student learning” (p. 170). Presenting its purpose and contributions in a relatively comprehensive picture, Crowther et al. (2009) proposed that teacher leadership “facilitates principled action to achieve whole school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life” (p. 10).

However, most conceptions of teacher leadership are closely aligned with a broader notion, namely process. Lambert (1998) identified teacher leadership as “the reciprocal learning process that enables participants to construct and negotiate meanings leading to a shared purpose of schooling” (p. 9). Furthermore, Harris (2003) indicated it to be broader than other formal positions, when she said it is “the exercise of leadership by teachers regardless of position or designation” (p. 316). Based on an extensive literature review of teacher leadership over the past twenty
years, York-Barr and Duke (2004) concentrate on teacher leadership as a process of influencing other people to improve and suggest that:

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. Such leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organisational development. (pp. 287-288)

In the current study, the basic notion of teacher leadership will be grounded in York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) conception. This definition is adopted for purposes of this study given its focus on the process of teacher leadership, as well as its influence on main subjects (principals, teachers, students) in the school environment. It also encapsulates the ultimate purpose of education, which is to improve student learning and achievement through the development of individuals, teams and organisations.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) conclude that teacher leadership is mainly exercised by means of formal and informal teacher leadership roles. Formal teacher leadership roles are assumed by teachers who have both management and pedagogical tasks with formal leadership positions (Muijs & Harris, 2006), while informal teacher leadership is undertaken through informal ways, such as “coaching peers to resolve instructional problems, encouraging parent participation, working with colleagues in small groups and teams, modelling reflective practice, or articulating a vision for improvement” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263). In the school environment, it is relatively easy and convenient to identify formal teacher leaders who exercise formal leadership in formal positions, while informal teacher leadership is more complex, likely to change over time and unable to control. Thus the definition of teacher leadership used in this study is teacher leadership that is ‘formal’ in nature.

3.3.1.2 The definition of teacher leaders

Although most definitions of teacher leaders focus on their effects on other people and improving teaching and learning, different writers have stated their distinct ideas
of this concept. Crowther and Olsen (1997) pointed out that teacher leaders need to have expertise in pedagogy as a professional criterion, as well as a transformational ability. They write that teacher leaders are “individuals acclaimed not only for their pedagogical excellence, but also for their influence in stimulating change and creating improvement in the schools and socio-economically disadvantaged communities in which they work” (p. 6). The area of leading activities is expanded from the classroom to outside in the definition of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), who said that “teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice” (p. 17). Patterson and Patterson (2004) conceptualised a teacher leader as “a teacher who works with colleagues for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, whether in a formal or an informal capacity” (p. 74). In addition to the traditional formal leadership, informal leadership which has been gradually accepted in research is also contained in this conception.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) and others have written extensively on formal teacher leadership. Similarly, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) have defined teacher leaders as teachers who are formal leaders and experts, who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice. This conception combines the core aspects of various notions, including the types of leaders, expertise, leading areas and teacher leaders’ contributions. This definition is accepted for the purpose of the study.

In this research, then, formal teacher leaders are considered as those who exercise formal teacher leadership in formal teacher leadership positions. Examples of formal teacher leadership positions include “union representatives, department heads, curriculum specialists, mentors, members of a site-based management team” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 263), “grade-level chairpersons, team leaders, peer coaches” (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, p. 74), as well as “lead teachers, master teachers, …, and members of the school’s governance council” (Leithwood, 2003, p. 104). In some studies, the definitions of teacher leadership and teacher leaders are mixed and considered to have the same meaning. Here the notion of teacher leaders is often
used to interpret teacher leadership. However, teacher leadership and teacher leaders are two different conceptions in the same research area. Teacher leadership is a process of influencing others to realise the development of teaching and learning, while teacher leaders are those leaders who are recognised as exercising leadership by leading principals, teachers, students and parents.

3.3.2 The benefits of teacher leadership

Understanding teacher leadership and recognising those who are teacher leaders are important contributing factors of teacher leadership in schools. Since the early 1900s, many noted authors have recognised the importance of developing teacher leadership within schools. Schools, teachers, students and principals are said to benefit when leadership among teachers is fully executed (Barth, 2001). Thus, three key benefits of teacher leadership are identified and explained in this study and these include: (a) school improvement and reform, (b) teacher development, and (c) student outcomes (the benefits for principals will be elaborated in a later section). The following section examines these benefits.

3.3.2.1 School improvement and reform

One rationale behind creating leadership roles for teachers is achieving school improvement and undergoing reform. Schools require teacher leadership which not only positively affects the classroom but also the whole school (Barth, 1999). Some authors assert that school effectiveness and improvement are more likely to occur when teachers are placed in leadership positions (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000; Gronn, 2000; Ovando, 1996). Another significant outcome of teacher leadership is increasing the success of schools engaging in reform (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

Teacher leadership draws on teachers’ expertise and experience to trigger lasting and effective reform at the school level as well as curricular and instructional reforms at classroom level. Additionally, teacher leadership is a crucial element to transform schools from being dictatorships to democracies (Barth, 2001; Weise & Murphy, 1995), in which teachers can directly impact school improvement and change. A more democratic school environment is said to be created when teacher leaders assume more school-wide responsibilities and where they participate in more collaborative decision-making activities (National Comprehensive Center for
Teacher Quality, 2007). The consistent opinion in the literature is that tapping into the leadership of teachers is beneficial to school change and brings about educational improvement.

3.3.2.2 Teacher development

Teacher leadership roles can yield significant personal benefits to the development of both teacher leaders and other teachers. A number of studies have recognised teacher leadership as an essential component in promoting teacher development in various areas (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 2000; O’Connor & Boles, 1992; Smylie, 1994; Smylie, 1995; Weiss, 1993). Specifically, the two kinds of benefits consist of higher teacher self-confidence, motivation, and ownership, lower teacher alienation, and ultimately enhanced teacher quality. These key items are discussed as follows.

Firstly, many studies (see for example, Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lieberman et al., 2000; O’Connor & Boles, 1992) have found a direct relationship between teacher leadership and teacher psychological benefits. Some of these research findings confirm that empowerment and leadership opportunities for teachers increase their self-confidence, which brings about higher levels of school performance. For instance, based on data from interviewing and observing 17 teacher leaders, Lieberman et al. (2000) found that the experience of executing leadership developed teacher leaders’ confidence in organising other teachers’ participation and leading school activities in new ways.

Some other studies (see for example, Muijs & Harris, 2006; Smylie, 1994; Troen & Boles, 2003; Weiss, 1993) have found that activities associated with teacher leadership had a positive effect upon teachers’ motivation, ownership, and alienation. After reviewing the research literature, Smylie (1994) pointed out that increased levels of teacher participation in school leadership engender the strongest motivation among teachers to carry out meaningful instructional activities. Moreover, Weiss (1993) conducted a qualitative study of 12 high schools in 11 states in the USA. After conducting 193 structured interviews, results revealed that teachers felt an improved sense of ownership when they were involved in leadership activities within the school. Similar results were found in a case study of ten schools in the UK
conducted by Muijs and Harris (2006), as teachers’ motivation and ownership were fostered when teachers took on a variety of leadership activities, such as collaboration, partnership and professional networking. Additionally, Pellicer and Anderson (1995) and Troen and Boles (2003) argue that as there are limited opportunities for teachers to work together and share knowledge and skills with each other in traditional schools, teacher leadership should be promoted as a strategy for eliminating alienation by means of enhanced collaboration and responsibilities.

Secondly, teacher leadership is able to improve teacher quality in various ways. The emphasis on teacher expertise in continuous learning, excellent teaching and spreading good practice to colleagues is needed, which contributes to instructional improvement and teacher quality throughout the school (Smylie, 1995). This expertise becomes more widely available when teachers participate in more leadership activities, such as those which “encourage sharing of best practices, mentor new teachers, and collaborate with teaching colleagues” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 258-259). When teachers actively pursue leadership opportunities, their knowledge and skills in both school and classroom environments are said to increase dramatically.

3.3.2.3 Student achievement

Teacher leadership has been shown to be centrally important in achieving students’ academic achievement. Some research shows that students’ academic achievement is more likely to improve where leadership is distributed to teachers throughout the schools (Burr, 2003; Dickerson, 2003; Dimaggio, 2007; Silins & Mulford, 2002). For instance, Dimaggio (2007) conducted surveys to explore the relationship between dimensions of teacher leadership and reading achievement at 22 primary schools in the USA. Findings revealed that several aspects of teacher leadership had statistically significant effects on student reading scores (Dimaggio, 2007). In another study, 400 questionnaires were completed by principals and 200 questionnaires were completed by teachers in primary schools in the USA (Dickerson, 2003). The findings from Dickerson’s research indicated that higher levels of teacher leadership contribute to higher student achievement or academic outcomes in schools. This research provides support for the notion that schools where students are successful academically have
more teachers exercising leadership, which suggests that teacher leadership creates conditions where students are more successful.

3.3.3 Teacher leadership roles

Although teacher leadership roles have been defined by many research studies, the roles of teacher leadership are still ambiguous and confused (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As teachers’ participation in school leadership has expanded, teachers undertake a variety of responsibilities in both their traditional classroom teaching duties and non-teaching duties (Ovando, 1996). These increasing roles trigger difficulties in defining teacher leadership and the work of teachers. If teacher leadership roles can be established with the permission of principals, teacher leaders and other teachers, it will be easier for teacher leaders to succeed (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In the current research, teacher leadership roles are redefined based on previous literature. Despite the fact that both formal teacher leaders and informal teacher leaders can assume teacher leadership roles, this study focuses on the leadership roles taken by formal teacher leaders in Shandong province of Mainland China. Participation in decision-making, parent and community involvement, professional development, collaboration, support and connection are identified as six key roles of teacher leadership in this study, since they are most mentioned, discussed and recognised in the literature related to teacher leadership roles. More details are explained below.

3.3.3.1 Participation in decision-making

Participation in decision-making is a critical element of teacher leadership that has emerged in the literature. In their Teacher Leadership School Survey (TLSS) (Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998), teacher leadership is categorised as comprising seven dimensions. Encouraging teachers to actively engage in decision-making is highlighted as one of the dimensions of participation (cf. Hart, 1995). Similarly, based on their qualitative study that explored teacher leadership across ten primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom, Muijs and Harris (2006) found that teacher leadership was exercised when teachers engage with shared decision-making on important school work in order to affect school change and improvement. In this process, teachers were provided with responsibilities and power to undertake school developmental tasks.
Teacher leaders are said to be stimulated to make decisions concerning diverse school affairs in order to enhance school development. Smylie and Denny (1990) conducted an empirical study to identify teacher leadership roles through interviews with 13 teacher leaders and a survey of 56 teacher leaders in primary and secondary schools in the USA. The results showed that decision-making was categorised as the main teacher leadership role consuming most of teacher leaders’ time, and this role included activities such as developing curricula, instructional programs and materials, as well as planning staff development activities (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Likewise, Barth (2001) introduced ten roles in decision-making which are crucial to teacher leadership for keeping schools healthy. The list consisted of deciding upon instructional materials selection, curriculum development, student behaviour standards, student tracking, staff development programs, promotion and retention policies, school budgets, teacher performance assessment, new staff hire, and new administrators’ selection.

In the current study, four dimensions of participation in decision-making are used following Smylie’s (1992) research in which they are organised as a relatively comprehensive structure. This structure of decision-making embraces personnel decisions (e.g., selecting staff members, evaluating teacher performance), curricular and instructional decisions (e.g., developing curriculum, choosing instructional materials), staff development decisions (e.g., evaluating staff development needs, designing staff development programs), and general administrative decisions (e.g., determining budget, setting staff work schedules).

3.3.3.2 Parents and community involvement

Teacher leadership roles operate within and beyond schools, which means that they include not only dealing with the affairs in the school, but also working outside the school with parents and the community. For instance, York-Barr and Duke (2004) propose that teachers’ work with parents and community is considered an important role of teacher leadership. Lambert (1998) also sees that teacher leaders work with and alongside parents and members of the community.

In this study, parent and community involvement consists of encouraging parents to participate in school affairs and enlisting their cooperation and support. In the 1996
National Teacher Forum held in the USA, 120 teacher leaders all over the country were invited to discuss the leadership roles that teacher leaders assume. This forum revealed a vital role of teacher leadership—working with parents and communities, which is illustrated as teacher leaders encouraging parents to participate in school activities and providing suggestions for school-home connections (cf. Quinn, Haggard, & Ford, 2006), as well as building partnerships with communities (Paulu & Winters, 1998). Furthermore, the aim of working together with community members was pointed out as obtaining support (e.g., resource acquisition) from communities, so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Cranston, 2000). Based on his research conducted in six primary schools in Brisbane, Australia, Cranston (2000) observed that teacher leaders sought valuable support and resources from their school communities.

### 3.3.3.3 Professional development

Facilitating professional development among staff members is the third role of teacher leadership. In the case study of Silva et al. (2000), semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain meaningful insights into the work of three teacher leaders in the United States. According to the analysis of their stories, teacher professional development was identified as a vital role of teacher leadership (Silva et al., 2000). Similarly, based on their extensive literature review, Day and Harris (2002) identified professional development as the most significant leadership role for teacher leaders (cf. Frost & Harris, 2003; Little, 1999; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Ovando, 1996; Silva et al., 2000).

Teachers need to possess an awareness to actively learn new knowledge and skills which are considered as the basis of teacher development (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Successful teacher in-service preparation is a process of combining previous theoretical knowledge with a large amount of new classroom experiences in teaching and learning, during which teacher leaders guide less experienced teachers to acquire the practical knowledge (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Frost & Harris, 2003; Hart, 1995; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lambert, 2003; Ovando, 1996; Smylie, 1995). In order to guide and help teachers develop, it is imperative for teacher leaders to possess appropriate capabilities. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) conducted a qualitative study where they interviewed 57 teachers who
exercised leadership in six secondary schools in order to identify their main capacities. “Procedural knowledge” and “declarative knowledge” (p. 126) were viewed as the most frequently mentioned capacities (Leithwood et al., 1999). Procedural knowledge is associated with knowledge regarding how teacher leaders execute leadership tasks, such as making tough decisions, holding meetings and dealing with administrative issues. Declarative knowledge relates to the specific professional aspects of knowledge, such as government education policies, education in general, specific subjects, and union affairs. Moreover, the researchers found that teacher leaders possessed the abilities to establish a good relationship with other teachers and solving problems, as well as the skills of good communication with students. Their study found that teacher leaders assist other teachers’ development by sharing their rich knowledge and skills.

In the current study, teacher professional development comprises teacher leaders’ direct influence on the professional growth of their colleagues, as well as their own growth by a variety of forms. Thus, most writers emphasise mutual learning among colleagues, rather than only learning individually (Day & Harris, 2002; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998; Muijs & Harris, 2006). More specifically, York-Barr and Duke (2004) concluded that professional growth could be achieved through different forms, such as mentoring, coaching, modelling, encouraging, as well as organising workshops (cf. Devaney, 1987; Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994).

In the research of tracing teacher leadership roles in professional development schools (PDSs) of the USA, Darling-Hammond (1994) indicated new ways of understanding professional growth identified by PDSs. These approaches involved action and reflection; comprehension and appreciation of others’ findings; discussion with practitioners within a collegial group; and research conducted by teachers or accompanied with researchers in empirical studies (Darling-Hammond, 1994, cf. Ash & Persall, 2000; Henson, 1996; Ovando, 1996). In summary, this leadership role in professional development contributes to teachers’ learning and teaching in schools (Harris & Muijs, 2002), whereby teachers are able to acquire new knowledge more readily and in turn teach students more effectively (Harrison & Killion, 2007).
3.3.3.4 Collaboration

Collaboration is the fourth role of teacher leadership considered here. After interviewing five teacher leaders selected from schools in the USA, LeBlanc and Shelton (1997) identified collaboration as a significant leadership role and the principal approach of teacher leaders to exert influence on school environments. From the perspective of participative leadership, Day and Harris (2002) indicate that this teacher leadership role focuses on collaboration between teacher leaders and their colleagues, for the purpose of forging school efforts in improvement and leading teachers towards a collective goal. In the process of collaboration, principals, formal teacher leaders, informal teacher leaders and other teachers work cooperatively in groups or teams with equal status. Collaboration aims at pursuing development of teaching and learning in schools (Muijs & Harris, 2006) as well as alleviating teachers’ isolation in their work (Steel & Craig, 2006).

Collaboration frequently emerges in related education literature. Some researchers refer to collaboration as collegiality (Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998; Muijs & Harris, 2006), which stresses distributed leadership and empowerment to execute teacher leadership. Moreover, Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (1998) point out that ‘open communication’ encourages school staff to share ideas or feelings easily and communicate relevant information in an open and honest manner so as to elevate school development more efficiently, which is an effective approach to collaboration. In the current study, collaboration comprises the ideas mentioned above and is said to occur when teachers discuss teaching strategies and approaches, share new findings and information, and engage in research and teaching activities with colleagues and administrators in the school (Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998).

3.3.3.5 Support

Support is the fifth role of teacher leadership. With the intention of accomplishing classroom responsibilities and enhancing practice, Smylie and Denny’s (1990) research revealed that teacher leaders defined their leadership role primarily as supporting other teachers, such as facilitating, helping, providing knowledge and new ideas in practice, and emotional support. In the current study, support means that formal teacher leaders provide different kinds of resources to other teachers for the purpose of realising school improvement and student development.
This support is exercised in a variety of forms. Firstly, substantial support refers to teacher leaders who provide various expertise and information to support their colleagues. More specifically, Harrison and Killion (2007) categorised these sources as resources support, instructional support, curriculum support, and classroom support to assist in teaching and learning in schools. Resources support is regarded as the assistance from teacher leaders to their colleagues through sharing instructional resources (e.g., Web sites, instructional materials, readings) and professional resources (e.g., articles, books, lesson or unit plans, and assessment tools). In order to assist teachers in carrying out effective teaching strategies, instructional support is offered by teacher leaders as ideas for excellent instruction or lesson planning in partnership with their colleagues. Moreover, curriculum support is considered as teacher leaders’ guidance to fellow teachers on agreeing on curriculum standards, abiding by adopted curriculum, using common pacing charts, and developing shared assessments. Classroom support is often utilised by teacher leaders to help colleagues apply new ideas in classrooms. This support might comprise demonstration of a lesson, co-teaching, observation and feedback provision (Harrison & Killion, 2007).

Secondly, mental support, such as stimulation, is sometimes supplied by teacher leaders through involvement in activities to improve other teachers’ development. For example, mental support can be expressed as “kind of stroking people and saying you can do it”, speaking out on teachers’ behalf whether they agree or disagree, allowing people to “vent” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 126), and share their frustrations (Smylie & Denny, 1990). Finally, it is possible for teacher leaders to put forward new methods to support the enhancement of principals, teachers and students’ work (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). The current study focuses on formal teacher leaders who can offer and create different kinds of support within and beyond the classroom.

3.3.3.6 Connection

Connection is the last dimension of the teacher leadership roles to be identified and discussed in this study. Some research has explored how teacher leaders connect the key school elements in school change and improvement (for example, see Day & Harris, 2002; Hart, 1995; Sherrill, 1999; Silva et al., 2000; Walters, 1992; Yarger & Lee, 1994). Although connection is a broad conception, it mainly focuses on the
areas of performing principles of school improvement, establishing positive relationships with colleagues, and reflecting the requirements of students in this study. According to Day and Harris’s (2002) research, teacher leaders are identified as the groups who have the responsibilities to apply school improvement principles of school improvement into classrooms practices.

Using the data from the Venture Capital School in Ohio, the USA, Sherrill (1999) explored the expectations of teacher leadership roles at three phases of a teaching career continuum: teacher preparation, induction, and ongoing professional development. Developing a good relationship with principals has been identified as a new leadership role for teacher leaders at the third phase (Sherrill, 1999). Similarly, Silva et al. (2000) recognised that nurturing supportive relationships with colleagues is a significant role for effective leaders so as to facilitate school change. Finally, in the same study, teacher leadership is emphasised as significant in raising awareness of the needs of students as learners and how they need to be supported in the classroom. The implementation of this connection role may trigger a collaborative and growth-oriented school environment.

3.3.3.7 Summary

Currently, with increasing recognition of the important role of teacher leaders all over the world, the research literature relating to teacher leadership roles has greatly increased, especially in the Western academic community. Although teacher leadership roles have been defined in many research studies there is a lack of consensus regarding a definition or specific dimensions of teacher leadership roles (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This study may contribute to an explanation of the complexity of teacher leadership roles in the school environment, especially for the Chinese context which has been under-researched to date.

It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned studies on primary and secondary teacher leaders discussed here were conducted in Western countries. Based on these studies, the researcher has established a relatively comprehensive structure and reasonable understanding of teacher leadership roles. However, research on teacher leadership roles in Mainland China is limited. Thus the second research question is addressed: What are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in
Mainland China under current educational reform? To gain a greater understanding about school leadership in the context of Chinese society, the relevant research literature is reviewed in the next section.

3.3.4 Research studies relevant to teacher leadership in Mainland China

In the context of the current education reform in Mainland China, the roles of teacher leaders have become more significant and complex, triggering the prominence of teacher leadership in schools. Even though research in this growing field is still in its infancy, there is a limited literature on teacher leadership and teacher professional development which is introduced in this section.

3.3.4.1 Research studies on teacher leadership

While writing and research on teacher leadership has flourished over the last twenty years, research on the Chinese situation in this area, either in English or Chinese, is scarce. In Mainland China, drawing upon Western literature, journal articles relevant to teacher leadership largely focus on introducing and analysing teacher leadership’s context, conception, definition, significance and influencing factors. Even though some empirical studies have been conducted to discover teacher leadership in Hong Kong and Taiwan, little is known about the status of teacher leadership in Mainland China. While some practical teacher leadership activities have begun to be assumed by teachers in Chinese schools under the current education reform, little has been demonstrated theoretically in academic research. In this section, the limited but growing body of literature related to teacher leadership in Mainland China is reviewed.

To date, there have been two empirical studies that have explored the status of teacher leadership in primary and secondary schools in Mainland China. Each of these is now reviewed. Using a case study design, Chen (2007) investigated the significance of teacher leadership for teacher professional development in two senior secondary schools of Mainland China. She found that formal teacher leaders are characterised by persons who uphold hierarchy, meritocracy and instrumentalism, all of which negatively influenced other teachers’ professional development. However, this research also revealed that the development of teacher leadership in schools has presented a strong challenge to the State’s monopoly of power on teachers’ continuing education, the barriers of examination-oriented education, and the weak
support from school administrators. Consequently, several conditions were proposed by Chen (2007) to promote teacher leadership in Chinese schools: the decentralisation of power from state to schools and teachers, the involvement of market in teacher continuing education, the reconstruction of professional values, the inspiration of teachers in leading, more support from schools to teacher leaders, and the cultivation of collaborative culture.

The other research study focused on the situation of teacher leadership in 15 primary and secondary schools of Mainland China (Jin, 2007). A mixed methodology was used through a survey completed by 486 principals and teachers, interviews with six principals and 36 teachers, observations of two secondary schools, and action research at one school. The research results revealed that group leaders and leading teachers are key teacher leaders but there was a low level of teacher leadership in Chinese primary and secondary schools. School culture, principal leadership styles, school organisational systems and the ways teachers interact are recognised as the main factors affecting teacher leadership. Several teacher leadership models were found to have been successful in practice. Examples included an excellent teacher-centred team-leading model in which leading teachers were required to accomplish and model high-quality teaching to their staff; collaboration groups where teacher leaders guided teachers in discussion of various topics and reported the results to other school teachers; and supervision of senior teachers to motivate them for playing a leading role in the school.

In short, the development of teacher leadership in terms of theory and practice is still at its early stage in Mainland China. Most literature reports on research findings and borrowed theories from Western countries. There is a lack of empirical studies based within the Chinese social, cultural and educational context. The two studies discussed above primarily identified teacher leaders’ characteristics, influencing factors and leadership models, yet neither study elaborated the categories of teacher leadership roles. Moreover, principals have been identified as an essential factor influencing the exercise of teacher leadership in Chinese primary and secondary schools (Jin, 2007). Thus it is worth investigating in more detail teacher leadership roles as well as how principals influence them through empirical studies.
3.3.4.2 Professional development of teachers

Teachers’ professional development is closely connected to teacher leadership. With the implementation of the current curriculum reform in Mainland China, the professional development of teachers has been emphasised as one of the fundamental driving forces of reform. At present, although teacher professional development practice in Mainland China is still not well developed enough (Liu, 2007), there has been some research undertaken that explores this field. Teacher professional development has been introduced for different developing stages of teachers, promoted in different forms, and confronts some existing problems.

First, teacher professional development emphasises teachers’ lifelong learning and growth with a process of pre-service training, new teacher training and in-service training (Zhu & Zhou, 2007). For instance, the professional development of beginning teachers as a distinctive developmental stage has been emphasised in some research. Lee and Feng (2007) undertook a qualitative study where they interviewed eight teachers in three secondary schools in Guangzhou. They concluded that there were four forms of support supplied by mentors to first-year teachers and these included support in the fields of “subject knowledge, student, teaching, and classroom management” (Lee & Feng, 2007, p. 243).

Second, multiple forms of teacher professional development have been analysed from different perspectives in the research. In accordance with the current education reform in Mainland China, Yang (2006) put forth five components of teacher professional development in schools: studying educational theory, reflecting on teaching practice, learning from others’ experience, undertaking educational research, and insisting on teaching benefits for teachers as well as students. Teachers’ autonomous awareness and internal need were highlighted as the foundation and premise to achieve their professional development. From the perspective of specific practical approaches, Wu (2007) identified several effective approaches to promote teacher professional development, which have been utilised by teachers in schools. They are educational narrative research, case study, teacher collaborative discussion, and investigation of special subjects. Furthermore, based on the practical problems of schools, Liu (2007) established a model of teacher professional development on the operational level. There are six aspects in this
effective model, consisting of collaborating with experts, planning vision, enhancing qualification, evaluating results, reflecting on practice and doing research.

Third, there have been some studies (see for example, Chiu, 2001; Lai & Lo, 2007; Walker & Cheng, 1996) that have shown the barriers to the process of promoting teachers’ professional development in China. Based on their qualitative research in two secondary schools in Shanghai, Lai and Lo (2007) found that teachers lacked an awareness of the meaning of ‘profession’ or ‘professionalism’. For this reason, they suggested that teachers needed to be given more opportunities of participating in decision-making in school affairs and educational policies to increase their awareness of professional authority and autonomy. Hence limiting the supervision from the State is an effective approach to provide teachers more space to concentrate on teaching and learning.

In summary, the terms of teacher leadership and teacher professional development share a similar conception which emphasises administrators’ empowerment to teachers and teachers’ collaboration against a background of education reform. In the current study, teacher leadership is considered to be a new perspective in which to exercise the professional development of teachers. It is argued here that the development of teacher leadership is likely to result in the professional development of teachers.

3.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP

As a principal’s work responsibilities have expanded due to the implementation of education reforms across many countries in the world, including Mainland China, it has been argued that it is unlikely that any one individual principal will be able to exercise all expected leadership functions effectively in school (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 2007). For this reason, the notion of leadership is no longer the sole province of the principal, the formal leader in the school, but also includes leadership exercised by teacher leaders who have expertise to share. Over recent decades, teacher leadership has gradually become a necessary imperative for effective school functioning and a pre-requisite for school improvement (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). In the wider literature, teachers have been identified for their capacity to exercise
leadership in schools. While the principal is the officially recognised leader in the primary school, many writers and researchers argue that it is necessary to distribute leadership among teacher leaders to achieve the demands of curriculum reform (Barth, 2001; Harris, 2003).

Given this context, it is therefore essential to examine the nature of the relationship between principals and teacher leaders to improve school development (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). It can be argued that positive staff relationships assist in effective change in schools when principals work together with teacher leaders in a team (Schmoker, 1999). Based on the research of Youngs and King (2002), Mangin (2007) concluded that principals who facilitate teacher leadership initiatives can enhance school capability and promote internal expertise. Similarly, if principals support their teacher colleagues and share instructional leadership with them, school improvement is likely to improve pedagogy and student achievement (Lambert, 2003, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Schmoker, 2007). Moreover, principals are said to benefit by sharing leadership with teachers as they are more likely to complete their work responsibilities effectively with the assistance of teacher leadership (Johnson, 2006).

Some research studies have investigated the nature of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher leadership, rather than focus on restricted leadership roles, behaviours or styles of principals and teachers (Walsh, 2005). As will be seen, of these, the recent work of Crowther et al. (2009) is significant for the purposes of this study as it proposes that the leadership of principals and teachers in school reform can occur in alignment, whilst at different levels, to achieve increased school capacity and curriculum goals. This ‘parallel leadership’ is a process whereby principals and teacher leaders work in parallel, each taking different areas of responsibility and engage in collective action to build school capacity and work towards achieving the same goals.

The study of micropolitics should offer some useful insights into understanding the complex relationships that arise as school principals exercise their power and leadership in their dealings with key staff members, such as designated teacher leaders. Micropolitics has been described as a set of “strategies by which individuals
and groups in organisational contexts seek to use their resources of authority and influence to further their interests” (Hoyle, 1986, p. 126). This part of the chapter briefly refers to the literature on micropolitics, for whilst it has been applied in Western contexts, its focus on the use of power is helpful in unpacking the perceptions about leadership that arose in the interviews with Chinese principals and teacher leaders in this study. As will be seen in the analysis of interview data in Chapters 5 and 6, recent theorising about micropolitics is insightful for unpacking the concept of parallel leadership (Crowther et al., 2009) and notions of power as the principals in this study exercised their power through (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blase & Blase, 1997; Fennell, 1999; Smeed, Kimber, Millwater, & Ehrich, 2009) the designated teacher leaders in their schools.

In broad terms micropolitics is concerned with the use and abuse of power in institutional settings. Hoyle (1999) refers to micropolitics in terms of a continuum that ranges from established management practices to a more extreme form of “illegitimate, self interested manipulation” (p. 126). Significantly, Hoyle’s focus is on the nature of this use of power within the internal operations of an organisation. Blase (1991, p. 11) conceptualises micropolitics in terms of its potential for the “use of formal and informal power” by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in an organisation. As with Hoyle (1999), Blase (1991, p. 11) refers to the range of power options utilised by individuals and groups within organisations as both “cooperative and conflictive actions and processes” and concludes that these are “part of the realm of micropolitics”. In other words, micropolitics encompasses a variety of strategies that include, for example, power, authority, trust, openness, collaboration, and cooperation.

Thus, micropolitics can encompass the daily interactions, negotiations, and bargains in school settings (Lindell, 1999, cf. Flessa, 2009). However, as Smeed et al. (2009, p. 27) observe, “Lindell fails to adequately distinguish what is internal to a school organisation and what is external to it”. Nevertheless, in reworking some established models of power and leadership within an Australian school context, these authors offer a reconceptualisation of micropolitics which focuses on three forms of power, namely power with, power through, and power over. In brief, “power over” refers to
dominance or control, “power through” refers to facilitative power, and “power with” entails a notion of shared leadership (Smeed et al., 2009, p. 35).

Whist elements of the more traditional approach of power over remain significant for the Chinese schools in this case study, the notion of power through is particularly significant. Power through is essentially a transactional use of power in which principals allow designated ‘others’, in this study, teacher leaders, to cooperate and negotiate with them in order to achieve and implement school-based decision-making. Following this view of power through in the Chinese context, principals then allocate their power through their teacher leaders to implement the outcomes of this process. As noted, this view of power in the internal operation of schools is aligned with the view of leadership that envisages principals and teachers working together in tandem, or in parallel, to together achieve the goals of curriculum reform in a school. Hence power through is useful in understanding the critical role of power dynamics in school relationships and also in determining the ways in which principals and teacher leaders perceive their roles as leaders.

In this study, the relationship between principal leadership and teacher leadership will be explored via the study of micropolitics drawing upon two core dimensions, cooperative and conflictive processes, previously described from Blase (1991). This is discussed in the conceptual framework later in the chapter.

3.4.1 The influence of principal leadership on teacher leadership

3.4.1.1 Principal leadership supporting teacher leadership: Cooperative process

It is recognised that teacher leaders play pivotal roles in school improvement, however, teacher leadership may not be executed effectively without the support and encouragement from principals (Birky, Shelton, & Headley, 2006). Principal-directed teacher leadership significantly promotes teachers’ professionalism, job satisfaction and student outcomes in schools (Johnson, 2006). Many studies have been conducted to explore what principals do to establish and promote teacher leadership.

In a study by Daley (2002), the behaviours and strategies of principals to establish teacher leadership capacity were explored from the perspectives of principals and
teacher leaders. He conducted a case study of five high schools by interviewing principals and teacher leaders based on the concepts of two survey instruments designed by Linda Lambert (1998). The findings showed six behaviours and strategies for principals to cultivate teacher leadership capacity in schools. These included creating a school culture characterised by communication and collaboration, highlighting continuous learning in schools, establishing a learning cycle, communicating confidence to lead, cultivating expertise to manage change, and keeping student success. Daley (2002) also suggested creating an environment where individuals could communicate with others in confidence, be effective at change management, and work to ensure student success.

Birky et al. (2006) conducted two mixed-design research studies to investigate the means by which principals encouraged teacher leadership activities in the United States. In the first study, four informal teacher leaders were involved in individual interviews and 40 responded to a survey. In the second study, teacher leaders serving as school council chairs from 49 public high schools completed another survey, which was followed up with surveys completed by 12 site council chairs concerning teacher leadership. Based on the data from the two studies, Birky et al. (2006) concluded that eight strategies were used to develop teacher leadership, particularly in the education reform environment. They were named as valuing and respecting colleagues, their work, and teacher leaders’ roles; accepting change, enabling teachers to do experimentation and taking risk; providing teachers’ tasks with verbal and technical support; facilitating collaboration; empowering teachers to assume leader roles; encouraging teachers in decision-making; keeping principals available to support teachers; and mentoring teachers to lead.

In order to create a professional environment and place importance on teachers, Steel and Craig (2006) provided some recommendations to principals and administrators to support teachers as professionals. Their data were mainly derived from interviews with teacher leaders, interviews with teachers in previous study and a project named the Next Generation of Teachers (NGT) conducted at Harvard University. Based on their findings, the authors arrived at six suggestions for principals as a way to develop teachers. These included: developing trust with teachers, listening to them, validating their work, communicating their support, expecting growth, and
facilitating collaboration (Steel & Craig, 2006). Steel and Craig (2006) argue that these suggestions should promote leadership at the teacher level in schools as well as providing a means of empowering teachers.

According to Wade and Ferriter (2007), there are seven important steps that principals should follow to foster and establish accomplished teachers for leadership roles in schools. First, administrators need to identify accomplished teachers who have potential leadership by means of observation; second, they should create suitable leadership roles for those potential leaders so as to fit their diverse skills; third, they should support accomplished teachers to undertake responsibilities; fourth, they should accompany teachers with guidance in their prime career period; fifth, they should provide teachers with encouragement and feedback; sixth, when teachers are able to execute leadership, they should reduce their support; and seventh, it is anticipated that these teachers will in turn support other teacher leaders to continue this cycle (Wade & Ferriter, 2007). The authors claim that these steps should provide an effective process to develop teachers as leaders within and beyond classrooms.

In many research studies, principals have been regarded as an essential factor in providing teachers with more responsibilities to improve their leadership (Blase & Blase, 2001; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002). Some results have proposed strategies and behaviours that principals have adopted or supported to promote teacher leadership. Several elements are highlighted, such as support, two-way communication, empowering teachers and collaborating with them.

**Parallel leadership**

Crowther et al.’s (2009) notion of parallel leadership is of particular interest to the concerns of this research into how principal leadership influences teacher leadership and how teacher leadership influences principal leadership during unprecedented education reform in China. Whilst related to notions of shared or distributed leadership, parallel leadership is distinct in that it proposes that while the leadership of principals and teachers varies in method and form, it is similar in significance. Moreover, according to Crowther et al. (2009), “it embodies three distinct qualities — mutual trust, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression” (p. 53). In
this context, mutual trust embodies values such as respect, nurturing and care. Other researchers have referred to this as relational trust where an environment is created in which “individuals share a moral commitment to act in the interests of the collectivity, and this ethical basis for individual action constitutes a moral resource that the institution can draw on to initiative and sustain change” (Bryk & Schneider cited in Fleming & Leo, 2000, p. 4). Hargreaves (1994) argues that the development of trust is highly significant to schools working for change and that building “confidence and connectedness” (p. 254) in teachers is important for this process.

The second characteristic of parallel leadership articulated by Crowther and his colleagues is ‘shared purpose’, which encapsulates the alignment between what is stated and what is enacted. Researchers investigating this characteristic in leadership studies look for the convergence when principals and teacher leaders enact their leadership at different levels and in different degrees to achieve common stated goal. Some researchers refer to this as a form of collaboration that over time becomes part of a school’s leadership culture. According to Cowan (2006), this notion of collaboration “fosters a clear sense of purpose and helps to define roles and responsibilities” (p. 602).

Allowance for individual expression, the third characteristic of Crowther et al.’s (2009) notion of parallel leadership, refers to principal-teacher leadership relationships that enable individualism and conviction. Principals and teacher leaders displaying this quality of parallel leadership recognise their individuality and autonomy and interact in a collaborative style that does not necessitate consensus. Crowther et al. (2009) also argue that allowance for individual expression is most effective in enacting leadership for school reform. For example, the researchers noted in their case studies that two key leaders had “strong individual convictions and assertive dispositions as well as a well-developed capacity to accommodate the values and circumstances of others” (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 56).

However, it should be noted that Goh (2009) argues that there are cultural constraints on the application of parallel leadership in the Singaporean context. This might well be the case in China also. As Andrews, Conway, Dawson, Lewis, McMaster, Morgan, and Star (2004) indicate, parallel leadership encourages school leaders to express
their individual ideas freely in the working interaction. It is in keeping with the Australian ethos that highlights people’s freedom of expression as being themselves (Samovar & Poter, 1991), and the respect for equality and fairness (Wierzbicka, 1997). However, different views from the Asian perspective reveal that collectivist societies, such as Singapore and China, emphasise the values of harmony, modesty, fulfilment of others’ needs, and equal distribution of reward (Triandis, 1990). Therefore, most principals and teachers are reluctant to show a high degree of individual expression or express their opinions with great caution in China.

Nevertheless, the notion of parallel leadership is particularly useful for purposes of this thesis as it accommodates the different roles that principal and teacher leaders have in schools, whilst acknowledging their synergies and capacities to each work differently to achieve the same goals. Cultural differences have been considered when parallel leadership is transferred from Australia to China. This view of leadership also allows for the fact that different individual leaders will give each parallel leadership team a distinctive quality and this is specifically explored with reference to the analysis of the findings in Chapter 6 in this thesis.

3.4.1.2 Principal leadership constraining teacher leadership: Conflicitive process

There have been a number of studies demonstrating how principals encourage and develop teacher leadership. However, due to principals’ traditional role, some teachers assert that principals are often considered as the major barrier in enabling them to exercise leadership in schools (Johnson, 2006). Moreover, some research studies and literature in the field also indicate that principal leadership practices sometimes interfere with the enhancement of teacher leadership (Barker, 1998; Birky & Ward, 2003; Blase, 1993; Hart, 1994; Fullan, 2007; O’Connor & Boles, 1992).

The complex relationship between teacher leaders and principals has been investigated by scholars in a range of contexts. A survey study by O’Connor and Boles (1992) revealed that teacher leaders’ relationship with administrators was regarded as one of the potential obstacles to teacher leadership. Among 76 formal teacher leaders who participated in the survey, 26% perceived that they had a strained relationship with their principals. Several teacher leaders even pointed out that there was a threatening relationship between them.
Moreover, principals’ effects on teachers’ leadership in their schools were identified in the study by Erwin (2000). Based on interviews with 28 principals and 28 teachers in Florida, USA, teachers indicated that principals’ instructions were lacking and principals’ support of teacher leadership was deficient (Erwin, 2000). As to the main reason accepted by principals, teachers’ lack of time in leading was considered as the predominant barrier to develop teacher leadership.

In a qualitative research study by Blase (1993), the nature of principals’ strategies exerted on teacher leaders was investigated from the perspective of teachers. Based on the statement of 1200 teachers as participants, two factors were concluded as barriers. First, teachers do not always have opportunities to be involved in decision-making in schools. Second, administrators seldom communicate with teachers in order to understand their aspirations, values and needs.

Similar to Blase’s (1993) study, the previously mentioned study of Birky et al. (2006) also revealed that there were a number of ways in which principals restrained teacher leadership initiatives. They included controlling teachers’ use of power, devaluing teachers’ work and efforts, discouraging collaboration among teachers, lacking a grand vision for the school’s future, and laying too much stress on micromanagement.

The aforementioned research studies have identified that principals’ support for teacher leadership is not always evident in some schools. Moreover, there are some principal behaviours that discourage teachers from exercising leadership. It appears that little is known about how principals influence teacher leadership roles. Thus, this study aims to explore whether these types of micropolitical interactions are apparent within the Chinese context.

### 3.4.2 The influence of teacher leadership on principal leadership: Cooperative process

Against a background of worldwide school reform, teacher leadership has been identified as a key factor in fostering a new relationship between administrators and teachers so that teaching and learning in schools can meet the requirements of education reform. Although some research concentrates on the influence of principal
leadership on teacher leadership, several studies (see for example, Anderson, 2004; Edgerson et al., 2006; Johnson, 2006) have demonstrated that teacher leaders exert influence on principals as well and there are some benefits principals may obtain from the support of teacher leaders.

Thus a multisite case study conducted by Anderson (2004), investigated the reciprocal influence between principals and teacher leaders. The researcher interviewed 28 participants from six Canadian schools, comprising administrators, teacher leaders and teacher nominators (described as “teachers who dominated colleagues as teacher leaders” (p. 99). His findings showed that most respondents recognised principals were influenced by teacher leaders in all schools. For example, teacher leaders could assist principals to carry out school affairs successfully by means of frequent communication. Moreover, it was found useful for principals to get suggestions from teacher leaders to help them deal effectively with school matters and with other teachers.

Similarly, Johnson (2006) carried out a mixed methods study to examine the benefits of teacher leadership for principals. In this study, 88 teachers were surveyed in American primary schools, with one principal and five teachers interviewed in one selected school. The interview results pointed out that all respondents acknowledged that teacher leadership played a pivotal role in supporting principals to perform responsibilities and manage schools. Another finding of Johnson’s (2006) study demonstrated that principals were able to take on their responsibilities more effectively through distributing teacher leadership among teacher leaders.

Based on their literature review, Edgerson et al. (2006) examined the relationship between principals and teacher leaders in schools. They concluded that principals should gather teachers’ trust and support by daily interpersonal interactions. With the support of teachers, principals could spend more time on eliminating barriers in working, supplying substantial and emotional support to teachers, dealing with management affairs, and setting up a new and valuable direction for school operation.
However, compared to studies about the influence of principals on teachers, very little research has explored the effects of teachers on principals. Many studies have focused on principals and how they influence teachers. Yet, limited research and literature show the positive or negative effects of teacher leadership on principals in their daily work. Although teachers’ supportive function has been demonstrated by some researchers, to date these studies are limited in scope and number and lack systematic analysis. In particular, little has been explored about what are the leadership practices of teacher leaders in influencing principal behaviours, as well as what leadership practices of principals are affected by teacher leaders. This study, then, aims to examine whether there are any negative effects for school principals based on teacher leaders exerting their influence on them, with particular reference to the Chinese educational context and leadership style.

3.4.3 The relationship between principals and teacher leaders

3.4.3.1 The interaction between principals and teacher leaders

There is little doubt that there is a mutual interaction between principals and teacher leaders (Gigante & Firestone, 2008), which is established by two-way influences between them (Anderson, 2002). Here, Crowther et al.’s (2009) previously discussed notion of parallel leadership is relevant. For example, Barnett and McCormick (2004) conducted a survey to collect data from 373 teachers in government secondary schools of Australia. Their findings demonstrated that principal leadership and teacher leadership depended on each other in schools. The interaction was characterised as a one-on-one relationship, rather than a group relationship. Additionally, the results strengthened Yukl’s (1998) opinion, which holds that the legitimacy of principals depended on teachers’ competency and commitment.

The relationship between principals and teacher leaders is categorised in different ways. Mangin (2007) divided the reciprocal influence between principals and teacher leaders into formal interactions and informal interactions. The former is represented as regular meetings while the latter consists of some informal meetings in the corridor or on-a-need basis. Based on interview data with 28 respondents, Anderson (2004) arrived at three models to illustrate three kinds of interactions between principals and teacher leaders. In the buffered model, principals are surrounded by teacher leaders; however, they are isolated from other teachers in schools. In the
interactive model, principals are capable of interacting with both teacher leaders and other teachers. In the contested model, principals are against all staff, including teacher leaders.

The interaction between principals and teacher leaders can also be evaluated according to certain criteria. The interactive frequency and quality are regarded as the main elements to determine the interactive level between principals and teacher leaders (Mangin, 2007). In her definition, high frequency interaction normally occurs weekly, moderate frequency happens monthly, and low frequency arises only several times a year. Correspondingly, interactive quality depends on “informational updates from the teacher leader, directives from the principal, and dialogue about instructional needs, goals, and approaches” (p. 331).

This discussion has demonstrated the reciprocal influence between principal leadership and teacher leadership. In particular, it has reviewed some categories, models and evaluation criteria representing the principals’ interaction with teacher leaders in schools. In addition, it has considered parallel leadership, which was introduced by some Australian researchers to explain the relationship between principals and teacher leaders within organisational contexts. The research studies discussed above were carried out in Western countries. Hence a study that investigates the interactive conditions between principals and teacher leaders in Mainland China is expected to make an important contribution to the research.

3.4.3.2 The factors that influence the relationship between principals and teacher leaders

In some of the existing research, the factors which exert influence on the principal-teacher leader relationship are considered. The most important effect is trust which should be established between principals and teacher leaders in order to assume leadership responsibilities effectively (Edgersen et al., 2006; Gronn, 1996; Harcher & Hyle, 2001; Jones, 2007). It is necessary for principals to establish a trusting relationship with teachers before distributing leadership and cultivating teacher leaders in schools (Jones, 2007), as trust is an essential strategy for teachers to follow and support principals’ work (Edgerson et al., 2006). To a certain extent, the promotion of trust between principals and teachers is reliant upon principals’ communicative and supportive behaviours towards teachers (Gimbel, 2003).
Other influential factors related to the mutual relationship between principals and teacher leaders have been explored. Mangin (2007) asserted that principals’ knowledge of teacher leadership roles and their interaction with teacher leaders are two components to promote a level of principal support for teacher leaders. The two components were revealed to be positively influenced by district-level supervisors’ communication with principals. These findings were acquired in an exploratory case study through interviews with 15 principals, 12 mathematics teacher leaders, and six supervisors in five districts of USA. Mangin (2007) noted that principals’ support for teacher leaders is capable of being facilitated; thereby he encourages districts to increase principals’ knowledge of teacher leadership and to promote the interaction between principals and teacher leaders (Mangin, 2007).

Gronn (1996) stated that mutual reciprocity between a principal and teacher leaders needs “openness, self-disclosure, shared intimate personal knowledge, the capacity to predict and anticipate one another, and above all trust” (p. 79). Based on a literature review, Ovando (1994) concluded that there were several factors influencing the relationship between principals and teacher leaders, such as “the context, traditions, individual values and beliefs, culture, and educational purpose of a school” (p. 10).

3.4.4 Summary

Currently, some research studies show that principals exert both positive and negative influences on teacher leaders in schools, while teacher leaders support the work of principals. However, despite such research, a great deal remains to be known about the nature of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher leadership (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Danielson, 2005; Mangin, 2007). Specifically, more detail is needed to explore how principals interact with formal teacher leaders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). In addition, much of the research that has been conducted has not been comprehensive because it has failed to identify different principal leadership roles that affect different roles of teacher leadership, as well as the detailed effects of teacher leadership on principal leadership.

Furthermore, most of the studies relevant to principal-teacher leader interaction discussed here were carried out in Western countries. To date little research has been conducted on this topic in Mainland China. Therefore, this situation provides an
impetus for the current study to address these issues within the Chinese context. The third research question is addressed: What are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact? In order to respond to this question, a qualitative research approach was employed in this study, as outlined in Chapter 4.

### 3.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the current study, the conceptual framework is established by utilising Gurr’s (2008) model of principal leadership roles and the model of teacher leadership roles based on this literature review (See Figure 3.1). In this framework, the roles of principal leadership and teacher leadership are identified initially to provide a basis to explore the leadership roles in Chinese schools. More importantly, the interaction between the two models is emphasised to guide the investigation of the principal-teacher leader relationship. This dynamic process is constructed within the contemporary educational contemporary context in Mainland China.
Globalisation effects and consequences

Social Context (i.e. cultural context, economic context, and political context)

Educational Context for education reforms

Principal Leadership Roles

Learning & Teaching
- Instruction focus
- Teacher support
- Wider Knowledge
- Decision-making

Symbolic & Cultural Awareness
- Values
- Parent & community focus
- Student & teacher focus
- Marketing of school
- Symbolism

Future Orientation
- Vision
- Responsiveness

Accountability
- Principal to school staff & govt.
- School to community & govt.
- Teacher to principal

Interaction
- Cooperative process
- Conflicitive process

Teacher Leadership Roles

Participation in decision-making

Collaboration

Parents and community involvement

Support

Professional development

Connection

*Figure 3.1. The conceptual framework for the study.*
As Figure 3.1 shows, the conceptual framework includes four main dimensions of principal leadership roles and six key roles of teacher leadership are included within a rectangle. The two-way arrows indicate an interactive and dynamic process between the roles of principal leadership and teacher leadership. There are three consecutive rectangles with three different levels of Chinese contexts surrounding the leadership roles. The outside rectangle stands for the cultural context, the middle ring indicates the social context, and the inside rectangle represents the educational context. The framework denotes that in the current study, leadership is viewed as “context-bound” (Gronn, 1999, p. 31) and constructed in a dynamic process.

In this conceptual framework, as previously argued in this and prior chapters, the roles of principal leadership and teacher leadership are influenced by the context of globalisation, social contexts (i.e., cultural, economic, and political contexts), and educational contexts in which they are located. It is noteworthy that the democratic concepts that have emerged within the globalising context have given impetus to democratic changes and a shift to decentralisation of power (Sayed, 2002). These dramatic changes are likely to exert an impact on leadership in schools. According to Gronn (1999), individual leaders are born in a particular context of society and culture which provides a significant backdrop to and influence on educational leadership (cf. Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

However, much of the existing body of knowledge on school leadership is based on the Anglo-American world, and therefore research conducted in other areas needs to consider the cultural context for education decision-making (Walker & Dimmock, 2002), including Mainland China. Furthermore, the current education reform of Mainland China provides the context in which school leadership is addressed (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). In the context of ongoing education reform, the role of school leaders has changed in Mainland China to be broadened, deepened, and externalised (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). As noted in Chapter 2, these changing roles reflect broader reforms designed to promote quality education in Mainland China, as the nation responds to the economic, political and cultural changes prompted by globalisation.
In summary, the conceptual framework is a synthesis of four roles of principal leadership and six main roles of teacher leadership within a three-level context (see Figure 3.1). These roles have been mostly explored in previous research studies about principal leadership and teacher leadership in Western countries. In this study, the conceptual framework provides a means to investigate the roles in Mainland China, which have been rarely examined in this field. Furthermore, a reflection on the principal-teacher leader interaction in leadership would be helpful to deepen the understanding about their development in changing Chinese contexts.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Internationally, leadership and teacher leadership have been identified as crucial in the process of education reform. During the last two decades, a large growing body of research and literature concerned with school leadership has emerged in the Western academic community. However, little has been explored relating to the interaction between principals and teacher leaders. While some researchers have begun to conduct research examining this relationship, there is still a demand for an in-depth investigation to establish their roles in a systematic way, especially with regard to mainland China.

In this chapter, key literature in the field of school leadership was discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of existing research around the world. This literature review identified a model of principal leadership roles proposed by Gurr (2008) and a new model of teacher leadership roles. The model of principal leadership roles consists of learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability (Gurr, 2008), while the new teacher leadership model includes six roles which are participating in decision-making, parent and community involvement, teachers’ professional development, collaboration, support, and connection.

There is a growing emphasis on the need to explore the status of school leadership in Asian countries, especially Mainland China. What are the roles of principal leadership and teacher leadership, and how do their roles interact with each other in the Chinese context are the main questions in this study. A synthesis of the literature and research presented in this chapter identified significant research gaps and
resulted in the development of a conceptual framework to support this study. In the next chapter, the qualitative research design for the case study adopted in this study is discussed.
Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology utilised in this study which explores the perceptions of principals and teacher leaders in one province, Shandong, Mainland China, as they deal with unprecedented requirements for curriculum reform. The chapter begins by revisiting the research questions and then explains the nature of qualitative research and its suitability for the study. Case-study design is the type of qualitative research approach used in this study and this is discussed in this section. The next part of the chapter considers the research design in terms of data collection sources and data analysis processes. The chapter concludes by considering validity and reliability issues as well as ethics and the limitations of the study.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an endeavour to understand the role of principals and teacher leaders in Mainland China during the current educational reform, three broad research questions were posed in this study. They are:

1. What are principals’ perceptions of their leadership role in Mainland China under current educational reform?
2. What are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership role in Mainland China under current educational reform?
3. What are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact?

As discussed in Chapter 1, the development of these questions was informed in part by role theory (Biddle, 1986) that has been used in research designs to observe participants carrying out their roles or via designs that ask participants to comment on their own roles or expectations. In this study, the latter approach was used where participants were asked to describe and discuss their own understandings regarding their role or social position. It was argued earlier in the thesis that the aforementioned questions are important particularly in the Chinese context where studies of this nature remain limited.
4.3 OVERVIEW OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that refers to different forms of research inquiry such as ethnography, case study, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and phenomenology (Merriam, 2002). Each of these different forms within qualitative research has its own research traditions and methods for data collection and analysis. Yet common to qualitative research as a field of inquiry is the quest to discover human beings’ thoughts, feelings and perceptions, and how they make meaning of their experiences within a particular context (Burns, 2000). Moreover, much qualitative research is based on the assumption that “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p.6). Some of the other key characteristics of qualitative research include its (a) focus on participants’ views; (b) its descriptive nature; (c) its inductive focus; and (d) the researcher is an important instrument. Each of these characteristics is now elaborated.

Qualitative research focuses on participants’ views since it aims to understand their experiences and how they make sense of them (Merriam, 2002). Meaning, not measurement, is sought in a qualitative research study. An important feature of qualitative research is that it is descriptive and exploratory in nature (Yin, 2009). Words or pictures are used to provide an illustration of a particular phenomenon. Descriptions include the context, the participants involved and the activities of interest (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is inductive. This means that this type of research develops themes and builds concepts and theories rather than tests existing theory. Theory can be built from observations and from participants sharing their views and perspectives about phenomena (Merriam, 2002). This lies in contrast to quantitative research which uses hypotheses before the research is carried out (Burns, 2000). Finally, within qualitative research, the researcher is a key instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998) particularly in accessing data and analysing data.

Each of these characteristics has relevance for the current study. Firstly, the study investigated principals’ and teacher leaders’ (i.e., the participants’) perceptions of their role and their perceptions of how these roles interacted. Thus participants were asked to reflect upon and recount their perceptions of the role. Secondly, the study
was descriptive in nature as it asked them to describe their role. A rich and thick description was used to present the findings of the study. Thirdly, the study followed an inductive approach since hypotheses or propositions did not guide the design of the study. Rather understandings from the field were used to explain the data. Fourthly, in the current study, the researcher designed and implemented the study, collected the data and analysed it. Thus, the researcher was a crucial person or instrument in designing the overall research.

One significant further process which is addressed in detail in Chapter 7 relates to the processes of micropolitics as revealed in the interviews. At issue is ascertaining the means by which power is exercised in the working relationships between principals and teacher leaders and vice versa. As addressed in Chapter 2, three possible types of practice are available: power through, power over, and power with (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Fennell, 1999). The next part of the discussion makes an argument for case study which was the particular qualitative research approach used in this study.

4.4 CASE STUDY

Case study research emphasises the phenomenon in its context and has been used in disciplines such as psychology, education, political science, and many other fields (Burns, 2000). It is used to contribute knowledge about individuals, groups, or organisations and it needs to be a “bounded system” (Burns, 2000, p.460). In other words, a case study needs to focus on an entity or a unit of analysis. In the current study, the case referred to the roles of principals and teacher leaders in Mainland China. However, when researchers undertake a study that involves more than one case, a multi-case study can be undertaken. This involves analysing collecting and analysing data about more than one case (Merriam, 1998). In the current study, two cases were explored and these were principals and teacher leaders.

According to Yin (2009) there are three main types of case studies and these are descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. Exploratory case studies are those that ask ‘what’ questions. In these studies, the goal tends to be to develop theory (Yin, 2009). Mayer and Greenwood (1980) claim that exploratory studies are often used when little research has been conducted in a particular field. Questions that ask ‘how’ and
‘why’ tend to fall within explanatory case studies or histories while ‘who’ and ‘where’ questions are suited for descriptive case studies or histories (Yin, 2009). Merriam (1998) maintains that descriptive case studies can also be used when little prior research has been undertaken. In the current study, an explanatory case study was chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, the research questions were ‘what’ questions which fit with exploratory research; and secondly the research questions focused on principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of their role—an under-researched area within Mainland China, which suggests that an exploratory case study was a suitably chosen methodology. Thirdly, case study also allows for the collection and analysis of multiple sources of data, which for this research included interviews and School Annual Reports.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, two groups of primary school leaders—principals and teacher leaders from one province in Mainland China—were invited to participate. A qualitative exploratory case study was used to investigate their roles and their leadership practices. Two core sources of data collected were, first, semi-structured interviews with participants to explore their perceptions, thoughts and beliefs about their respective leadership roles and second, document analysis. Before discussing these data sources, a discussion regarding the nature and type of participants and how they were accessed follows.

4.5.1 Participants

The researcher travelled to Shandong Province, Mainland China to collect the data for this research. Interviews—pilot interviews and subsequent main interviews were conducted in December 2009–January 2010. A sample for qualitative research should be selected purposefully in order to explore a more detailed understanding of the central phenomenon. For the pilot study, convenience sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) was employed and three principals and three formal teacher leaders from public primary schools of W city in Shandong province, Mainland China leaders were invited to participate in interviews. Principals were selected with the recommendation of Education Bureau officials while teacher leaders were chosen with the recommendation of participating principals in the same schools. All of them agreed to participate in the interviews. It was possible to collect varied data about the
members of both groups with the purpose of gaining insights into different characteristics of a range of principals and teacher leaders (Gall et al., 2007).

For the main study, stratified purposeful sampling (Gall et al., 2007) was utilised to invite the principals in selected public primary schools in two cities (W and Z) in Shandong province, Mainland China, to participate. Consequently, in total ten principals with varying characteristics (e.g., gender, years of service) were invited to participate. Significantly, these principals then selected ten teacher leaders from within their school who they perceived to be most appropriate to interview. Criteria were provided to help principals select teacher leaders with different varying characteristics, such as gender, years of service, and positions. One teacher leader was chosen by one principal in each school. This selection process was indicative of the traditional nature of hierarchical authority that principals in Chinese school hold as designated leaders of their schools.

Accordingly, the participants in the study were staff from ten public primary schools of Z city and W city in Shandong province, Mainland China. While the findings of this study cannot be generalised across Mainland China, the participants selected might arguably be seen as broadly reasonably representative of the principals and teachers in urban primary schools of the province. The regional difference has been considered in this study in that the principals were targeted in two typical cities that were located in the middle (Z city) and east (W city) of the province. The researcher first contacted Education Bureau officials in the city of Z and W, in Shandong province, Mainland China to introduce this study. Following this, officials of the two cities recommended ten principals from public primary schools to the researcher to conduct main study. Each participating principal then recommended one teacher leader in every school. No official approval of the Education Bureau was required. The consent form and the information sheet (See Appendix A, Appendix B) about the study were first written in English and then translated into Chinese, as not all of the participants were fluent in English. The Chinese version was given to each participant before interviews. All 20 participants’ consent was gained not only to participate in the study but also to digitally record the interviews.
4.5.2 Data collection

In the present research study during the period of data collection, data from two main types of sources, interviews and School Annual Reports, were collected to obtain abundant evidence for the study. Guided by the research questions, this study gathered qualitative data around three broad aspects: principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles, and the interaction between them.

4.5.2.1 Interviews

An interview is defined as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, [that] sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data” (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). It is considered as one of the oldest and most frequently used qualitative methods in social sciences (Coleman & Briggs, 2007). At the heart of interviews lies questioning. Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran (2001) emphasise that “well-designed questions allow the interviewer to control the direction of the interview and investigate areas of relevance and interest, to say nothing of ensuring that the objectives of the research project are achieved” (p. 142). In conducting an interview, it is imperative to design questions which outline the research topic and are sufficiently extensive to promote discussion and follow up questions.

Like any research strategy or technique, interviews are seen to have both advantages and disadvantages in qualitative research. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) point out that “the interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard” (p. 349). It is also acknowledged that the interview has the strengths of obtaining in-depth understanding of complex or deep issues with detailed information (Creswell, 2008). Marshall and Rossman (1995) identify two disadvantages of interviews as interviewees who may not be truthful or those who may feel uncomfortable and therefore are unwilling to share their thoughts and ideas. Thus, researchers need to endeavour to develop a good rapport with interviewees and be responsive to their comments and non-verbal communication. In the current study, the researcher endeavoured to build a friendly and supportive rapport with interviewees Moreover, the researcher also presented gifts to all of the participants to express appreciation, as the giving of gifts is a strong cultural tradition in China.
Depending on what questions are investigated in a study, an interview can be categorised into three forms: unstructured (open-ended) interview, semi-structured, and structured interviews (Burns, 2000). Structured interviews are sometimes referred to as ‘standardised interviews’ as they follow a strict interview guide in which the research adheres rigidly to pre-determined questions. In contrast, unstructured interviews fall at the other end of the continuum as they resemble a conversation and are informal in nature. There are no predetermined questions and the interview tends to be flexible and exploratory. Semi-structured interviews fall somewhere in between as the interview questions are worded more flexibly and there is less structure evident (Merriam, 1998). As a form of interview, it provides “greater flexibility than the close-ended type and permits a more valid response from the informant’s perception of reality” (Burns, 2000, p. 424). In the current study, semi-structured interviews were used and the interview strategy addressed the ‘what’ questions regarding principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership role and how their roles intersected. An interview schedule which consisted of a set of questions and probes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) was developed and this helped to guide the semi-structured interview process employed.

**Interview questions development**

In the current study, the advice of Cavana et al. (2001) was followed as these authors suggest that a semi-structured interview should commence with an open-ended question then progress to a more closed-ended form. They say:

> Commence the interaction as an unstructured interview—present the primary, overall question and then concentrate on managing the process by using interview skills to elicit information. When the information elicited appears to be drying up, the interviewer switches to planned questions based on defined, pre-identified topics—that is, questions based on content. (pp. 148-149)

The questions used in the interviewing process for this study were developed with reference to the findings of the literature review in Chapter 3. Utilising insights from the literature in the formulation of research questions is said to provide a type of content validity which “ensures that the measures include an adequate and
representative set of items that tap the concept” (Cavana et al., 2001, p. 213). Thus, the interview questions consisted of four sections: demographic information of principals and teacher leaders, principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles, teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles, and principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact.

As the interviewees were Chinese and for them English was a foreign language, all the interview questions were developed in English first and then translated into Chinese (Mandarin). In order to ensure the quality of translation in research, translators are required to possess both linguistic competence and relevant knowledge of the study (Birbili, 2000). Therefore, two qualified translators, who were bilingual with Chinese as the first language and with experience in qualitative research, were involved in the process of translation in this study. The researcher as the first translator translated interview questions from English to Chinese (Mandarin). Following this, it was also crucial to back translate the interview questions from Chinese to English so as to evaluate the equivalence between the two languages (Chapman & Carter, 1979). Thus back-translation was undertaken by the second translator. The processes of translation and back-translation were replicated to make sense of the interview questions in two languages and finally reach the semantic equivalence between Chinese and English. The specific questions used with principals and teacher leaders in the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

**Pilot study interviews**

Following the development of interview questions, a pilot study was carried out to prepare for the interviews. Its purpose was to ensure that the process of data collection and data analysis was appropriate to obtain the desired research results. This responded to the requirement for researchers to “enter the pilot study with a different frame of mind from the one they have when going into the real study” (Glesne, 2006, p. 43). Thus, the pilot study not only allowed the researcher to conduct data collection to check the research process and interview questions, but also it helped to inform the researcher’s deep thinking about the research topic (Glesne, 2006).
In this research study, the pilot study enabled the researcher to prepare for the main study. Semi-structured interviews with three principals and three teacher leaders were conducted during this process. The interview with each participant took 60-90 minutes. Most of the interviews with principals and teacher leaders were conducted at the school site. The pilot study enabled the researcher to trial the interview questions with the intent of improving them. The pilot outcomes were used to revise the research statement, research plans, interview questions, and the length of interviews (Glesne, 2006). The feedback provided by participants was helpful in revising ambiguous questions.

Main study interviews
In the main study, interviews with ten principals and ten teacher leaders were conducted to answer the three research questions in this study. All of the interviews were carried out at the school site, such as the principal’s office, the teacher leader’s office, and the meeting room, and took place at a negotiated time outside of the participants’ teaching hours so as not to disrupt their work routines. The interviews were conducted following the predetermined interview protocols; however, the order and form of questions in interviews were flexible for an in-depth exploration of research questions from the perspectives of interviewees. Although the direction of interviews was controlled by the researcher, the participants were given freedom to express their opinions, feelings, and perceptions without constraint from researchers’ viewpoints and previous research results (Creswell, 2008; Hittleman & Simon, 2006; Neuman, 2007). Each interview took between 45–130 minutes, depending on the extent to which participants were able or willing to contribute. In the current study, all interviews were conducted in Chinese and were audio-taped, to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the data. (Cavana et al., 2001). The next part of the discussion considers the process that was followed to analyse the data. Procedures used to ensure high quality of transcriptions and translations are addressed below.

4.5.2.2 Document analysis
Document analysis plays an essential role in providing “a behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 307). According to Merriam (1998), documents refer to a “range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p.112). These
can be documents that are publically available or documents prepared for the purposes of the research. Documents can be valuable sources of information because they can provide rich information about a setting and a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In a case study, the analysis of documentation plays an explicit role in expanding and corroborating the information gathered by other data collection techniques (Yin, 2009). It is employed to ensure the validity of interview data in qualitative research (Glesne, 2006).

**Documents sourced**

In the current study, the main source of document analysis was the School’s Annual Report. A hard copy of this report was given to the researcher by many of the participants. In cases where hard copies were not provided, the researcher downloaded the report from the School’s website. The Annual Report was deemed a relevant source of data as it provided valuable information about the school, such as its vision and mission, its culture, its teaching and learning activities.

### 4.5.3 Data analysis

#### 4.5.3.1 Analysis of interview data

After all data were collected, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher from audio interview data (in Chinese) into Chinese language (Mandarin) transcripts and these were saved as word documents. During the process of transcribing, the researcher corrected the incorrect conversational grammar of participants. Using notes where necessary, the researcher also recorded pauses, such as laughter, nodding, gesture, and hesitation, which appeared in the interviews. As oral language uses different clause patterns from written language, the talk was broken up into sentences according to the researcher’s own understanding and then checked by participants.

Each of the 20 participants, then, received a copy of their respective transcription for their perusal, accuracy check, and amendment if necessary (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). In this study, 12 participants made changes to the transcription and these changes were of a minor nature. For example, as the sound quality is not satisfactory in some parts of the tape recordings, some words were missing or incorrect in the interview transcripts. After perusing the transcription, 12 participants added the
missing words and amended the incorrect expression to ensure the accuracy of interview data.

Once the transcripts were returned to the researcher, the first step before data analysis commenced was the researcher de-identified all of the transcripts and documents and gave each a new designation. For instance, each principal was referred to as ‘P’ and given a number from 1-10 (e.g., P01, P02...P10) and teacher leaders were given the initial ‘T’ and given a number from 1-10 (e.g., T01, T02...T10).

Because of the complexity of accurately translating all transcriptions from Chinese into English, the researcher analysed data firstly in Chinese and then translated the preliminary Chinese analysis into English. In order to ensure the quality of translation, the procedures of translation and back-translation were also undertaken as indicated previously. An example of this procedure for a selected quote is provided in both Chinese and English in Appendix D.

In this study, the focus of data analysis was on theme or category construction. Following Cohen et al.’s (2007) recommendation, instruments and research questions were applied to organise and present the data. Accordantly, the researcher conducted the analysis of interview transcripts and school documents separately. The detailed description of the data analysis progress is articulated as below.

Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the qualitative data in this research (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The process followed Creswell’s (2008) model of qualitative data analysis to generate themes which are the keys to identify principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles, and their interaction. The coding process in qualitative research was illustrated in Figure 4.1. First, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts and the documents to get a sense of the data. This reading and re-reading was essential before any coding or identification of significant issues could take place. In qualitative research, data analysis occurs by identifying themes that emerge from the interviews or other texts through an iterative process, reading and rereading the material to determine critical issues contained in it (Creswell, 2008). Following this, the researcher coded the data. Transcripts were broken into segments which
mean “sentences or paragraphs that all relate to a single code” (Creswell, 2008, p. 251). A code was assigned to describe each segment using the researcher’s words or the interviewees’ words. After coding all transcripts and documents, all codes were grouped with similar code words to eliminate overlap and redundancy among codes. This led to fewer and broader themes that are “similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database” (Creswell, 2008, p. 252). Finally, the new list of codes and themes was examined to ensure that these codes recorded common themes, the emerged themes were appropriate, and no segments were overlooked.

Figure 4.1. A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research (Creswell, 2008, p. 251).

In order to illustrate how Creswell’s (2008) model of qualitative data analysis was applied to this study, an example is provided here to articulate the process of analysing interview transcripts from ten principals. The researcher first read through the ten principals’ interview transcripts several times to gain a general sense about it. Following this, each segment was labelled with a code word, such as ‘instructional supervision’, ‘supporting teachers’, and ‘building common direction’. In coding all of the segments, the researcher found some similar codes representing a major idea, such as ‘teacher’s collaborative learning’, ‘attending teaching and research activities’, ‘external training’, and ‘learning community’. Therefore, the researcher collapsed these code words into a broad theme, namely ‘creating professional development opportunities for staff’. After all themes were constructed from the interview
transcripts, the researcher examined the list of codes and themes to ensure they were common to all interviewees and no new code or theme arose.

4.5.3.2 Analysis of document data

A similar process was applied in the analysis of document data. Each of the documents (i.e., the Annual Reports) was also assigned a designation (e.g., AR01....AR10). Each of the Annual Reports pertaining to principals and teacher leaders in the sample was read and key content/themes were identified. The reports were used mainly to augment the transcripts. In a number of cases, the reports included important contextual information about the school and provided clarification regarding some of the operational elements of the school.

4.5.4 Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, there is more focus on validity than reliability. Validity refers to the fact that information provided by participants and researchers should be accurate, trusted, and credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As validity is significant to establish, three strategies were employed to address it: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Yin, 2009). Internal validity was not considered in an exploratory case study as in this study (Yin, 2009). Consequently only the other two are illustrated here.

Construct validity focuses on building correct operational measures for the construct. In the current study, three tactics were employed to ensure the construct validity. First, this study gathered data from multiple sources, i.e., semi-structured interviews and school documents, to verify the coherence of the data. Although this could not be regarded as strict triangulation, the two-source evidence also enhanced the validity of the study. Second, the chain of evidence was maintained in research questions, data collection, and research report so that an external observer is able to trace the operational measures and research procedures used in this study. Third, after gaining the interview results, the researcher sought feedback from participants to ensure that the findings were an accurate reflection of their thoughts.

External validity concerns the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalised (Yin, 2009). Case study research is undervalued by some critics who declare that “single cases offer a poor basis for generalising” (Yin, 2009, p. 43).
However, although the results of case studies cannot be generalised to a great population, it is possible to generalise them to some broader theories (Yin, 2009). That is because case studies rely on analytical generalisation in contrast to survey research’s reliance on statistical generalisation (Yin, 2009). In this study, ten principals and ten teacher leaders were selected to explore their perceptions of their roles and interaction. The findings from this study were not able to be generalised to the larger population of school leaders throughout the county. However, the framework constructed from the study may be generalised in a theoretical sense.

Reliability was achieved by comparing coding among multiple coders who followed the same procedure to obtain the same result (Yin, 2009) in order to “minimise the errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2009, p. 45). This procedure referred to the fact that several persons are involved in coding the same text and then comparing their findings to examine whether they achieve the same codes and themes or not (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the current study, the researcher and two Chinese academics followed this procedure in order to ensure that final agreement could be reached. In this process, the researcher first coded data and categorised them into themes. A database was then created to organise and manage every piece of evidence collected in interviews and documents. The two Chinese academics were then invited to further examine the researcher’s findings based on knowing the details of data collection and category construction. Some differences in coding occurred among the researcher and the other two academics; however, final agreement was concluded through discussion.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research involved the researcher working and interacting with principals and teacher leaders and, for this reason, ethical issues were considered carefully to ensure appropriate conduct of the research. The study was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans and the ethics guidelines of Queensland University of Technology Human Ethics Committee.

In order to address the ethical issues, the researcher obtained permission from the appropriate school district authority for selected schools to participate. All participants who volunteered received information about the study and were required
to sign consent forms to demonstrate their willingness to participate. In this study, the researcher visited 10 schools and began by explaining the nature and purpose of the research to principals first and then to the formal teacher leaders in each of the primary schools. Principals and teacher leaders were informed that their identity and location would not be revealed in any way. During the process of field work, tape recording was only undertaken with the expressed permission of participants. All participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time without comment or penalty.

4.7 LIMITATIONS

Although qualitative exploratory case study research has been justified as appropriate to address the research questions in this study, two main limitations and one potential weakness need to be acknowledged. First, as the sample population of principals and formal teacher leaders was located in Shandong province, Mainland China alone, it is not possible to generalise the results to other areas of Mainland China. It is acknowledged that there is a dramatic difference in schools between urban areas and rural areas, and also between eastern (coastal) provinces and western provinces. Second, the data of this study were highly dependent on the interviews with participants and school documents. The data collection method of observations or a more ethnographic approach may have yielded different sets of insights. Thirdly, since English is the second language of the researcher, a possible shortcoming of translation from Chinese into English has to be considered. While, as indicated previously, substantial measures were undertaken to ensure a high degree of accuracy in translation, it is possible that some errors and misinterpretations appeared during the process of translation. Also, with regard to the selection of participants and the nature of their interview responses, it is important to acknowledge the possible effects of having them selected by their principal. For example, did they feel free to give their own opinion or did they feel constrained to ‘please the boss’ and give an ‘official’ answer? The interviewer was aware of some apparently minimal constraints, but they were not very obvious. Given that all participants were assured of confidentiality and given the interviewer’s efforts to ensure that they were relaxed in the interviews, it would seem that little more could be done to eliminate this risk.
4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study’s research method, qualitative exploratory case study, to investigate ‘what’ questions in the current study. This approach is the basis of the detailed research design which enabled data collection and data analysis capable of addressing research questions in this study. It was argued that the use of a qualitative research method allows for an extensive exploration to identify principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles, and their interaction in Mainland China. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were utilised to collect data to achieve convergence in evidence for the case study. Key themes were sought through coding and collapsing codes. This chapter concluded by discussing issues of validity and reliability, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.
Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion of Principal Leadership Roles

5.1 OVERVIEW

The research findings and discussion for this study are organised in three chapters. Chapter 5 presents the findings and discussion of principal leadership roles, Chapter 6 describes the findings and discussion of teacher leadership roles, and Chapter 7 presents the findings and discussion of the intersection between these two roles. All three data chapters present findings based on interviews with principals and teacher leaders respectively from urban primary schools in Shandong province, Mainland China.

The focus of this chapter addresses research question one: what are principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform? This question is examined according to one part of this study’s conceptual framework which draws mainly upon Gurr’s (2008) model of principal leadership roles. In this chapter, the data gathered in the interviews confirmed some existing research results from Western countries and also identified some new principal sub-roles that were uniquely Chinese. Chapter 5 is structured in three main sections. First, it presents demographic data about the ten principals in the sample. Second, it provides a rich description and discussion of principal leadership roles in the Chinese context. Finally, a summary of this chapter is provided.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA REGARDING PARTICIPANTS

Two cities, referred to as City W and City Z in Shandong province, became the research sites for this study. Five principals were selected from the central district of City W (namely District HC) and five were drawn from the central district of City Z (namely District ZD). All principal participants were from primary schools. As can be seen from Table 5.1, the ten principals were given designations from P01 to P10. According to stratified purposeful sampling (Gall et al., 2007), participants should possess a number of characteristics. As a means of comparison, principals were matched according to gender and years of service in similar positions. There were a greater number of female principals (i.e., six) than male principals (i.e., four) in the
sample. This reflects the current situation in China where an increasing number of females occupy the position of principal in urban primary schools. Years of service ranged from 1.5 to 18.5 years. This represents principals at different stages in their development. Finally, these principals were drawn from ten schools, ranging from 860 students to 1800 students in size, which provides a diversity of different school sizes by Chinese standards.

Table 5.1
Principals in the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Years' Experience</th>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>P01</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>C primary school (CPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>18.5 years</td>
<td>120 teachers 1800 students</td>
<td>2 hours 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>P02</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>G primary school (GPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>103 teachers 1750 students</td>
<td>2 hours 5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>P03</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>N primary school (NPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>40 teachers 860 students</td>
<td>1 hour 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>P04</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>T primary school (TPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9.5 years</td>
<td>93 teachers 1800 students</td>
<td>1 hour 40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>P05</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>E primary school (EPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>13.5 years</td>
<td>130 teachers 1000 students</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>P06</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>J primary school (JPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>12.5 years</td>
<td>62 teachers 1100 students</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal G</td>
<td>P07</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>X primary school (XPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>80 teachers 1500 students</td>
<td>1 hour 55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal H</td>
<td>P08</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>R primary school (RPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>56 teachers 1036 students</td>
<td>2 hours 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal I</td>
<td>P09</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>P primary school (PPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9.5 years</td>
<td>60 teachers 1006 students</td>
<td>1 hour 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal J</td>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>W primary school (WPS)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>10.5 years</td>
<td>85 teachers 1561 students</td>
<td>2 hours 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

As indicated earlier, the findings and discussion of principal leadership roles in this study are addressed in terms of the four key roles as identified by Gurr. These roles include learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability. In this study, principals indicated they played a range of sub-roles

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1 The participants’ names and their school’s names are pseudonyms.
and these are discussed in the section that follows. The findings confirmed Gurr’s (2008) model that these roles were important dimensions of school principals’ work and some Western research related to this study (e.g. Davies, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson, 2007). Not surprisingly, some sub-roles were uniquely Chinese and different from those in Western countries.

One other level of theorising was useful for analysing the interview data in order to gain insights into principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles. As indicated in the literature review, the theory of micropolitics, which has become an important perspective to comprehending the nature of leadership within the context and socialisation of schools (Blase, 1993; Flessa, 2009; Lindell, 1999), was also informative for this study. This aspect is addressed more comprehensively in Chapter 7.

In this chapter, findings are summarised in the following four tables (Table 5.2, Table 5.3, Table 5.4, and Table 5.5). The ticks under each principal’s name indicate whether that particular principal made mention of the roles and sub-roles during the interview. The shaded lines represent leadership roles and sub-roles identified by Gurr (2008), while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by school principals in the Chinese context.

**5.3.1 Learning and teaching**

The findings relating to principal leadership in learning and teaching are summarised in Table 5.2 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified by Gurr (2008), while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by school principals in the Chinese context.
Table 5.2

*The First Role of Principal Leadership: Learning and Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Learning and teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1.1 Instructional focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on teacher leaders to supervise instruction</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct supervision by principals</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1.2 Teacher support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging school-based formal leaders to support teachers</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating professional development opportunities for staff</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy one: Knowledge-based examination</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy two: School-based training</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mentoring</em></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Utilising experts’ specialisation</em></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Inviting excellent teachers within the school to offer seminars</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Inviting outside educational experts to offer help in the school</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Encouraging teachers to learn collaboratively</em></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Encouraging teachers to prepare lessons together</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Arranging activities to share experience and resolve problems</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Supporting teachers to use internet for communication</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Organising teachers’ competition in classroom teaching</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy three: External training</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy four: Ongoing reading</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy five: Research activities</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2

_The First Role of Principal Leadership: Learning and Teaching (continued)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Principals</th>
<th>City W</th>
<th>City Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P01 P02 P03 P04 P05</td>
<td>P06 P07 P08 P09 P10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing individual support to staff</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy one: Cultivating teacher leaders</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy two: Providing an appropriate model</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy three: Providing emotional support</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.3.1.3 Wider knowledge</strong></td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
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<td>Learning from each other</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy one: Education Bureau planned discussions</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<td>Strategy two: Online communication</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<td>Strategy three: Site visits to other schools</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<td>Making an individual development plan</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<td>Learning individually</td>
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<td><strong>5.3.1.4 Decision-making</strong></td>
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<td>Empowerment of teacher leaders</td>
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<td>Empowerment of teachers</td>
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<td>Making decisions only by the principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving students’ non-academic achievements</td>
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Principals in the sample indicated that as the key leader of the school, they placed considerable emphasis on learning and teaching and inevitably paid a lot of attention to learning and teaching activities in their daily exercise of leadership. The findings of this study echo the view of both Western and Chinese researchers. For example, Western researchers in the school leadership field identify learning and teaching as a significant role of principals in promoting the development of students and staff (Gurr, 2008; Robinson, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008; Henderson, 2009). Similarly in Mainland China, researchers also identify the importance of school principals taking responsibility for leading and managing learning and teaching activities in their schools (Chen, 2002; Huang, 2008; Li, 2005).

The current study revealed that, as Gurr (2008) suggests, there are four key sub-roles that principals undertake that fit within the core leadership role of learning and teaching. These are instruction focus, teacher focus, wider knowledge (i.e., refers to improving principals’ own knowledge), and decision-making. Emerging from the interviews with ten principals in two cities was the identification of one more sub-role related to learning of students. These sub-roles are now discussed as follows.

5.3.1.1 Instruction focus

All principals interviewed indicated that one of their important leadership roles was supervising the instructional standards of staff. The finding was in line with national and district based policy directives such as the Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999), Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education (2001), and Guidelines on the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (trial version) (2001), and Educational Supervision Regulations in City Z (2001) regarding the central place of teaching and learning for school principals in Mainland China under the current education reform.

Informed by both national and district based policies, teachers are required to transform their teaching approaches from a traditional imparting of knowledge to leading students to learn actively. Yet, according to the principals in the sample, many teachers in their schools struggled to achieve this change of focus in their teaching approach. In this study, principals referred to two aspects of supervising
instruction to enhance the teaching quality and these were relying on teacher leaders to supervise instruction, and direct supervision by themselves.

**Relying on teacher leaders to supervise instruction**

All of the principals in the interviews and School Annual Reports agreed that they devolved responsibilities to teacher leaders who were afforded the authority to perform the role of supervising and monitoring teaching and learning of other teachers and students. The findings of this study supported Gurr’s (2008) research that one role of school principals was to supervise staff through working closely with teacher leaders who mainly perform the supervision on teachers in daily work. This finding reflected the situation that principals had to spend considerable time on other school affairs and needed teacher leaders’ assistance on instructional supervision. A principal said that “*I can only listen to teachers’ classes three or four times each semester*” (P10). In order to ensure the quality of learning and teaching, the principals explained that they supervised or monitored teacher leaders’ work and provided timely guidance through organising weekly meetings to seek feedback from teacher leaders. One principal described how the supervision was conducted in her school:

> As I am very busy and cannot spend enough time on instructional supervision, I arrange teacher leaders to select excellent and experienced teachers to coach and monitor daily teaching and learning in classrooms. Then I attend meetings with these teacher leaders to know the situation of teaching and learning and make decisions. (P03)

According to the principals, four main approaches were undertaken when teacher leaders supervised and monitored instruction. The first approach was “*listening*” (P01) by which teacher leaders could determine whether the classroom teaching was effective. It concerned “*teachers’ utilisation of teaching methods*” (P01), “the arrangement of teaching time” (P04), and “the choice of teaching contents” (P08). The second approach involved “*checking*” (P01) teachers’ “*lesson preparation*” (P01), “*lecture notes*” (P05), “*records of lesson preparation group activities*” (P10), and “*setting and correcting homework*” (P02). The third approach was “*inquiring*” (P01) by means of “*interview and survey*” (P06) with teachers and students.
Accordingly, these principals believed that teacher leaders could understand the situation of “teaching management” (P04), “students’ life” (P03), and “learning activities” (P01). The last approach involved “seeing” (P01) the overall condition of teachers and students, such as “teaching and learning atmosphere” (P09), “the situation of students’ studying in class” (P01), and “positive attitude of teachers and students” (P07). Principals in the study elaborated that teacher leaders offered advice to their fellow teachers by helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, and then develop appropriate solutions and steps for their improvement. This accords with the findings of some Western researchers which indicate that as principals can exercise leadership in learning and teaching through, and with, other people they indirectly influence students’ outcomes (Lambert, 2009; Southworth, 2009).

**Direct supervision by principals**

In addition to delegating supervision responsibilities to teacher leaders, some principals (four out of ten) preferred to directly supervise teaching and learning activities themselves. This was also reflected in three School Annual Reports (AR01, AR04, and AR07). These principals noted that this form of engagement was an effective way to achieve reciprocal dialogue between principals and teachers, so that teachers could improve their teaching skills and classroom management capabilities based on principals’ guidance. Compared with those principals who delegated most supervision tasks and responsibilities to teacher leaders, one principal said that “in my school, I devoted 90% of all my energies into classes to track teaching and learning” (P04). This echoes some literature that underscores the importance of principals spending time in classrooms, observing teachers at work, and providing feedback (Blase & Blase, 2004; Southworth, 2009). Principals’ changes of performance correspond to educational policies under the current curriculum reform in Mainland China. The enactment of the *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* (1999) policy highlights quality education which focuses on the all-round development of students. The policy suggested that principals should spend more time in classrooms supervising teachers which enabled principals to provide support to teachers to learn the new classroom teaching methods and skills that were required.
The four principals in the study who supervised staff directly regarded themselves as experts in teaching and well-placed to assist teachers to develop professionally. Based on directly utilising the “listening”, “checking”, “inquiring”, and “seeing” (P01) approaches mentioned above, they asserted that they could obtain more specific information about the quality of teaching and learning in their schools if they were directly involved. Such classroom observation provided the basis for future leading and managing in this area and helped principals to make effective decisions. For example, a principal reported that “I could establish more appropriate aims, directions, contents, and strategies for the development of teachers at different stages” (P07) on the basis of direct supervision. As Blase and Blase (2004) maintain, principals who conduct effective instructional conferencing with teachers support their learning.

Furthermore, these principals also claimed that because of direct supervision, they could promptly respond to teachers’ needs and provide opportunities for staff to gain educative and developmental learning experience. The extract from an interview with a principal illustrated that “by means of sitting in on the classes, I directly coach teachers to improve their teaching skills and classroom management capabilities. I provide teachers with directions, ideas and encouragement to develop their good points and overcome their shortcomings” (P04).

Finally, the four principals underscored that direct supervision was a useful way to reduce the distance between the principal and teachers, enhance their mutual understanding, and establish a harmonious relationship. One principal’s comment was typical of this sentiment, “by directly communicating with teachers, I am able to deeply understand teachers’ teaching abilities and effectively hear their true inner thoughts and feelings. Thus I can give teachers constructive feedback regarding their practices” (P02).

5.3.1.2 Teacher focus

In the interviews, all of the principals concurred with the view that they supported and developed teachers in their schools based on the recognition that school performance outcomes are dependent upon the work of teachers. These principals indicated that they went to considerable lengths to foster efforts to improve learning
and teaching by encouraging teachers to engage in professional development. These findings are similar to the argument that principals who practise instructional leadership are also strongly expected to help teachers enhance their capacities (e.g. knowledge, responsibilities, and skills) in learning and teaching and identify appropriate methods to improve student learning (Blase & Blase, 2004; Hopkins, 2003).

Under the current curriculum reform in Mainland China, the interviewed principals raised an expectation that teachers would pursue the development of high professional standards in learning and teaching. The quality of teachers has been highlighted because of the enactment of three important educational policies. These are the Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education in 1999 and the Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education in 2001 (State Council of the PRC, 1999, 2001). Since the late 1990s, the focus of education reform has been gradually transferred to quality education, instead of pursuing the quantity of education development such as the rate of universalisation of nine-year compulsory education (Chu, 2008). The important influence of the ongoing education reform on school education has been demonstrated by principals who are expected to transform the shortcomings of traditional learning and teaching styles such as imparting knowledge to new ones such as cultivating active learning. Following these policies, the Guidelines on Further Strengthening the Teacher Training for New Curriculum of Basic Education (2004) was issued with the aim of developing teachers’ capabilities and enhancing teaching quality.

Under the current climate, the ten principals conceded that although teachers were familiar with new educational directions and imperatives such as child-centred approaches, they were still very confused as to how to apply these initiatives in practice. Thus, these principals elaborated on three main strategies they had implemented to foster teachers’ ongoing improvement. These included encouraging school-based formal teacher leaders to support teachers, creating professional development opportunities for staff, and providing individual support to staff. Each of these strategies is now considered.
Encouraging school-based formal teacher leaders to support teachers

All of the principals in the sample indicated that they nominated teacher leaders to support fellow teachers in their schools. The significant role of teacher leaders was also highlighted in seven School Annual Reports (AR01, AR04, AR05, AR06, AR08, AR09, and AR10). As one principal claimed, “they (teacher leaders) perform their responsibilities with the aim of promoting teaching and learning by supporting teachers in classroom teaching and in other learning and managing activities” (P06). These principals followed the practice of holding regular meetings with all the formal leaders, normally once per week, to inspect the implementation of their working tasks, to collect information from them, to discuss any problems that may occur, and to provide feedback. This situation also occurs in many Western schools, such as those in Australia. For example, in his research, Gurr (2008) found that although principals endeavoured to support teachers in their schools, most responsibilities for promoting teachers’ professional development had been delegated to teacher leaders.

In the current study, the principals acknowledged that the formal teacher leaders in their schools had rich knowledge and considerable experience in teaching and learning and were therefore effective role models for other teachers. Several ways were described by the ten principals and in School Annual Reports in which teacher leaders supported their fellow teachers and these included “enhancing their abilities in student management” (P02), “guiding them with moral development” (P07), “coordinating the work among all grades or subjects” (P08), “developing their teaching practices” (AR04), and “helping them focus on improving their understanding of latest educational concepts” (AR10). One principal’s remarks exemplified many of the remarks made by the principals in the sample:

I encourage teacher leaders to take responsibilities in assisting teachers. All the teacher leaders in my school have been taking the responsibilities in teaching for many years, which makes them become the most qualified experts in teaching. Additionally, our school provides teacher leaders with more opportunities in learning and training so that they are always able to lead teachers in the forefront. When teachers are confronted with problems and first turn to teacher leaders for help, the teacher leaders can be
considered to be successful. (P02)

Creating professional development opportunities for staff

In order to achieve the sustainable development of their school, all of the principals asserted that it was critical to create professional development opportunities for staff. This was in line with the statement in all School Annual Reports. One principal revealed her belief that “if teachers’ professional abilities are enhanced, then so too will be teaching quality promoted and students guided to complete learning tasks in an effective way” (P06). However, based on an analysis of 11 studies in Western countries, Robinson (2007) concluded that effective principals actively participate in teacher learning and development activities rather than merely creating development opportunities to teachers. Indeed, Robinson (2007) recommends that principals become the ‘leading learners’ of their schools.

In the current study, principals indicated that those teachers’ classroom teaching capabilities particularly their subject knowledge and skills were regarded as the most significant part of their professional development. Teachers’ subject accomplishment—“basic knowledge, basic skills, basic quality, and basic experiences” (P07) cultivated in learning and practice—was seen as the basis of effective teaching. Thus, an expectation was raised by these school principals that teachers had to master professional abilities in their teaching subjects. Furthermore, principals also highlighted the appointment and cultivation of form teachers\(^2\) to oversee student management, as well as the development of teacher leaders both in teaching and in leading and managing. This important role of principals is also emphasised in some Western literature (DuFour, 2002; Eldredge, 2008; Sheppard, 1996). Constructing capabilities of school staff, such as knowledge and skills, contributes to the achievement of school development (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2001).

Since the implementation of the latest curriculum reform, the ten principals indicated that teachers had gradually realised the significance of professional development and

\(^2\) Form teachers are those teachers who are responsible for all the students in the same class at a school.
were provided with more opportunities for acquiring professional learning so as to adapt to the new educational environment. The principals in this study indicated they provided opportunities for teachers to communicate with one another about learning and teaching (cf. Southworth, 2009). As indicated in interviews and School Annual Reports, five main strategies were employed by principals to advance teachers’ professional development in their schools and these included a yearly knowledge-based examination, school-based training, external training, constant reading, and research activities.

**Strategy one: Knowledge-based examination.** In the first strategy, all principals noted that they supported teachers to prepare for and participate in a yearly knowledge-based examination organised by the District Education Bureau. The examination normally consisted of two parts—“subject knowledge and the theory of quality-oriented education” (P06). These principals considered this examination as a helpful means to promote teachers’ professional development because it motivated them to continue learning and growing. This particular strategy is not normally used in Western countries.

**Strategy two: School-based training.** In the second strategy, school-based training was viewed by all of the principals as an effective, resource-saving and commonly used way for teachers’ professional development. This is also a commonly used approach to promote teachers’ capability in teaching and learning reported in Western literature and studies (e.g. Ehrich & Hansford, 2004; Eldredge, 2008; Southworth, 2009). The principals adopted both targeted training and general training for teachers on different levels. The first level was “the beginning teacher” (P02), the second level was “the qualified teacher” (P02), the third level was “the experienced teacher” (P02), and the fourth level was “the excellent teacher” (P02). According to these principals, three approaches to training were carried out, which related to mentoring, utilising experts’ specialisation, and encouraging teachers to work collaboratively.

The first approach within school-based training was mentoring which was identified by eight of the principals in the sample. With respect to this approach, “older and more experienced mentor teachers were required to work with beginning teachers with the purpose of advancing their professional capability” (P05). These principals
indicated that mentoring was an effective approach to improve beginning teachers’ abilities in teaching and managing students. Mentoring is a well-known and commonly used professional development strategy used in schools across the globe to support the growth of beginning teachers (Ehrich & Hansford, 2004).

The second approach identified by all of the principals was utilising internal or external experts’ specialisation in their schools. This is in keeping with the way used in Western countries to promote teachers’ learning (e.g., Blase & Blase, 1999; King & Newmann, 2000). More specifically, principals from City W preferred to utilise the expertise from excellent teachers within their school, while principals from City Z were more likely to help teachers obtain knowledge and information from experts outside their schools. According to six principals, when excellent teachers from within the schools were called upon to provide seminars, the topics covered included “developing and utilising curriculum resources to improve teaching efficiency” (P04), “cultivating students’ learning habits” (P01), and “promoting students’ self-confidence” (P03). As five principals indicated, external experts included experienced teachers, well-recognised educators, or experienced officials from different departments of the Education Bureau. Each year these experts were invited to “deliver lectures and seminars” (P05), “coach teachers” (P07), and “engage in face to face discussions with teachers” (P09) on a range of themes, such as “how to effectively communicate with parents, how to face competition, and how to apply body language” (AR06). The aim of inviting experts both within and outside the school was to provide further professional development opportunities for staff.

The third approach all principals indicated they pursued was encouraging teachers to work collaboratively and learn from each other. One principal argued that “those professional development programs we implemented were purposefully directed towards enhancing teaching capabilities through team or group, rather than individual teacher” (P05). This is consistent with some Western principals who exercise instructional leadership to create a collaborative learning environment to enhance the learning and teaching capabilities of all school members (Blase & Blase, 2004; Eldredge, 2008; Lambert, 2009). The Chinese principals introduced five kinds of collaborative activities in their schools and these included guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes, encouraging teachers to prepare lessons together,
arranging activities to share experience and resolve problems, supporting teachers to use internet for communication, and organising teachers’ competition in classroom teaching.

First, most principals in this study (nine out of ten) claimed that they supported teachers by guiding them to observe other teachers’ classes aimed at the improvement of teaching quality. This observation mainly referred to “learning from excellent teachers’ effective teaching skills, methods and concepts in the classroom” (P02). These principals believed that with active thinking and communication, teachers would be able to accumulate teaching experience and create their own teaching characteristics. This is in keeping with the strategy utilised in some Australian schools, for instance, an Australian principal stated that she encourages teachers to go into other teachers’ classrooms to develop their skills through sharing (Gurr et al., 2007).

Second, all of the principals indicated that they encouraged teachers to prepare lessons together, which was viewed as a highly effective routine activity in collaborative teaching and learning. Preparing lessons together meant that “before teaching in the classroom, teachers who teach the same subject work in a group collaborate to create a teaching plan which highlights the common and individual characteristics of teaching as well as resources sharing” (P05). The importance of lesson plans is also highlighted in Western countries. For example, some American principals review teachers’ lesson plans regularly and provide feedback in order to maintain the teaching quality of teachers (Goldren & Spillane, 2007). The participant principals agreed that preparing lessons together successfully enabled teachers to share their wisdom and to minimise the likelihood of mistakes occurring. Therefore, preparing lessons together was viewed as a way of enhancing teaching practice and improving teaching quality.

Third, all principals in the sample suggested that they arranged activities for teachers to share their ideas and experiences and resolve problem together. Examples of activities included “school-based discussions” (P01), “symposiums” (P04), “forums” (P07), “teacher interests groups” (P02), or “meetings” (P06). Southworth (2009) also underscores the need for principals to provide teachers with more opportunities to
discuss their achievement and experience in teaching and learning. The principals from Shandong Province participating in the current study indicated that during these activities, good ideas were often generated and shared among teachers. All of the principals remarked that it was essential to nurture teacher’s self development, awareness and capability through communication. One principal took her experience as an example of this specific strategy:

I actively engaged in organising a variety of staff meetings, forums symposiums and associations to discuss teaching, learning, management and curriculum development. During the discussion, I encouraged teachers to share their self-reflection of teaching and learning and offered teachers constructive suggestions to improve their teaching capabilities. (P01)

Fourth, many participant principals (seven out of ten) stated that they supported teachers to use the internet for communication. In Western countries, it has been demonstrated that information and communications technology (ICT) which refers to the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals), computers, middleware, software, storage- and audio-visual systems, plays as a tool for enhancing learning, teaching, and leadership (e.g., Jonassen, 1995; McDonald & Ingvarson, 1997; Yee, 2000). These principals encouraged teachers to use resources on the internet, such as “BBS (Bulletin Board System)” (P06), “blog” (P01), and “online videotaped classes” (P03) to learn and communicate experiences in teaching, managing and research. These principals admitted that this was a new channel in modern teaching and teachers needed to become gradually familiar with it.

Finally, four principals in the sample indicated that they organised a teaching competition for subject teachers ³ in their schools every semester. Because “competitions for teachers is a very important way, just like horse race, to stimulate

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³ A teaching competition means all teachers who teach the same subject usually participate in classroom teaching competitions every year. Their performance was observed by everyone and marked by an evaluation team composed of school leaders and experienced teachers. The teachers who received the highest scores were deemed the winners and awarded with a certificate. Teaching competitions are commonly used in primary schools across Mainland China to help teachers think about and improve their teaching pedagogy. Under the curriculum reform, teachers are especially encouraged to apply student-centred concepts, and use new teaching skills.
teachers to carefully treat and delve deeply into their classroom teaching” (P10), as one principal described. They specified that teachers normally prepared for the competition by “collecting information” (P01), “thoroughly understanding textbooks” (P05), and “practising teaching skills” (P10) individually and collaboratively. The use of competitions was identified by these principals as an indispensable way to advance teachers’ teaching methods and capabilities. This approach was not evident in Western research literature.

Strategy three: External training. In the third strategy, all school principals claimed that they arranged external training for some staff to attend every year, such as seminars or lectures in different areas of the country. This is in line with the interview findings of Day et al. (2001) that principals strongly support their staff to visit to and learn from other schools for continuing professional development. However, this contrasts with the findings of Penlington et al. (2008) that school leaders in some UK schools intend to stop sending individual staff to external courses, as they increasingly rely on school-based training for teacher professional development. As one principal mentioned, “I allocated certain funds to my staff to ensure their yearly external training” (P03). At the training sessions, teachers were able to “access advanced educational concepts” (P01), “learn new knowledge from educational experts” (P05), and “share experience with other excellent teachers” (P07). The ten principals indicated that they rewarded high performing staff with external training as a bonus, thus teacher leaders and excellent teachers normally had more opportunities for training than other teachers. When teachers finished any external training, they were required by their principals to give a presentation to share their experience with others. These principals noted that this form of professional development was valued by their staff.

Strategy four: Ongoing reading. In this strategy, most principals (eight out of ten) declared that they encouraged teachers to read books constantly with the belief that continuous reading contributed to teachers’ professional development. This strategy was of particular relevance to these principals’ view that teachers’ increasing awareness of acquiring ongoing professional learning could enable the school to be a learning community. One principal insisted that “reading could help teachers reflect on their teaching behaviours. It is also an effective way to promote teachers’
professional level, subject accomplishment, and teaching knowledge” (P10). In order to encourage teachers’ professional reading, these principals allocated an amount of funds to purchase books, journals or newspapers that covered topics such as educational theory, educational concepts, and teaching and learning in different subjects. Teachers were required by these principals to read materials, write reading notes, and then implement the new approaches into practice. This is similar to the strategy of professional reading (e.g. teachers share their thinking in reading about teaching and learning), which is employed to develop teachers’ professional capability in an Australian school (Gurr et al., 2007).

These eight principals stated that they also recommended useful books regarding leadership and management to teacher leaders so as to improve the quality and efficiency of the school leadership team. In this way, teacher leaders were able to know what books they could learn from when they were confronted with problems in leading and managing. One principal said:

In our weekly school leadership team meeting, we always read one article regarding cultivating a leader’s management ability. For instance, teacher leaders read books about how to build personal networks, which helped them to gain an effective interpersonal communication between the superior and the subordinate or among the peers. (P08)

*Strategy Five: Research activities.* All of the principals suggested that they encouraged teachers to participate in school research activities which could improve their professional abilities and help them solve problems in their teaching practice. One principal introduced the achievements in his school, “by engaging in the research projects, the efforts of principals and teachers finally brought about school development” (P08). As these principals indicated, there were usually several research projects in their schools during one period. The principals were normally involved in one or two research projects as the team leaders and allocated other projects to teacher leaders who were empowered to organise and plan them. This is accordance with Hopkins’ (2003) argument that principals should exercise instructional leadership practices to propel teachers’ professional development through involving them in research programs.
According to the ten principals, conducting small research projects was viewed as more feasible and effective than conducting big research projects such as those conducted by scholars in universities and research institutions. As one principal said, “teachers had limited expertise and time in participating in large scale research activities” (P01), moreover, “schools’ funding did not allow large projects to be pursued” (P04). This emphasis on school research activities is advocated in the academic community in Mainland China (Qiu, 2005; Xu, 2005). Therefore, these principals encouraged teachers to carry out small research projects on specific topics to identify concrete problems emerging from their teaching practices.

All the participant school principals agreed that it was easier for teachers to focus on their own small research projects, in which teachers who explored similar areas were categorised into the same group. Thus, working in these research teams provided opportunities for teachers to “share ideas and resources” (P07), as well as “exchange research experience” (P06). These principals reported that once teachers had determined their research topics, they needed to go through the whole research process which included identifying research problems, solving research problems, and proposing strategies for improvement. The research areas could refer to matters such as “the design of school-based curriculum” (P02), “the problems in school transformation” (P09), “the methods in teaching” (P03), “the usage of media” (P05), and “classroom assessment” (P10). For all of the principals, engaging in research activities not only raised the quality of teachers, but also assisted teachers to socialise with each other.

With regard to the sub-role of teacher support which will be addressed shortly in further detail, the study found that school principals in Mainland China were engaged in a variety of activities that facilitate, encourage and generate professional development opportunities for staff. Many of the activities such as mentoring, training, and encouraging staff to work and learn together are commonly used professional development activities for staff (Logan & Dempster, 1992) in many countries around the world.

As can be demonstrated by the points raised above, there are a number of commonalities and difference between the findings of the present study and those
identified by Gurr (2008). It is evident that school principals in the Chinese context exercised similar leadership roles to those in Western countries, such as mentoring, utilising experts’ specialisation, guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes, encouraging teachers to prepare lessons together, arranging activities to share experience and resolve problems, and supporting teachers to use internet for communication external training. However, it is significant that two activities identified by principals in the sample appear to be peculiar to the Chinese context and these were knowledge-based examinations and the teaching competition on teaching for teachers. These types of findings tend not to be found in the Western literature as examples of professional development activities for teachers.

While school-based research, such as action research, has been advocated by researchers in Western countries for decades (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991), a point of difference is that in Mainland China there is an expectation that all teachers will engage in some type of research-based activity. This expectation has been identified in policy documents such as the Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999).

Providing individual support to staff

Besides offering professional development opportunities to school staff, all principals in the study said that they provided individual support to staff on a daily basis. This was echoed in three Annual Reports (AR01, AR02, and AR06). As one principal indicated, “Since the implementation of the latest education reform, the role of the principal has been changed from a manager to a supporter. The relationship between the principal and teachers has transformed from being strained to collaborative and harmonious” (P04). According to the principals, one major responsibility of the principal was setting a clear direction for school development and supporting many aspects of teachers’ daily work. The following discussion identifies three strategies employed by principals to support their subordinates.

Strategy one: Cultivating teacher leaders. Over half of the principals (six out of ten) in the sample said that cultivating the leadership skills of teacher leaders was an important responsibility of theirs. These principals acknowledged the valuable role played by teacher leaders not only in supporting other teachers’ work in the school,
but also through their involvement in the school’s leadership team where teacher leaders worked with and alongside the principal, vice-principals and other formal leaders. Hence in reflecting upon the nature of their leadership, principals’ comments indicated that they gained the cooperation of teacher leaders by exerting a power through approach (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Fennell, 1999) when working with them. Similar findings were identified in case studies conducted in Australia by Gurr et al. (2006). In their study, principals supported teacher leaders to build individual capabilities, such as allocating leadership tasks to teacher leaders and promoting the professional learning of teacher leaders (Gurr et al., 2006). The Chinese principals in this study revealed a variety of ways in which they cultivated teacher leaders’ leadership and learning and one of these ways was by empowering them to grow in maturity and in practice. As one said,

For example, when there was a large activity, I first talked about a general idea and then asked teacher leaders to develop a specific plan. When the plan was done, I reviewed their design in terms of guidelines, implementation steps, and the division of labour. I promptly pointed out what teacher leaders did not take into account. It is a good way to improve teacher leaders’ own capability through taking on specific tasks. After the activity finished, I helped them analyse their strengths and weaknesses, regarding the work that was well carried out and those that needed improvement. (P09)

Strategy two: Providing an appropriate model. Many principals (seven out of ten) noted that they themselves were role models for teachers and students. One principal proposed a viewpoint that “the most effective way of school management is modelling” (P04) and leading by example. These seven principals emphasised leading by personal example which required them to be competent in what they were doing so that teachers could observe good practice. According to these principals, modelling happened in many areas, such as “learning” (P02), “reading” (P04), “making up deficiencies” (P08), “the way of getting along with people” (P01), and “the methods of solving problems” (P07). Principals indicated that they acted as an appropriate role model for teacher leaders and teachers, and in turn, teacher leaders and teachers acted as appropriate role models for students. As Leithwood & Jantzi
(2009) demonstrate, principals who are appropriate role models for staff yield positive effects on teachers’ work-related motivation and capabilities.

Strategy three: Providing emotional support. All of the principals indicated that they provided emotional support to teacher leaders and teachers to develop their wellbeing. They described their relationship with school staff as not only colleagues, but also friends. In order to carry out quality education under the current curriculum education in China, teachers have had to undertake more responsibilities in learning and teaching, such as transforming their traditional teaching methods (e.g., instilling knowledge into students) to new ones (e.g., guiding students towards learning actively and creatively). Not surprisingly, principals in the current study revealed that teachers were under a lot of pressure, which is similar to those who experience stress, anger, and frustration to carry out education reform strategies in Western countries (Trohan & Woods, 2000; Roulston et al., 2003; Sutton, 2002). Hence, they highlighted it was necessary for them to offer teachers more emotional support to help them become motivated and enthusiastic in their work (cf. Day & Leithwood, 2007).

These principals introduced three kinds of support they provided to their staff to show their concern and care. First, principals stated that they were concerned with the daily lives of their staff and this was reflected in the humanistic approach they used. These principals indicated when teachers or their families were confronted with personal difficulties; they offered material help and emotional support to teachers and let teachers feel that they cared for them. For instance, one principal said, “I went to teachers’ homes and provided help when their parents, children or they themselves were sick” (P10). Moreover, principals reported that they often visited teachers’ offices to talk with them, get informed of their difficulties and offer encouragement and support. All interviewed principals stated that providing concern and care to teachers was an effective way to create a close sense of intimacy between themselves and their staff. Some writers refer to this type of relationship as demonstrating an ‘ethic of care’ (Beck & Murphy, 1993) and being morally accountable to staff (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). Care and concern for others is also a central value of Confucian teaching (Tu, 1990).
Second, all of the principals claimed that they asked teacher leaders to plan social activities for teachers during and after school. These activities included organising a variety of recreation and sport, such as “teacher chorus, table tennis, and games” (P04). These principals identified that teachers could relieve their working pressure in activities, whereby they experienced a team spirit and a sense of cohesion.

Third, all of the principals encouraged teacher leaders to provide opportunities for staff to seek professional support and counseling from psychologists if they needed it. They also encouraged teacher leaders to attend training programs on how to provide counseling and emotional support. With the implementation of the current education reform, teachers had to meet more requirements from the Education Bureau and faced more pressure to perform at a high level. Principals indicated that teachers increasingly experienced both physical and mental stress due to the expanding workloads. The issue of expanding workloads for teachers is not only evident in China, but is an issue in Australia (Starr, 2009).

As a way of addressing stress caused by increasing workload, the principals in the current study encouraged teacher leaders to emotionally support teachers and put forward solutions to help ease teachers’ negative emotions (cf. Day & Leithwood, 2007; Troman & Woods, 2000). One principal said: “Every semester I send some teacher leaders outside the school to attend training regarding psychological consultations. After these teacher leaders came back, they offered consultation to other teachers” (P06). Principals admitted that teachers were able to deal with the difficulties they met in their work through consultations with teacher leaders and themselves. This lessened the likelihood of unnecessary conflicts with other teachers and disharmony with parents.

5.3.1.3 Wider Knowledge

As well as supporting teachers’ growth, all of the principals in the study asserted that they had a great responsibility to engage in their own learning and professional development. However, principals’ development was not mentioned in School Annual Reports. Emphasis has increasingly been placed on principals’ preparation and professional development in both Western countries (Gurr, 2008; Hallinger, 2003) and Mainland China (Wu & Ehrich, 2009; Feng, 2003). One summarised this well: “I need to update my own knowledge by constantly learning and in turn
ensuring the continuous advancement of teachers, students and even the whole school” (P02). The principals regarded learning as a crucial way of improving themselves and they indicated they relied on learning from experts, books, peers, and practice. In terms of the focus of the learning, the principals referred to: “learning educational theories” (P09), “acquiring professional knowledge” (P03), “getting informed about education reform trends” (P05), “understanding new concepts of education reform” (P04), “establishing social networks” (P10), “enhancing abilities in leading and managing” (P08), and “learning from the good experience of other principals” (P07).

With the ongoing progress of education reform in Mainland China, principals’ professional development has been gradually underscored as essential in educational policy documents. On the national level, the Regulation on the Training of Primary and Secondary Principals (1999) was issued by the Ministry of Education. On the regional level, the Implementation of the Professional Development of Principals in ZD District (Trial version) (2008) was released by the District Education Bureau. In both policies, principals are recognised as the key person to oversee curriculum reform. According to the principals, the Education Bureau provides a great deal of opportunities for them to enhance their knowledge and abilities to help prepare them carry out the curriculum reform effectively.

District Education Bureaus throughout China are pro-active in supporting principals’ professional development based on the guidance of educational policy. In the current study, District Education Bureaus in both cities (i.e., City Z and City W) provided specific training for principals to broaden their knowledge and social network. All principals declared that they also sought ways individually to improve their professional competencies and level of management by reading books, learning from their peers, and reflecting on their practice. These findings are in accordance with Gurr’s (2008) work as he found that principals in his study emphasised the necessity of having up-to-date knowledge to keep them informed as well as the need to expand their external networks and community linkages as a way of keeping connected.

Based on the findings, there was a significant difference between the District Education Bureaus of two cities regarding their contribution to principals’
professional development. The District Education Bureau in City Z appeared to put more energy into the development of school principals. For example, the findings revealed that five principals from City Z were provided with opportunities to learn from each other (e.g., engaging in Bureau planned discussions, online communication, site visits), and were also required to make individual plans every year. However, in City W, the Education Bureau did not organise these kinds of professional development activities for principals.

**Training**

School principals from both of the cities indicated that the District Education Bureaus organised for them to participate in face-to-face training every year. Similar training is also provided in Western countries (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2003; Mulford, 2004). As one said, “It (training) is a useful way of broadening my horizons and visions in terms of educational theory and practice” (P09). Under the ongoing curriculum reform, principal training was reported to be associated with new knowledge, new theories and new methods in educational practices and school management. With support, these principals indicated that they could achieve an in-depth understanding of educational phenomena and therefore be better placed to address problems they faced in their schools.

Two main types of training were provided by the District Education Bureaus. The first one was training provided by well-known professors and experts outside schools who delivered lectures and seminars to principals on topics various topics. For example, “the stimulation of teachers’ enthusiasm” (P01), “the transformation of principal roles under education reform” (P02), and “the construction of school development plans” (P06). The second one was the opportunity for principals to attend training in other cities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai) for a long (e.g., 4 months) or short term period (e.g., 2 weeks). The following comments from one principal reflect the sentiments of the principals interviewed,

> The District Education Bureau organised principals from primary and secondary schools to attend seven-day training at a university last year. Well-known professors and experts were invited to give lectures or seminars on school teaching and management. Principals were encouraged to discuss
the topics with each other and learn from study notes. It enhanced my leadership abilities and theoretical level by means of face to face communication with experts and other principals. (P09)

At these training sessions, all principals in the study stated that experts offered guidance, support and advice on books and articles to read. For instance, these principals were encouraged to speak freely, fully express their opinions and make study notes in order to learn from experts and each other. The key purpose of the training was identified as enhancing principals’ theoretical knowledge, updating their educational knowledge, fostering their learning and reading habits.

*Learning from each other*

All five principals from District ZD in City Z indicated that in recent years the District Education Bureau had begun to provide a variety of activities to encourage principals to learn from each other in a group. This was in contrast to the five principals from District HC in City W who did not report on any extra professional development for principals except for training. This suggests a difference in emphasis on principals’ professional development between two District Education Bureaus. What follows discusses three strategies employed by District Z and City Z for principals.

*Strategy one: Education Bureau planned discussions.* The five principals from City Z indicated that the District Education Bureau arranged collaborative discussions such as workshops and forums where they could interact with each other and discuss important topics relating to school management under the ongoing curriculum reform. Examples of topics included “how to construct school culture” (P06), “how to apply new school management methods” (P08), and “how to develop school-based curriculum” (P09). These meetings were described as effective as they enabled principals to share their experience and ideas and to learn from others. One principal remarked that “these lectures and seminars enlightened me to think more deeply about my leadership practices” (P10). This discussion could also occur in another form where excellent principals are invited to deliver lectures to other principal trainees in Mainland China (Wu & Ehrich, 2009).
**Strategy two: Online communication.** Another strategy the District Education Bureau employed to foster principals’ professional development was the establishment of a BBS (Bulletin Board System) on the website. This is consistent with the approach of the Department of Education in Tasmania, Australia to achieve principals’ professional learning. It not only relies on face-to-face training, but also emphasises the utilisation of online learning (Mulford, 2004). Half of the principals in the study noted that they were required to log on the BBS regularly to put forward their opinions, ideas and share their experience with peers on teaching, leading and managing. The District Education Bureau provided principals with this website as a convenient means to encourage peer discussion and information exchange with other principals. One principal expressed his feeling on utilising BBS in his daily work,

> I really enjoyed the BBS which saved me a heap of time. I can only stay in my office to communicate with other principals in the district. I learned a lot from them, and meanwhile they also offered me suggestions to resolve problems in my school. (P07)

**Strategy three: Site visits to other schools.** Five of the principals revealed that the District Education Bureau of City Z promoted their professional development by organising visits to other schools where they were encouraged to learn from their peers. This strategy is also emphasised by some Chinese researchers where principals are organised to visit other schools either inside or outside Mainland China with the aim of deepening their instructional understanding of school leadership (Wu & Ehrich, 2009; Yu, 2003). Similar opinion also appears in Bush et al.’s (2007) overview of English National College for School Leadership (NCSL) evaluations. It states that visiting other primary schools contributes to powerful leadership learning. These principals stated that they were afforded opportunities to either visit schools for several days or work in other schools for a period such as one month. The latter was illustrated as a program related to principals’ exchange between urban schools and rural schools or between high performance schools and low performance schools. Through such visits principals were encouraged to learn from each other and grow professionally from this shared experience. One principal commented on his experience,
Through visiting, we could learn to determine the developing stage of these schools regarding their school management in terms of standards, system or culture. Those excellent schools in carrying out curriculum reform, school management system reform and quality-oriented education reform were also introduced as examples for us to learn. (P08)

There was a consensus by the principals that visiting other schools is a useful way to link educational theory with practice. In this way, they could “conduct an in-depth analysis on specific management cases” (P09), “gain the advanced experience of running a school” (P07), and “achieve the insights of possible problems” (P06). Thus, practical knowledge and skills could be obtained and then applied to the future school management.

Making an individual development plan

All of the principals in City Z reported that since 2009 they have been required by the District Education Bureau to develop an individual professional development plan as a key part of their work. As Mulford (2004) indicates, principals in Australia plan their own continuing professional learning and identify priority areas each year as part of their accountability to the system. Similarly, in Mainland China, it is mandatory for principals from the various districts to develop an individual three-year and one-year development program in addition to the school development program and an annual progress report indicating their achievements. In their individual development programs, principals said that they were required to identify personal and professional learning goals and include goals that have been mandated by the system.

As illustrated by a principal, “we are required to read official education documents such as laws, regulations and policies so as to lead and manage school affairs according to them” (P06). Additionally, it was necessary for them to “read one educational book and write reading notes” (P10), “write reflective notes based on problems that have happened in school” (P09), “publish one academic article in a journal” (P07), “regularly observe and guide teachers’ classroom instruction” (P06), and “participate in certain teaching and research activities” (P08) throughout the year. One principal pointed out that “I feel reading is a relatively fast one among all
the approaches to improve my quality” (P10). According to these principals, all these tasks were monitored by the District Education Bureau during the annual principal evaluation. They suggested that making an individual development plan adapted to the new curriculum reform was regarded as a means of promoting self-development.

**Learning individually**

Principals from both of the cities claimed that besides participating in training or initiatives offered by the Education Bureau, they also spent their spare time learning by themselves. This is consistent with those principals in Western countries (e.g., Copland, 2003; Davis, 2003; Littky & Schen, 2003). The principals in the sample said they endeavoured to take advantage of every opportunity to enrich their knowledge, experience and awareness, and then adjust their behaviours to better guide school development. In order to truly become “the teacher of teachers” (P02) in leading the current curriculum reform, one principal said that she should work hard, be good at learning, learn by asking questions, and improve learning so that practical problems can be better addressed.

All of the principals pointed to the importance of reading as a means of ongoing learning. Here they referred to classical books, journal articles or newspapers in education related to various aspects, such as “new educational concepts and trends” (P03), “effective teaching methods” (P04), “useful strategies in leading and managing” (P01), and “effective communication between principals and teachers” (P07). Furthermore, all of the principals said that they were involved in ongoing reflection on practice and communication with peers.

Yet, the principals indicated that an obstacle to their learning was the heavy administrative demands of their position which took time away from engaging in learning. As one remarked, “Even though I would like to learn at school, there is no spare time. For example, I have to spend time with visitors from outside, such as officials from Education Bureau, parents and friends” (P10).

Another obstacle raised was that much of the learning they were required to undertake was being mandated by the system and system imperatives that required them to be aware of and in control of changes. For example, “national and district
based policy directives” (P01), “the constraints of administration system” (P05), and “the requirements of the Education Bureau” (P06). The following is a principal’s comments on the important relationship between learning by principals themselves and the supervision from the Education Bureau,

I think learning by principal themselves and supervision by the Education Bureau are both equally important to principal’s development. As principals usually have more routine work to do, it is hard to make great efforts on learning without the attention and supervision of the District Education Bureau. However, it is also impossible to enhance their development if principals only rely on the supervision without their own motivation. (P09)

This discussion on wider professional and leadership knowledge demonstrates that principals engaged in a variety of professional development activities. To an extent, the principals relied on the support of and were guided by the District Education Bureau as well as being proactive themselves in seeking out learning opportunities. The notion of professional development as being a joint responsibility between the employing authority and the individual principal is one that has been recognised in Australia for decades (DEET, 1993).

5.3.1.4 Decision-making

In response to the latest curriculum reform, all school principals in the study declared that they had devolved decision-making powers to teacher leaders and other teachers in their schools. School Annual Reports of all ten schools also revealed the same results. This is in line with what has happened in many countries in the world under school-based management where principals have increasingly devolved school-based decision-making to teachers (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002; Harris, 2007). Since the issue of the Decisions on the Reform of the Educational Structure in 1985, the education system in China has gone through a process of decentralisation. The administrative power and financial responsibility once held by the central government has gradually moved to regional and local governments. In schools, under the Principal Responsibility System, more power has shifted to school principals at the school level and they in turn have shifted power to share that with teachers. As principals’ workload has increased, principals in the sample identified the important role teacher
leaders and teachers must now play in promoting education reform and taking on more school responsibilities. Such a move has become necessary in the current climate characterised by increasing pressure on principals (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The following discusses two types of empowerment and times when principals indicated they made decisions themselves.

**Empowerment of teacher leaders**

With the implementation of the principal responsibility system\(^4\), principals in China are appointed as the school’s corporate representative who has ultimate authority and accountability regarding every aspect of school operation. Yet, in this study, the ten principals indicated that they endeavoured to empower teacher leaders to make decisions in the school. Principals stated they encouraged teacher leaders to fully participate in discussing and drawing up programs to achieve school goals through regular school meetings. These principals said that they listened to the opinions of teacher leaders and utilised their ideas when making a final decision even if the ideas were contrary to their own. For example, one principal deemed that “it is necessary to have a generous heart to accept other people’s opinions, even those who are against me” (P10).

The ten principals explained that they also offered teacher leaders more autonomy and power to execute decisions. This is because they acknowledged the ability of teacher leaders and had faith in their ability (cf. Blase & Blase, 2001; Gurr, 2008; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002). These principals were intent on providing every teacher leader enough space to fully display their respective capabilities, which would stimulate their work enthusiasm and initiative to better accomplish tasks. The following comments from one principal provided an example of decision-making in his school,

> In my school, our decision-making is very democratic. For instance, in the weekly leadership team meeting, I encourage teacher leaders to speak freely and give suggestions to make decisions. As teacher leaders have been

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\(^4\) The principal responsibility system refers to a system that the principal is given plenipotentiary powers in the school’s operation. The principal is responsible for all school working areas, such as school-based decisions, school personnel, and school finance.
engaged in decision-making, they are more likely to carry out the final decisions with enthusiasm. (P08)

In the current study, the principals suggested two essential strategies that impacted on the effective delegation of decision-making. In the first strategy, all principals stressed their key role in steering the school towards its goals. In the second strategy, the ten principals underscored the need to integrate teacher leaders’ rights and responsibilities. These principals respectively allocated each teacher leader clear responsibility and power to prevent any overlapping working areas and finally rewarded or penalised them according to their work outcomes.

**Empowerment of teachers**

All principals in the sample announced that they also encouraged teachers to participate in a range of decision-making activities in the school based on the assumption that teachers have a valuable contribution to make and a lot of good ideas to share (cf. Blase & Blase, 2001; Gurr, 2008; Smylie, 1997). Without including teachers in decision-making, “it would be hard to establish an effective communication between leaders and fellow teachers” (P02) as one principal said.

The ten principals described the process they followed to empower teacher leaders and teachers in decision-making across a variety of areas such as “making an annual work plan” (P01), “organising school events” (P04), “issuing school policy and documents” (P07), and “particular issues related to teachers’ benefits (i.e., formulating teacher annual evaluation program)” (P10). These principals explained that they usually first worked with teacher leaders to develop a program with a framework and main ideas. Then they arranged for teachers to attend meetings to discuss the program in great detail and elicited responses from them. After that they would conduct revisions with the intent of improving this program. Finally, the program could be implemented when it was approved and adopted by most teachers. Based on such principals’ accounts of how they worked with teacher leaders, principals described examples of facilitation, negotiation, exchange, and sharing to achieve particular educational goals (Blase & Blase, 1997). It is argued here that such strategies fall under the umbrella of a micropolitical leadership process referred to as power through (Smeed et al., 2009).
Making decisions only by the principal

All of the principals indicated that they sometimes made decisions themselves without either seeking or accepting teachers’ ideas. Even though they endeavoured to empower teachers to make important decisions about the school, they recognised that part of their role was maintaining control over the school’s affairs. This view can be explained by the influence of Confucianism which maintains that respect should be given to people who occupy high positions and such people should be obeyed (e.g., Cheng, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Principals in schools would be an example of such people.

The principals in the study provided a number of reasons why they made decisions without any input from teachers. First, these principals admitted that they were obliged to ignore or reject teachers’ advice and suggestions that were deemed unworkable. Under these circumstances, they tended to adhere to their own knowledge and experience to ensure the school was developing along the lines they deemed effective. As one principal explained: “teachers might not think about issues as deeply as the principal, so the principal could not follow teachers’ ideas in some situations” (P10). Second, these principals noted that teachers were reluctant to engage in some decision-making issues that they considered should be addressed by the principal. A principal made the comment: “from teachers’ point of view, what teachers should consider was largely focused on how to teach effectively rather than participating in making school-based decisions” (P05). This quote indicates that the perspectives of the principal and teachers are different. A final reason offered by principals related to decisions that were based on issues that were either trivial or too sensitive. Regarding the trivial, one principal said: “principals could totally handle these small problems, so we did not want to waste time to discuss them” (P03).

However, all principals stated that there were times when they had experienced a dilemma as to whether to enlist teachers’ support and advice or not. For instance, one principal said: “as it was hard to form a unified opinion on sensitive issues, sometimes I did not know how to empower teachers to make decisions” (P08). Yet, the principals indicated that they needed to be able to carefully distinguish when to make decisions by themselves and when to call upon staff. In summary, the finding revealed that decentralisation of school management was a reasonably new
phenomenon in China having been introduced in 1985. For this reason, it is unsurprising that principals indicated it was problematic to know when to share decision-making with teachers.

5.3.1.5 All-round learning of students

Improving the quality of student learning was stressed by all principals in the interviews and the ten School Annual Reports, although student learning per se was not identified as a core role undertaken by principals in Gurr’s (2008) model. There is a great emphasis, in contemporary China, on students’ achievement and development. Since quality education has been highlighted under the ongoing education reform, principals in the sample indicated they had paid more attention to students’ all-round development and the enhancement of students’ learning abilities, rather than focusing on students’ examination scores. The findings confirmed the views of Hallinger and Heck (1996) and Leithwood (1994) who argue that principals can increase teachers’ understanding of, and support for, the goals of students’ development and learning.

All principals in the sample underscored the necessity for students to achieve all-round development in terms of both academic achievements and non-academic achievements. Since the implementation of the current education reform, these principals noted that they were required to place more emphasis on the improvement of students’ non-academic achievement, such as good habits, which is a long-standing Confucian concern, and students’ interests. In one principal’s mind, “the most important aim of cultivating students is developing students’ abilities, rather than only learning knowledge” (P03). Not surprisingly, principals indicated they helped teachers to provide more opportunities for students to actively learn so that their potential could be developed in different aspects of the curriculum. The following discusses the strategies that principals pursued to improve two areas of students’ learning: academic achievements and non-academic achievements.

Improving students’ academic achievements

All of the principals indicated that it was crucial for students to experience high-quality learning with the aim of improving their academic ability. Although the most recent curriculum reform in China was carried out since 2001, principals indicated that many teachers were still using traditional methods in teaching students which
were far from the requirements of the reform. Traditional methods focus on instilling knowledge in students, whereas new teaching methods aim to arouse students’ creativity and activeness in learning. The principals in the study indicated it is imperative to transfer the teaching and learning style from teacher-oriented to student-oriented.

In the interviews, principals explained two approaches that they used to trigger this change in approach. This echoes some findings that transformational leadership of school principals produces significant and positive effects on student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Ross, 2004). Results in this study are also in line with some research that instructional leadership helps teachers develop and employ effective teaching methods to improve student learning (Blase & Blase, 2004; DuFour, 2002; Eldredge, 2008).

Firstly all of the principals encouraged teachers to help students learn actively and creatively instead of receiving knowledge passively. For instance, a principal indicated she “led teachers to provide students with guidance on exploring the knowledge, designing their own solutions, and making their own conclusions by themselves” (P02). This approach is influenced by educational thoughts of Confucius who highlighted the heuristic method of teaching, but was against teaching students through indoctrination. In Confucius’ philosophy of teaching, teachers were expected to grasp the best opportunity to fully increase students’ learning motivation and inspire their interests in learning (Bu Fen Bu Qi, Bu Fei Bu Fa).

Secondly, all of the principals referred to the need for teachers to utilise various ways and methods to teach students in accordance with their individual intelligence, characters, interests, and needs. An example was given by a principal that “teachers should set up different learning expectations for different students so that all students are able to achieve great improvements in each class” (P09). This expectation is reflected in Confucius’ doctrine which stresses the necessity to cater for students’ individual differences in teaching and learning (Yin Cai Shi Jiao). Principals in the study accepted the two approaches as crucial to develop students’ confidence and potential in learning.
Improving students’ non-academic achievements

As well as academic achievements, all school principals indicated the importance of improving students’ achievements in non-academic areas for their overall development. They described non-academic achievements to be relevant to students’ personal “interests” (P08), “habits” (P03), “personality” (P09), “motivation” (P02) and “emotion” (P06). According to the policy requirements in the Guidelines on the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (Trial version) (2001), students are expected to achieve all round development of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetics and labour education to implement quality education. This concept is aligned with “six arts” (Liu Yi) proposed by Confucius that requires ancient scholars to master. The six arts consist of ritual (Li), music (Yue), archery (She), charioting\(^5\) (Yu), writing (Shu), and calculations (Shu) (Hall & Ames, 1987). In this study, principals believed that students would be able to lay a solid foundation for their future study when they were given opportunities to develop in these arts.

The ten principals showed that they adopted a variety of strategies to train and cultivate students in non-academic aspects of schooling. This is aligned to some studies that reveal the significant positive effects of transformational leadership on student participation in class and school activities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Silins & Mulford, 2002). First, all principals helped teachers set up extra-curricular activities as well as student associations in which students were able to select favorite courses following their interests. These activities included: “dancing” (P07), “singing” (P04), “drawing” (P05), and “playing with different balls” (P10).

Second, these principals encouraged teachers to organise comprehensive practical activities to help students engage in more social and cultural experiences. For example, one principal specified that “in my school, all of the activities were categorised with topics in terms of Chinese tradition, culture and festivals to enhance their own quality” (P01). Principals indicated that through these activities, students would learn how to communicate and cooperate with other people, exercise self-discipline, and develop many different learning interests. Third, all of the principals said they supported teachers to develop strategies to advance students’ abilities in

\(^5\) Charioting is an ancient sport that does not have relevance in modern society.
effective self-management. For example, one principal adopted the strategy that “students were offered opportunities to manage themselves in activities and take actions to resolve problems among them” (P08). Lastly, these principals proposed a reward system whereby students were given rewards for good behaviour. As one indicated: “It is vital to encourage and praise students while doing activities so that they can feel happy in school life and grow up healthy”, (P04). Using incentives was recognised by these principals as a way to encourage students’ good behaviour.

5.3.1.6 Summary

The discussion above identified the key role of learning and teaching in the work of primary school principals in China. It confirmed the work of Gurr (2008) which highlights teaching and learning as a key role of school principals. Principals in the current study indicated they were involved in supervising instruction directly themselves as well as enlisting support from teacher leaders to supervise fellow teachers. It became evident from principals’ discussions that they relied heavily upon teachers to lead in this way. Principals indicated they supported teachers not only emotionally but also via creating opportunities for them to engage in a variety of professional development activities. Some of these activities had a distinctive Chinese flavour such as knowledge-based examinations and teaching competition. Principals saw merit in professional development for themselves as a way of keeping informed and being able to lead the mandated curriculum reform. An important finding of the study was the key role of principals in improving student academic and non-academic achievements. Non-academic achievement can be best understood in terms of the current curriculum reform which maintains that education should be holistic and encompassing. That principals in the study underscored teaching and learning for themselves, teachers, and students can also be explained by the influence of Confucius who prized learning.

Teacher and teacher leader empowerment manifested in decision-making powers was an important theme that emerged from the findings and one which principals claimed was a relatively new phenomenon in China. The principals in the study gave examples where teacher leaders were actively involved in leading the learning and making key decisions about learning (not only for teachers but also for students). Under school-based management, principals have increasingly been involved in
sharing decision-making with teachers. And, as noted, it became increasing evident that based on principals’ accounts of how they worked with teacher leaders, principals described examples of facilitation, negotiation, exchange, and sharing to achieve particular educational goals (Blase & Blase, 1997). Such strategies fall under the micropolitical concept of power through (Smeed et al., 2009). However, this use of power was not always the chosen method, as some principals claimed that sharing decision-making can be problematic. The next part of the discussion refers to the second of Gurr’s roles: symbolic and cultural awareness.

5.3.2 Symbolic and cultural awareness

The findings relating to Symbolic and cultural awareness are summarised in Table 5.3 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified by Gurr (2008), while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by school principals in the Chinese context.

Table 5.3
The Second Role of Principal Leadership: Symbolic and Cultural Awareness

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In Gurr’s (2008) model, the second role of principal leadership, namely symbolic and cultural awareness, has been categorised into five key sub-roles. These are values, parent and community focus, student and teacher focus, marketing of school, and
symbolism. However, the principals in the current study did not specify a student and teacher focus or symbolism as leadership sub-roles in practice. Rather, these principals placed more emphasis on the construction of school culture and their interviews indicated that they viewed this focus as a major force in driving a school’s overall development. The following section considers Gurr’s sub-roles as well as the role of school culture construction.

5.3.2.1 Values

All of the interviewed principals highlighted the significance of principals’ values in leading and managing schools. They believed that this ‘valuing’ aspect of their leadership contributed to fostering excellence in the school. Principals’ values were also reflected in all School Annual Reports. Researchers have identified the great importance of values in understanding school leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1990; Stoll & Fink, 1996). This may be caused by the increased awareness that principals should assume their obligations in moral and ethical ways in their practice (Ehrich, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2009). In addition to confirming the values identified by Gurr (2008), such as equity, fairness, respect, empowerment, and encouragement, this study revealed another four values and these included openness, recognition, trust, and democracy. Values of care, respect, and concern for other human beings can be attributed to Confucius’ notion of humaneness (Ren). The discussion that follows discusses these central values.

Equity, fairness, and openness

Half of the principals (five of ten) in the interviews argued that they promoted strongly the adoption of the principles of equity, fairness and openness in every aspect of school management. Equity highlights that all school staff are treated equally and no one has an unfair advantage. Fairness means that principals treat school staff in a way that is right or reasonable, and not allow personal opinions to influence their judgment. Openness refers to principals’ quality of being honest, willing to talk about things, and not hiding information or feelings. This approach to embedding equity, fairness and openness in their work with staff was viewed as a vital way to improve the enthusiasm of teachers and the effective implementation of school directives. These three values have been identified in existing literature. Many researchers from Western countries have underscored the importance of fairness and equity as a goal not only for education but also for relationships with staff in schools.
(Day et al., 2001; Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002). Moreover, Gurr et al. (2006) identified equity as a key value of school principals that is demonstrated through being open and flexible.

An example that was provided by principals to demonstrate equity and openness in practice was via the annual teacher appraisal system. Here five of the ten principals referred to how they adopted a number of processes underpinned by equity and openness. According to one principal, teachers were encouraged to “get more understanding about themselves, enhance self-reflection, pinpoint their own development problems, and then identify effective solutions” (P09). The principals in the study also indicated they encouraged teachers to develop their own personalised teaching styles and think carefully about their career development.

*Respect*

All interviewed principals agreed that respect was one of the most important values that principals held towards teachers and students. This is in line with the findings in some Western studies where respect for all people in schools is a central value of principals (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002; Novak, 2009). In the current study, this belief was reflected by comments made by principals regarding the way they respected teachers’ work and opinions. Principals also respected students’ interests whilst expressing a broader desire to support teachers and students in achieving excellent performance. For example, principals asserted that such respect was based on an equal relationship between teachers, students and principals, rather than conceptualising the position of the principal as an authority figure superior to teachers and students. Yet, they also recognised that they were the formal leaders in the school which required them to use their legitimate authority to oversee and manage the school’s operations at times.

In addition, principals suggested that when teachers were well respected in the school, their self-confidence would grow and this would contribute towards high levels of teacher enthusiasm, motivation and innovative work. In a case study by Day et al. (2001), a number of ‘personal values’ of principals were demonstrated as underpinning principals’ practices. One of these values referred to the modelling and
promotion of respect for individuals. The following paragraph provides a good illustration of one of the Chinese principal’s views about respect:

As both teachers and students with whom I am confronted have complex thoughts, any word and deed of mine may exert effects on their mind. Therefore, it is necessary to first respect each school member on an equal level, such as listening to and accepting their comments and suggestions. Otherwise, it will become easy for me to stand too high and lose the truth of the matter. (P02)

Empowerment

All of the interviewed principals stated that they had delegated their power and responsibilities to other teachers, especially teacher leaders. Empowering teachers has been identified as an important value and practice by principals in Western schools (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2003). In the current study, principals indicated that they were aware of the increasingly complex schooling environment in which teachers now work. In this environment, a principal could not be an omniscient and omnipotent leader and manage all the responsibilities of administering and leading a school. Principals accepted that they needed to rely on others, especially their teacher leaders, to assist them in making the school run effectively. They indicated that they provided teacher leaders with many opportunities to develop their autonomy with full trust and support. The findings from the interview data revealed that teachers’ motivation, efficiency and creativity were stimulated by this approach that enabled them to make a greater contribution to their school’s development. One principal described her approach to empowering staff:

I always encourage teacher leaders and teachers to carry out more tasks with courage. They can learn from working to improve their leading and managing abilities and working quality. At the same time, I also make efforts to think and observe teachers’ work in order to provide them ongoing advice and guidance. The teachers and I could achieve the enhancement together during this process. (P05)
The ten principals also proposed three strategies they used to empower their staff. First, principals claimed that it was essential to clearly identify the roles and responsibilities taken by principals and teacher leaders. Principals emphasised the importance of having an in-depth understanding of teacher leaders’ work in order to effectively arrange the work of the school in each phase. According to one principal, “as a school principal, I need to stand high and look far so that I can have a clear mind in most aspects of school management and make a proper arrangement of distributing responsibilities to teacher leaders” (P10).

Second, principals stated that they not only delegated power to teacher leaders in the school hierarchy, but also indicated clearly the levels of accountability that came with accepting increased levels of leadership responsibility and the consequences of unintended outcomes. For this reason, teacher leaders could experience principals’ trust and support whether they finally achieved success or failure. Conversely, principals could also gain support and loyalty from their subordinates. Principals indicated that this approach to empowerment contributed to a school’s sustainable development. One principal said, “as long as teacher leaders make great efforts to do things with careful consideration, it does not matter when unexpected problems emerge. I will take the blame for them” (P07).

Finally, all principals pointed out that it was necessary to supervise teachers’ work when authority and power had been distributed in the school. Principals were alert to problems that may emerge in leading and managing, should unsupervised teachers abuse their authority. Principals indicated that they were kept informed of teachers’ work by means of regular inspection, discussion and meetings. More specifically, as one principal mentioned, “I offered the recognition of teachers’ achievements, pointed out the shortcomings in their work and coordinated the arrangement of school work to ensure teacher leaders were using their power properly” (P03).

Encouragement

Most principals (eight of ten) noted that they provided encouragement to the leadership team and the teacher group in the school. Encouraging staff as a core value of principals was also identified by Harris (2002) and Gurr (2008) in Western schools. The significance of this was noted by one principal in the sample who
stressed that “the principal’s encouragement and support to teachers is the most important component in teachers’ development” (P01). A principal’s encouragement was also seen as significant for prompting the inner working passion and energy of teacher leaders. The eight principals were mindful that if teachers were not interested in their work or lacked commitment and passion, they would find it difficult to deal with increased levels of responsibility regardless of their acceptance of training or discussion activities in the school.

From the interviews, it was evident that principals adopted two main approaches to encourage teachers. One approach focused on verbal encouragement, for instance, principals showed their acknowledgment and praise through comments such as “well done” (P03) or “you did a good job” (P08) to encourage teachers in their daily work. Principals realised that their encouragement and praise, even through brief comments, could prompt teachers’ motivation and commitment to practice. The second approach involved was offering various rewards to teachers, such as issuing them with certificates or awards in different areas: such as “outstanding teachers, outstanding form teacher, subject experts, excellent teachers in teaching, and moral model” (P10). Principals believed that selecting and publicly acknowledging some teachers with excellent performance each semester, enabled them to be more diligent and thoughtful in their work. Principals indicated that this approach to encouragement was an effective way to reward excellent teachers and encouraged less able or underperforming teachers to be aware of professional standards.

Recognition

More than half of the principals (six of ten) indicated that their recognition of teachers had a significant effect on the implementation of teachers’ work. These principals reflected that although the background and abilities of teachers were diverse, principals should recognise their teachers’ achievements, regardless of their level of significance. It has also been demonstrated by Combs, Miser, and Whitaker (1999) that in order to create an environment for learning and growth, principals should acknowledge teachers’ desire for achievement and recognition. As Kouzes and Posner (2010) pointed out, the leader needs to recognise the contributions of others by sharing appreciation. This was the case in this study as one principal explained that “as each teacher has a particular way of pursuing success, teachers
They expect their principal to recognise their efforts and devotion” (P02). Thus, principals remarked that their recognition of teachers’ work gave teachers confidence and made them feel their efforts were valued. Such recognition also contributed to teachers who approached their work with commitment and enthusiasm. These principals suggested that when teachers experienced recognition they were more likely to work actively and creatively. They drew a contrast with teachers who might require constant monitoring and supervision. Moreover, the six principals claimed that by recognising different teachers’ work efforts, principals were able to draw from teachers’ strengths, thereby contributing to the overall development of the school.

**Trust**

All principals asserted that they trusted teacher leaders and other teachers to carry out their work. One principal said that “if the principal always keeps an eye on teachers’ shortcomings, it will dampen their working enthusiasm and initiative” (P06). Thus, principals underlined the necessity to establish a relationship of trust between themselves and teachers through open and honest communication. Likewise, principals in Western schools not only trust staff, but also require trust from them (Harris, 2002; Novak, 2009). In the study, principals stressed that mutual trust was of particular importance in the operation of the leadership team. In this context, the principal and teacher leaders could work closely to contribute to the development of the whole school. Principals believed that as long as they listened to teachers’ opinions and provided genuine and sincere guidance teachers would experience a sense of trust and reassurance at work. They indicated it was important that they would demonstrate their trust towards and support of teachers, even if a teacher acted improperly or incorrectly. They also indicated that by building trusting relationships with teachers, they would be enabled to do their best to meet school requirements. The following comment comes from a principal who referred to the importance of trust:

As a principal, I fully trust my teachers in our school. So teachers can do their work with a sense of responsibility. Although most working tasks are very common, teachers can still feel the glory and sacredness of the work and they are achieving success during the process. (P06)
Democracy

Most principals (eight of ten) stressed that they endeavoured to provide a democratic environment for teachers and students by adopting a tolerant and relaxed leadership style within the school. Democratic concepts, as evident in the trend towards decentralisation of school management that has emerged globally (Beare, 1991), have become a relatively new feature of principals’ values in Mainland China. As an example, these principals claimed that they identified the increasingly important role of teacher leaders in teaching and managing to carry out the current curriculum reforms. Accordingly, those principals who indicated they adopted a democratic style of leadership in their schools reported that they actively listened to teachers’ points of view and were not perturbed if teachers disagreed with their views. The following statement illustrates this idea:

In order to prepare for Education Bureau’s supervision last year, teacher leaders talked about how to display school achievements and provided a plan. However, as I had another plan to carry out, we could not reach an agreement. After my adequate consideration, I found that their suggestions were indeed good and I finally accepted their ideas. (P01)

5.3.2.2 Parent and community focus

In this study, all of the principals indicated that educating students in contemporary China was a complex process and schools were far from able to solve all of the educational and societal issues affecting young people. Therefore, principals advocated a combined approach involving school education, family education and social education in the development of students. Principals emphasised that students growing up in Chinese society should not only acquire knowledge, but also learn how to be responsible citizens. They identified that community factors, including parents of students and communities in which their schools were located, had a direct or indirect influence on school achievement.

According to the data from interviews and School Annual Reports of ten schools, principals had paid more attention to communication with parents and the community since the implementation of the latest curriculum reform. The Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education (2001) highlighted the necessity
for schools to establish an effective communication and cooperation with parents and
the community. Research in Western countries has for decades underscored the vital
role of parents in schooling (Spry & Graham, 2009) and the need for principals to
establish positive and productive relationships with parents and members of the
wider community (Gurr, 2008; Harris, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2008). The principals
in the current study reported that they had begun quite recently to open up their
schools to the local community, involving parents in school activities and acquiring
more resources by collaborating with their parents and communities. The following
section explores principals’ efforts to communicate with parents and the community.

*Communication with parents*

According to the principals, increased competition in current Chinese society has
brought about a strong emphasis on education for individuals. This stress on the
importance of education has been further highlighted by the implementation of the
One Child Policy since 1978. Under the ongoing curriculum reform, students are not
only expected to get high scores in examinations, but also to achieve excellent
performance in other aspects of schooling, such as physical education and aesthetics.
Under these circumstances, principals in the study indicated that parents imposed
very high expectations on their children to prepare them for a promising future. In
order to meet the requirements of parents, these principals realised the necessity to
establish a closer relationship with parents. It is acknowledged that establishing an
effective parent-school communication is recognised as one major role that
principals play in ensuring success for all students (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Gurr,
2008; Griffith, 2001).

All of the interviewed principals in the sample indicated they were aware of the
significance of family influence on the child’s development. They went further to
suggest that the performance and well-being of children was linked to their parents’
attitudes towards education. One principal even stated that “if the school cannot
obtain the support of parents, it is impossible to achieve its success in education”
(P09). Principals admitted during their interviews there was room to develop better
family-school relationships and ways of improving parental participation in school
affairs. For instance, they commented that the school did not take full advantage of
parents’ expertise or other resources and some principals indicated that parents were
not always aware of how they might participate in the school’s activities. However, all principals suggested that they were working on establishing an effective cooperative relationship with parents to improve students’ well-being in the long-term.

In the ten schools, principals indicated that they normally adopted five main approaches to communicate with parents. First, principals referred to the importance of parent-teacher meetings. Principals noted that they organised school wide meetings, usually once a year, so that both parents and teachers could share awareness of students’ performance in school and at home. These principals highlighted that the concern of parents and teachers was not only about students’ learning, but also their behavioural habits and cooperation with other students.

Second, principals stated that they utilised communication methods such as blogging, mail, and telephone calls to keep in touch with parents. Such methods were helpful in ascertaining parents’ attitudes, advice and suggestions on school education and were also useful for addressing unsolved issues and problems.

Third, principals also organised structures such as a Parents’ Committee and regarded it as a useful channel to connect parents to the school. As members of a Parents’ Committee, parents had the rights and responsibilities of involvement in school decision-making and supervision of school operations. Principals said they organised Parent Committee Meetings every year to collect parents’ comments and suggestions on school affairs, such as homework loads, teachers’ professional ethics, and school environment enhancement.

Fourth, principals reported that they also required teacher leaders to schedule Open Teaching Days at least once a year in the school. On Open Teaching Days, parents were invited to the school to sit in on classes, observe the daily life of students and teachers, and provide comments and suggestions on their perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of what they observed.

Lastly, principals suggested that sometimes principals, teacher leaders, or form teachers invited parents, with expertise in different areas, to deliver seminars to
students. They indicated that students could broaden their horizons and enhance interest in learning through this kind of activity. All principals asserted that through such means, they were making efforts to open the school to parents and community. A principal summarised her opinion of the connection between the school and parents.

We not only focus on school-based education, but also emphasise the effects of family education. In order to achieve the best education results, the school and family are expected to provide a favorable environment and atmosphere suitable to students’ growing up. For this reason, I put forward various ways to connect our school to parents, such as Parent Committee involvement, parent-teacher meetings, classroom open day, and parents advice letters. (P06)

*Communication with community*

A series of education reforms, particularly the devolution of administrative power from central government to local and regional governments, has exerted an impact on the leadership roles of principals. Since more responsibilities have been allocated to the locality for developing education, the community in which the school is located is seen by the principals exerting an increasing influence on school practices. All principals in the study maintained that they made efforts to establish a win-win relationship with the community. This relationship is well developed in Western countries. For example, Kilpatrick et al. (2002) reveal that Australian principals play effective leadership in building deep school-community partnerships beyond only involving stakeholders in school decision-making.

As well as communicating with parents, all interviewed principals declared that they were involved in two-way interactions with members of the community. According to the interviews, the community made a contribution to school education; while school teachers and students also offered services to the community. For the school, principals cooperated with members of the community to establish student practice places, or what is commonly referred to as ‘work experience programs’ in Western schools. For instance, one principal who introduced such activities stated, “I encouraged teachers to arrange students’ observation in the organisations (our
practice places) around our school. Through these activities, students can get an in-depth understanding of the operation in different kinds of jobs” (P08). Moreover, these principals also invited staff from different community organisations to give students seminars every year, such as “legal education and safety precaution from the police, how to keep healthy from the staff of Hygiene Department” (P05). All of the principals agreed that their operation with the community provided more opportunities for students to engage in practical activities and acquire more social experiences.

The principals also encouraged students and teachers to offer the community a variety of services. This approach, referred to as ‘service learning’ in the West (Furco, 1996), was considered to be most worthwhile for students’ moral development. For example, one principal indicated that “I pushed students to visit old people in the aged-care centre every semester. Students provided help and performance [i.e., singing, dancing] to them” (P03). Principals acknowledged that students who participated in community activities could learn a lot of ‘life-knowledge’ that was not available through book knowledge.

However, principals indicated that the cooperative level between the school and the community varied in different schools. As one principal reflected, “I seldom organised students to participate in community activities. In the work of community-school cooperation, school 03 did much better than me” (P04). Furthermore, principals also noted that when compared with the communication between primary schools and communities in big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, the community-based programs in their schools were limited and uncoordinated.

In summary, the findings in this study provided support for the important role principals play in involving parents and members of the community in the life of the school. For example, there were various forms of family-school cooperation which included parent-teacher meetings, principals’ connection with parents, Parent Committee Meetings, Open Teaching Days, and parents delivering seminars. Moreover, several forms of communication were also illustrated that related to community-school cooperation, such as community observation, community seminars, and service to the community. These types of activities are not uncommon
in other countries, such as Australia (see Spry & Graham, 2009), that underscore the
necessity of strengthening partnerships between schools, parents and the wider
community.

5.3.2.3 Marketing of school

All interviewed principals noticed the increasing significance of enhancing links
between school and community in this period of education reform in China.
Principals explained that they played key roles to advertise their schools and promote
the achievements of staff and students and to also establish networks with the
community and parents. According to one principal, “our school needed the
recognition of all aspects of the society, particularly the recognition of parents. So
more people could understand our school and provide us with more support” [i.e.,
providing advice for school improvement, offering places for students’ activities]
(P02). Principals claimed that creating a positive image of their school in the wider
community was not only for the parents’ sake or peer competition, but also
significant in fostering closer communication and resources exchange with other
schools.

Principals indicated that they employed a range of communication media such as
television, magazines, newspapers and websites to market their schools better to the
broader community. Six Annual Reports (AR01, AR02, AR04, AR06, AR08, and
AR10) also illustrated these media. This is similar to what is happening in Western
countries where schools actively market their programs in order to recruit students in
this new competitive environment (Oplatka et al., 2002).

In the current study, principals indicated the importance of publicising the school’s
positive image to promote the school’s reputation and strengths. Moreover, this
approach could promote cohesion and encourage teachers and students to develop a
sense of belonging and pride in their school. Principals added that school staff would
be more willing to work in their school and contribute their efforts to school
development if the school were marketed appropriately. Overall, principals noted
that a positive school image enhanced the potential for cohesion and the
improvement of the school. One principal provided the following example of how he
publicised his school.
We have taken advantage of various channels to provide a positive school image to the public. First, school image is largely disseminated by parents who know well about the status of the school. Second, all staff in the school are entitled to disseminate school information to the society, such as publishing papers and articles. Third, we also utilise medium to make the public know more about our school, such as newspapers, internet and TV.

(P10)

In summary, school marketing has become a typical characteristic of school development all over the world. However, the focus on school marketing by the Chinese principals in this study contrasts with Gurr’s findings (2008). That is, the ten principals in this study utilised marketing methods to enhance their school’s recognition in the wider community, boost teachers’ working enthusiasm, and foster cohesion within the school. This is in contrast to the findings of Gurr’s study (2008) in which the positive school image was sought in order to attract more student enrolments in the school. A possible contextual factor for this difference is the fact that, under the compulsory education system in China, school children are required to register in only one primary school in the community where their parents are residing. Thus, there is little competition amongst public primary schools in Shandong province, so schools do not need to strive for student enrolments.

5.3.2.4 School culture construction

All principals in this study underscored the necessity of constructing a culture for their school’s development. The emphasis on school culture was also highlighted in all ten School Annual Reports. This role was not identified in Gurr’s (2008) empirical study. According to Gurr’s research, principals in Australia did not mention the term ‘culture’ in their work, but acknowledged that culture automatically existed in their schools. However, one study of two cases of Australian schools in the ISSPP revealed that successful school leaders developed their school culture by developing collegiality, collaboration, support, and trust amongst staff (Gurr et al., 2006).

In the present study, principals claimed that they played a pivotal role in constructing a school culture that fostered learning, teaching, and managing in their schools. As a
key policy in the current curriculum reform in Mainland China, the *Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* in 2001 (State Council of the PRC, 2001) laid emphasis on strengthening the construction of school culture in primary and secondary schools. It aims at optimising the school environment as well as establishing a positive school atmosphere characterised by moral integrity, friendliness, and harmony. Thus, principals are expected to pay increasing attention to developing a school culture with new educational ideas (Ma & Ma, 2003). One principal even mentioned that “*the highest status of school management is culture management*” (P09). However, principals admitted that the formation of school culture was a long process with ongoing improvements. During this process, they stressed the prerequisite was to first adopt a principle that focused on carrying forward good school traditions and then creating a new school culture. The interviewed principals indicated that most principals recognised the importance of school culture in the current education context and endeavoured to develop it. One principal reflected, “*Now we are doing culture construction, but it is not good enough. I plan to take three years to clarify this part of work*” (P03).

To some extent, the formation of a positive school culture can be drawn from some educational thoughts of Confucius. For example, Confucius highlighted the necessity for a modest attitude to learning, so that students would learn from each other and learn about the merits of each other (*Bu Chi Xia Wen*). According to Confucius, teachers are required to treat all students fairly and without discrimination (*You Jiao Wu Lei*) and to treat students and colleagues with humaneness (*Ren*). School culture in the contemporary Chinese society has expanded the meaning of humaneness (*Ren*) to love, which includes love of people, love of country, love of society, and love of the world.

The process of developing a positive culture characterised by humaneness is a complex process. The principals in the study referred to three core elements and these involved school spiritual culture construction, school material culture construction, and school system culture construction. This confirms the three-level of organisational culture defined by Wu (2005). Principals endorsed the notion that a spiritual culture was the heart of all the other kinds of school culture and was
significant in leading school activities. For this reason, school spiritual culture construction is first reviewed below.

*School spiritual culture construction*

All principals indicated that the school’s spiritual culture was the most fundamental part of a school’s culture. Based on the interviews, spiritual culture was referred to as the generation of school values, morality (in terms of honesty and kindness), the school’s vision, and team spirit amongst staff and students. This is somewhat similar to Western schools’ use of a statement of goals, school mottoes and assemblies. For example, principals indicated that a school’s spiritual culture would help to develop a democratic, harmonious, united, cooperative, happy and healthy atmosphere. This could be achieved by means of building the core values of the school, specific school features, a school motto, school spirit, teaching spirit and learning spirit. Depending on the different types of school features, spiritual culture was constructed in schools with varying characteristics according to the preferences and styles of principals.

Principals noted that school spiritual culture was a priority for them. An example of this is evident in the following interview extract.

> We used metaphors to define the unique school spiritual culture as a locomotive culture, which referred to a united team spirit that infiltrated every aspect of the school. A locomotive culture underscored that both locomotives and carriages should have the power to accomplish the school’s harmonious, and rapid development. It reflects the concept that every leader, teacher and student’s internal driving force needed to be inspired to make them take the initiative to work and develop actively. (P08)

The principals emphasised that their role was to ensure the concepts and values of the school’s spiritual culture would be recognised and accepted by teachers and students and that what they themselves say and do should reflect this culture. Principals claimed that regardless of whether spiritual culture was constructed ‘from bottom to top’ or ‘from top to bottom’ in a school, teachers and students were expected to fully understand and support this culture. Furthermore, principals claimed they strove to build a positive atmosphere for staff and students so that their
efforts were reflective of the school’s culture. For example, one principal noted, “In our school, students are very active and polite, while teachers are working hard and actively communicating their experience related to student education. This reflects a beautiful picture of school spirit culture” (P04).

**School material culture construction**

All interviewed principals also stated that the school’s material culture was the basis and extension of spiritual culture in their schools. According to principals, the construction of school material culture referred to some of the following features: a clean and beautiful campus environment, attractive school buildings, school sculptures, meaningful materials displayed on the wall, a school song, a school flag, a school uniform, school decorations, and blackboard newspapers. Again, these practices are similar to those of Western schools. As the material culture was visible, principals required each aspect to reflect the school’s spiritual culture. A principal summarised this approach as “one thing in the school should have its meaning relevant to school culture” (P01). Principals indicated that students and teachers could not only learn from the physical expressions of a school’s material culture, but also gain profound understanding of the concepts of school spiritual culture and gradually reflect them in their study, work, and life.

**School system culture construction**

Many principals (seven out of ten) in the sample asserted that a school’s system culture established a solid foundation for the stable and sustainable development of the school. They illustrated how the system culture construction was related to the establishment of rules and regulations in leading and managing schools and to the obedience of teachers and students to them. One principal highlighted that “it is crucial to well implement school rules and regulations, because even with a good institution, there would not be any effects if it was not carried out in the school” (P09).

Thus, principals guided teachers and students to obey the school rules and regulations. For those who disobeyed, punishment was handed out. With reference to one rule, “teachers should know how to teach students, how to communicate with parents, and how to get along well with colleagues in my school. If they cannot reach
the requirements, they will get low scores in school evaluation and not be allowed to get promotion” (P05). At this stage of education reform in Mainland China, principals suggested that their schools had finished the preliminary construction of school standardisation as system culture and moved to the period of spiritual school culture construction.

With the implementation of Chinese education reform, the principals devoted increasing efforts to constructing school culture for school development. All of the principals highlighted that school culture was the foundation and guide for all school work.

**5.3.2.5 Summary**

The discussion above provided illustrations of symbolic and cultural awareness as described by school principals in the sample. The findings were aligned to Gurr’s (2008) empirical study that suggested school principals are involved in a variety of activities such as marketing and working with parents and members of the community to strengthen relationships for the good of the school. Furthermore, central values of equity, respect and openness were referred to by principals as those they demonstrated in their dealings with teachers and students alike. Two important findings that are uniquely Chinese that emerged from the findings discussed herein were the newness of the value of ‘democracy’ that principals referred to and the focus on school cultural construction. As discussed previously, the movement to shared decision-making between teachers and principals under school-based management is a recent phenomenon in China. Principals in the study acknowledged this and highlighted that their role had changed considerably with the advent of teacher leaders and teachers taking a more active role in school-based decision-making. The second important finding was the strong focus on school culture construction and the overt and explicit way in which principals now work to develop a school culture that encapsulates a spiritual, material and system dimension. The next section considers the third role: future orientation.

**5.3.3 Future orientation**

The findings relating to principal’s roles around future orientation are summarised in Table 5.4 below. As previously, the shaded lines represent sub-roles identified by
Gurr (2008), while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by school principals in the Chinese context.

Table 5.4

*The Third Role of Principal Leadership: Future Orientation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Principals</th>
<th>City W</th>
<th>City Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P01</td>
<td>P02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3 Future orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3.1 Vision</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1.1 Developing a shared school vision</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1.2 Developing a medium-term development plan</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1.3 Developing a short-term development plan</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3.2 School feature construction⁶</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gurr (2008) classified the principal leadership role of future orientation into two main aspects: creating a vision for the school and being responsive to a changing educational climate. All of the principals interviewed in this study stated that devoting energy to creating a school vision, and developing plans to achieve that vision, formed a key part of their role as leaders. The discussion that follows explores future orientation as described by principals in the sample.

5.3.3.1 Vision

There was a consensus among the principals that vision construction was a vital leadership role they played in the school for the purpose of achieving excellence. This is aligned to the statement in School Annual Reports of ten schools. Across schools globally, there is an expectation that principals should build a school vision which promotes both school effectiveness and school improvement (Davies & Davies, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). In the current study, for example, one principal referred to the metaphor of a ship to explain that the school was a ship with the principal as ship’s captain guiding and directing staff towards a particular destination. With the implementation of the Principal Responsibility System and school-based management under the current education

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⁶ School feature construction is the direct translation from Mandarin. It refers to the construction of schools’ individuality and features that make it distinctive. The features could be manifested in the school’s philosophy, school management, teacher development, school infrastructure, school environment, or particular student activities.
reform, participating principals indicated that they had achieved sufficient power to develop a school vision based on their own schools’ history, culture, characteristics, and needs. They further pointed out that school vision and strategic plans were required to follow the demand of the national development plans (e.g., the Eleventh Five-Year Plan), the policies and directives issued by the Ministry of Education and the local Education Bureaus. Principals in this study referred to long-term vision as well as medium term (i.e., three-five year) and short-term (one year) visions formulated through strategic plans.

*Developing a school vision*

Not only did principals indicate that a key role was focused on building a school vision, but they also pointed to the necessity of helping school members clearly understand it, and leading them to implement the vision into a reality. Principals in Western countries are also expected to play a significant role in setting up school vision to guide school effectiveness and sustainable development (Davies & Davies, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004). They agreed that there was a need for the vision to be articulated and recognised by the whole school community. Principals’ emphasis on creating a common direction to guide their schools and establishing a harmonious school climate has been influenced by traditional Chinese culture which is a collectivist or group-oriented unified social configuration. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of the collective rather than individuals in Chinese society (Cheng 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Principals deemed that all staff in the school should keep the school development goals and overall vision in mind; so that they could do their best to develop the school’s potential to achieve an excellent performance. One principal described the vision in his school:

As a principal, I need to keep considering what the future of the school is and how to reach this goal. I have defined a vision of developing a high quality school and proposed a slogan called ‘Building a wonderful school, achieving the brilliant life of teachers and students’. This vision has been shared with and accepted by teachers and students. (P10)
The principals indicated that they made it known to teachers that they held high expectations for their performance and expected them to be role models of the highest order for students so that students would develop into being good responsible citizens in the future. One principal described the following behaviours and attitudes of teachers as desirable: “possessing high moral accomplishment, sound personality, excellent professional competence, and harmonious teacher-student relationships” (P06). Principals indicated that they established different goals for different levels of teachers to attain by means of creating targeted professional development training. For example, one principal referred to three levels including “qualified teacher, experienced teacher, and excellent teacher” (P08). In order to achieve these goals, principals stated that they also required teachers to set a three-year or five-year development plan according to the school development plan. As one principal explained, “a new teacher is required to become a qualified teacher in one year, a good teacher in two years, a teaching expert or subject leader in three years, and finally become an excellent teacher” (P09). Principals indicated that it was an effective way to motivate teachers’ professional development with a clear direction.

In keeping with the broad goals of student development as articulated under current education reform, principals stated that they also held high expectations regarding students’ commitment to and performance in school. For instance, one principal referred to a number of important outcomes for students’ overall development and these included students who were “well educated, studying diligently, doing excellent [work] in one or several fields, living with happiness, and having high moral quality” (P02). Principals in the sample recognised that in order to achieve these goals, it was critical to cultivate students’ good habits, raise their interest in learning, and develop students’ good character.

In the ten schools, the visions presented in terms of schools, teachers and students seemed to be influenced by the context of globalisation and its impact upon Chinese society. These aims focused on providing excellent education for students and preparing them for international competition in the 21st century. This orientation in their school vision echoes the increasing value of education that fosters national economic development and national investment in education (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 1998).
The principals in the sample were divided over the issue of whether the establishment of a school vision was their responsibility alone or a shared responsibility between themselves and their staff. On the one hand, some principals in the sample underscored their decisive role in drawing up the vision based on the belief that they had wider knowledge and more experience than teachers and therefore were in the best position to consider the long-term development of the school. For example, one principal said: “I tried to listen to the ideas from teachers, but they were lacking depth in thought. So I had a careful consideration to outline the vision by myself which reflected my personal ideas, such as the understanding of education” (P09). On the other hand, there were some principals who indicated that they encouraged teachers to provide ideas and participate in the development of a shared school vision. At the same time, however, they conceded that they played an important role in leading this process. As one principal said: “teachers put [their] heads together and expressed useful ideas to develop school vision with meaningful aims” (P05). As Leithwood and Janzi (2009) stated, setting directions that help staff to develop shared understandings about their schools and vision contributes to school development.

Principals, who indicated they were more receptive to including teacher leaders and teachers in building a school vision, gave some examples of the ways they encouraged them to participate. For instance, principals said they asked teachers to contribute suggestions and provide advice on the school vision through face-to-face conversations, small group discussions and teacher surveys. These principals admitted the importance of having a good process for teachers to understand and respond to the school vision. They indicated that if they forced staff to implement the vision without their support or acceptance, then this could lead to staff developing a negative attitude towards the vision. By the same token, principals suggested that when teachers understood and embraced the vision fully, they would work actively and creatively support it. One principal summed this up when she said:

From the first day of the new semester, I carefully explained the vision and related concepts to teachers to let them clearly understand them. After that, teachers were encouraged to keep on learning online and provide feedback
and advice to perfect the vision. I always listened to teachers’ voice so that we can act together to form a joint force. (P02)

Similar findings have been identified also in some Western countries, for instance, successful principals in Australian schools endeavoured to develop a shared or collective vision in which clear expectations were made known to teachers and students (Gurr et al., 2006).

Developing a medium-term development plan

In order to implement the school’s vision, all of the principals in the sample indicated that they developed and implemented strategic plans both in the medium term (i.e., 3-5 years) and short-term (1 year). This finding is not unique to China; under school-based management, developing and implementing a vision and preparing school-based plans both annually and for a period of three years to achieve those visions, is common practice (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992).

In the study, two districts have different years of medium term plan. District HC in City W is three-year, While District ZD in City Z is five-year. The principals suggested these plans were based closely on the direction of educational policies, guidelines and instructions issued by the government and District Education Bureau. Principals elaborated that the medium term plan included all aspects of school work, such as teaching, research, school management, school culture construction, and teacher professional development. One principal described the plan used in her school: “We made one development plan every five years to reflect the school vision and latest educational directives. For instance, we built up a clear aim of what teachers, students and the classroom could be [like] after five years’ development” (P03).

The principals in the sample referred to the process of formulating the medium-term plan (i.e., 3-5 years) as moving from the top to the bottom. First, the officers of the District Education Bureau guided each school to design the three-year or five-year development plan in alignment with district level and government policy. While the District Education Bureau had defined key requirements and a framework for schools to follow, schools were offered a certain degree of autonomy to formulate the plan.
according to their specific needs. Thus, teachers and teacher leaders at all levels within the school were afforded the opportunity of putting forward their ideas towards the development of the strategic plan. The final step in the process was an evaluation where an expert committee from the District Education Bureau would inspect and evaluate the implementation of the school development plan and provide advice and suggestions to improve it.

The principals in the sample indicated that there were two main aims they were required to achieve within the medium-term development plan. One aim was to ensure the school met the mandated requirements and standards as identified by the Education Bureau. The other aim was for schools to be engaged in a process of self-development where principals were encouraged to create and develop a unique school culture to meet the specific situation in their school. For example, one principal said:

Although the establishment of school development plan should be supervised by District Education Bureau, schools also have considerable autonomy in designing the plan. At present, my school has reached the requirements of development according to the standard, so the school development with characteristics has been sought as the priority. We successfully completed the first five-year plan of developing school characteristics this year. Then the officers of District Education Bureau visited my school to help us advance the plan and develop the second five-year plan. With the goal, we expected our school’s characteristics could be our school brand which ultimately would lead the school to be a national elite school. (P04)

*Developing a short-term development plan*

While principals indicated that the medium-term plan identified the school’s overall direction, they referred to the need to formulate an annual school development plan every year to guide the daily work of school members. They described the short-term development plan as focusing on all school work, such as the school’s mission,
teaching and learning, logistics\textsuperscript{7}, and student safety affairs\textsuperscript{8}. Principals indicated that they were supported by the District Education Bureau to develop the short term plan by providing them with a plan outline at the beginning of each year. According to the principals, every year the government issued new educational policies with the implication that the principals were required to make adjustments to their annual plan in order to comply. At the same time, principals stressed that their plan should be practical and responsive to the school’s particular needs and situation. Principals said that they organised meetings with teacher leaders to discuss specific items in the plan and then based on their ideas and recognition, made final changes. One principal described how she introduced the implementation of an annual plan in her school,

We first ensured the development of school annual plan targeted the goal and direction of school’s five-year plan. We also adjusted the new plan based on the latest educational policies and effects of the plan in last year. Normally, we announced the plan on the school website and required staff to actively carry it out. For instance, we arranged an activity this February with specific time, organisers, participators, and activity types. With the guidance of annual plan, I could see the gradual improvement of teachers and students every year. (P01)

In light of the whole school plan, all of the principals declared that they urged every teacher in every department across each subject, and each grade to develop their own one-year plan. For instance a principal specified that “teachers’ own specific plans were relevant to their aims and what they would do in the coming year in terms of teaching, research, and management” (P04). In order to for each teacher to achieve their individual one year plan, principals indicated they provided teachers with a number of appropriate development opportunities such as internal training, external training, and sufficient research funds. These principals held the view that teachers were the foundation of school development and should be able to offer students different types of support such as intellectual and moral support. One principal even

\textsuperscript{7} Logistics refers to activities not specifically educational, such as infrastructure, development and facilities maintenance for items such as services including cleaning the school, building, organising the school canteen, and maintaining facilities.

\textsuperscript{8} Student safety affairs refer to road safety, earthquake, disaster etc.
said “a school could be well-known when there were enough well-known teachers supporting it” (P07). From this perspective, these principals found out that all teachers were motivated by their own development plan and their morale was heightened.

In summary, developing a school vision was identified by principals in the present study as an important leadership role they played, thus lending support to Gurr’s (2008) study. An important point of difference between the findings reported here and Gurr’s (2008) work was that the latter referred to input from the community and school council members in developing a school vision. This is different from what happens in Mainland China. Schools have neither school councils nor do members of the community participate in visioning. The parents’ committee is the only official association amenable to parents and its brief does not include contribution to the school’s vision. The Chinese principals indicated that the development of the school vision was guided closely by political and educational directives from the District Bureau and in many cases was shaped further by conversations with teacher leaders and teachers in their schools who provided important input into developing the vision.

5.3.3.2 School feature construction

Most principals (nine of ten) indicated that were fully aware that they were required to create a school philosophy and environment that made their school distinctive from other schools. The School Annual Reports in the nine schools accordingly presented their achievements in constructing school feature. The expression “school feature construction” is the direct translation from Mandarin. These principals endorsed the idea that the distinctive school features they introduced were developed in line with educational policies and their schools’ traditions and situations. It referred to the construction of schools’ individuality that made them distinctive. The features could occur in the school’s philosophy, the school-based curriculum, teacher development, school infrastructure, the school environment, student management, or particular student activities. The principals acknowledged that under current curriculum reform which stressed a quality education for all students, the traditional approach to school development was insufficient; now the onus was on them to
develop their schools with distinctive school features that would enhance their schools’ core competitiveness.

School feature construction which emerged from the current education reform was not mentioned in Gurr’s (2008) model. The concept of constructing school features is drawn from the quality education notion as part of the education reform which emphasises students’ different characteristics and interests instead of viewing examination scores as the only achievements. As principals in this study indicated, school feature construction viewed as a goal of school development requires a long period to achieve. Since the implementation of school-based management under the latest education reform, principals have been allocated more autonomy in establishing their schools with particular features. Principals in the sample emphasised that the District Education Bureau had placed high expectations on them to develop unique school features in their schools. Many factors are considered to constitute these features which can range from the provision of resources to scaffold teaching and learning, supporting the needs of teachers and students, fostering awareness of the school’s history, and developing the school philosophy. This is in contrast to the situation before the current education reform, when schools were expected to develop according to unified standards and there was no encouragement for principals to create unique schools.

The interviews showed that the nine schools were engaged in different aspects of “school feature construction”. For example, principals in three schools referred to operating a unique school-based curriculum at the early stage of development, such as “English” (P04), “calligraphy feature” (P05), “distance education” (P06), and “football” (P10). Six other principals referred to developing slogans as the direction of school features, such as “blending education into life”\(^9\) (P01), “true love education”\(^10\) (P04). These principals indicated that they embedded the ideas of the slogans into all aspects of school work to reflect their unique school features. These principals said that it was important for their distinctive school features to be

\(^9\) Blending education into life refers to combining teaching and learning with social life in order to guide students to put their knowledge into practice (cf. Dewey & Dewey, 1915).

\(^10\) True love education has the purpose of cultivating students’ love for other people, such as family members, teachers, and other students.
consistent with their schools’ long-term vision; it should facilitate the all-round development of students. A principal’s comment was typical of schools’ work in constructing school features,

I think the key issue in school future orientation is school feature construction. In my school, we named this idea as ‘blending education into life’ which covers the school’s key work and was classified into ‘teaching in life’ and ‘moral education in life’. In order to carry out this feature system, we made efforts to promote teacher training, educational research, and evaluation of teachers and students. At present, a school feature [within the school] has been established based on the recognition and support of teachers, students and parents. (P01)

The nine principals admitted that school feature construction was a long-term project that required a continuous process of innovation. They reported that the formation of school features required a long period, normally more than five years, and its development and enhancement would take even longer. Therefore, these principals indicated that they formulated a long-term plan of school feature construction, and then reasonably established the medium-term and short-term developing plans to turn the vision into reality. One principal summarised that principals held the expectation of developing their schools from a lower to higher level through three stages: “the advanced school, the school with specific features, and the top-ranking brand school” (P05). Principals announced the intention to lead all school members to reach these targets and progressively highlight their schools’ features. One of the principals gave an explanation of the school feature development process,

There will be a long process to establish school features, thus we came up with a long-term development plan in my school. In the first round of the three-year plan, we have achieved some initial goals. Now the second round of three-year plan has been carried out with the purpose of a large change in school culture, educational ideas of running the school, and the quality of leaders and teachers. With the continuous promotion and evolution of school features, I believe my school will finally become a brand school. (P02)
5.3.3.3 Summary

The findings discussed above highlight the role principals play in regard to setting a vision and achieving that vision through strategic school plans (both in the short and long term). An important finding that emerged from the study was principals’ new role in constructing uniquely distinctive school features for their school. Driving this new focus has been the Education Bureau with the rationale that it will enable schools to achieve both excellence and competitiveness. This approach lies in contrast to schools before the reform when there was no encouragement for principals to develop schools that specialised in particular curriculum areas or other unique characteristics. The next part of the discussion considers the fourth role: accountability.

5.3.4 Accountability

The findings for principal’s roles associated with accountability are summarised in the following Table 5.5. Again, the shaded lines represent sub-roles identified by Gurr (2008), while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by school principals in the Chinese context.

Table 5.5
The Fourth Role of Principal Leadership: Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Principals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4 Accountability</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4.1 Principal to staff and government</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal to staff</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4.2 Principal to government</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School to community and government</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School to community</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School to government</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4.3 Teacher to principal</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the ongoing education reform, all principals in this study asserted that they had experienced increasing accountability to the government, the staff, and the community. This situation is also reflected in the work of a number of Western writers (e.g., Chapman et al., 1999; Gurr, 2008; Mulford et al., 2008; Stein & Nelson, 2003). In terms of the community, principals indicated that parents paid more attention to students’ all-round development and therefore had higher expectations.
regarding their children than they had in previous decades. Yet, principals admitted that accountability to the system, in particular the local government, was a key type of accountability impacting upon their work. This is understandable as schools around the world are part of the wider political and cultural context, including in China, where the political system continues to exert considerable influence over education.

The current study found that the type of accountability principals primarily described in this study is akin to contractual accountability, explained as high government control and an expectation of particular audiences that need to be fulfilled in terms of standards, outcomes, and results (Halstead, 1994). Yet there are other types of accountability that are also important. For example, moral accountability (Eraut, 1993) or responsive accountability (Halstead, 1994; Mulford et al., 2008), maintains that educators should make decisions that are concerned with the betterment of others (such as students and staff) (Eraut 1993) and consider their interests and wishes (Halstead, 1994). The earlier part of the discussion that referred to the important values of care, respect and concern for teachers, held by principals, could be construed as a type of responsive or moral accountability.

All of the principals in the sample endorsed Gurr’s (2008) research that leadership involves the establishment and exercise of three different levels of accountability. These included principal to staff and to the government, the accountability of the school, the community and government, and the accountability of teachers to principals. As there is no school council in Chinese primary schools, principals are fully accountable to school staff for their performance. The principals in both districts collectively emphasised that they were not only accountable for their own performance but also their schools’ performance and for what their staff did. The principals elaborated on these three levels of accountability as follows.

5.3.4.1 Principal to school staff and government

There was a consensus amongst principals that they were accountable to their staff and the District Education Bureau, for their performance. The interviews indicated that principals willingly accepted the importance of feedback and evaluation from staff and government officials as part of this system of accountability.
Principals highlighted their accountability to satisfy the needs of school staff through specific strategies such as staff representative meetings\textsuperscript{11}. In contrast, principals in some Australian schools are accountable to the school council (e.g., Gurr, 2008). In the current study, this scheduled formal meeting with staff representatives was viewed as an effective strategy through which principals could respond democratically to staff concerns. Principals indicated that they utilised different strategies at these annual meetings to communicate with staff. For example, some principals indicated they collected staff feedback in the form of anonymous teacher comments and suggestions about school affairs, while other principals said they encouraged teachers to participate in face-to-face conversations with them. Principals referred to the categorisation of the feedback raised at such meetings such as those issues that revolved around problems in school management. For example, staff raised concerns about “the principal should provide teachers with more support for family-school communication, and the principal should offer teachers more external training opportunities” (P07).

Following the staff representative meeting, all principals indicated that they usually held a meeting with the whole staff to discuss the issues raised at the staff deputy meeting. Principals highlighted their accountability in providing feedback to staff by explaining the context for some of the management issues and how these issues could be addressed in the future. Such accountability was made explicit when principals explained how they would solve problems, or provided reasons why they were not able to solve particular problems, such as insufficient resources and other possible concerns. Principals pointed out that it was vital to establish effective communication between themselves and their staff so that staff were better able to understand the complexity of dealing with management issues in a school and to lessen the risk of misinterpreting the management decisions made by principals. Some principals also indicated that they attempted to address those problems raised by staff, by proposing and implementing strategies which were then itemised as specific tasks and allocated to those teacher leaders who were in charge of different

\textsuperscript{11} A staff representative meeting is usually organised by a principal to discuss school affairs with those staff who serve as representatives of the entire school staff.
areas, such as teaching or moral education. One principal commented on the effectiveness of the staff deputy meeting in indicating a principal’s accountability as follows:

I think the relationship between principal and staff representative meeting is intimate and complementary. In staff deputy meetings, the school staff are entitled to give advice and make suggestions on all aspects of school development. I am accountable to provide feedback on teachers’ ideas. This meeting is a useful way to complement principal’s deficiencies and shortcomings in working. (P01)

**Principal to government**

All of the principals asserted that they were accountable to the government, notably the District Education Bureau, by demonstrating how they responded to the Education Bureau’s requirements. Whilst all principals acknowledged that they had gained more power and autonomy in school management, they noted that the Education Bureau still kept centralised control over schools and also sent their officials to monitor schools. The notion of centralisation and decentralisation operating at the same time and exerting different types of influence over the work of principals has been highlighted in the wider literature (Beare, 1991; Smyth, 1993). For example, Smyth (1993) has referred to the tensions that this state of affairs can create for principals who on the one hand are accountable to the system (i.e., Education Bureau) but on the other, accountable to meet the needs of the staff and student body.

According to the policy document issued by the District Education Bureau, Bureau officials evaluated school principals’ yearly performance. This system of evaluation assessed principals’ morality, ability, performance, and achievements from two perspectives. That is, the inspectors (Education Bureau officials) conducted their own evaluation of the principal’s performance according to these criteria, whilst a second evaluation based on the same criteria was made by school staff, students, and parents. With reference to the Education Bureau audit, principals explained that following the delivery of the principal’s personal annual report, District Education Bureau officials from different sections allocated ratings to a principal’s work. This
form of evaluation could be quite specific, for example, those principals from ZD District made reference to the fact that since 1998, District Education Bureau officials evaluated a principal’s professional development by assessing principals’ performance, such as “reading notes, lecture notes and published academic hard copy journal articles” (P06). For the school- and community-based annual evaluation, principals indicated in the interviews that school leadership team members, teachers, students and parents were also required to complete questionnaires to assess aspects of a principal’s annual performance. Principals deemed that the final evaluation results could reflect one part of their comprehensive work in the past year.

The principals indicated their accountability as school leaders and managers by providing feedback to Education Bureau officials based on the results of this formal assessment process. The principals indicated that they viewed this as an opportunity to improve their quality of their work and did not regard the inspection and supervision from District Education Bureau officials as unnecessarily pressured. Instead, they indicated it was a process that provided them with opportunities for stimulus and self improvement. Principals also detailed their efforts to respond to areas of their work that needed improvement, to analyse the causes and nature of problems, and to develop and implement improved school-based management systems.

5.3.4.2 School to community and government

With reference to the ways in which the school is made accountable to the community and government, principals reflected during the interviews that it was their role to ensure that such accountability was administered and enacted.

School to community

Principals referred to two different ways through which accountability could be achieved in response to the requirements of parents and community representatives. First, principals noted that parents were entitled to evaluate schools, and that parents’ committees were encouraged to have an opportunity to provide comments and advice each year. Parents put forward suggestions and ideas that were of great benefit to the school’s development. Principals indicated that they were able to demonstrate their accountability by responding to problems and comments that parents raised through
telephone conversations, online correspondence, questionnaires, and in meetings. Principals suggested that they collected information from parents and then provided feedback to them based on their discussion of the issues raised with teacher leaders. Second, principals organised meetings with the members of the community to achieve their comments on school affairs every year. Principals highlighted the necessity that they demonstrate the nature of their accountability by responding in a timely manner to evaluation results with the support of school staff. There was consensus amongst principals that community members helped them identify problems, respond to issues, and further enhance school development.

School to government

The principals noted that they were accountable to ensure that their schools met the requirements of the District Education Bureau officials who formally evaluated, supervised and guided all schools each year. These officials also reviewed School Annual Reports which was seen as the summary of school achievements in the past year. During the interviews, principals elaborated on the nature of the inspections conducted by those officials from the District Education Bureau on each aspect of school affairs. First, officials evaluated the school’s management with reference to property, personnel management, and regular administration matters. Second, officials assessed the effects of these requirements for the implementation of quality education reform of 1999 that were highly relevant for the development of teachers and students. Third, a significant aspect of the school’s assessment related to the various components of the school culture construction and school feature construction. Finally, District Education Bureau officials evaluated the school’s development goals to identify whether the goals were appropriate to school development and whether the adopted strategies in the school could facilitate the achievement of these goals. Principals reported that officials also provided opportunities for teachers to evaluate aspects of the school’s operations in each semester by completing questionnaires. Significantly, principals collectively indicated they exercised their leadership in driving accountability regimes by providing opportunities for school staff to formulate and implement effective approaches in response to District Education Bureau requirements.
5.3.4.3 Teacher to principal

There was consensus amongst principals that the teacher appraisal process was an effective means to ensure that teachers were accountable to principals. Evaluation of teachers and teacher leaders was also reported in six School Annual Reports (AR01, AR05, AR06, AR07, AR08, and AR09). Moreover, during the interviews principals elaborated on this teacher appraisal system in various ways. For example, they noted the development of the teacher appraisal system should be mainly based on an evaluation system issued by Education Bureau and this system should then be discussed, improved and approved in school staff deputy meetings. Principals also noted that all teachers should be able to meet the requirements of each category formulated in the system and regulation, and that this could be monitored and supervised by them and teacher leaders in their schools. Principals indicated in the interviews that they expected the appraisal requirements would be reviewed, upgraded and improved. Six aspects of teacher appraisal were identified in the principals’ interviews. These referred to teachers’ professional ethics, teachers’ attendance rates, student results, evidence of teacher capacity to work in teams with reference to cooperation and coordination, research achievements (i.e., the number of published journal articles), and achieved awards. Principals stated that in order to enhance the whole school performance, teacher appraisal should be connected to individual evaluation, team evaluation and routine evaluation.

Principals claimed that apart from establishing a teacher appraisal system, they considered the supervision and monitoring of teachers to be important for the process of implementing the appraisal system. The interviews indicated that the principals mainly supervised vice-principals and teacher leaders, whilst it was left to the teacher leaders to supervise their fellow teachers. Principals reflected that as the supervision was distributed at two levels, it was likely to identify problems and provide timely feedback in teaching and managing work. These principals deemed the timely nature of evaluation to be one of the most effective ways to improve the work of schools. With respect to the results of the supervision, principals believed they were able to be impartial in the dispensation of awards and penalty. One principal reflected that “the reward system requires a principal to give teachers appropriate recognition and awards so as to inspire their internal drive force and stimulate their interests and enthusiasm” (P07). According to principals, effective teacher appraisal should be
founded on a reasonable evaluation system, prompt supervision and fair reward and punishment.

In summary, evaluation within the participating schools was important and provided guidance for school staff to achieve improvement in teaching and managing (e.g., Barth, 1999; Smylie, 1997). However, one problem proposed by the principals was that school staff had to spend a substantial amount of time preparing for undertaking evaluations from the District Education Bureau each semester. To some extent, this influenced the routine progress of teaching and learning and increased the workload of principals, teacher leaders, and fellow teachers.

5.3.4.4 Summary

The discussion above revealed that a core role principals play in China is concerned with accountability to the system, to staff and to parents and the wider community. This finding was in keeping with Gurr’s (2008) empirical study and other Western literature (Eraut, 1993; Mulford et al., 2008). The descriptions provided by principals in the current study indicated that they themselves as well as the school underwent a yearly evaluation that involved supervision and feedback from officials from the Government. This type of accountability was referred to in the discussion as *contractual accountability* (Eraut, 1993). Principals also indicated that they received feedback from students, staff and parents regarding their performance. The process of obtaining feedback from a variety of sources at different levels about one’s performance is referred to as 360 degree feedback (Maylett, 2009) and is used in many schools by school leaders to gain a sense of others’ perceptions about their performance.

Principals also referred to teachers’ accountability and how they and/or other leaders in the school evaluated teachers’ performance. The aim was twofold: to help teachers improve their teaching practices and to enhance promotion prospects. Over the last decade, it appears that schools in Western countries such as Australia are following the lead of China with its strong focus on performativity via regulation, compliance and accountability (Ball in Starr, 2009). A renewed interest in teacher appraisal, teacher and leaders’ standards, standardised testing, and performance based pay are among the shifts that have been brought about by globalisation.
5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion of the findings relating to ten school principals’ perceptions of their leadership role in Mainland China. As indicated in Figure 5.1 below, which shows the revised conceptual framework of principal leadership roles arising from this study, the findings were aligned quite closely to the empirical study of Gurr (2008) that identified four central roles played by principals and these include teaching and learning, symbolic and cultural awareness, holding a future orientation, and accountability. While there was much similarity between the work of Gurr and the current study at hand, there were also some interesting points of difference.

![Figure 5.1. The revised conceptual framework of principal leadership roles.](image-url)
Learning and teaching was highlighted by principals as their most significant leadership role, as this area was the centre of the school’s operation. There were five sub-roles played by principals and these were supervising teachers’ instruction activities, providing support for teachers’ professional development, acquiring a wide knowledge as part of their own professional development, involving teacher leaders and teachers in school-based decision-making, and improving students’ learning.

In this study, symbolic and cultural awareness was regarded as the second role of principal leadership. Principals claimed that the effective exercise of principal leadership was driven by their values concerned with equity, fairness, openness, respect, empowerment, encouragement, recognition, trust, and democracy. As principals indicated, these values contributed to a positive school climate which promoted the development of students, and the school. Principals underscored the necessity of constructing a culture for school development. Culture was classified into three categories and these involved the school’s spiritual culture, its material culture, and its system culture. This was an important finding that appeared to be uniquely Chinese.

Holding a future orientation formed the third key role of principal leadership. Principals devoted energy to creating a school vision, and developing strategic plans to achieve that vision so as to lead their schools in the right direction. Additionally, principals emphasised ‘school feature construction’ which referred to the way they created a school philosophy and environment that made their school distinctive from other schools. For example, they identified features such as school-based curriculum, teacher development, school infrastructure, school environment, student management, or particular student activities.

Accountability was exercised as the last leadership role by principals. Principals were not only accountable for their own behaviours, but also for their schools’ performance and how their staff performed. More specifically, principals willingly accepted the feedback and evaluation from staff and government officials as part of this system of accountability. They also undertook their role to ensure the school was accountable to the community and government. There was consensus amongst
principals that they utilised the teacher appraisal process to ensure that teachers were accountable to principals.

The discussion in this chapter demonstrated that principal leadership roles were shaped by wider contextual factors such as globalisation, Chinese culture (in particular, Confucianism), and Chinese education reform. First, it is worth noting that globalisation and the advent of the knowledge economy have exercised a great impact on the transformation of school education in Mainland China. Currently, under the current reform, education has become of greater value to national economic development, social progress, and international competition (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 1998). The concepts of democracy and the decentralisation of power that have emerged within the context of globalisation (Sayed, 2002) provide opportunities to principals to undertake more responsibilities in leading and managing in their schools. However, as parts of the previous discussion have indicated, this press to democratisation exists within a larger overarching frame of surveillance from educational bureaus and political authorities.

Second, the Chinese social context is closely associated with the Chinese cultural context, the Chinese economic context, and the Chinese political context. The Chinese cultural context exclusively relates to the traditional and enduring values and norms of Chinese society. In contemporary society, Chinese education is still bounded to the traditional culture of China where education and knowledge are highly valued in the whole society. Confucianism as the dominant culture for centuries continues to emphasise the importance of education not only for the individual but also for the State (Wong, 2001). Zhang (2004) has demonstrated that Confucianism also exerts an impact on the values of school principals. In the current study, principals underscored the centrality of learning for students, teachers and themselves. Related to the key place of learning, was the message that principals held personal values of respect, care and openness to staff and put into practice these values through the development of harmonious and effective relationships. Cultivating virtues and morally binding relationships with others is a core belief of Confucius (Wong, 2001).
The Chinese economic context refers to a fundamental revolution from a planned economy to a socialist market economy since the economic reform in 1978. What has been seen in China in recent times has been a gradual shift from centralization of state power to more democratic and autonomous regional and local governments. Thus, the current society under the economic and political reforms has been characterised by less state control, more freedom for individual citizens, more openness to the outside world, and the increasing influence of market factors.

Understood in the context of this study is the shift to school-based management with school leaders being afforded more opportunities to make decisions that affect them and their staff. In the current study, principals referred to the space given to them to create and construct distinctive and unique school cultures and school features. They also referred to enabling and empowering teacher leaders and teachers to lead the school in particular ways. Significantly, the interviews indicated that the 10 principals worked with their teacher leaders by way of facilitation, negotiation, exchange, and sharing to achieve particular educational goals (Blase & Blase, 1997). All of these strategies fall under the umbrella of the micropolitical strategy of power through. Yet, principals also referred to continuing impact of centralisation manifested in the close accountability they were required to demonstrate to the Education Bureau.

Finally, influenced by the current changes to the economy and politics in Mainland China, education has also experienced a series of reforms since 1978 that have brought about new challenges and many changes to school principals. Among these has been the requirement to link education more closely to the nation’s development. In terms of current curriculum reform, there has been a focus on the quality of education and students’ all-round development. This change has brought challenges not for principals but also teachers who have struggled to make changes to their pedagogy and teaching.
Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion of Teacher Leadership Roles

6.1 OVERVIEW

Chapter 6 presents the findings and discussion of the teacher leadership roles based on interviews with ten teacher leaders from urban primary schools in Shandong province, Mainland China. As indicated in the preceding chapter, this chapter provides a rich description of teacher leadership roles by exploring teacher leaders’ perceptions of their working experiences as formal leaders in their schools. This chapter also considers the findings with reference to the context of globalisation, Chinese society, and Chinese education reform. These broader contextual factors contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of teacher leadership in practice during a period of education reform in China.

This chapter aims to examine research question two: what are teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China under current educational reform? Five key roles of teacher leadership have been identified based on the teacher leadership model established in the conceptual framework of the study and these are used to frame the discussion. There are three sections in this chapter. First, the chapter begins with an overview of the demographic information about the ten teacher leaders in the sample. Second, it situates the discussion of teacher leadership roles in the Chinese context. The third and final section offers a summary of this chapter.

6.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA REGARDING PARTICIPANTS

As noted in Chapter 5, two cities, referred to as City W and City Z in Shandong province, became the research sites with five teacher leaders selected from each respective city. Thus, five schools were drawn from the central district of City W (namely District HC), while the other five schools came from the central district of City Z (namely District ZD). In sum, ten formal teacher leaders were selected from these ten primary schools and designated from T01 to T10 in the demographic information provided in Table 6.1. This Table also represents information related to the participants’ names and designation, gender, the cities in which they work, their
schools, positions, the number of years’ experience, the subject taught, and duration of the interview.

As is evident in Table 6.1, eight female teacher leaders and two male teacher leaders constitute the sample. This gender ratio reflects the broader context in Chinese primary schools, as currently there is a much larger proportion of female teacher leaders than male teacher leaders in urban primary schools. Moreover, the interviewed teacher leaders’ experience ranges from between 1.5 and 10.5 years.

Table 6.1
*Teacher Leaders in the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Designation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years in Similar Positions</th>
<th>Subject Teaching</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>C primary school (CPS)</td>
<td>Director of moral education</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 hours 35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>G primary school (GPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 hours 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader C</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>N primary school (NPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 hours 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>T primary school (TPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>9.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City W</td>
<td>E primary school (EPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader F</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>J primary school (JPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>1 hours 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader G</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>X primary school (XPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 hours 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader H</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>R primary school (RPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>10.5 years</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1 hours 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader I</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>P primary school (PPS)</td>
<td>Director of teaching affairs</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher leader J</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>City Z</td>
<td>W primary school (WPS)</td>
<td>Director of moral education</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Moral lesson</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher leaders’ names and their school’s names are pseudonyms.
6.3 TEACHER LEADERSHIP ROLES

In this section, teacher leadership roles are discussed based on several broad categories that emerged from the literature review in Chapter 3. These leadership roles include participation in decision-making, parent and community involvement, leading professional development, collaborating with other staff, supporting other staff, and connecting with school members. Analysis of the interviews with these ten teacher leaders provided rich insights into the complexity of the leadership roles they play in their schools at a time of curriculum change in China, and this prompted the construction of a new framework to represent the complex and layered nature of such teacher leadership roles. This framework incorporates factors such as participation in school-based decision-making, parent and community involvement, leading professional development, mediation, and dealing with issues about accountability. It is worth noting that the interviewed teacher leaders regarded collaboration with and supporting other staff as two strategies of leading professional development, thus these two aspects of teacher leadership are included in the category of leading professional development in this study. Moreover, a new role emerged that referred to the significance of ‘accountability’ in Chinese schools and it is also elaborated here. Within each key leadership role identified in this section, a number of sub-roles are also discussed.

It is commonplace in Chinese primary schools to have three officially designated teacher leadership positions and these are: the Director of Teaching Affairs, the Director of Moral Education, and the Director of Logistics. As these titles suggest, the Director of Teaching Affairs is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day teaching and learning activities in the school, such as daily teaching in classrooms, the quality of teachers’ work, academic and pedagogical lesson preparation, curriculum development, the professional development of staff, and the enrolment of new students. The Director of Moral Education is responsible for supervising and managing student affairs. This includes tasks such as the daily management of students, moral education, the cultivation of good behavioural habits, the organisation of students’ activities, and the management of form teachers. The Director of Logistics oversees the administration of school maintenance, such as managing school buildings, school facilities, financial affairs, and school security. It
is notable that all teacher leaders in the study played a number of key roles. For example, not only were they the Directors of a particular area within the school, but also as a result of their designated role, they had membership of the school’s leadership team which brought additional responsibilities. Furthermore, these formal teacher leaders were also responsible for being in charge of one grade level in their school (for example, Year 1) and, in that role, they oversaw the performance of all teachers and students in that year level.

As noted earlier, ten teacher leaders from ten schools of two districts participated in the interviews. Given the protocols of interviewing in Chinese schools, a teacher leader from each school was selected by their principal to participate in the study. Only the Directors of Teaching Affairs and the Directors of Moral Education in these schools participated and, in total, four Directors of Teaching Affairs and one Director of Moral Education in each district were involved. It must be noted that this selection was based on the fact that principals deemed that directors from these two areas of leadership constituted the focus of educational work since they directly contributed to the development of teachers and students. As will be shown in Chapter 7, this provides some insights into the ways in which primary school principals envisaged the nature of formal teacher leadership roles and their potential significance in schools. It also indicates the degree of power and authority that resides with Chinese principals and the nature of micropolitics (Blase, 1991) in the schools.

Currently in Mainland China, teacher leaders are expected to apply for a designated teacher leader position in a school for a two to three year term. This is a highly competitive process. All qualified teachers and teacher leaders who meet the requirements of an education degree, appropriate teaching experience, as well as internal and external teaching awards are entitled to apply for a position as teacher leader. Applicants for the position are required to deliver a speech to the school community in which they present their working achievements and acknowledged shortcomings. Each applicant is assessed and allocated a score by principals, vice principals, teacher leaders and all teachers (or teacher representatives) in the school. The position of director for the relevant teacher leadership position is then made on the basis of the highest scoring candidate. The teacher leaders in this study all gained their positions through this process.
The interview findings about the nature of teacher leadership roles are summarised in the following five tables (Table 6.2, Table 6.3, Table 6.4, Table 6.5, and Table 6.6). The tick under each teacher leader’s designated name (i.e., T01, T02, etc.) indicates whether that particular teacher leader made reference to the roles and sub-roles during the interview. The shaded lines represent leadership roles and sub-roles summarised in the literature review, while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles identified by teacher leaders in the Chinese context.

### 6.3.1 Participation in school-based decision-making

The findings relating to teacher leadership in participation in decision-making are summarised in Table 6.2 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified in the existing literature mentioned in Chapter 3, while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by teacher leaders in the Chinese context.

#### Table 6.2

**The First Role of Teacher Leadership: Participation in Decision-making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Teacher Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1 Participation in school-based decision-making</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.1 Personnel decisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.2 Staff development decisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.3 General administrative decisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.4 School-based curricular and instructional decisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.5 Vision and strategic plans(^{13})</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.6 School culture decisions(^{14})</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In keeping with the literature on teacher leadership, participation in school-based decision-making was identified as a key teacher leadership role in the current study.

The interviews confirmed the findings identified in the Western academic

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\(^{13}\) Vision decisions (cf. discussion in chapter 5) refer to teacher leaders’ decision-making involvement in their own school’s vision and plan, such as the school’s strategic vision, its development plan (i.e. annual school development plan, three-year or five-year school development plan), and personal development plan for teacher leaders and teachers.

\(^{14}\) School culture decisions refer to teacher leaders’ decision-making involvement in constructing the school culture, such as a school’s spiritual culture, its material culture, and its system culture. These are discussed later in this chapter.
community on the shared nature of decision-making. This emphasises the significance of the devolution of decision-making to principals who in turn decide how to work through their teacher leaders in schools to achieve desired policy outcomes (Hart, 1995; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Ovando, 1996). All of the teacher leaders stressed that they contributed to important decisions within their schools. As indicated in Chapter 2, the implementation of Decisions on the Reform of the Educational Structure (1985) brought out the decentralisation of national education system as well as the development of School-Based Management in primary and secondary schools. Therefore, principals were delegated increased power and responsibilities in school affairs and school decision-making. However, given the huge task of leading and managing schools, principals increasingly delegated some aspects of decision-making to teacher leaders in order to deal with the volume of work. The teacher leaders in the sample acknowledged their participation in decision-making was valued by school principals whose energy and time was limited due to many other commitments. They pointed out that their respective principals provided them with opportunities to engage in a range of decisions impacting upon different aspects of the schools’ operations. For example, one experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) provided the following comment,

In my school, the principal empowered teacher leaders to undertake more tasks and improve abilities in the process. For instance, as the principal is very busy and cannot cover things comprehensively enough, we are required to supplement and improve our principal’s ideas in school meetings. (T06)

The ten teacher leaders stated that all major school-based decisions were discussed during school meetings, particularly the regular weekly school leadership team meeting chaired by the school principal. At these meetings the principal usually leads the agenda by proposing an idea or theme for discussion and teacher leaders are expected to provide feedback on these proposals. Teacher leaders noted that they considered carefully how to develop a detailed plan in their different working areas, such as teaching affairs and moral education, so that it will be rigorous and effective. To ensure this, teacher leaders sought guidance from their principals as well as input from other teacher leaders. The outcomes of weekly meetings include, for example, preliminary drafts of school policies, such as a school activity planning document.
An experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) summarised her school-based work in decision-making,

The principal first put forward his idea and then each teacher leader was expected to express views to make a precise draft and further revision. After that, teacher leaders divided the work to make it process smoothly. (T07)

The interviewed teacher leaders indicated that it was their responsibility to hold subsequent meetings with all teachers in the school to discuss the preliminary plan and include teachers’ comments and suggestions. A newly appointed teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) reflected “it was important to include fellow teachers’ reflections on the plan in order to achieve the best possible result” (T02). When the principal approved the final version of the plan, all teacher leaders were then required to indicate how this would be implemented in stages. Teacher leaders unanimously commented on the value and significance of this kind of decision-making, and indicated that it provided opportunities to fully exercise everyone’s potential to contribute to decision-making.

In this study, six different forms of participation in decision-making were identified in the interviews with teacher leaders and School Annual Reports. These findings echo Smylie’s (1992) leadership classification which includes personnel decisions, school-based curricular and instructional decisions, staff development decisions, and general administration decisions. Significantly, two new areas of decision-making emerged from the data. These findings indicated that teacher leaders in these primary schools were now involved in decision-making, in conjunction with their principals, which concerned the nature of the school’s philosophy. For example, teacher leaders spoke at length about their input into decisions that affected the nature of a school’s vision and the development of a school culture. As will be seen, teacher leaders’ perceptions about this sort of decision-making provide insights into the ways in which the current period of education reform in China is impacting upon school-based decision-making. Moreover, it indicates that a form of teacher leadership was emerging that was similar to Crowther et al.’s (2009) notion of parallel leadership for teacher leaders were closely aligning their working goals in conjunction with the decision-making of their principals and working at a different level to achieve the
goals identified in the weekly school leadership team meetings. As Crowther et al. (2009, p. 55) observe, parallel leadership flourishes where there is “a sense of shared purpose”. Each of the different forms of participation in decision-making is now discussed.

**6.3.1.1 Personnel decisions**

Teacher leaders indicated that decisions about appointing new teachers to a school were outside the realm of Chinese primary principals and teacher leaders. Currently in Mainland China, Education Bureaus in each district appoint staff. Accordingly, District Education Bureaus recruit and assign new teachers to satisfy the staffing requirements of each primary school in the district every year. This process contrasts with staffing processes in some Western nations, for as Barth (2001) and Smylie (1992) suggest, teacher leaders in some countries are responsible for selecting staff members, such as new teachers and new administrators, and this is viewed as a significant aspect of teacher leadership. It must be noted that teacher leaders in Mainland China are constrained from acting in this role given the official processes for staffing schools.

However, once teachers were appointed to the Chinese school, teacher leaders, in consultation with the principal, were able to make some decisions regarding the work duties that teachers would undertake. For example, a very experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) summarised, **“at the beginning of the first semester each year, we teacher leaders discussed with principals how to assign new teachers to different job positions”** (T04). All teacher leaders stated that at first teachers were allowed to apply for their preferred job positions in any grade and subject consistent with their working capability. Based on the quality of teachers’ applications, the principal, vice-principals, and teacher leaders discussed and then together decided which teacher was qualified to teach a subject or act as a form teacher. These teacher leaders asserted that this democratic process met teachers’ needs and would be of benefit to teachers’ future career development. This process of decision-making also reflects Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer’s (1998) findings that teacher leadership is exemplified via their active participation in school decision-making.
6.3.1.2 Staff development decisions

All of the teacher leaders in this study claimed that they helped principals to design professional development programs for staff in their schools, such as school-based training and external training. This finding is consistent with the research which emphasises that teacher leaders are largely involved in deciding staff development activities or programs (Barth, 2001; Smylie, 1992; Smylie & Denny, 1990). The teacher leaders in this study indicated that decisions based on professional development were first discussed and then made through the school leadership team meetings. During this process, the principal oversaw and maintained the strategic direction of school programs, while the teacher leaders and vice-principals were empowered to design specific professional development programs. As will be seen later in this chapter, and also in Chapter 7, the nature of this iterative decision-making between the school principal and their designated teacher leaders is highly significant in terms of understanding the ways in which their roles and interactions are evolving during this period of education reform in Mainland China. According to Crowther et al.’s (2009) notion of parallel leadership, this alignment between the principal and teacher leaders in decision-making is indicative of the second characteristic of parallel leadership. Following this view, convergence occurs when principals and teacher leaders enact their leadership at different levels and in different degrees to achieve a common stated goal. Cowan (2006) refers to this as a type of collaboration in which a sense of purpose is established which also assists in defining leadership roles and responsibilities.

With reference to the design of professional development programs for staff, following the endorsement of the school principal, teacher leaders sought the input and advice of other teachers. These teacher leaders agreed this was an effective way to plan and prepare programs tailored to both the development of the school and the needs of teachers. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) with years of experience expressed her views on this process, “we never carried out a new professional development program immediately until we discussed it and pooled the wisdom of the masses [other teachers]. This way helped me to progress the program smoothly” (T08).
Every teacher leader in the interviews emphasised that their work involved preparing teachers’ learning opportunities. They noted that in each semester, all of the members of the leadership team discussed the development of professional development programs on the specific topics that teachers indicated they wished to learn more about. With reference to one semester program, a new teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) observed “I and the vice principal developed a program to improve teachers’ abilities on different levels with the support of excellent teachers in the school” (T03). This was also verified in the School Annual Report (AR03) which list several forms of teacher professional development programs, such as internal training, external training, and constant reading.

6.3.1.3 School-based instructional decisions

Teacher leaders in the interviews indicated that prior to the current reforms, schools in China were given only limited opportunities to negotiate the curriculum and design special classes for students. They emphasised that as China had a highly centralised system of education, most of the work of teachers was prescribed by the government and curriculum was standardised before the current education reform. For example, one teacher leader with long working experience as the Director of Teaching Affairs specified that “curriculum programs, textbooks, and the number of lessons for each subject, were all prescribed by the Ministry of Education or local Education Bureau” (T04). However, since the Guidelines on the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (Trial version) were issued by the Ministry of Education in 2001, the power of curriculum management has been distributed from the central level to three levels in terms of state, locality, and school. Therefore, the participating teacher leaders stated that they were provided with full responsibility to develop courses derived from school-based curriculum which was recognised as an effective way to foster the all-round development of students. This focus on school-based curriculum development reflects global trends in education reform, as teacher leaders in Western countries are also increasingly engaged in leading curriculum change (Cranston, 2000) and deciding upon curriculum development and instructional materials selection (Barth, 2001; Smylie, 1992; Smylie & Denny, 1990).

All of the teacher leaders also underscored their involvement in school-based curriculum development under the direction of principals. In broad terms, the
interviews indicated that teacher leaders identified three factors influencing the nature of their school-based decision-making. These are the expertise of the school staff including principals, teacher leaders and teachers, the nature of the school’s specific features, and finally, the school’s vision. These teacher leaders also highlighted the importance of learning from the experiences of successful schools in order to enhance their own school-based curriculum development. For example, data from interviews and School Annual Reports in all ten schools revealed that one lesson was set aside per week in the school curriculum to develop students’ broader interests such as dancing, singing, and drawing. Teacher leaders indicated that they monitored the effectiveness of these classes in order to ensure the implementation of a school-based curriculum that met a wide range of student needs. This strategy is indicative of one of the ways in which schools are attempting to foster a more holistic approach to the education of children in the primary years of schooling, as required by the current reforms. With specific reference to strategies used to monitor staff instructional performance, teacher leaders explained that principals, teacher leaders, and other leaders in charge of different subjects attended different teachers’ classes, commented on their performance, and provided feedback for their improvement. One teacher leader who had been appointed as the Director of Teaching Affairs for nearly ten years exemplified the nature of school-based curriculum development in her school in terms of the following:

We have developed more than 30 school-based programs in our school to target the needs of different students. Students from the same grade are organised to participate in their interested classes together. Such as dancing class, aerobics class, chess class, musical instrument playing class. Students in these classes can do what they really like and learn from each other in order to reach the goal of making all students successful with difference. School leaders [principals and teacher leaders] also regularly monitor the classrooms to improve teaching quality. (T04)

6.3.1.4 General administrative decisions
All of the teacher leaders indicated that they participated in some general administrative decisions in schools. They detailed various strategies that were employed at the beginning of each semester, for example, the Directors of Teaching
Affairs indicated they “developed a curriculum schedule” (T04), “guided teachers to develop teaching programs” (T05), “planned the teaching calendar according to the duration of each semester” (T06), and “arranged leaders of teaching and research groups to help teachers to plan teaching syllabus throughout the semester” (T08). These findings on teacher leaders’ participation in general administrative decisions is also reflected in the research on this aspect of teacher leadership in Western schools (Smylie, 1992). It is worth noting that whilst teacher leaders in Western contexts were entitled to determine school budgets (Barth, 2001; Smylie, 1992), the teacher leaders in this study, however, indicated that they did not have responsibility for school finance management. Schools in Mainland China follow the central policy established by the Principal Responsibility System and this, together with the influence of the Chinese traditional hierarchical system, means that financial power is always controlled by principals as they hold highest level of authority in schools.

6.3.1.5 Vision decisions

Most teacher leaders (eight of ten) indicated they were involved in the process of developing their school’s vision and plan. China’s push for education reform, notably through the Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (2001), emphasises the development of a school’s ‘vision’ that encompasses overarching aspiration goals and school development planning. Teacher leaders’ perceptions as reported in interviews indicated that principals gradually accepted their insights and contributions to the discussion on vision decisions for their schools. Accordingly, teacher leaders reflected that they did have the opportunity to contribute to the school strategic vision, school development plans (such as the annual school development plan, three-year or five-year school development plan), and personal development plans for themselves and other teachers.

The interviewees indicated that the process of planning a school vision involved various stages. First, principals collected their ideas and suggestions and presented these in the school planning meeting to discuss a draft of vision and plan. Second, teacher leaders prepared the final document based on principals’ guidance. Significantly, four teacher leaders noted their responsibility for developing school plans, based on their initiative, instead of waiting for a principal’s initiative or
directive. One experienced teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) explained the process of decision-making about the school’s vision as follows: “When we made the annual school plan, first the principal required us to write up ideas related to respective working area. Then a plan was integrated and revised based on the exchange of ideas and other leaders’ suggestions.” (T01) A School Annual Report (AR07) also provided evidence that the school development plan was built and carried out in their school.

Eight of the teacher leaders noted that not only did they participate in planning the strategic school vision and school development plan, but they also developed an individual development plan and assisted teachers to develop their own long-term and short-term professional development plans. A new teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) observed “During this process, teachers were required to analyse their own conditions and characteristics for well designing suitable development plan” (T10). Similarly, in one’s School Annual Report (AR01), it stated that teachers’ individual development plans were formulated in keeping with the school’s vision and development plans.

6.3.1.6 School culture decisions

Half of the teacher leaders (five of ten) in the study emphasised their vital role in developing their school’s culture. The significance of developing a positive school culture was also reported in five School Annual Reports (AR01, AR04, AR05, AR08, and AR09). As the Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999) was jointly promulgated by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council, the importance of culture has been gradually highlighted during this current period of education reform. These teacher leaders reported that in order to establish a meaningful and unique school culture their principals utilised the strategy of seeking opinions and views from the school community in order to shape particular aspects of the culture. Concomitantly, teacher leaders were involved in discussions with their principals in the development of a school culture. The interviews revealed that development of a school’s culture in China incorporated a wide range of facets of school life which can broadly be classified into three categories: spiritual culture, material culture, and system culture. A spiritual culture incorporates the development of particular values across the
school community such as moral values including honesty, kindness, obedience, and a team spirit. The material culture of a school refers to the visible and tangible features of the school such as buildings, school sculptures, and materials displayed on walls and other distinguishing physical features of the school. A school’s system culture relates to the policies and rules regulating student and staff behaviour.

Teacher leaders stressed that the formation of the spiritual, material, and system culture in Chinese schools was now regarded as a democratic process and one which involved teacher leaders contributing their ideas and insights. Analysis of the interview data indicated that teacher leaders had the opportunity to discuss their suggestions and ideas with their fellow leaders, and to assist principals in integrating a range of ideas about shaping the school’s culture. The principals therefore considered a wide range of teacher viewpoints during the decision-making processes for the construction of school culture, and the teacher leaders indicated that this process also incorporated the views of the majority of teachers in schools. One new teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) elaborated upon her impact in creating a school’s culture,

> Recently, school culture is being constructed in my school, which is considered as a critical step in school development. Teacher leaders played a significant role in this process. In order to establish a high quality school culture, I read a lot of books, shared good ideas with other leaders, and provided useful suggestions to push the work progress effectively. (T09)

6.3.1.7 Summary

According to the discussion above, these teacher leaders in Mainland China experienced increased opportunities to influence school-based decision-making. Under the school-based management agenda of the current education reforms, teacher leaders have been empowered to share decision-making with the principals in their schools. It is evident that most types of decision-making identified in this study are consistent with the findings of other researchers (i.e., Barth, 2001; Smylie, 1992; Smylie & Denny, 1990). For example, teacher leaders engaged in decisions about school personnel once teachers were allocated to schools, school-based curriculum development and instructional decisions, staff development decisions, and general administrative decisions. Moreover, it was significant that much of this decision-
making reflected the recent work of Crowther et al. (2009) on parallel leadership. That is, the interviews indicated that teacher leader decision-making, whilst delivered at a different level to that of the principals, ran parallel with the principals’ decision-making and was aligned in terms of a focus on delivering the ‘shared purpose’ or same outcomes for the school.

It is also significant that the current agenda for curriculum reform emphasises the development of school-based curriculum in order to enrich the teaching and delivery of balanced curriculum together with appropriate resources for students. As teacher leaders are regarded as the experts in teaching and learning in their schools, they have been given increased opportunities to demonstrate their leadership in developing school-based curriculum and in choosing relevant text books and other curriculum resources. Moreover, teachers’ professional development has been considerably strengthened in the context of this education reform in order to achieve the goal of students’ all-round development.

The interviews reveal that teacher leaders were experiencing more opportunities to determine the nature of school-based strategies to foster and develop teachers’ capacities to teach and plan effectively. Most significantly, the interviews indicate that teacher leaders’ involvement in decisions about the development of a school’s vision together with the development of the school’s culture have emerged as particularly important elements in this investigation of the perceptions of principals and teacher leaders regarding their role under current education reforms in Mainland China.

Teacher leaders’ increased contributions to decisions based on vision and culture reflected a further example of how teacher leaders were engaged to participate in democratic processes in school development planning. Thus far, this discussion of the interview findings indicate that as principals used their authority to provide increased opportunities for teacher leaders to make decisions, a form of ‘parallel leadership’ (Crowther et al., 2009) was emerging. The next section is related to the second teacher leadership role that focuses on parents and community involvement.
6.3.2 Parents and community involvement

The findings relating to teacher leadership in parents and community involvement are summarised in Table 6.3 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified in the existing literature mentioned in Chapter 3.

Table 6.3

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<tr>
<th>Teacher Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Teacher Leaders</th>
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<tr>
<td>6.3.2 Parents and community involvement</td>
<td>T01 T02 T03 T04 T05 T06 T07 T08 T09 T10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2.1 Communicating with parents in school affairs</td>
<td>✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅ ✅</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3.2.2 Enlisting community’s support</td>
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In line with the views expressed earlier in the literature review (Cranston, 2000; Lambert, 1998; Paulu & Winters, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), all of the teacher leaders from Mainland China in this study indicated they played an important leadership role in communicating with parents and the community at large. Lambert (2003) argues that teacher leaders’ focus has been expanded from a notion of self as a “reflective practitioner” (p. 427) to leading others, including parents and community members as a “skilful leader” (p.426). In order to implement education reform, the Guidelines on the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (Trial version) (2001) were issued to promote quality-oriented education which aimed at developing students who would become well-rounded Chinese citizens able to participate effectively in society. Under these circumstances, the participating teacher leaders highlighted the necessity of developing good partnerships between parents, community and schools, in order to achieve students’ all-round development.

During the interviews it became apparent that those teacher leaders designated as the Directors of Moral Education played a major role in guiding teachers to connect with parents and community members. Teacher leaders in the sample indicated that the Director of Moral Education allocated different tasks to school staff in order to prompt various ways of collaborating with parents. For example, form teachers took on the responsibility of communicating with parents about students’ social, emotional and general learning progress and other related aspects of a child’s
development at school. Subject teachers were responsible for liaising with parents about their children’s academic performance in specific subjects. The Director of Moral Education was also responsible for enlisting the support, advice and expertise of members of the community in school matters and, where appropriate, to provide reciprocal support.

6.3.2.1 Communicating with parents in school affairs

All of the teacher leaders underscored the significance of establishing strong connections between their school and the parents of children within and outside the school. Teacher leaders exercise their leadership in this domain via collaborating with parents to promote teaching and learning (Paulu & Winters, 1998). Informed by the education reform agenda for a more holistic quality of education, the participating teacher leaders indicated their strong awareness that parents and members of the community were becoming increasingly important in the life of the school and they were highly motivated to involve parents and community members in more school activities. A School Annual Report indicated that “school education should be carried out under the support of family education” (AR08). It was accepted amongst the teacher leaders that harmonious school-family relationships should underpin effective communication between the school and parents and that this, in turn, would promote the well-being and rounded development of children. The interviews reveal teacher leaders’ awareness that form teachers and subject teachers made great efforts to inspire parents to contribute to the school’s development and students’ growth. One experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) expressed her belief, “when teachers’ paid great attention to students’ performance and the communication with parents, parents could also be affected by these teachers and would try their best to support their work” (T04). These findings echo the situation in Western contexts that as parental input becomes more frequent, teacher leaders are expected to intensify their efforts to collaborate and interact with parents (Quinn et al., 2006).

Interviews and documents revealed that teacher leaders perceived their role in this dimension of leadership in terms of overseeing and supporting the work of teachers in communicating with parents and they adopted seven different strategies to foster effective communication. First, seven teacher leaders and statements in four of the
School Annual Reports (AR01, AR05, AR06, and AR08) reviewed in the study indicated that the Directors of Moral Education required form teachers to regularly organise teacher-parent meetings with the parents from their respective class at least once each semester. As in Western schools, this strategy was acknowledged as the most traditional type of communicating with parents in the school.

The Directors of Moral Education encouraged form teachers to take the opportunity in these scheduled parent-teacher meetings to inform each parent about their child’s academic and social progress at school. Teachers were also encouraged to be proactive about inviting parents to participate in school matters. For example, one young teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) revealed that the Director of Moral Education in her school encouraged form teachers to take the opportunity to fully utilise the resources of parents. She remarked “sometimes experienced parents were asked to do some family education presentations and exchange experience with other parents” (T03). One experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) indicated that their Director of Moral Education paid more attention to external expertise when he said “they invited experts outside the school to give parents lectures or played a video on family education” (T06). This was confirmed in its School Annual Report (AR06). In contrast, it was notable that one teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education), who occupied the position for nearly three years, went so far as to encourage form teachers to present sessions to parents that prompted them to reflect on the quality of their parenting. During the interview this teacher leader noted that as some children experienced problems and issues at home, she was in fact encouraging form teachers to assume the responsibility of training parents. For example, she commented: “form teachers presented parents how to manage and educate children and required parents to learn more about it” (T10).

Four teacher leaders and two School Annual Reports (AR02, AR09) identified the establishment of a parent committee as the second strategy for the purpose of supporting the education of children in the school. The parent committee consisted of parent representatives who had enthusiasm for education and ability in managing a range of tasks. These teacher leaders claimed that each semester the Directors of Moral Education in their schools organised teachers to liaise with the parent committee and listen to their suggestions on school development affairs, such as
school policy-making, students’ activities, and student management. A Director of Moral Education with considerable experience in her position said: “Parents were all concerned with the school charges. When the school had to charge parents [extra fees], we always sought the views of the parent committee” (T01). Teacher leaders admitted that effective communication facilitated parental acceptance of these school decision-making processes and that parents were less likely to oppose difficult outcomes such as raising school fees.

The third strategy raised by three teacher leaders and mentioned in two School Annual Reports (AR05, AR06) involved encouraging staff to invite parents to attend classroom open days. During these open days, teacher leaders and teachers encouraged parents to observe classes in all subjects. Parents were invited to follow their children’s performance throughout the day, and to comment on the merits and demerits of school work, and offer suggestions for improvement. One experienced teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) reflected on the outcomes of this strategy, “this activity not only let parents know more about their children and teachers’ quality, but also enhanced the mutual understanding between teachers and parents” (T08).

The fourth strategy, namely “parents coming into the classroom”, was proposed by six teacher leaders and identified in a School Annual Report (AR02). These six teacher leaders indicated the leadership strategy of the Directors of Moral Education in encouraging form teachers to involve parents in sharing their expertise and experience. One teacher leader commented that form teachers regularly invited parents with expertise to teach students about a range of practical and relevant issues of interest. For example, “the traffic police explained the traffic laws and regulations to students, a lawyer described the crime cases of primary students in real life” (T10) (the Director of Moral Education). Another type of activity that fostered effective collaboration between parents and teachers instigated by the Directors of Moral Education, involved them or their form teachers organising students to visit the workplaces of parents, such as a “hospital, museum, and barracks” (T06) (the Director of Teaching Affairs). These teacher leaders argued that such activities helped students to engage with the community and real world issues, whilst
broadening their horizons. They also emphasised that this form of experience could not be found in school textbooks.

In addition to meeting with parents in person, three teacher leaders and one School Annual Report (AR01) highlighted the fifth strategy which was using electronic communication technologies to achieve effective contact with parents. One typical example was put forward by a young teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs). She said “the Directors of Moral Education assisted form teachers in ensuring the daily communication with parents through email and BBS on school website, SMS, and blog” (T03). Therefore, teachers provided parents with information about students’ performance and enabled parents to help their children purposefully. Another teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) referred to the importance of encouraging parents to contact teachers at school “as parents are all very busy, we also encourage teachers to get in touch with parents by phone call to fix the problems that happened to their children” (T04). Findings identified in interviews are in keeping with those in one of the School Annual Reports (AR01) which stated that a blog was established in every class to ensure effective communication between classes and parents, communities.

Only one teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) identified the final strategy which involved holding a special consultation with parents experiencing difficulties with their children. In the interview this teacher leader explained that she organised teachers to offer different kinds of advice to those parents who sought extra support, in order to help meet parents’ needs particularly in relation to their children’s education. She referred to “inviting the psychological consultation teacher to give parents’ mental health guidance, inviting experts to teach parents good learning methods, and helping parents build a scholarly family” (T01). Hence, teacher leadership in this context involved strategies that aimed at counselling and educating parents to respond to their children’s needs. This sort of proactive teacher leadership was identified in a Western context in the work of York-Barr and Duke (2004), Lambert (1998), and Paulu and Winters (1998).
6.3.2.2 Communicating with community members

All of the teacher leaders emphasised the importance of communicating with community members and they referred to both enlisting the community’s support to promote the school’s development and offering help to the community. Similarly, teacher leaders in Western countries also make efforts to acquire more resources and support by collaborating with local communities or community organisations (Cranston, 2000; Crowther et al., 2009; Paulu & Winters, 1998). The teacher leaders in this study claimed that the Directors of Moral Education encouraged students to participate in a wide range of social activities, and for the community to engage in a range of school activities. These teacher leaders also pointed out that most parents endorsed their children’s involvement in such activities. Based on the interviews and School Annual Reports, five approaches were identified by teacher leaders as ways of enlisting their community’s support and providing for their development. These were cooperating with community organisations, inviting community staff to deliver lectures, drawing upon the community’s support and service, seeking the community’s advice and suggestions, and supporting the community’s work. Each approach is illustrated below.

Teacher leaders from four schools indicated that each semester they actively cooperated with various community organisations to create more opportunities for students to engage in practical activities. This type of cooperation was mentioned in one of the School Annual Reports (AR06). These teacher leaders stated that the Directors of Moral Education and form teachers organised student visits to various organisations and encouraged students to learn from these experiences. These organisations included a “weather bureau” (T01), “youth activity centre” (T02), “traffic police command centre” (T03), “botanic garden” (T07), and “museum” (T10). One experience teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) referred to the ways in which this sort of experience was effective in prompting learning, “We took students to visit the Weather Bureau to learn meteorologic observation, temperature measurement this year. Thus, these students could learn more practical knowledge” (T01). Compared with those teacher leaders who undertake the responsibility to gain financial resources from community organisations and businesses (Cranston, 2000; Paulu & Winters, 1998), teacher leaders in this study indicated that their efforts focussed on accessing specific local sites for school visits.
and also drawing from the expertise of those community members employed there for the benefit of their students. Further, the interviews revealed that as their schools were all public schools sponsored by government in Mainland China, teacher leaders who were Director of Moral Education did not need to pursue extra financial support from outside schools.

Four teacher leaders asserted that the Directors of Moral Education regularly invited community experts to deliver lectures in their schools. This was also reported in a School Annual Report (AR10). These teacher leaders emphasised that the activities were of great benefit to parents and students, as they provided practical knowledge and opportunities to foster safety awareness. Some topics relevant to these lectures emerged from the interviews, such as “inviting doctors from the hospital to give hygiene knowledge lecture” (T05) (the Director of Teaching Affairs), and “inviting police to carry out students holiday safety education” (T10) (the Director of Moral Education). This finding is consistent with the strategy that teacher leaders adopted in the research of Paulu and Winters (1998), in which fire officers were invited to a school to share knowledge with students and establish fire safety program. It indicates that teacher leaders in both Mainland China and the USA are keen to involve community members into their schools.

There was a consensus among four teacher leaders that their communities also provided strong support and services to the school. A teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) provided a typical example, “As there were a lot of students around the school during peak hours, we asked for help from traffic police who directed traffic to guarantee students’ safety” (T06). Another teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) reported that their community worked with the school to facilitate different types of activities for students. For instance, “we worked with the community to jointly build a community library. It solved the problem that parents could not take care of their children during their working time in school holiday” (T08).

Only two teacher leaders noted that the Directors of Moral Education encouraged community members to present advice and suggestions regarding aspects of school development. One teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) described the
activity of her school in detail, “sometimes we sent out some questionnaires to the community, or discussed with representatives of the community and surrounding organisations. So they could give us helpful suggestions for school improvement” (T02).

In addition to seeking help from the community, six teacher leaders stated that teacher leaders also guided students to participate in several kinds of community service. This was also reflected in two School Annual Reports (AR01, AR07). For instance, one School Annual Report said that “students were regularly organised to visit the elderly living in a welfare house. Students gave them a performance [i.e., singing, dancing] and helped them do some cleaning” (AR01). She recognised that these kinds of activities not only helped elderly citizens to benefit from socialisation with students together with some practical assistance, but also fostered the moral development of students. Such teacher leadership to promote student wellness and service learning is gaining increased emphasis in many Australian schools (Henderson, 2010). Another teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) remarked that their school actively supported the community’s cultural activities, for instance, “Last year, the community organised a performance in the city central square. We provided a sound system and led a student dance team to give a performance” (T04). Moreover, one kind of service was also mentioned by a teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs), “we teacher leaders are also responsible for supplying school facilities and sites for community activities, such as community football matches and basketball matches” (T07). These teacher leaders deemed that the community’s support for the school was strongly linked to its service to the community. As noted earlier, the benefits of such reciprocal relationships are noted in the literature on teacher leadership in Australia (Cranston, 2000) and the United States (Paulu & Winters, 1998).

6.3.2.3 Summary

The aforementioned discussion illustrates the role that the teacher leaders play in relation to pursuing effective communication with parents and community members. The participating teacher leaders introduced seven different strategies with Chinese characteristics to establish school and family connections. These comprised inviting parents to attend teacher-parent meetings, offering information and training parents
to enrich their knowledge in family education, establishing the parents’ committee, inviting parents to observe school classroom teaching, inviting parents with expertise to present student seminars, using electronic communication technologies to keep in touch with parents, and providing consultation with parents.

In addition, three approaches employed by teacher leaders in the sample were aligned with the findings of Cranston (2000) and Paulu and Winters (1998). These were related to cooperating with community organisations, inviting community experts to share knowledge, and seeking support from the community. Yet, some teacher leaders in this study also tried to involve community members in school operations by seeking their advice and suggestions, as well as offering services to the community through the use of school buildings or by participating in community functions. Whilst community organisations and businesses provide financial support to schools in some nations such as the USA (Paulu & Winters, 1998), teacher leaders in this study indicated that their schools received expertise and other forms of non-financial assistance from their local communities.

The significant role of teacher leaders in establishing school-family/community connection has been well established in Western countries (Cranston, 2000; Crowther et al., 2009; Lambert, 1998; Paulu & Winters, 1998; Quinn et al., 2006). By contrast, the interview findings with these teacher leaders indicated that their work in collaboration with parents and community was relatively new and still developing in Mainland China. The next section of this chapter considers the third role of teacher leadership: leading professional development.

6.3.3 Leading professional development

The findings relating to teacher leadership in leading professional development are summarised in Table 6.4 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified in the existing literature mentioned in Chapter 3, while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by teacher leaders in the Chinese context.
Table 6.4

The Third Role of Teacher Leadership: Professional Development

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<tr>
<th>Teacher Leadership Roles</th>
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<td>City W</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3.3 Professional development</td>
<td>T01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.1 Organising mentoring experiences for beginning teachers</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.2 Organising and attending seminars</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.3 Guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.4 Organising group discussion</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.5 Guiding teachers to participate in research activities</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3.6 Guiding teachers to engage in ongoing reading</td>
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All of the teacher leaders concurred during the interviews that they saw their roles in terms of providing opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and abilities and of offering support and guidance. This was also confirmed in School Annual Reports of all ten schools. This focus on teacher leaders working to capacity-build staff was referred to with reference to the increasing push for quality education in the context of education reform. Since the issue of the *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* (1999), policy requirements for the school curriculum in China has required substantial change in terms of structure, content, pedagogy, standards, and evaluation. Moreover, such changes have proven challenging to teachers in terms of their knowledge and pedagogy. Accordingly, the *Guidelines on Further Strengthening the Teacher Training for New Curriculum of Basic Education* (2004) was produced to establish what was required of the teaching profession in order to implement such curriculum change. While it aimed at enhancing the competence of teachers to achieve the goals that characterise quality education, the 2004 Guidelines created high expectations for teacher professional development. Under such circumstances, the significance of promoting teachers’ continuous professional development has received increased priority in China. This emphasis on skilling the profession to meet national education policy goals is a global phenomenon (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). For example, teacher leaders in the USA and UK have been expected to lead professional development in their schools to capacity build their staff in response to national agendas for reform (Frost & Harris, 2003).
In this study, the prominent role teacher leaders played in fostering and enhancing the expertise of their colleagues emerged as a significant finding. All teacher leaders perceived their leadership in promoting the professional development of their colleagues as most significant during their interviews. The significance of this aspect of teacher leadership is noted in the literature (Day & Harris, 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Ovando, 1996; Silva et al., 2000). And, as noted, the interview findings reflected this acknowledgement that teacher leadership plays a major role in improving the performance of teachers in schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995). Teacher leaders in the sample highlighted the importance of their knowledge, their considerable experience, and the key part they played in being a role model for other teachers in order to enhance their learning. All the teacher leaders in the study were very experienced teachers themselves and they noted that they were viewed by other teachers in their schools as qualified experts in teaching. These teacher leaders unanimously perceived their roles as teachers of teachers (Little, 1999). One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching affairs) reflected that “when teachers’ professional abilities are enhanced, their teaching and managing tasks can be operated in a more effective way” (T02). Teacher leaders noted that enhanced teaching capacity, directly impacts on the quality of student learning, and consequently, a school’s development as a whole (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Moreover, whilst different in construct and context, the Western literature largely indicates that high performing school systems, maintain a strong focus on improving the quality of teacher instruction “because of its direct impact upon student achievement” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 13).

All of the interviewed teacher leaders claimed that during the process of supporting teachers’ professional development, they encouraged teachers to work collaboratively with, and learn from, each other. The professional development activities the teacher leaders implemented were purposefully directed towards enhancing teachers’ capabilities through team or group work, rather than individual work. This is consistent with the notion that teacher leaders strive to establish a collaborative culture in the school which fosters teacher growth and school improvement (Lieberman et al., 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2003). As these teacher leaders indicated, the Directors of Teaching Affairs were in charge of promoting subject teachers’ professional development in teaching, while the Directors of Moral
Education were in charge of developing form teachers in the management of students overall well-being. Six main activities are elaborated by these school-based formal teacher leaders and mentioned in School Annual Reports. These strategies included organising mentoring experiences for beginning teachers, organising and attending seminars, guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes, organising teachers to share ideas and experiences, guiding teachers to participate in research activities, and guiding teachers to engage in ongoing reading. Each of these strategies is now considered.

6.3.3.1 Organising mentoring experiences for beginning teachers

Mentoring was identified by eight teacher leaders in this study as a valuable leadership strategy for supporting the professional learning of their colleagues new to their schools. This is in accordance with the statement in six School Annual Reports (AR01, AR03, AR04, AR07, AR09, and AR10). This finding is also reflected in the literature on the significance of school-based mentoring programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Frost & Harris, 2003; Hart, 1995; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert 2003; Ovando, 1996; Smylie, 1995). Teacher leaders in this study indicated that although beginning teachers had less experience, they were keen to develop professionally in order to become effective teachers. Teacher leaders assigned older and more experienced teachers, including themselves, to mentor beginning teachers for one year with the purpose of advancing their professional capacities. New teachers were also expected to increase their theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning together with practical knowledge under the guidance of experienced teachers. Not surprisingly, this strategy is used in many nations in school-based mentoring programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995).

Those teacher leaders who were Directors of Teaching Affairs in the sample described several strategies that experienced teachers, such as themselves, employed to mentor beginners. These included “helping young teachers prepare lessons” (T03), “listening to young teachers’ classes and providing advice” (T05), “recommending suitable books” (T08), and “guiding young teachers to reflect on their teaching” (T09). These strategies are reflective of the coaching, feedback, modelling, and training approaches of mentors as summarised by Lambert (2003). Teacher leaders in this study regarded mentoring as a very practical and useful means of supporting
young teachers to develop professionally as they teach in schools.

6.3.3.2 Organising and attending seminars

Attending seminars within and outside schools was viewed by all of the teacher leaders as an effective and commonly used way for their own development as well as for the professional development of their staff. This was also reflected in School Annual Reports (AR01, AR03, AR04, AR09, and AR10). Teacher leaders noted during the interviews that they also led workshops to provide teachers with more opportunities for professional learning, a strategy used widely in education systems (Devaney, 1987, Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994). These teacher leaders indicated that they invited internal experts, such as recognised excellent teachers within the school, and external experts such as experienced teachers from other schools, well-known scholars, and experienced officials from the Education Bureau, to deliver seminars to staff in their schools.

These findings indicate that teacher leaders as school-based experts harnessed various sources of expertise and information in order to facilitate teachers’ learning. This confirmed that drawing on internal experts to promote professional learning amongst teachers is a well established strategy for capacity-building staff (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The teacher leaders in this study referred to these seminars which addressed various topics relevant to subject knowledge, general knowledge, and psychological health. The selection of these topics not only provided teachers with a broad overview of educational concepts and ideas, but also guided teachers to develop in depth their respective subject knowledge and expertise. Moreover, these teacher leaders also organised technical training for teachers to enhance their ability in engaging multimedia teaching and whiteboard teaching. Some examples included: “how to carry out psychological health education of students” (T01) (the Director of Moral Education), “how to write notes of teaching reflection” (T06) (the Director of Teaching Affairs), and “how to make effective presentations” (T07) (the Director of Teaching Affairs). The teacher leaders indicated that during the process, teachers were provided with opportunities to engage in face to face discussions with these experts to discuss issues that they encountered in the course of their work.

In one school, the teacher leader (T07, the Director of Teaching Affairs) introduced
school-based seminars as a form of professional development for the members of the school management team with the aim that they would foster effective communication amongst members of the school leadership team. In her explanation, each of the members was required to give seminars to their colleagues every semester in order to gain experience and knowledge in leading and managing from each other. As the teacher leaders noted, the overall purpose of inviting experts both within and outside the school was to provide professional guidance to enrich the knowledge of teachers and teacher leaders and enhance their professional abilities.

Furthermore, all teacher leaders referred to the fact that through this leadership strategy they were both organisers and recipients of professional development. Some teacher leaders claimed they organised for their fellow teachers to attend training sessions such as seminars, lectures, and observation held in different areas of the country. At the training sessions, teacher leaders indicated that they, and other teachers, were able to learn from the “experience of other outstanding teachers” (T01) (the Director of Moral Education), access “excellent classroom teaching methods” (T03) (the Director of Teaching Affairs), and share “advanced educational concepts” (T07) (the Director of Teaching Affairs). The ten teacher leaders reported that they were responsible for informing their principals about forthcoming training activities outside the school. Whilst teacher leaders indicated that some professional development activities were only available to them as designated school leaders, nonetheless, they were expected to report to staff in school-based sessions that served to inform and encourage teachers to adopt new practices. These teacher leaders noted that the strategy to report following their external training offered all school staff a chance to transcend the limitations of their own schools to achieve a dramatic leap in their abilities.

6.3.3.3 Guiding teacher leaders to observe other teachers’ classes

The third strategy to emerge from the interviews indicated that all teacher leaders supported teachers in their schools by providing them with opportunities to observe other teachers’ classes. As stated in six School Annual Reports (AR01, AR02, AR05, AR06, AR07, and AR08), classroom observation was also conducted in their schools. This means of highlighting the significance of teacher quality aimed at improving teaching quality. Such school-based efforts to improve teacher quality confirm the
argument that teacher leaders are experts in promoting quality teaching amongst their colleagues (Frost & Harris, 2003; Little, 1999; Muijs & Harris, 2006). The teacher leaders in this study made reference to three types of classroom observation that commonly occurred in participating schools. The first type involved observing excellent teachers within the school as models or exemplars of teaching quality. The teacher leaders declared that they guided teachers to observe those teachers who were deemed “excellent” in the school in terms of their teaching skills, methods and ideas they used in the classroom. Second, young teachers attended experienced teachers’ classrooms in order to observe their lessons and learn about the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Following this, these teachers would address the issues raised and then invite their senior colleagues into their classrooms to observe the lesson in the spirit of improving their classroom practice. The third type of classroom observation was similar to the second, only this time new teachers were required to teach a class and invite an experienced teacher who also taught the same subject or year level to observe and provide feedback. In summary, teacher leaders unanimously emphasised the value of offering feedback and guidance based on the observation of classroom teaching in order to promote quality and to provide opportunities for teacher to address their shortcomings in the classroom. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) commented on these activities, “we recognised that every teacher had shining points for others to learn from. Thus observing teachers’ class had been viewed as an effective way to promote teachers’ professional development” (T07).

Moreover, four teacher leaders in the sample referred to the strategy of asking an experienced teacher who taught the same subject to teach a sample lesson for observation. Teacher leaders indicated that this activity provided young teachers with an opportunity to observe excellent teachers’ classes and gain knowledge and skills from them which they could try to apply to their own classroom teaching. In addition, teacher leaders and other teachers also offered advice to participating teachers by helping them identify their weaknesses, and then develop appropriate solutions and steps for improvement. Teacher leaders referred to this strategy as “an indispensable way to advance teachers’ teaching methods and capabilities” (T02) (the Director of Teaching Affairs). A similar situation is also referred to by Silva et al. (2000) in Western contexts, when teachers invite specialists to observe their classrooms and
pursue specialists’ guidance in order to improve their practice.

All of the teacher leaders showed that observations enabled the teachers to learn about effective practices in teaching and managing. The Directors of Teaching Affairs provided some examples in terms of teaching, such as “how to well use body language” (T03), “how to utilise teaching time” (T04), and “how to effectively organise activates to help students learn actively and effectively” (T06). Similarly, the Directors of Moral Education indicated that they guided form teachers to observe the classrooms of excellent form teachers with the aim of improving their experience in managing students, such as “how to cultivate students’ good habits” (T01) and “how to establish classroom culture” (T10). One teacher leader (T09, the Director of Teaching Affairs) noted that writing reflective notes could be regarded as a useful way for teachers to deepen their understanding and master the knowledge they learned from classroom observations. All teacher leaders stressed the value of improving the teaching abilities of their colleagues as a means of fostering staff morale and confidence, which in turn, provides positive learning environments for the students in their schools.

6.3.3.4 Organising group discussions

In the fourth strategy, all teacher leaders indicated that they organised group discussion activities for teachers to share their resources, ideas, and experiences and resolve problems together. These activities were also reflected in five School Annual Reports (AR01, AR05, AR07, AR08, and AR09). For instance, activities included “meetings” (T01), “teacher interests groups” (T02), “symposiums” (T07), “forums” (T10), and “discussion seminars” (AR08). Similarly, teacher leaders in Western countries strive to organise group discussions among teachers whereby teachers share experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1994) and solve practical problems (Muijs & Harris, 2007) in order to develop their professional abilities. Teacher leaders in this study explained that in these activities teachers raised problems they confronted in their work and then generated the solutions together based on discussion. These problems concerned aspects of teaching and managing, such as “teaching skills” (T02), “the development of students’ learning initiative” (T05), and “the management of student discipline” (T10). One teacher leader pointed out the value of utilising excellent teachers as role models for their capacity to influence young teachers and motivate
them to achieve improved classroom practice. All of these teacher leaders claimed that they provided teachers with opportunities to learn from excellent teachers and communicate with other teachers to attain professional development.

Furthermore, five teacher leaders stated that they also guided teachers to exchange information via the internet. They encouraged teachers to share resources in various ways, such as observing “online excellent videotaped classroom teaching” (T03), accessing “excellent teaching plans” (T05), and reflecting upon “comments on classroom observation” (T09), through “blogs” (T01) and “BBS (Bulletin Board System)” (T08) on the internet. In this way, teachers were able to communicate their knowledge, ideas, experiences, and concerns about teaching, managing and research with other teachers. These teacher leaders identified the internet as a new approach that was gradually integrated into teachers’ daily work as a means of accessing the accumulated wisdom of the masses as well as a way of conducting prompt communication. Whilst not referring to electronic means of communication, Smylie and Denny (1990) also emphasise the significant role that teacher leaders take in providing teachers with rich knowledge and new ideas to improve their classroom practice.

All of the teacher leaders in the study indicated that they guided the teachers who were heads of teaching groups to work with other teachers and also directly guided teachers themselves to prepare lessons together. This was referred to as a collaborative and well established means of enhancing teaching quality as it also produced shared teaching plans. This approach highlighted shared approaches to teaching based on utilising the same resources and teachers were also able to create their own variations of the collectively produced year level plans. For example, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) indicated that when she involved other teachers in planning and preparation, these teachers were more active in devising their own plans. She reflected “I guided teachers in my group to discuss and identify the teaching key points and the effective ways to help students learn them, and to design good PowerPoint slides, homework, and extra-curricular activities

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15 The teaching group refers to teachers who teach the same subject and are working in the same office as a group who participate in teaching activities. There is one group for every subject taught in a primary school.
with everyone’s ideas” (T08). These teacher leaders agreed that preparing lessons together helped teachers to work harmoniously and successfully enabled teachers to achieve teaching goals. This approach to leading staff to work collaboratively confirms that teacher leaders are responsible for exercising leadership to achieve mutual learning with teachers through establishing a close relationship (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

6.3.3.5 Guiding teachers to participate in research activities

All teacher leaders indicated that they guided teachers to participate in school research activities with the aim of improving teachers’ teaching competence and professional skills. This was confirmed by six School Annual Reports (AR01, AR02, AR06, AR07, AR08, and AR09). This fifth strategy to emerge from the finding is aligned with one of the approaches to school-based research initiated by teacher leaders in some Western countries. For example, teacher leader facilitated research, notably action research, is concerned with teachers’ working practice (Ash & Persall, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Henson, 1996; Ovando, 1996). With reference to the present study, the interviews revealed teacher leaders’ awareness that many teachers were reluctant to participate in large projects organised by District Education Bureau, but preferred to be largely involved in school-based small research projects. Large projects were viewed as not closely linked to teaching practice by teachers in their schools, consequently teacher leaders regarded small, school-based projects to be more practical and feasible for teachers to resolve problems in their daily work and to develop professionally during the process.

All teacher leaders agreed that it was easier for teachers to focus on their own small research projects, in which teachers who explored similar areas were categorised into the same group. Thus, working in these research groups provided opportunities for teachers to “share ideas and resources” (T07), as well as “exchange research findings and experience” (T06). Teacher leaders suggested that once teachers had determined their research topics, they required guidance and support throughout the whole research process. This involved identifying research problems, analysing research problems, and proposing strategies for improvement. Such research projects ranged from “the design of school-based curriculum” (T02), “the problems in school transformation” (T09), “the methods in teaching” (T03), “the usage of media” (T05),
and “classroom assessment” (T10). Teacher leaders all referred to the benefits of this collaborative approach to school-based research on practice for their staff. They considered mutual support and assistance to be effective in guiding group members through the research process and in improving their practice. As well as leading teachers’ research capacity and facilitating group based approaches, teacher leaders acted as the “school research coordinator” (Frost & Harris, 2003, p. 482) in guiding their colleagues through this process.

6.3.3.6 Guiding teachers to engage in ongoing reading

The interview findings indicated that six teacher leaders emphasised their roles in guiding teachers to engage in professional reading. Same activity was also reported in four School Annual Reports (AR01, AR05, AR06, and AR09). This sixth strategy was considered to be effective in contributing to teachers’ professional development. These teacher leaders indicated that they read constantly and they encouraged teachers to do the same by guiding them to improve their reading skills, encouraging them to take notes from their readings, and by participating in discussions about what they had read. These six teacher leaders indicated that they also recommended useful reading materials on teaching and classroom management so in order to help teachers improve their capabilities. For teacher leaders, reading materials included “newspapers” (T02), “journals” (T03), and “books” (T04) covered topics such as “the latest educational concepts” (T08), “the advanced teaching skills” (T09), and “student management experience” (T10). These teacher leaders believed that ongoing reading was crucial to enhance teachers’ mastery of their subjects, teaching knowledge and pedagogy, and classroom management skills.

6.3.3.7 Summary

The discussion above emphasised the key role of leading professional development in the work of teacher leaders in Mainland China. The findings confirmed the work of some researchers that teacher leaders are significant in initiating and managing activities that facilitate teachers’ growth. These activities ranged from mentoring, seminars, classroom observation, group discussion, to school-based research groups (Ash & Persall, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Frost & Harris, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2006). However, the interview data revealed that teacher leaders emphasised guiding and encouraging teachers to engage in ongoing reading as a means of professional development in a way that is not reflected in the
Western literature. It is worth mentioning that, in line with the findings of Silva et al. (2000), teacher leaders in this study also endeavoured to refine and promote their own capacity for professional development whilst they led and assisted their colleagues’ ongoing professional growth. The next section of this chapter refers to the fourth role teacher leaders play, namely that of mediation.

6.3.4 Mediation

The findings relating to teacher leadership in mediation are summarised in Table 6.5 below. The shaded lines represent sub-roles identified in the existing literature mentioned in Chapter 3, while the unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by teacher leaders in the Chinese context.

Table 6.5

*The Fourth Role of Teacher Leadership: Mediation*

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<tr>
<th>Teacher Leadership Roles</th>
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<td>6.3.4 Mediation</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3.4.1 Implementing school-based decisions</td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✓</td>
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<td>6.3.4.2 Communicating the requirements of teachers and students to principals</td>
<td>✓/✓/✓/✓/✓</td>
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<td>6.3.4.3 Establishing positive relationships among colleagues</td>
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All teacher leaders interviewed for this study emphasised that their leadership role required them to develop effective ways of mediating with staff and with the school community. Some researchers also refer to the capacity of teacher leaders to mediate and negotiate with colleagues over matters of conflict (Hart, 1995; Silva et al., 2000; Yarger & Lee, 1994). In broad terms, “mediation” refers to different facets of communication in the school, some of which are problematic, and the ways in which teacher leaders connect principals with teachers and students. The interviewees indicated that mediation involved a variety of strategies. For example, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) referred to “conveying principals’ ideas to teachers and students” (T02), whilst another teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) stressed that communication was a two-way processes which involved “reflecting the voices of teachers and students to principals” (T06). These teacher leaders indicated that they connected principals, teachers and students in a
continuous cycle which was both ‘top-down’ (from principal to teacher to student) and ‘bottom-up’ (from student to teacher to principal), indicating the complexity and richness of the communication processes in their schools.

Teacher leaders also noted that they were responsible for two other facets of mediating in the members of the school community, both of which related to decision-making. First, teacher leaders implemented decisions made by the school principals together with the decisions made by the school leadership team. Second, teacher leaders were responsible for informing principals of the progress and any problems that occurred in the school when such decision-making was implemented in practice. In response to these processes of communication, principals organised meetings with teacher leaders to discuss ways to facilitate effective implementation strategies to improve school decision-making. This cycle of communication for decision-making processes proceeded as teacher leaders responded to their principal’s requests. Teacher leaders reported that this reiterative process of communication and decision-making continued as new challenges and problems emerged in their schools. According to the interviews, teacher leaders envisaged their roles as ‘mediators’ or essential ‘conduits’ in the school communication process. In sum, this involved implementing school-based decisions, communicating the requirements of teachers and students to principals, and establishing positive relationships among colleagues. As noted earlier in this chapter, this can be termed a form of ‘parallel leadership’ (Crowther et al., 2009) and each of these facets is elaborated below.

6.3.4.1 Implementing school-based decisions

All teacher leaders emphasised their leadership role in the implementation of school-based decisions. This involved working with teachers to ensure that decisions made by the school leadership team, such as devising the school development plan and developing school policies, were implemented in the daily operations of the school. The interview findings indicated that teacher leaders were mindful of the importance of fully comprehending and supporting their principals’ decisions. Teacher leaders also emphasised their responsibility for implementing school decisions in their different working areas. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) pointed out that “the main work of teacher leaders is implementation” (T09). This is
in accordance with Day and Harris’s (2002) research that teacher leaders are identified as the group who assume the responsibilities to apply school improvement decisions into teaching and learning practices. Moreover, this facet of teacher leadership indicates the mutual trust and shared sense of purpose that existed between teacher leaders and their principals, two of Crowther et al.’s (2009) features of parallel leadership, which facilitated the effective implementation of school-based decisions.

Given the strategic nature of teacher leaders as pivotal to the implementation process, teacher leaders indicated that in conveying school decisions to teachers it was also significant that they assisted teachers in understanding the nature and intent of what was required. All of the teacher leaders emphasised their roles in clarifying and explaining the purpose of school decision-making and enlisting teacher support for the implementation of decisions. Some teacher leaders emphasised that this could be challenging, for example one teacher leader, the Director of Teaching Affairs, noted: “Sometimes I met with teachers’ resistance to change when I carried out new school policies. So I presented the facts and reasons to make teachers fully accept the new policies” (T04).

In this study, the interview data also indicated that an obstacle confronting teacher leaders was teacher reluctance to change. Some teachers found it difficult to learn the new teaching methods and access the materials necessary to fulfil the requirements expected under the current curriculum reforms. This is not unique to the teachers in these two primary schools in provincial China, as Silva et al.’s (2000) study suggests that Western teachers feel uncomfortable and threatened with changes that challenge their usual working habits, patterns, and routines. Whilst it is recommended that teachers need to adopt a positive attitude towards learning new knowledge in order to move forward professionally (Silva et al., 2000), nonetheless, some teachers resist the requirements of professional development. An inquiring perspective (Walters, 1992) is significant for teachers in an era of change and the discussion of interview data thus far indicates that teacher leaders were mindful of the important roles they play in using a range of strategies to encourage teachers to accept new practices for change. When explaining the ways in which they conveyed and implemented school decisions, all teacher leaders referred to two strategies they employed to connect with
teachers in their schools. The first strategy aimed at communicating to staff via meetings or through the use of the campus network, such as blog, BBS (Bulletin Board System), to help teachers have a comprehensive understanding of school decisions. For instance, with specific reference to meetings held at strategic times in the school semester, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) noted that “at the beginning of each semester, I held meetings to report the main ideas of the activities to teachers, such as the topics and the forms” (T07).

The second strategy which teacher leaders utilised to convey and implement school decisions focused on involving staff in specific activities. In this way, teacher leaders mediated staff in their respective schools with principals’ decisions and facilitated the ways in which teachers implemented these into their daily work. In the interviews, teacher leaders referred to this aspect of their roles as “transforming” school decisions into specific activities in teachers’ daily work and into particular experiences for their students. One teacher leader, the Director of Teaching Affairs, commented on her contribution to help teachers gain a deep understanding and greater insights into the purpose and nature of school decision-making. For example, she organised a series of activities, such as “research activities, observing other teachers’ classroom teaching and forum discussion” (T08). Teacher leaders referred to this as ensuring that school decision-making processes were deeply embedded in their schools. In doing so, all teacher leaders emphasised the significance of effective communication and their role as conduits for this process. Significantly, they also emphasised that effective communication was more purposeful and had greater impact than the older methods of indoctrination. As noted in Chapter 5, this was a highly significant cultural shift. Some insights into the nature of this facet of teacher leadership and their cultural shift in Chinese schools are evident in the following reflection.

In this semester, the main work of my school is to ensure students’ autonomous and effective learning. I not only explained the new ideas in this decision, but also organised activities to help teachers and students truly understand and accept them. These activities were related to inviting experts to lead teachers and students in classroom teaching and learning, requesting
teachers to write reflection of their work, etc. Thus every teacher could be active in engaging in this decision. (T05)

6.3.4.2 Communicating requirements of teachers and students to principals

The interviews revealed that all of the teacher leaders largely engaged in teaching and research activities in their schools, which provided opportunities for them to gain insights into the circumstances facing their teachers and students. The significance of establishing a good relationship between teachers and students was also stated in two School Annual Reports (AR02, AR06). Teacher leaders noted that it was important for the running of their schools that they were aware of the problems, difficulties or concerns that teachers encountered in their work. As one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) reflected, “as I spent a heap of time working with teachers, I could fully understand their requirements in teaching and learning, for instance, more support from experts” (T08). Furthermore, the teacher leaders asserted that they tried to support and encourage teachers to provide new insights through research and professional literature, practical ideas and effective methods to foster effective teaching practices. Teacher leaders also noted that they promptly conveyed teacher ideas, insights and suggestions to their principals and also discussed ways to implement new approaches, such as specific teaching activities, in school leadership team meetings. As one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) reflected: “teachers will increase the sense of achievement and group honour [like the team spirit] when their suggestions have been accepted and carried out by their schools” (T03).

All ten teacher leaders commented on the ways in which they gathered feedback from staff and teachers and emphasised how they valued “the voices of teachers and students” (T06). Teacher leaders referred to the importance of regularly visiting teachers’ offices and students’ classrooms to talk with them every week. They also accessed the internet to communicate with them, and participated in their activities such as “seminars, workshops and discussion forums” (T07). Through such mechanisms, teacher leaders indicated that they accessed and identified possible problems or issues facing teachers in schools in relation to “professional development, student management, and teachers’ lives” (T02).
However, all teacher leaders noted that as it was impossible for them to look after every child in the school. This finding is aligned with the study of Silva et al. (2000) that emphasises the importance of raising students’ voices and providing support to meet their needs. Interview findings indicated that teacher leaders relied on form teachers, subject teachers and the teacher heads of year levels to gain information and insights into students’ issues. A practical example of this relates to the well-being and safety of students in schools. For example, when a student reports problems to teachers, such as “the ground is slippery in some places” (T01), teachers pass this information to the respective teacher leaders for that area, who then reports this to the school principal. Apart from raising these issues to the principal for support, teacher leaders also tried their best to help teachers and students resolve the problems by means of guide, explanation and coordination.

6.3.4.3 Establishing positive relationships among colleagues

All teacher leaders highlighted the significance of establishing positive relationships amongst colleagues to ensure their effective performance as a key part in their roles in mediating with different members of school staff. Similarly, some researchers recognise that teacher leaders nurturing solid relationships with colleagues is a significant leadership role aiming at facilitating school development (LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997; Sherrill, 1999; Silva et al., 2000). Significantly, this notion of mediation also applied to the ways in which teachers communicated with each other. Teacher leaders emphasised that they made great efforts to coordinate teachers’ work so that they worked with other teachers in a harmonious and productive way. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) referred to a specific example from her school to illustrate an aspect of this during the interview. She mentioned, “In my school, teachers who undertook the same task easily shirked their responsibilities in the work. So I divided the task to each teacher to make them work collaboratively” (T03). All teacher leaders also stressed that when teachers worked in a collaborative and harmonious environment, it enhanced their efficiency.

Additionally, these teacher leaders claimed that they tried to foster a harmonious relationship between themselves and their fellow teachers in order to successfully implement school decisions. All teacher leaders emphasised that respect and honesty were the key points to communicate with other teachers in their schools. As the
interviews indicated, the ten teacher leaders paid attention to teachers’ work and life in order to fully understand their needs and situations and endeavoured to help their teachers overcome any difficulties they were facing. These teacher leaders regarded it as an essential way to gain the respect and trust from teachers. The teacher leaders also noted the necessity of pursuing common topics in teaching and learning with teachers, such as “how to enhance students’ interests in learning” (T05), in order to establish good working relationships. Therefore, these teacher leaders tried to enrich their knowledge and experience in teaching and managing to ensure that they always understood teachers’ problems and issues in practice. In addition, the teacher leaders asserted that they could gain more understanding and support from teachers when they also understood teachers’ difficulties and identified their merits in the work. One teacher leader provided a typical example to illustrate his successful work in communicating with teachers,

In my school, each member of the school leadership team is responsible for one grade. As I am in charge of the first grade, I fully participate in all activities of teachers and students in this grade. In activities, I tried my best to provide teachers and students with support, help and encouragement so that I establish a close relationship with them and understand their real situations. (T06)

Finally, in order to establish positive relationships among school members, seven teacher leaders highlighted the significance of providing emotional support to teachers in their school. This finding is reflected in some research studies in which teachers are sometimes provided with intellectual and moral support by teacher leaders for their development (Leithwood et al., 1999; Smylie & Denny, 1990). These teacher leaders noted that they provided “encouragement” (T01), “recognition” (T04), and opportunities for teachers in “sharing their personal feelings” (T09) with them. They identified that their emotional support was seen as significant for prompting the inner working passion and energy of teacher leaders. Furthermore, during the process of helping others, teacher leaders themselves could also gain the respect from teachers.
The participating teacher leaders asserted that their encouragement largely helped teachers, particularly young teachers, to increase their confidence and enthusiasm in working and learning. As one teacher leader commented, great emphasis was required to “promptly encourage teachers especially when they met with difficulties and trouble in their work” (T08). These teacher leaders stated that they encouraged teachers by identifying their achievements rather than their shortcomings, and that in this way they could motivate teachers to be positive and encourage them to succeed in their work.

These teacher leaders claimed that their recognition of teachers’ achievements prompted teachers to be productive whilst fostering their sense of belonging to their schools. For example, one teacher leader said, “I always focused on teachers’ improvement, even in very small ways, to show my recognition of their work” (T08). Interviews indicated that teacher leaders were mindful that their staff expected recognition when they strived for success in their work. Therefore, once teachers’ efforts were recognised by their leaders, sometimes even with one sentence, “well done” (T01) (the Director of Moral Education), this meant that they were more likely to work actively and creatively. The encouragement and recognition of teacher leaders in this study is in line with the term “stimulation” (P.126) defined as one form of mental support in the study of Leithwood et al. (1999). Participators provided verbal feedback to stimulate teachers, such as “you can do it” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p.126), which is similar to the term “well done” that Chinese teacher leaders used in this study.

The teacher leaders also referred to their efforts to build good relationships with teachers so that they felt comfortable in sharing their personal feelings and problems with them. The interviews indicated that that many teachers confided their worries and concerns to their teacher leaders, for instance, “when teachers expressed any dissatisfaction in their work, I helped them find out how to deal with these situations” (T06). In the study of Smylie and Denny (1990), one teacher leader commented that teachers regarded her as someone in authority in the school with whom they could share their frustrations. All teacher leaders in this study commented that their emotional connection to their staff could reduce teachers’ sense of pressure in the workplace and assist teachers to work more productively.
6.3.4.4 Summary

The discussion above articulated the role that teacher leaders act in regard to mediation. All teacher leaders in this study adopted the role as a ‘mediator’ in the school by undertaking different tasks such as implementing school-based decisions, communicating the requirements of teachers and students to principals, and establishing positive relationships among colleagues. In this role, teacher leaders seemed to take great responsibilities in school management to ensure the satisfaction of teachers and student as well as the smooth operation of their schools. It is evident that teacher leaders performed as facilitators in a planned way to ensure that the decisions made by principals and the school leadership team were implemented effectively. Moreover, this approach to facilitating decision-making indicates that school environments were changing from the traditional top-down model prior to the current reforms in which principals did not consult but stipulated change and expected compliance to a more consultative democratic system. Moreover, it was notable that all teacher leaders in this study perceived their roles in this era of reform in terms of collaborative practice. The next section of this chapter concerns the last teacher leadership role: accountability.

6.3.5 Accountability

The findings relating to teacher leadership in accountability are summarised in Table 6.6 below. The unshaded lines refer to those roles or sub-roles revealed by this research and identified by teacher leaders in the Chinese context.

Table 6.6

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teacher Leadership Roles</th>
<th>Interviewed Teacher Leaders</th>
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<td>6.3.5 Accountability</td>
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<td>6.3.5.1 Evaluating teachers’ performance</td>
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<td>6.3.5.2 Teacher leaders’ own evaluation</td>
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<td>6.3.5.3 Preparation for school’s evaluation</td>
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According to the interviews, accountability was regarded as an important leadership role in teacher leaders’ daily work. Accountability in terms of evaluation of teachers and teacher leader performance was highlighted in six School Annual Reports (AR01,
In the context of school-based management and the current curriculum reform, the participating teacher leaders explained that they took on this role as principals were too busy to fully adopt the role of monitoring and evaluating teachers’ classes. Teacher evaluation was undertaken by teacher leaders in Chinese schools, which is similar to the roles teacher leaders appointed as the middle managers in the UK are expected to exert leadership in monitoring and evaluating teaching in their schools (Frost & Harris, 2003). However, in other nations, such as Australia, the notion of this type of accountability rests with school principals or members of the senior management team in a school (Dempster, 2000). Teacher leaders in Australia are expected to demonstrate their accountability in the monitoring of student learning outcomes (Cranston, 2000) rather than of staff evaluation.

The interview findings indicated that accountability was understood in terms of teacher leaders being accountable for fellow teachers’ performance, their own performance, and the school’s evaluation as a whole. The teacher leaders in the study claimed that they themselves needed to demonstrate their competence as teacher leaders and were likewise evaluated by others (within the school and outside of it). These teacher leaders explained that they submitted results from teacher evaluations to principals every semester so that principals were kept informed about teachers’ performance across all grade levels. In sum, teacher leaders exercised their accountability role in three ways—evaluating teachers’ performance, exercising accountability through their own performance, and preparing for their school’s evaluation. Each of these forms of accountability is elaborated as follows.

6.3.5.1 Evaluating teachers’ performance

As indicated earlier in this chapter, there are three different formal teacher leadership roles in primary schools in China, and these relate to Teaching Affairs, Moral Education, and Logistics. The findings revealed that it was standard across all schools that the Directors of Teaching Affairs were accountable for evaluating subject teachers’ performance; while the directors of moral education were accountable for evaluating form teachers’ classroom management performance. A teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) gave an example, “If a teacher occupies two positions—subject teacher and form teacher, he/she should be...
evaluated by both the director of teaching affairs and the director of moral education” (T01). These teacher leaders acknowledged that they did not carry out the evaluations on their own; rather they relied on the assistance of the teacher heads of teaching groups and the teacher heads of year levels to carry out evaluations. For instance, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) said, “In my school, the teacher heads of teaching groups who are in charge of mathematics, Chinese, or English subjects assist me in evaluating teachers’ daily performance” (T09). The teacher leaders indicated that as the teacher evaluation results were closely associated with teachers’ promotion to higher professional titles, every teacher attached great importance to it.

The ten teacher leaders illustrated that teacher evaluation consisted of daily evaluations and an end-of-semester evaluation. They indicated the evaluation results were mainly indicated by scores but also included comments. Since the strong push towards promoting teachers’ professional development under the current period of education reform\textsuperscript{16}, these teacher leaders emphasised the use of formative evaluation to evaluate teachers’ daily performance. According to the interviews, there was an evaluation form that teacher leaders used to evaluate teachers’ performance in every school. Teacher leaders gave scores in each evaluation aspect based on the criteria and then summed up all scores as the final results. They reported that this form of evaluation focused on the evaluation of teachers’ work and the provision of feedback on teachers’ key performance (i.e., teaching skills, subject knowledge) during the year. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) mentioned that, “we keep the records of teachers’ performance every day and publicly announce the evaluation results monthly in my school” (T02).

In addition, the teacher leaders stated that they also conducted a summative evaluation of teachers at the end of each semester in which every teacher was required to deliver a speech about their whole semester’s performance to an evaluation group which would then allocate each teacher a score. This group was

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\textsuperscript{16} During the education reform in Mainland China, two main educational policies were issued to improve the professional development of teachers. These were the Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education (1999) and the Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education (2001).
composed of teacher leaders, leaders of teaching and research groups, leaders of each grade, and some teacher representatives. One teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) gave more details, “I organised the members of the evaluation group to evaluate teachers’ achievements and weaknesses every semester” (T07). Teacher leaders indicated that commendations were made to teachers based on their results. For example, teacher leaders awarded outstanding teachers with titles of honour to recognise and inspire teachers, such as “award for outstanding classroom teaching” (T03), “award for outstanding research achievements” (T06), and “award for outstanding form teachers” (T10).

All of the teacher leaders referred to the use of two different evaluation forms to assess subject teachers and form teachers. Eight teacher leaders working as the Directors of Teaching Affairs indicated that they mainly evaluated three aspects of subject teachers’ work. The first aspect referred to the evaluation of subject teachers’ professional ethics. For instance, these teacher leaders indicated that they inspected whether the subject teachers “gave students corporal punishment” (T04), “kept a civil tongue in teaching” (T05), or “made money as private teachers” (T08). The second aspect was related to the evaluation of subject teachers’ daily teaching work, including “lesson preparation, teaching skills, homework setting and checking, and student achievements” (T09). The last aspect was when teacher leaders evaluated teachers’ participation in research activities and research achievements, such as “the number of journal publications” (T02), “the achievements in research projects” (T07).

In contrast, two teacher leaders who held the position of the Director of Moral Education stated that they evaluated form teachers’ performance in terms of three other areas. First, these teacher leaders reported that they carried out a routine evaluation of classroom management every day. One teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) drew an example in her school, “I publicly announce the evaluation scores of each class’s performance in discipline and cleaning work of classroom and school environment every month. Excellent classes are selected based on their scores” (T10). Within a Chinese context, discipline referred to students arriving in school on time, and their attendance at classes. Second, the teacher leaders stated that they evaluated the comprehensive performance of form teachers at
the end of each semester. On the basis of an interview, the two teacher leaders invited teacher representatives to give form teachers scores according to their speech on their achievements, such as, “the organisation of extra-curricular activities, the organisation of class meetings” (T01). Finally, these teacher leaders indicated that they evaluated form teachers according to parents’ comments on the performance of their children’s form teachers every semester. For example, one teacher leader said she collected parents’ feedback on form teachers’ performance at the end of semester, such as “whether form teachers respect parents and emphasise the communication with parents, whether form teachers cultivate students’ good learning habits” (T10).

All interviewed teacher leaders indicated that under the new education reform, the evaluation of teachers focused on monitoring many different dimensions of teachers’ ongoing learning and development. This meant that teacher leaders had to provide and also access different forms of feedback in order to support teachers’ learning. From the teacher leaders in the sample, it was noted that teachers preferred the new evaluation system that provided more feedback and support to the previous system which mainly targeted teachers’ evaluation scores without feedback. These teacher leaders pointed out that the key outcome of evaluation was providing feedback to teachers by recognising their achievements and merits as well providing advice on how they could overcome or address weaknesses. In this way, “teachers could know what advantages they should make full use of and how to deal with their weaknesses” (T06), a teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) said. These teacher leaders believed that their proactive approach to evaluation could assist teachers in improving their teaching practices.

6.3.5.2 Teacher leaders’ own evaluation

Teacher leaders indicated in the interviews that they were evaluated not only at the school level, but also the district level. Their own evaluation process demonstrated both similarities and differences with the form of evaluation experienced by their fellow teachers. The ten teacher leaders indicated that they were evaluated by other

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17 The class meeting occurs in most primary schools in China. Usually the form teacher organises class meetings for a class of students weekly to summarise their performance in the past week and plan their activities for the next week.
teachers every semester, that their principal did not evaluate them formally but instead provided verbal feedback on a daily basis. Teacher leaders referred to two forms of evaluation. Firstly, because teacher leaders were also subject teachers or form teachers across all schools, they underwent an evaluation process similar to those teachers. For instance, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) described her situation, “We as teacher leaders also need to teach and publish journal articles, like the fellow teachers. So we are evaluated in the same contexts” (T02). Moreover, these teacher leaders reported that as each teacher leader was responsible for the work of one grade in their school, the performance ranking of this grade was also an element of their evaluation. For example, one teacher leader (the Director of Moral Education) noted: “The development level of the grade reflects the teacher leaders’ ability in teaching and managing” (T10).

In addition to being evaluated within their school community, the teacher leaders indicated that they were required to demonstrate their expertise in teaching, research and management within the district where they competed against other teacher leaders. According to the teacher leaders, district Education Bureau officials visited their schools and evaluated their performance every semester. For these visits, teacher leaders were required to prepare a speech about their achievements, problems and ideas, and after this presentation, the officials gave them an evaluation score. As part of the evaluation process, these officials required all teachers in the school to evaluate teacher leaders’ performance through a survey which they administered. The survey asked teachers to rank teacher leaders in different areas, such as “the school research achievements, classroom teaching, and the ranking of students’ competition with other schools” (T03). According to the teacher leaders’ reports, the district Education Bureau sent the final score form to each school to help them gain a clear understanding of the teacher leaders’ achievements so that improvements could be made at the wider school level. Therefore, these teacher leaders claimed that they were motivated to improve their abilities and qualities for school development, as well as create positive role models for teachers and students.

All of the teacher leaders claimed that their principals communicated with them individually after they received the evaluation results from the Education Bureau. According to teacher leaders’ interviews, the principals helped them to interpret and
analyse the results and assisted them to address those issues raised and resolve any problems with their work. For example, one teacher leader (the Director of Teaching Affairs) remarked: “The principal guided me to find out what work I did not deal with well, why I did not do a good job, and how to sort it out” (T07). Every teacher leader acknowledged that this type of communication was very helpful for their leadership development.

6.3.5.3 Preparation for school evaluations

All of the teacher leaders asserted that District Education Bureau made great efforts to supervise their school’s operation which included aspects to do with inspection and guidance. Teacher leaders referred to the fact that principals and teacher leaders attached great importance to the nature of supervision within the school in order to ensure the school met the accountability requirements of the District Education Bureau. The ten teacher leaders indicated that the officials from different departments of District Education Bureau visited their schools to monitor their respective areas at the end of each semester. The officials evaluated each working area based on standardised criteria and then provided feedback and advice on school improvement. One Director of Teaching Affairs provided some examples of these areas which referred to “school routine management supervision, teaching affairs supervision, moral education supervision, logistics supervision, school standardisation supervision, school feature development supervision” (T02). In addition, teacher leaders referred to other scheduled visits by officials as part of the monitoring of supervision in the school during each semester. Thus officials from the District Education Bureau were able to monitor the progress of school operations and provide prompt guidance to school work, such as “the improvement of teachers’ teaching skills, the enhancement of school conditions, the achievements of teachers’ research activities, teachers’ training achievements” (T07).

All the ten teacher leaders indicated that they prepared carefully for the supervisory visits of District Education Bureau officials. The interviews indicated that teacher leaders aimed to have all paper work available to ensure that monitoring and inspection process flowed smoothly and contributed to a positive final inspection. One Director of Moral Education explained, “if we did a good job in routine work and made a regular summary, we could quickly provide the officials of Education
Bureau with the documents regarding school’s daily work performance in the end-of-year supervision” (T10). Moreover, these teacher leaders noted that they spent a lot of time working with other teachers to discuss and write the end-of-semester and end-of-year summary reports which covered all aspects of school work. The teacher leaders suggested besides those reports, they also aimed to find out other positive ways to display school achievements, such as “videos, photos” (T04).

Contrasting attitudes emerged from the interviews about the impact of such supervision and inspection from the District Education Bureau. On the one hand, all of the teacher leaders acknowledged the positive effects of the support and guidance from Education Bureau officials. They reported that the supervision could help them identify problems and seek ways for improving their work, such as “student managing, teaching and learning” (T01). Yet, on the other hand, these teacher leaders highlighted that the supervisory visits also interfered with the normal school routine. For example, officials from different departments of the District Education Bureau carried out supervisory visits in all areas of school work during the semester and at the end of each semester. These official inspections entailed different requirements in their respective supervision areas, yet also replicated the inspection requirements of other official visits. Such practices caused a lot of repetitive work from the school staff and also interrupted the school routine. Therefore, teacher leaders were required to work closely with teachers and invest a great deal of overtime in order to prepare for the District Education Bureau inspections. Teacher leaders referred to the extra and unnecessary work load and stress for themselves and fellow teachers prompted by such inspections. One Director of Teaching Affairs referred to her working conditions, “When we were preparing for the supervision, we were largely involved in the work not related to education. This has become one main cause for our increased working pressure” (T05). The teacher leaders noted that the Bureau inspections disrupted their professional work and limited their time for professional activities such as reading books, discussing education issues with other teachers, and participating in research activities. The interviews indicated unanimous support for a more effective District Education Bureau system to monitor school accountability. For example, one Director of Teaching Affairs suggested that “it will be fantastic to keep the inspection requirements which are good for school
development and get rid of those which interfere with normal school education progress” (T08).

6.3.5.4 Summary

As discussed above, teacher leaders in this study assumed accountability in three ways. These consisted of evaluating teachers’ performance, teacher leaders’ own evaluation, and preparing for the school’s evaluation. With the implementation of school-based management, teacher leaders in Chinese schools have been delegated more responsibility and principals have allocated power through the teacher leaders in their schools to oversee and evaluate and the performance of staff and students. Yet, like principals in this study, teacher leaders’ accountability is attributed to a form of contractual accountability as a whole, which highlights the nature of control in the school governance process in this period of education reform (Halstead, 1994). The interviews revealed that teacher leaders were very aware of how important such accountability was for monitoring the implementation of curriculum change. However, when teacher leaders conducted the evaluation of teachers’ performance, particularly teaching and learning, the interview findings indicated that they were mindful of and responsive to teachers’ needs, interests, and wishes during this process. This reflects the notion of responsive accountability (Halstead, 1994) as the teacher leaders in this study emphasised their ultimate aim in the evaluation process was to promote teachers’ professional growth and the school’s development.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion of the findings relating to ten teacher leaders’ perceptions of their leadership roles in Mainland China at a time of education reform. Such leadership roles were varied and included participation in school-based decision-making, parent and community involvement, professional development, mediation, and accountability. As indicated in Figure 6.1, a new teacher leadership model was established in response to these findings in order to represent this context in Mainland China. It confirmed most findings identified in Western literature, however some new aspects also emerged in this study. For example, the notion of accountability was highly significant. The Chinese teacher leaders interviewed all emphasised the importance of accountability in their perceptions of themselves as leaders in their schools.
In this study, participation in school-based decision-making was identified as the first teacher leadership role. As the importance of teacher leaders and the workload of the principal have been increased, teacher leaders have become empowered to engage in a range of decision-making activities regarding nearly all working areas in the school. Six different kinds of decision-making were employed by teacher leaders and these embrace decisions about personnel, staff development, school-based curricular and instruction, general administration, the development of a school vision and strategic plans, and a school culture. As noted, this form of leadership, whereby teacher leaders enact the directions of the school principal and work in tandem to achieve the same goals can be considered a form of ‘parallel leadership’ (Crowther et al., 2009).

The second teacher leadership role referred to parents and community involvement. In Chinese schools, teacher leaders known as the Directors of Moral Education take on the key responsibility for communicating with parents and community members. They encourage form teachers and subject teachers to inform parents of their
children’s performance and inspire parents to contribute to schools’ development and students’ growth. Moreover, teacher leaders not only enlist the support, advice and expertise of community members, but also offer help to the community.

The third teacher leadership role was related to professional development. Teacher leaders provide opportunities and support for teachers’ professional development, such as teaching skills and managing abilities. In order to achieve the goals of professional development for school staff, teacher leaders adopted six strategies to assist teachers work collaboratively with and learn from each other. These strategies consisted of organising mentoring experiences for beginning teachers, organising and attending seminars, guiding teachers to observe other teachers’ classes, organising group discussions, guiding teachers to participate in research activities, and guiding teachers to engage in ongoing read.

The fourth teacher leadership role concerns mediation and the way in which teacher leaders connect school members with each other. Teacher leaders connect the principal, teachers, and students in a continuous cycle which has two forms—‘top-down’ (from the principal to teachers to students) and ‘bottom-up’ (from students to teachers to the principal). More specifically, the interviews indicated that teacher leaders used three main mediation strategies. These are implementing school-based decisions, communicating the requirements of teachers and students to principals, and establishing positive relationships among colleagues.

Accountability is viewed as the final teacher leadership role in this study. Teacher leaders are accountable for fellow teachers’ performance, their own performance, and their school’s operation. Thus teacher leaders exercise their accountability role in three ways—evaluating teachers’ performance, being evaluated by others (within the school and outside of it), and preparing for the school’s evaluation.

As indicated in Chapter 5, the interviews demonstrated that teacher leadership roles were also shaped by contextual factors. These factors relate to the context of globalisation, the Chinese social context, and the Chinese educational context. Consideration of these factors provides a deeper understanding of the nature of teacher leadership in Mainland China. First, globalisation has prompted a range of
changes that contributes to the importance of teacher leaders in their schools. For example, concepts of democracy and the decentralisation of power that have emerged within the context of globalisation (Sayed, 2002) provide opportunities to teacher leaders to undertake more responsibilities in leading and managing in their schools. However, as Rizvi and Lingard (2010) note, over the past two decades, educations systems across the world have undergone significant restructuring in an effort to link education policy reforms to securing national economic gains. Policy and the educational goals of policy are increasingly discussed in terms of economic constructs such as accountability, outcomes, performance indicators and quality assurance with the effect of quantifying the act of education (Crump, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Fullan, 2005). This direction has impacted on the way schools, school administrators and teacher leaders engage with education, directing their focus away from what was their traditional singular focus of student learning to incorporate a range of accountability and performance levels into their practice. The interviews with teacher leaders indicate that these global trends were evident in the local challenges they faced as leaders in their schools.

Second, as with the principals in this study, teacher leaders are also influenced by the Chinese social, cultural, economic and political context. Moreover, it could be argued that significant Confucian values continue to influence the nature of school leadership in balancing hierarchy and collectivism (Bush & Qiang, 2002). Since the implementation of China’s open-door policy and market-oriented economic reforms, some of the power of state and economic control has been devolved from the central government to provincial and local governments in an effort to accelerate their economic development. This phenomenon has also spread into the decision-making structure of District Education Bureaus and schools and has provided opportunities for principals to allocate some of their power and authority through their teacher leaders.

The current curriculum reforms have provided teacher leaders with the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise and leadership in the development of students and teachers. As principals have to take more responsibilities during the process of school-based curriculum development, teacher leaders have been empowered to implement aspects of the new curriculum program, improve school management, and
promote teacher professional development. The interview findings indicate that teacher leaders perceive their roles as strategic and significant to effecting curriculum reform.

In this broad context, teacher leadership was construed in a hierarchical and also collaborative way. It was hierarchical in that the position of teacher leader was a designated role within the school administrative system. Teacher leaders were allocated power and authority over other teachers in the school by virtue of this position. Moreover, teacher leaders acted as conduits for their principals, who maintained their authority as the most powerful figure in the school. Teacher leaders and teachers were largely involved in the traditional top-down way to contribute to teaching, learning, leaning and managing in their schools. This reflected the traditional Confucian-influenced culture which underscored the importance of respect for authority in the long history of Mainland China.

Finally, the interview findings revealed that collaboration was regarded as the heart of teacher leadership in this study. All ten teacher leaders indicated that they perceived their roles in a collaborative context and referred to a variety of collaborative activities as necessary for the successful development of a school. Teacher leaders recognised peer support as the most commonly used strategies to promote teachers’ knowledge and teaching abilities. In this study, teacher leaders were fully entitled to exercise the power of peer control (Harris & Muijs, 2002) to enhance teachers’ performance.
7.1 OVERVIEW

Chapter 7 provides the discussion and conclusion of this thesis. The first part of the chapter addresses research question three: what are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact? Thus, it provides a discussion that investigates the influence of principal leadership on teacher leaders’ roles and the influence of teacher leadership on principals’ roles. The focus of this part of the chapter is an exploration of the interaction between principal leadership and teacher leadership via micropolitical theory. The second part of the chapter provides the overall conclusion of the study. It highlights the significance of the study and identifies implications for theory, policy, and for the practice of school principals and teacher leaders in Mainland China. The study’s limitations and the directions for further research are also outlined.

7.2 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Micropolitical theory has developed as an important perspective to comprehend leadership within the context and interaction processes of schools (Ball, 1987; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Hoyle, 1982). As it is concerned with understanding both cooperative and conflictive processes that exist within the dynamics of relationships between and among people (Blase, 1991), it holds much merit for interpreting the interactions between principals and teacher leaders.

In this part of the chapter, both cooperation and conflict (core constructs following the work of Blase, 1991) are used to frame the discussion. Two important strategies for cooperation—exchange and facilitation—emerged from the interview findings. Similarly, two important strategies for conflict—enforcement and compromise—emerged from the interview findings. Each of these processes and strategies is now considered.
7.2.1 Cooperative processes

The findings in the previous two chapters clearly underscored that the micropolitical practice of cooperation, as reported in the interview accounts, was paramount in the working relationships between principals and teacher leaders and teacher leaders and teachers. As with Gurr’s (2008) and a number of other studies addressed in the literature reviews (e.g., Crowther et al., 2009; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2006), this study was based around interviews; it did not observe the actual practices and interactions of principals and teacher leaders. This caveat will be addressed more fully later in this chapter. It is argued here that school principals typically reported gaining the cooperation of teacher leaders by exerting a power through approach (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Fennell, 1999) when working with them. Power through is based on enabling or empowering others, such as teacher leaders, rather than controlling them (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Blase & Blase, 1997). In this study, based on principals’ accounts of how they worked with teacher leaders, they described examples of facilitation, negotiation, exchange, and sharing to achieve particular educational goals (Blase & Blase, 1997). All of these strategies fall under the umbrella of power through.

From the interviews with principals, examples of power with and power over in dealings with teacher leaders did not appear as frequently as examples of power through. Power through occupies the middle ground between power with and power over (Smeed et al., 2009) and in some respects can be understood as transactional in nature (Blase & Anderson, 1995). Power with, which refers to relationships that are democratic and where power is shared fully (Smeed et al., 2009), was not apparent in the comments made by principals. This is understandable for two main reasons. Firstly, while democratic reforms have been implemented in Chinese schools, China is not a fully democratic country and there is a continuing residuum of Confucian respect for hierarchy. However, secondly, principals are required to exercise contractual accountability to the system and this means that they are the main officers in schools who must ensure the school complies with mandated imperatives. For this reason, principals are required to exercise power (via their directions and decisions) to satisfy contractual accountability concerns (Smeed et al., 2009). In terms of power over, described as a type of domination or control of over others that
allows little room for negotiation or discussion, there were suggestions of this approach being used by principals in some circumstances. Yet this approach to school leadership could be said to be more reflective of governance in China prior to the recent and current education reforms. As was established in the previous two chapters, a decentralised type of school governance in China (as in many other countries in the world) has meant that a top-down approach where the principal is the chief decision-maker is no longer entirely relevant. Under school-based management, school principals in China are no longer the main decision-makers in schools; rather they are actively engaged in empowering teacher leaders to work alongside them to achieve goals. The findings of this study suggest that principals by and large report endeavouring to move away from a power over approach in their interactions with teacher leaders towards facilitative power.

In this study, cooperation between principals and teacher leaders can also be understood in terms of certain aspects of Chinese culture, in particular, the residual influence of Confucian teachings. His five virtues (Wu Chang) included benevolence (Ren), righteousness (Yi), ritual (Li), wisdom (Zhi), and integrity (Xin) (Dong, 1989). These five virtues stress the necessity of cultivating harmonious and friendly relationships between and among individuals, leading to a morally binding society. These concerns arguably still figure in the concern for shared school values and goals expressed and applied by principals and teacher leaders. Thus, both principals and teacher leaders referred to at least three of these virtues in the context of relationships with others in the school. For example, when they were addressing the need to apply respect and kindness in treating others (teachers and students) in the school context, they were applying the principle of benevolence; in the value they placed on knowledge and the respect they gave to those who were seen to be experts, they were acknowledging the principle of wisdom; and as teacher leaders and principals worked in alignment they were enacting the principle of integrity (cf. Crowther et al., 2009).

According to the interviews, it appeared that cooperation between principals and teacher leaders was made possible by certain personal and professional qualities characterised by principals and teacher leaders. For example, both principals and teacher leaders identified that principals’ personal characteristics, values, knowledge,
and ability helped to shape and influence the school and leadership within it. Here, teacher leaders highlighted the importance of principals’ personal characteristics. They indicated that when principals were “amiable and easy to approach” (T02), “cared about their colleagues” (T04), and “tolerant and generous” (T05), it brought about a harmonious and more democratic working atmosphere in the school.

Moreover, both principals and teacher leaders regarded principals as a key role model who influenced teacher leaders to learn from them in their daily work. Principals were seen as role models in terms of “working methods” (T03), “working style” (T07), and “working attitude” (P01). One teacher leader further argued that “our principal first did things well when she asked teachers to do so, such as being never late for work” (T06). As Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) demonstrate, principals who are appropriate role models for staff can contribute towards increasing the staff’s work-related motivation and capabilities.

Participants in this study claimed that principals’ values, such as “trust” (e.g., P06, P09, T03, T10), “respect” (e.g., P02, P09, T04, T05), “recognition” (e.g., P02, P03, T01, T09), and “equity, fairness and openness” (e.g., P01, P07, T04, T07), exerted a great impact on teacher leaders’ enthusiasm for work. This lends support to the idea that principals should set up a trusting relationship with teacher leaders when they distribute leadership and cultivate teacher leaders in their schools (Crowther et al., 2009; Jones, 2007; Gronn, 1996). Another pervious finding was also confirmed that principals in the United States utilise ‘respect colleagues’ as a strategy to develop teacher leadership in their schools (Birky et al., 2006).

Principals also emphasised the necessity to keep themselves up-to-date regarding their professional knowledge and skills so that they could lead and guide others. As one principal said, “a principal not learning, not reading, not thinking is definitely leading a mediocre team” (P02). This is also reflected in Western countries where principals pay considerable attention to their own professional development to achieve the development of their schools, colleagues, and students in the reform environment (Hallinger, 2003; Mangin, 2007).
Both principals and teacher leaders also reported that principals’ working attitude and outlook were influenced by teacher leaders’ characteristics, such as passion, creativity, values, spirit of utter devotion, and their knowledge and ability. These types of teacher leader qualities were conducive to a situation where cooperation and goodwill flourished. In particular, principals identified teacher leaders’ “respect and trust” (e.g., P04, P06, T05) as facilitating the smooth implementation of school-based decisions and directions. Trust has been demonstrated as a significant strategy for teachers to employ in order to support principals’ work (Edgerson et al., 2006). Principals also indicated that as most teacher leaders were younger than themselves, they were full of passion, vigour and creativity which in turn stimulated principals’ working enthusiasm. A comment was provided by a principal that “young leaders’ passion helped me pursue a more positive attitude in the work” (P07).

Principals in the sample reported that they were largely influenced by teacher leaders’ great devotion to the work. For example, one principal remarked “I was really touched by teacher leaders when they still worked in their holiday without extra salary” (P02). Most teacher leaders were also aware that it was imperative for them to possess rich knowledge and high ability in teaching and learning so that they could help fellow teachers’ development and lead the work to accomplish principals’ tasks. This idea was described effectively by one teacher leader who said: “I have to be an expert first so that I am capable to help teachers improve their professional abilities to meet the requirements of the current curriculum reform” (T06).

The discussion thus far has provided some illustrations of cooperation that were apparent between principals and teacher leaders in the study. This cooperation was based on reciprocal respect and trust and admiration for each others’ personal and professional qualities. There were many illustrations of a power through (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Fennell, 1999) approach that was used when working with teacher leaders. Such an approach is not surprising given the hierarchical nature of Chinese society on the one hand and the shift to new governance models, such as school-based management, under the current educational reform on the other hand. The next part of the discussion refers to two cooperative strategies: exchange and facilitation that principals and teacher leaders indicated they employed. Exchange is considered first.
7.2.1.1 Exchange

In this study, exchange was identified as a useful strategy to achieve the growth of both principals and teacher leaders during the cooperative processes. According to the interviews, exchange was viewed as a significant approach that participants utilised to promote their development and it mainly occurred in three ways. First, principals and teacher leaders stated they exchanged their knowledge, experience, and the latest information with each other. A teacher leader stated “principals and teacher leaders gave lectures in our school or in school leadership team to exchange our learning from external training and observation” (T03). Moreover, “reading activities” (e.g., P06, T04) were highlighted by principals and teacher leaders as ways whereby they could exchange their understandings and acquire new knowledge. Principals claimed that they also organised open and honest reflective meetings in the school in which members of the school leadership team could “learn from colleagues’ success and failure in their work” (T06). This is aligned to Gronn’s (1996) statement that sharing intimate personal knowledge contributes to build mutual reciprocity between principals and teacher leaders. Participants recognised attending these meetings was as an effective way to candidly exchange their feelings and avoid conflicts in the school.

Second, participants in this study reported that they exchanged their feelings and ideas through frequent communication in their daily work to establish what would ideally be a united and harmonious school leadership team. (As noted previously, there may indeed be some discrepancy between report and practice; further research is indicated.) One teacher leader commented on her own experience, “When I was carrying out work in the school, our principal always talked to me. In this way, I could better understand the principal’s ideas and the principal could know more about the overall operation of the school” (T02). This reflected that frequent communication between principals and teacher leaders can contribute to the successful implementation of school affairs (Anderson, 2004). However, participants in the study also pointed out the challenges such an approach can pose. One principal explained that “sometimes when I found the working methods of a member were different from mine, I did not try to exchange our ideas due to the fear of hurting his/her feelings” (P10). According to the interviews, exchange of ideas between
principals and teacher leaders, and teacher leaders and principals, was beneficial for all parties and prevented misunderstandings from occurring.

Finally, both principals and teacher leaders realised the necessity to fully utilise and learn from each others’ knowledge and skills. It is worth noting that some exchanges occurred in a non-deliberate way through observation. For example, principals and teacher leaders admitted that members of the school leadership team had different personalities, characteristics, and working methods and they were able to learn from watching them in action. As one teacher leader said, “I observed my colleagues carefully to learn from them and in turn they also learned from me in the same way” (T05). A principal illustrated his experience that “I encouraged teacher leaders to learn from others’ merits so that each member’s ability could be improved after a period of time” (P09). Participants believed that by listening to others and observing them in action, they could adopt some of their values or working methods.

7.2.1.2 Facilitation

As discussed previously, power through seemed to be the approach that principals commented on when they worked with teacher leaders to achieve their goals. A key strategy that falls under a power through approach is facilitation (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Smeed et al., 2009). In the study, both principals and teacher leaders acknowledged that facilitation was a strategy that enabled them to work so well together. Facilitation included principals’ facilitation of teacher leaders, and teacher leaders’ facilitation of principals. For example, facilitation occurred when principals provided feedback, support, and arranged resources (Blase & Blase, 1997) for teacher leaders. In turn, facilitation was apparent when teacher leaders provided guidance to principals, offered advice and ideas and in turn received principals’ support and encouragement (Birky et al., 2006). These are discussed next.

Both principals and teacher leaders reported that principals played a pivotal role in facilitating teacher leaders’ daily work and development. All participants underscored the significance of providing professional and practical resources, described here as knowledge in terms of advice and guidance, and material resources such as professional development activities, books and other equipment. For example, a principal used three words to summarise principals’ facilitation in work
as “direction, guidance, and modelling” (P04). Other comments illustrated that principals gave teacher leaders “advice and guidance” (e.g., P05, T01), offered teacher leaders opportunities for their professional learning, such as “external training and book reading” (e.g., P10, T07), and conducted “supervision and evaluation” (e.g., P07, T03) on teacher leaders to improve their working abilities and the quality of the work. Moreover, principals in the sample stated that they made great efforts to create a positive working environment conducive for teacher leaders’ learning. Participants showed that principals tried to improve the office environment, such as “setting up classroom buildings” (T03), and “purchasing computers” (P07). Teacher leaders in the sample recognised that these ways were effective to help them achieve professional growth and promote school development.

Similarly, both principals and teacher leaders also identified the strong facilitation from teacher leaders to support principals’ work. Participants stated that teacher leaders proposed good ideas to principals during the process of decision-making. Principals reported that they provided teacher leaders with scope to investigate areas to discuss and created a more inclusive environment for teacher leaders to speak out freely in the leadership team meetings. A principal uncovered the reason why she endeavoured to collect teacher leaders’ ideas. She said that “listening to teacher leaders’ voice could use the collective wisdom and make me avoid unnecessary mistakes” (P01). Additionally, principals in the study particularly underscored teacher leaders’ role in implementing school-based policy to support principals’ work. One teacher leader showed her understanding that “if teacher leaders could not adequately implement school decisions, the leadership of principals would fail in the school’s operation” (T06). This finding strengthened the argument of several researchers that principals are more likely to deal with school affairs effectively with the support from teacher leaders (Anderson, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Yukl, 1998).

Teacher leaders emphasised that principals were involved in facilitating teacher leaders to achieve their goals by igniting their passion, vigour, and interest for the work. Principals and teacher leaders indicated that principals were concerned about the feelings of teacher leaders and were engaged in providing verbal encouragement” (T04), “praising teacher leaders for their achievements” (P05), “offering certificates of honour” (T09), and “caring about their family life” (P10) to relieve teacher
leaders’ working pressure and to make them feel more contented in their work. Similar strategies have been mentioned in other research studies, such as providing verbal support with their tasks to teacher leaders (Birky et al., 2006) and offering emotional support to teacher leaders (Edgerson et al., 2006). Principals reported that their care for teacher leaders contributed to teacher leaders’ enormous enthusiasm to support their work and a sense of belonging to the school. However, teacher leaders’ emotional facilitation to principals was not mentioned in the interviews.

7.2.1.3 Summary of cooperative processes

In this study, cooperative processes largely permeated the reported relationships between principals and teacher leaders. Two important cooperative strategies that participants referred to were exchange and facilitation. The findings revealed that participants acknowledged the mutual support that teacher leaders provided to principals to perform their responsibilities and school management (Johnson, 2006), as well as noting that principals were more actively involved in supporting and encouraging teacher leaders when teacher leadership was exerted through the school (Crowther et al., 2009).

The main purpose of undertaking these strategies was promoting staff growth, assisting them to carry out their daily work effectively, and pushing forward the development of their school. However, principals’ significant role in supporting teacher leaders and sharing leadership to increase school effectiveness and develop staff expertise (Mangin, 2007) as well as improve student achievements (Lambert, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Schmoker, 2007) is more emphasised in Western research studies. These studies reflected the emphasis of principals and teacher leaders on the power of a team in which members cooperated based on the division of responsibilities and internal solidarity. Participants all expected an effective teamwork and collaboration to achieve effective work and the sense of belonging. Collaboration as a significant element to influence principals’ support to teacher leaders is also highlighted in existing literature (e.g. Birky et al., 2006; Steel & Craig, 2006; Daley, 2002).

7.2.2 Conflictive processes

According to Blase and Anderson (1995), cooperation and conflict are two key features of micropolitics. As already noted, in this study, there were many
illustrations provided by principals and teacher leaders that suggested cooperation characterised their relationship. However, there was a small number of illustrations provided by both parties of conflict and this emerged when principals and teacher leaders could not reach an agreement in a discussion about a particular matter.

In order to resolve situations where differences of opinion were evident, the principals in this study indicated that they had, at different times, employed a power over approach with teacher leaders. Power over is a traditional type of power used in decision-making (Fennell, 1999) where power is concentrated in the hands of principals who make decisions by themselves and forced teacher leaders to accept their ideas.

Influenced by traditional Chinese culture and the hierarchical education system, principals recalled times when they acted in an authoritative way and ensured that teacher leaders were compliant with their wishes. In traditional Chinese society under Confucianism, social members are tied to a hierarchical pattern influenced by five relationships (Wu Lun) which comprise social relations between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friend and friend (Tu, 1998). Authority, obedience, and loyalty are three behaviours that characterise this hierarchical configuration as a dominant-subservient relationship (Wang, 2008). According to the interviews, the legacy of these traditional ideas could still be felt within the relationship between principals and teacher leaders since teacher leaders were expected to respect and obey principals who occupied the highest position within the school.

Moreover, since the implementation of the Principal Responsibility System in 1985, principals have been afforded more power and greater decision-making in the school setting. Yet, this situation sometimes caused conflict for principals who on the one hand were required to share power and empower teacher leaders to participate in decision-making, yet on the other, continued to enforce control and exercise ultimate power in the school. One principal commented that “Principals have the unchallenged supremacy in the school. Once principals’ command is issued, teacher leaders are required to accept it and carry it out” (P01). Thus conflict emerged and
two strategies that were called upon were enforcement and compromise. These are considered next.

### 7.2.2.1 Enforcement

As principals and teacher leaders indicated, principals relied upon enforcement as one strategy to enlist teacher leaders’ cooperation. In these circumstances, principals held tight power. Participants in this study claimed that when an agreement could not be reached in the leadership team, principals sometimes utilised the strategy of enforcement to ensure that school staff accepted their ideas and carried out their decisions. According to the interviews, enforcement demonstrated principals’ dominance through the process of decision-making based on considering conditions, such as “the overall situation of the school” (P06) and “the benefits to the majority of staff” (T05) in their schools. Principals in the sample agreed that principals must possess legitimate authority or power to make final decisions, as they were not only the formal leaders in the school but also they had greater knowledge and experience than others. As an illustration, one principal announced that “the principal is the person who is most able to represent the school” (P10).

In the current study, principals reported that they also enforced decisions and directives on teacher leaders in some situations. These situations consisted of carrying out “education guidelines and policies” (P02) formulated by Education Bureau, “rules and regulations” (T08) issued in the school, and “very tiny decisions” (P09) made by principals themselves. This strategy referred to enforcement without consideration given to conditions, such as without listening to teacher leaders’ ideas and suggestions. This was reflected in the study of Birky et al. (2006) whereby principals sometimes control teacher leaders’ use of power, so that teacher leadership initiatives were restrained by principals.

These principals and teacher leaders realised that enforcement could lead to inadequate implementation of decisions and interpersonal problems due to conflict among different needs of teacher leaders. Therefore, principals claimed that they strove to strengthen communication with teacher leaders and thus lessened or resolved the conflict. Principals also deemed that although enforcement triggered
conflict, it was used as an efficient management technique to speed up the work implementation in their schools.

7.2.2.2 Compromise

In the current study, participants claimed that teacher leaders had to compromise themselves when they were in conflict with principals on significant issues that mattered to the development of their schools. In this situation, principals insisted their opinions were considered crucial to school development. However, teacher leaders stated that they were reluctant to perform some tasks distributed by principals for reasons such as “the heavy workloads” (T04), “different education concepts” (T03), and “different ideas for problem resolution” (T07). Participants indicated that while principals’ opinions and directions were likely to contribute to effective school operations, principals’ determination to get their own way was likely to trigger some resentment and even resistance amongst teacher leaders.

Participants in this study reported that principals considered the views of the majority and compromised with teacher leaders in decision-making when they had disagreements on non-principled school issues. As participants indicated, principals’ compromise occurred when “these school issues were not essential to the school development” (P04), or “teacher leaders’ ideas were much better than principals” (T09). These participants agreed that principals generally compromised with teacher leaders and accepted their suggestions; doing so stimulated the working enthusiasm of teacher leaders. Moreover, teacher leaders viewed this strategy as a great source of encouragement to their work. Teacher leaders also claimed that the more democratic environment principals aimed to cultivate encouraged them to devote themselves to their work with creativity and activity.

7.2.2.3 Summary of conflictive processes

In the current study, conflict was apparent when there were different views between principals and teacher leaders. However, based on the reports provided by principals and teacher leaders, cooperation rather than conflict seemed to characterise most relationships between school principals and teacher leaders. However, when conflict did arise, the two strategies of enforcement and compromise were employed by participants. Although both principals and teacher leaders exerted enforcement and compromise in different situations, the final authority lay in the principals’ hands.
This finding confirmed the argument of York-Barr and Duke (2004) that principals are located in the dominant position in principal-teacher connections where principals hold the greatest power in the relationship. Indeed, it could be argued that due to their formal authority in the school, they steer the micropolitical processes to a great degree.

7.2.3 Summary

Research question three asked what are principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of how their roles interact? In this study, it was evident from their interviews that cooperative and conflictive processes underpinned the relationship between principals and teacher leaders in primary schools in Mainland China. Principals and teacher leaders reported employing exchange and facilitation as two strategies in cooperative processes; and they adopted enforcement and compromise in conflictive processes. Overall, however, it is worth noting that principals and teacher leaders in this study highlighted the central role of cooperation in their daily interactions.

Influenced by the traditional Confucian doctrine which underscores the importance of respecting and obeying authority figures, such as principals, however, teacher leaders were reluctant to reveal too many examples of conflictive situations that took place. This issue, along with the evident high degree of conformity between responses by principals and teacher leaders, is addressed later in this chapter.

With that caveat in mind, drawing on the research in this current study, it is argued that under the ongoing Chinese education reform, the connection between principals and teacher leaders has been strengthened. Principals reported expanding their work responsibilities to be more actively involved in activities that contributed to the professional capability development of school staff and themselves. The role of principals has undertaken dramatic change “from manager to supporter” (P04), therefore, the relationship between principals and subordinates has gradually transformed “from strained to harmonious” (P08).

Additionally, under educational reform, principals reported tending to distribute power and decision-making to members of the school leadership team instead of controlling everything themselves. Teacher leaders have largely engaged in school-
based decision-making processes and exerting power in managing teachers and students. In order to rekindle teacher leaders’ enthusiasm to support their work, principals placed great trust in teacher leaders and ensured they had opportunities to lead in the school. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (1999) summarised that teacher leaders devote more efforts into work to respond to principals who delegate more power to them. This seemed to be the case in this study.

While conflict was identified by participants, it was not apparent to a great extent. However, conflict was said to emerge when principals and teacher leaders had differences of opinion about aspects of the curriculum reform. In this situation, principals were more likely to have strong control over the leadership practices in the school. By the same token, principals indicated they compromised on matters that were not crucial to school development. It may well be, however, for reasons addressed above, that the amount of conflict is greater in practice than was reported by participants.

Along with the overarching effects of economic globalisation and national and transnational corporatist capitalism, Western cultural influences have increasingly permeated Asian thought and practice. These changes, adapted or modified for national cultural and political processes, are exemplified by China’s membership of the World Trade Organisation and its continuing political push to develop a ‘socialist market economy’ (Li, 2006). In education, it is evident in the degree to which recent developments in Chinese education policy, curriculum, and pedagogy indicate a substantial degree of assimilation of Western educational thought and practice (Shi & Zhang, 2008). Figure 7.1 summarises the findings of research question 3 which was concerned with how principals and teacher leaders interact. The next part of the chapter provides a conclusion to the study.
7.3 CONCLUSIONS

This section draws conclusions about the study. It has five parts and these include significance of the study, implications for the study, limitations of the study, directions for further study, and thesis conclusion.

7.3.1 Significance of the study

The impetus for this study came from a spate of international and Chinese education reforms that have had a significant impact upon the leadership of education systems. Of interest to this study were the education reforms initiated in Mainland China since 2001 and the impact of these reforms on formal leaders in schools: namely principals and teacher leaders. Not surprisingly, in both policy documents and research, new roles for principals and teacher leaders have been identified where they have been recognised as the key players in bringing about effective implementation of the new reform (Ma & Ma, 2003).
When compared with a growing body of literature on school leadership within Western countries, the literature on principal leadership and teacher leadership in Mainland China is limited. To date there has been a limited body of research that has examined the status of school principals in Mainland China (Ribbins & Zhang, 2004). In particular, there is little systematic empirical research that has investigated principal leadership roles in primary schools or teacher leadership roles for that matter. Thus, this study was significant as it has met a gap in the research literature by exploring principals’ and teacher leaders’ perceptions of their roles and the perceived intersection between their roles.

7.3.2 Implications for the study

The next section considers the implications of the study’s findings for theory, educational policy, and practice.

7.3.2.1 Implications for theory: towards a new model

This study used a conceptual framework that drew upon scholars’ work from Western countries to try to encapsulate principals’ roles, teacher leaders’ roles, and the interaction between the two. Role theory was employed to understand the various “behaviour patterns or roles” (Biddle, 1986, p.67) enacted by participants in their daily interactions. Principals and teacher leaders have been shown to behave in different ways based on their respective roles in school positions of leadership within the Chinese context and even the broader international context (Biddle, 1986). The reason for drawing so heavily on Western research and theory was that the area of principal and teacher leadership in Mainland China continues to be under-theorised. Also, given the influences of globalisation on Chinese education and the adaptation of Western models of curriculum and pedagogy to the Chinese context, as addressed earlier in this study, the manifest influence and relevance of Western research and theory is self-evident.

The framework, then, integrated four roles of principal leadership, five roles of teacher leadership, and two main dimensions of their interaction. The relatively comprehensive leadership model put forward by Gurr (2008) was utilised as a basis to explore the principal leadership roles in Chinese context. The findings confirmed Gurr’s (2008) model that the four roles were important dimensions of school principals’ work both in Western countries and Mainland China. These roles
included learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability. More importantly, some sub-roles that emerged from the data were uniquely Chinese, such as school culture construction, school feature construction, and all-round learning of students. These aspects are addressed shortly.

In seeking to understand the nature of teacher leadership, this research confirmed most findings identified in Western literature (e.g., Day & Harris, 2002; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Leithwood et al., 1999;Muijs & Harris, 2006; Smylie, 1992). For example, it confirmed the findings of Western literature in that teacher leaders in Mainland China were involved in decision-making, working with parents and community members, undertaking and planning professional development for staff, and mediating with others. However, some new aspects, such as teacher leadership accountability, to be addressed shortly, also emerged in this study. Analysis of the interviews with ten teacher leaders provided rich insights into the complexity of the leadership roles they played in their schools at a time of curriculum change in China.

The final component of the conceptual framework drew upon some insights from micropolitics and, in particular, utilised two core constructs: cooperation and conflict (Blase, 1991) to explore the interactions between principals and teacher leaders. The findings of this study demonstrated that principals mainly exerted a power through or facilitative leadership approach when they worked with teacher leaders. Principals also indicated there were times when they drew upon a power over approach with teacher leaders to achieve their goals (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

While the conceptual framework was relevant since it helped to interpret the findings of the study that were concerned with leadership in a Chinese context, in other ways it was limited. This is understandable given that leadership is a reflection of the wider cultural context within which it is located. An important implication of this study, then, was the development of a new conceptual framework that reflects the findings of the study. It is argued that this revised theoretical framework makes an important contribution to knowledge. The framework is presented in Figure 7.2 below.
Figure 7.2. The conceptual framework of the study.
As indicated in Figure 7.2, this framework is a revision of the earlier framework presented in Chapter 3. Highlighted in the discussion that follows are the uniquely Chinese findings that emerged. Within principals’ leadership roles are three important additions. Firstly, under symbolic and cultural awareness, school culture construction can be found. This referred to the very deliberate process in which principals and their staff talked openly about, and were involved in, creating a positive school climate comprising a spiritual, material, and system dimension. Under the role of future orientation, school feature construction emerged. This referred to the process that principals and staff used to make their school distinctive and different from other schools and included features such as the school’s philosophy, the school-based curriculum, and other features. The final addition to the principal’s role in the new framework is all-round learning of students which appeared under the role: learning and teaching. All principals in the study stressed the importance of their role which was concerned with improving the comprehensive quality of students through moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetics, and labour education. Since the reform, this learning has meant students’ all-round development rather than just student examination scores.

In terms of teacher leadership, the revised framework has included the role of accountability for teacher leaders. The findings in the study suggest that teacher leaders in China play a very active role in evaluating their fellow teachers’ performance and their school’s operation. This lies in contrast to schools in some Western countries where teacher accountability tends to be a responsibility of members of the senior administrative team (Dempster, 2000). However, teacher leaders’ accountability is dominated by school principals and education bureaus, which is characterised as contractual accountability (Halstead, 1994).

Finally, in terms of the interaction between principals and teacher leaders, the revised conceptual framework has added two sub-dimensions each under the core micropolitical processes of cooperation and conflictive processes. Within cooperation, were clear examples of exchange and facilitation; and within conflict were strategies of enforcement and compromise. As was argued earlier in the thesis, the nature and focus of principals’ and teacher leaders’ roles in Mainland China as they were recounted by participants in the study can be explained by the effects of
globalisation, here the influence of Western research and theory in education on pedagogy and curriculum; the continuing influences of traditional Chinese culture, in particular, Confucianism; and most recently, Chinese educational reform. All of these wider contextual factors helped to shape the leadership practices that were described in the study. The next part of the chapter considers the implications for policy.

7.3.2.2 Implications for policy

Currently, there are several important educational policy documents that guide the performance of school leaders in Chinese schools. Among these are *Decisions on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* in 1999 and the *Decisions on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* in 2001 (State Council of the PRC, 1999, 2001). These policies, which are moving towards national standards for principals and teachers, stipulate what principals should do and how they should lead their schools. The findings of this study revealed that while policy provides important guidelines for practitioners it is limited for the reason that the work of school leaders and teacher leaders is complex and multilayered. In other words, policy is far removed from the existential meanings of leadership as it is lived and enacted. The principals and teacher leaders in this study provided rich accounts of their roles, responsibilities and activities as they led their schools. Their rich descriptions provided important insights into the nature of school leadership within Mainland China. Thus, an important implication of this study for policy makers, then, is that leadership is not a technical or simplistic process; it needs to be understood as a moral and human endeavour that relies on goodwill and good relationships between principals and teacher leaders and other members of the school community.

Another important implication of the study for policy makers is the recognition that teacher leaders are invaluable members of a school community. Their support to school principals is vital for effective school functioning. Indeed, as was found in this study, teacher leaders exercise leadership in alignment with principals to achieve good school performance. This finding supports the work of the Australian researchers, Crowther et al. (2009), regarding the alignment of teacher and principal leadership.
The findings of this study indicated that some educational policy initiatives could not be successfully implemented in practice. For example, both principals and teacher leaders in this study claimed that some expressions in the policy document were too vague which triggered confusion and difficulty for them to carry it out. Therefore, a further implication of this study is to consider the feasibility and practicability of the policy initiatives so that educators are able to follow them in their practical work.

7.3.2.3 Implications for practice

The results of this study provided informative insights about how principals and teacher leaders enact their roles and how their roles interact. It is argued that these findings have important implications for practitioners (both principals and teacher leaders) in Mainland China to reflect on their beliefs and practices. Principals and teacher leaders should be able to find out effective ways to undertake their roles, to support each other, and to establish a harmonious and efficient working relationship. In particular, the mutual support between principals and teacher leaders is expected to be strengthened to effectively implement the current education reform. Moreover, it is crucial to connect schools to parents and communities in this increasingly open society.

A further important implication is that it is essential to enhance the professional development of principals and teacher leaders to adapt to the changing and complex policy, curriculum, and pedagogical environment. If not, aims like ‘quality education’, ‘student-centred education’, and ‘all-round development of students’ proposed in education reform could finally become empty political rhetoric. Thus this study may help education authorities at the school, provincial, and national level to reflect on current strengths and weaknesses in professional development programs and to identify some key areas for further development. Professional development programs cannot be limited to traditional training courses and seminars. Various forms are suggested to facilitate their professional development, such as workshops, field observation, and online communication. The purpose of these professional development activities is not restricted to studying policy documents or the latest educational theories and practices. They are indispensable in developing the capacity for critical reflection, enabling professional networks, and enabling the application of theory into practice. However, for principals and teacher leaders to question
traditional ideas and assimilate new concepts in the current education reform implies incremental change rather than a revolutionary process. The next part of the discussion considers the limitations of the study.

7.3.3 Limitations of the study

All studies have limitations and this study was no exception. There were three main limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it is not possible to generalise the results of this study due to the small sample population of participants (i.e., 10 principals and 10 teacher leaders) and research sites. Moreover, the sample of participants was drawn from two cities in Shandong province which is a highly urbanised coastal area in Mainland China. The schools from which participants were drawn were deemed effective schools by members of the community. It is acknowledged that there is a dramatic difference in schools between urban areas and rural areas, and also between eastern (coastal) provinces and western provinces. Therefore, the findings of this study, as well as the implications that were raised for policy makers and practitioners, should be considered cautiously by people in other cities of Shandong province and other provinces in Mainland China.

The second limitation of the study refers to the reliance on interviews and documents alone as the prime data resources. While it is recognised that this approach is an acceptable research method, as evidenced by its wide use in studies reported in Chapter 3 (e.g., Gurr, 2008; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2006), the high degree of consonance in results between principals and teacher leaders suggest that the data collection method of observations or a more ethnographic approach may have yielded different sets of insights. This is a significant issue for the following reasons. While the use of interviews proved to be an effective data collection device, it appeared to the researcher that participants may have steered their responses to the more positive aspects of leadership rather than the more contentious. For example, teacher leaders were very careful about what they said and were reluctant to say things that were too critical of their principal. This can be explained in a couple of ways in which the nature of Chinese culture is critical. First, participants were not familiar with the researcher—a stranger who would be reporting on their school—so they wanted to impress her by highlighting positive aspects of the role. Second, there was a possible consequence of Confucian respect for authority and hierarchy in
concurring with their perceived understanding of the views of the principal. Third, as
they were chosen by principals who also participated in the study, they may have
been afraid to speak too freely in case their comments may have travelled back to
their principals. As noted above, participant observation or some other form of
ethnographic study would be an appropriate follow-up to this study.

A further possible shortcoming of the study relates to issues of translation. This issue
has been addressed. All data, including interviews and documents, gathered for this
study were in Chinese. This required the researcher to translate these materials from
Chinese to English. While the researcher made a great effort to translate carefully
and check each word for its proper meaning, it is possible that some errors and
misinterpretations could still have been present during the process. Thus, the strategy
of translation and back-translation was adopted to ensure the quality of translation in
this study. An example of the procedure of interview transcripts translation and back-
translation is provided in Appendix D.

7.3.4 Directions for further study

The findings of this study identified and discussed the roles of principal leadership
and teacher leadership, as well as their interaction in ten urban primary schools in
two cities in Mainland China. It is suggested here that further research is required
that builds on from this study and adds to the small but slowly growing empirical
research in the field of school leadership in Mainland China. Five key
recommendations for further research are now identified:

1. There is great disparity between regions and between schools in Mainland
   China. It is recommended that future studies be conducted to explore the
   leadership roles of school leaders in rural areas and less developed regions in
   Mainland China. Research that focuses on less developed regions would
   create a broader understanding regarding school leadership roles in different
   school contexts and lead to more effective resolutions for greater equity and
   quality.

2. It is evident that there are many factors that impact on principal leadership
   roles and teacher leadership roles in Mainland China. It is recommended that
future studies explore a wider range of factors that help to shape leadership as it is enacted by principals and teacher leaders.

3. Part of this study’s focus was an exploration of the relationship between principals and teacher leaders in a school leadership team. It is recommended that an in-depth study be conducted that further investigates the dynamics and micropolitical dimensions underpinning the relationship between principals and teacher leaders. Related to this recommendation is research that explores the micropolitical dimensions that underpin the relationship between teacher leaders and teachers in schools. This type of investigation would be very interesting as it would demonstrate teacher leaders’ influence on teachers and teachers’ influence on teacher leaders.

4. As noted above, the findings of this study, based as they are on interviews, may have presented a too positive view of the actual practices of principals and teacher leaders and their interactions. Hence, further research based on observation and participation in school processes should provide a more comprehensive understanding of these issues.

5. This study used a qualitative approach to explore principals’ roles, teacher leaders’ roles, and their mutual interaction. It is recommended that a quantitative methodology be utilised so that a much greater sample size of participants can participate and a wider range of issues can be addressed. It will then be possible to make some important generalisations about the nature of principal leadership and teacher leadership in different areas of Mainland China.

To conclude, the results of the present study revealed contemporary principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles, and how these roles interact through a case-study qualitative approach. However, more research regarding this field is still needed. It is necessary to establish a broader empirical base for understanding and explaining the nature of principal leadership and teacher leadership in Chinese context. Future research can continue to construct principal leadership and teacher leadership in less developed regions, exploring their influential factors, investigating
their micropolitical dimensions, and utilising other research methods, such as observation and survey. These, to a large extent, will provide evidence to validate and extend the findings obtained in this thesis.


reforms and changing governance in Chinese societies (pp. 3–17). Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong.


Appendices

Appendix A
The consent form (English version)

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND TEACHER LEADERS INTERVIEW

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Officer on 3138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- agree to participate in the project
- understand that the project will include audio recording and give permission for this

Name ________________________________

Signature __________________________________

Date ___________ / ___________ / ___________
昆士兰科技大学(QUT)研究项目同意书

校长与教师的互动研究（访谈）

同意声明:

同意签署以下协议:
● 您已经阅读并了解了本研究项目的相关信息。
● 您提出的问题都得到了满意的答复。
● 如果您有其他问题，请联系研究小组。
● 您可以自由决定参与或退出研究，不会受到任何指责和处罚。
● 如果您对此研究的伦理道德问题有任何疑问，可以致电昆士兰科技大学研究
伦理主任+61731385123，或发邮件至ethicscontact@qut.edu.au。
● 您同意参加此项目。
● 您知道该项目将包括录音，并给此权限。

姓名

签名

日期 ______ / ______ / ______
Appendix B
The information sheet (English version)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION for QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND TEACHER LEADERS INTERVIEW

Research Team Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctor of Philosophy Student: Yaxing Zhang</th>
<th>Primary Supervisor: Dr Lisa Catherine Ehrich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
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<td>Phone: 61 7 3138 3038</td>
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<td>61 0431311587 (mobile in Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:yaxing.zhang@student.qut.edu.au">yaxing.zhang@student.qut.edu.au</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:l.ehrich@qut.edu.au">l.ehrich@qut.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of PhD project for Yaxing Zhang. The project is funded by Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

The purpose of this project is to present in-depth description about the practices of principals and teacher leaders in Chinese primary schools. This study anticipates providing a useful reference for further understanding principal leadership roles, teacher leadership roles and the interaction between them, with the purpose of bridging the knowledge gap regarding the study of educational leaders in mainland China. Semi-structured interviews with the principal and teacher leader working in Chinese primary schools will be undertaken to obtain insights into the practices of school leaders and teachers.

This information sheet describes the project. Please read it carefully before deciding whether to participate.

Participation

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate or to not participate in this study will in no way affect your current or future relationship with Queensland University of Technology.

Field work for this project will be conducted in selected school sites over a period of four weeks. Your participation will involve an in-depth face-to-face interview. For each principal and teacher leader, one interview will be conducted. It is anticipated that all interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews can be scheduled at a mutually convenient time at your workplace so as minimize disruption to your daily teaching activities.
**Expected benefits**
This project may not benefit you directly, but it will provide a useful reference for further understanding principal leadership, teacher leadership and their interaction to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the study of school leaders in Mainland China. Participation in the study may contribute to the professional development of primary school principals and teacher leaders by providing an opportunity to reflect their leadership practices.

**Risks**
There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day school attendance associated with your participation in this project.

**Confidentiality**
All comments and responses will be treated confidentially. The names of individual persons and each school will be replaced by pseudonyms. No one other than the researcher will know whether or not you have participated in this study.

The interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. Once the interviews are completed and transcribed, you will be given a copy of your interview text for your perusal, comments, additions and/or amendments. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets. Only the members of research team can access this raw data. The outcome of the field study will be written up in the researcher’s doctoral thesis.

**Consent to Participate**
We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

**Questions / further information about the project**
Please contact the researcher Yaxing Zhang to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

**Concerns / complaints regarding the conduct of the project**
QUT is committed to researcher integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Officer on +61 7 3138 5123 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The Research Ethics Officer is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.
校长与教师的互动研究（访谈）

研究小组联系方式

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>主导师: Dr Lisa Catherine Ehrich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>博士生: 张亚星</td>
<td>昆士兰科技大学教育学院</td>
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<tr>
<td>昆士兰科技大学教育学院</td>
<td>电话号码: 61731383038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>电话号码: 15011488037 (中国手机)</td>
<td>电话号码: 610431311587 (澳大利亚手机)</td>
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<td>邮箱: <a href="mailto:yaxing.zhang@student.qut.edu.au">yaxing.zhang@student.qut.edu.au</a></td>
<td>邮箱: <a href="mailto:Lehrich@qut.edu.au">Lehrich@qut.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

研究介绍

该研究项目为张亚星研究项目的一部分，该项目由昆士兰科技大学（QUT）提供研究经费。

该研究的目的在于深入了解新课程改革背景下中国小学校长和教师在学校中的实践活动。这一研究主要调查校长领导角色，教师领导角色，以及校长和教师领导者之间互动的现状和变化，以期最终建立相应的理论模型。当前，国内此领域的研究非常欠缺，本研究目的在于弥补这一不足，为校长和教师领导者建立良好的工作关系提供支持，从而推动学校有效的开展新课程改革，实现更好的发展。研究将对中国公立小学校长和教师进行访谈，以获得他们对自身行为的理解。访谈获得的信息也将用于开发一份校长和教师的调查问卷。此信息表对本研究项目进行了介绍。请仔细阅读，然后决定是否参加。

参与

您是自愿参与这一项目。如果您不同意参加此项目，可以随时退出，不会受到任何指责和处罚。您参与或不参与此项目的决定绝不会影响您现在或将来与昆士兰科技大学的关系。

该研究项目将在选定的学校进行为期四周的数据收集工作。您将参与面对面的深度访谈，访谈时间大约为90-120分钟。访谈地点将会安排在您的工作场所，访谈时间将定于双方都方便的时间，以尽量减少对您日常教学和管理工作的干扰。

预期收益

这一研究项目可能不会对您产生直接的收益，但是它会提供一个进一步了解中国小学校长领导、教师领导以及双方互动的资料，以弥补中国大陆对于学校领导研究的不足。同时，参与这项研究有助于小学校长和教师的专业发展，并为他们提升自身的领导行为提供了机会。

风险

在此次调查期间，您的参与不会对您的正常工作产生任何风险。
机密性
您的所有意见和答复均会被绝对保密。您的姓名和学校名称将由假名替代。

此外，对访谈内容的音频录音将得到您的允许再进行。一旦完成访谈的音频内容向文本内容的转录，您会得到一份访谈内容的文本资料供您查阅，提出意见，补充或修改。访谈的音频录音将被存储在昆士兰科技大学有密码保护的电脑中，访谈转录的文本内容将会安全存放在上锁的文件柜中，只有研究小组成员可以查阅这些原始数据。本研究结果将被写入研究人员的博士论文中。

同意参加
我们想请您签署一份书面同意书（见附件），以确认您同意参加此项目。

关于项目的问题/进一步信息
如果您有任何问题需要回答，或如果您需要本研究的进一步资料，请与张亚星联系。

对项目实施的关注/投诉
昆士兰科技大学致力于研究的完整性和研究项目实施的道德性。如果您有任何问题或对此研究的伦理道德行为的投诉，请致电昆士兰科技大学研究伦理主任+61731385123，或发邮件至ethicscontact@qut.edu.au。研究伦理主任与此研究项目没有关联，从而能够公正的解决您所关心的问题。
Appendix C
Semi-structured interview schedule

Section One: The roles of principal leadership

Participants: school principal and formal teacher leaders

Interview questions:
1. What constitutes the core work of school principals?

作为校长，您的核心工作有哪些?

This question is designed to achieve a holistic understanding the experience of school principals.

2. What do you understand by the term “principal leadership” in relation to your work?

结合您的工作，您如何理解“校长领导力”这个词?

This question is expected to guide the participants to focus on the leadership field concerning principals and to gain participants’ perspective on principal leadership.

3. How do you perceive the principal’s work in learning and teaching? Does it include instruction supervision, teacher support, wider knowledge, or decision-making?

在教学领域，您的工作是如何开展的？您在教学指导，支持教师发展，自身专业发展，以及决策等方面都做了哪些工作？

In Gurr’s (2008) model of principal leadership role, “learning and teaching” is recognised as a significant leadership role that principals play in order to guarantee students’ opportunities in quality learning. It refers to four leadership functions that focus on instruction supervision, teacher support, the wide knowledge of principals, and establishing effective decision-making process (Gurr, 2008).

4. How do you perceive the significance of the principal’s cultural awareness? Does it include your values, parents and community involvement, caring students and teachers, marketing of school, or symbolism?

您是如何开展学校文化建设的？您的价值观产生了哪些影响？您在与家长和社区合作，关注教师和学生，以及学校市场化方面都做了哪些工作？

According to Gurr’s (2008) model, “symbolic and cultural awareness” is an important principal leadership role, which refers to how school and community
cultures and symbolism are underscored as significant factors principals to be aware of and employ. Therefore this aspect of leadership role is concerned with spreading the range of values in the broad school community, focusing on parents and community, focusing on student and teachers. It also relates to the marketing of school and symbolism which signifies the symbolic expressions of principals (Gurr, 2008).

5. **How do you perceive the principal’s awareness of preparing the school for the future? Does it include vision or responsiveness?**

   在学校未来发展方面，您的工作是如何开展的？您在制定学校发展规划和应对外界变化等方面都做了哪些工作？

   In Gurr’s (2008) model, another leadership role namely “future orientation” is related to realising future opportunities with the aim of achieving the school’s sustainable development. It highlights the link between a shared school vision and the responsiveness to changes in educational environment (Gurr, 2008).

6. **How do you perceive the principal’s accountability?**

   您是如何应对上级检查的？您是如何考核教师的？

   Based on Gurr’s (2008) model, “accountability” is considered as an important facet of the principal’s leadership role. It consists of three facets. The first facet underlines the principal’s accountability to the school council and government. The second aspect relates to how school leaders make transparent processes to do with the school’s accountability to community and government. This purpose of accountability may be expressed to evaluate school programs in terms of utilizing school charter and making resource allocation decisions. The third facet refers to ensuring that teachers are accountable to the principal. The explicit application of this accountability has accompanied the development of teacher appraisal progress and the monitoring of teachers’ delegated tasks (Gurr, 2008).
Section Two: The roles of teacher leadership

Participants: school principal and formal teacher leaders

Interview questions:

1. What constitutes the core work of teachers officially designated as teacher leaders?

   您作为正式任命的中层领导，核心工作包括哪些?

   This question is created to acquire a preliminary understanding of the distinct work that teacher leaders’ assume both as teachers and leaders.

2. What do you understand by the term “teacher leadership” in relation to your work?

   结合您的工作，您如何理解“教师领导力”这个词?

   It also aims to lead the interview direction to focus on teacher leadership so as to obtain participants’ perspective on teacher leadership.

3. How do you perceive teacher leaders participating in decision-making?

   您是如何参与学校决策的?

   Participation in decision-making is a critical element of teacher leadership in this study, and has often emerged in the literature (see for example, Barth, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Smylie & Denny, 1990). In the current study, four dimensions of participation in decision-making will be used following Smylie’s (1992) research; they are personnel decisions, curricular and instructional decisions, staff development decisions, and general administrative decisions.

4. How do you perceive teacher leaders working with parents and community?

   在学校与家长和社区合作方面，您的工作是如何开展的?

   Teacher leadership roles operate within and beyond schools, which means that they include not only dealing with the affairs in the school, but also working outside the school with parents and the community (Cranston, 2000; Lambert, 1998; Paulu & Winters, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this study, parent and community involvement consists of encouraging parents to participate in school affairs and enlisting their cooperation and support.

5. What do you understand by the term “professional development”? How important is this for teacher leaders?

   您是如何开展教师专业发展工作的?

   Teacher leadership roles operate within and beyond schools, which means that they include not only dealing with the affairs in the school, but also working outside the school with parents and the community (Cranston, 2000; Lambert, 1998; Paulu & Winters, 1998; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In this study, parent and community involvement consists of encouraging parents to participate in school affairs and enlisting their cooperation and support.
According to the literature review, facilitating professional development among staff members is viewed as another role of teacher leadership (Day & Harris, 2002; Leithwood et al., 1999; Silva et al., 2000). Teachers need to possess an awareness to actively learn new knowledge and skills which are considered as the basis of teacher development.

6. **In what ways do you perceive how staff can collaborate?**

您是如何推动教师在工作中的合作的？

According to some research studies, collaboration has been demonstrated as one role of teacher leadership (Day & Harris, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Katzenmeyer, 1998; LeBlanc & Shelton, 1997). In the process of collaboration, principals, formal teacher leaders, informal teacher leaders and other teachers work cooperatively in groups or teams with equal status, with the purpose of forging school efforts in improvement.

7. **What sorts of support do teacher leaders provide to other teachers to fulfil their work?**

您作为中层领导对老师提供了哪些支持帮助他们完成工作？

Some research studies revealed that teacher leaders defined their leadership role primarily as supporting other teachers (Harrison & Killion, 2007; Leithwood et al., 1999; Smylie & Denny, 1990). In the current study, support means that formal teacher leaders provide different kinds of resources to other teachers for the purpose of realizing school improvement and student development.

8. **How do you perceive teacher leaders’ function in connecting principals to teachers and students?**

在实现校长和教师，学生的有效沟通方面，您作为中层领导是如何做的？

Some research has explored how teacher leaders connect the key school elements in school change and improvement (for example, see Day & Harris, 2002; Sherrill, 1999; Silva et al., 2000). Although connection is a broad conception, it mainly focuses on the areas of performing principles of school improvement, establishing positive relationships with colleagues, and reflecting the requirements of students in this study.
Section Three: The interaction between principal leadership roles and teacher leadership roles

Participants: school principal and formal teacher leaders

Interview questions:

1. **How do you perceive the influence from principals on formal teacher leaders?**
   Are they positive or negative influence? Explain.
   您认为校长是如何影响中层领导的？有哪些积极或消极的影响？请解释。
   Many studies and literature have been conducted to reveal the significant efforts of principals on teacher leaders and explore what principals do to establish and promote teacher leadership (Birky et al., 2006; Daley, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Steel & Craig, 2006; Wade & Ferriter, 2007). However, some research studies and literature in the field also indicate that principal leadership practices sometimes interfere with the enhancement of teacher leadership (Barker, 1998; Birky & Ward, 2003; Blase, 1993; Hart, 1994; Fullan, 2007; O’Connor & Boles, 1988).

2. **How do you perceive the influence from formal teacher leaders on principals?**
   Are they positive or negative influence? Explain.
   您认为中层领导是如何影响校长的？有哪些积极或消极的影响？请解释。
   Several studies (see for example, Anderson, 2004; Edgerson et al., 2006; Johnson, 2006) have demonstrated that teacher leaders exert influence on principals as well and there are some benefits principals may obtain from the support of teacher leaders. Although previous study findings have exposed the positive influence of teacher leaders on principals, this question is also designed to explore whether there are some negative effects.

3. **In what ways can schools experiencing rapid change benefit from the dynamic relationship between school principals and the formal teacher leaders in their schools?**
   您认为校长和中层领导之间的动态关系对学校变化产生了哪些积极影响？
   Based on some researchers, it has been argued that positive relationships between principals and teacher leaders assist in effective change in schools when principals work together with teacher leaders (Lambert, 2003; Mangin, 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003; Schmoker, 1999).
4. **How can schools experiencing rapid change be disadvantaged if there is not effective communicating between principals and teacher leaders?**

您认为如果校长和中层领导之间无法有效沟通，会对学校发展产生哪些消极影响？

Although most research studies have been conducted to investigate the benefits that the schools achieved in the environment of positive principal-teacher leader relationship, this question will continue to ask the negative results of a not effective communication.
Appendix D
An example of the procedure of interview transcripts translation and back-translation

Interview transcript in Chinese:
比如举行一个大型活动，我先把大体的思路讲一讲，让中层制定一个具体方案。中层领导制定好之后，我看看他们的设计：指导思想、实施步骤、分工是否合理、还有哪些东西没有考虑到，要给他们及时的指出来。这是一个非常好的方式，让他们通过一些具体的工作来提高自身的能力。活动结束以后，我会及时帮助他们总结优劣，指出哪些方面落实的比较好，哪些有待改进（P09）。

Interview transcript translation from Chinese into English:
For example, when we held a large activity, I first talked about general ideas and then let teacher leaders develop a specific plan. After the plan was done, I reviewed their design in terms of guidelines, implementation steps, and the division of labour. I promptly pointed out what teacher leaders did not take into account. It is a good way to let teacher leaders improve their capabilities through some specific tasks. Since the activity had finished, I helped them summarise their good points and bad points, such as what were well implemented and what needed to be improved (P09).

Interview transcript back-translation from English into Chinese:
例如，我们在举办大型活动的时候，我首先会提出一个大体方案，然后请中层干部制定一个具体方案。方案定下来之后，我会从指导思想、执行步骤、分工等方面审查一下，随后立即指出中层干部没有考虑到的方面。这些具体的任务可以帮助中层干部提高工作能力。活动结束后，我帮助他们总结好的方面和不足的方面，哪些得到顺利执行，哪些需要改进（P09）。

Agreed final translation by two translators:
For example, when there was a large activity, I first talked about a general idea and then asked teacher leaders to develop a specific plan. When the plan was done, I reviewed their design in terms of guidelines, implementation steps, and the division of labour. I promptly pointed out
what teacher leaders did not take into account. It is a good way to improve teacher leaders’ own capability through taking on specific tasks. After the activity finished, I helped them analyse their strengths and weaknesses, regarding the work that was well carried out and those that needed improvement (P09).