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## Practice and reflection of principals' transformative curriculum leadership in a Taiwan KIST school

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### Abstract

This study adopts the framework of transformative curriculum leadership theory, focused on one privatized school, the KIST (KIPP Inspired Schools in Taiwan) school, as a case study. The authors mainly utilize interview methods to explore the practices of principals' transformative curriculum leadership in the KIST school, and find that the case of school principal leadership successfully integrates the interactions from the school autonomy, the local educational authority, and the private foundation into a driving force to develop a new educational model. Such results not only restructure the subjectivity of school education, but also effectively provide the reference framework for policy correction and solutions to the contemporary problems of rural education.

*Keywords:* KIPP, KIST, privatization of public schools, experimental schools, transformative curriculum leadership

## Introduction

In 1987, Taiwan lifted Martial Law, alternative schools operated by the private sector have emerged, and affected the educational system at that time. Such changes have prompted the government to loosen restrictions of related decrees, and endow those schools with the legitimacy, as well as autonomy for innovation and changes, in order to meet public expectations and needs. Consequently, the public has become the main subject of rights to education. Such change put an end to the state monopoly on education and restriction on private operation of schools.

In 2014, the Executive Yuan of Taiwan launched three acts on experimental education, which permit the local governments and the private sector to establish different types of alternative schools for experimental education. Among the three acts, the Act Governing the Commissioning of the Operation of Public Schools at Senior High School Level or Below to the Private Sector for Experimental Education permits local educational authorities to sign administrative contracts with private or non-governmental organizations, which could be commissioned to operate experimental schools based on specific educational concepts. Their school-wide educational innovation and experiment in aspects of administrative operation, organizational mode, and curriculum teaching can differ from the traditional school. This act implies the concept trend of new public management in the 1980s that stresses deregulation, privatization, and public-private partnership. Hence, the private management of public schools, which is a mode that differs from mainstream, can introduce the synergy and professionalism from the private sector, thus overcoming the weakness in public schools, such as lack of competition, rigid educational service content, and inability to meet the diversified needs of schools.

Since 1960, industrialization and urbanization have brought rural areas more broken families, more grandparenting, lower self-esteem of students, decreased population, and school closures. This challenging situation widens the gap between urban and rural schools. Influenced by the initiative of privatized public school, one private foundation introduced the “Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) from the U.S. and adopted its experience of promoting disadvantaged students’ learning motivation and performance. Those schools started the process of re-constructing curriculum structure and brought themselves to a turning point of transformation. Three of this type of elementary schools were first established in 2017 and were named KIST (KIPP Inspired Schools in Taiwan), which then expanded to eight schools in 2021, including three junior high schools. Although the number of the schools has increased, the transplanted idea from KIPP has started to meet challenges, with the decisive aspect being the principal leadership. Principals are expected to face challenges of cooperation with the local educational authorities, collaboration with the foundation, proper transformation of educational concepts to change school cultures, and the realization of the educational goals specified in the administrative contracts. This latter challenge is the focus of this study.

In the 2019-2020 school year, there were 255 schools in the KIPP network, serving over 100,000 students in 28 areas across the U.S. KIPP covers pre-school to high school education. The majority of students are African American and Latino (95%), who grew up in culturally disadvantaged areas and often have developmental delays in entry

behaviors and behavioral deviations (KIPP, 2020). The main focus of KIPP schools is to improve the students' academic performance and characters. Research has found that in the reform brought by KIPP, curriculum leadership is the key factor to ensure the practice of curriculum, guide the direction of curriculum implementation, and warrant the students' learning quality (Pajak & McAfee, 1992). Hence, the KIPP Foundation recruits principals that agree with its mission, and strengthens their curriculum leadership power, including acting as a leader to engage in curriculum implementation, increasing the number of class hours, emphasizing the outcomes, establishing school features and culture, requesting that teachers and students sign a KIPP commitment of excellence, developing incentive mechanisms, building teacher growth alliances, and practicing the 3Rs concept of rigor, relationship, and relevance (Gawlik, 2016; Results for America, 2020; Tuttle et al., 2015). These leadership actions of principals have brought positive influences to students in disadvantaged areas (Coen et al., 2019).

From the perspective of axiology, those alternative schools that are operated by private organizations in remote rural areas are endowed with an "experimenting" role in developing, evaluating, and disseminating a new educational mode, so that education can manifest its diverse values (Dunn, 1997; Stacey, 1995), thus further simulating the improvement of mainstream education. However, the promotion of alternative education is often confronted with many problems (Nagata, 2007). One problem is that education authorities and schools often fall into the dilemma of instrumental rationality and performance thinking, thus lacking student-oriented curriculum thinking. Another problem is that teachers and parents tend to develop the educational "habitus" of paying attention to students' academic and rate of further studies. These ideologies often lead the course stakeholders to lack the awareness of exposing, questioning and criticizing the teaching scenarios (McCarthy, 1978). Thus, curriculum leaders must challenge and change the traditional school practices and adopt new leadership methods, which could empower course stakeholders with more autonomy, collaboration, and inclusion of different values (Shields, 2009). This concept of "curriculum leadership", which challenges the mainstream education, is the main focus of this research. Henderson and Hawthorne (2000) referred to this concept as transformative curriculum leadership. The concept expressed by "transformative" refers to fundamental changes that are revolutionary approaches to change deep-rooted beliefs and social structure, and it can be described as a "paradigm shift" (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000). It also focuses on qualitative transformation of the educational frame of reference (Brown, 1988).

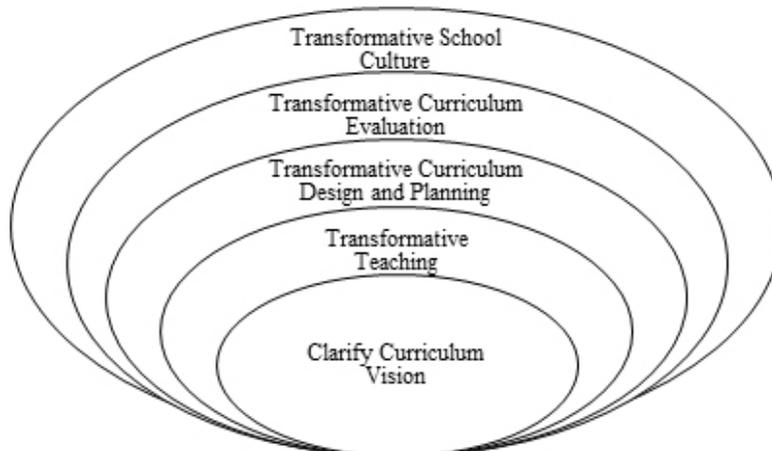
This study suggests that transformative curriculum leadership as the theoretical reference frame for this study has relevance and important significance, especially in the field of KIST schools, which are endowed with the role of "experiment" and imply some ideology. It is obvious that principal leadership strongly links to school context and campus scenario, which go well with a case study methodology to explore the case's complexity and uniqueness (Yin, 2009). Therefore, this study involved a case study on a KIST school promoting the new educational model, and discussed the practice of the principal's transformative curriculum leadership in KIST schools. Based on the limited studies on privatized schools in East Asia and Taiwan (Chin & Chuang, 2019; Lee & Guo, 2018), this paper will extend the landscape of school privatization studies in this region. In addition, the authors also intend to investigate the diverse development of rural principals' transformative curriculum leadership, inspired by

related studies (Hsieh et al., 2021; Moreeng & Tshelane, 2014; Midwest Comprehensive Center, 2018). The results will provide an insightful outcome for public school principals in the light of school management and transformative curriculum leadership.

## Analytical framework

The traditional curriculum thinking and ideology of Taiwan's public school system are based on scientific rationality, standardization and efficiency. This management model, as the mainstream or traditional education, ignores the experience and process of teachers and students jointly constructing and seeking meanings of education (Greene, 1971). It has no great significance for nonlinear and dynamic school situations. "Transformative curriculum leadership," proposed by Henderson and Hawthorne in 1995 (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995), reverses the traditional pattern of curriculum implementation, design and leadership, emphasizing that the design and enactment of curriculum and teaching should be centered on the learning interests of students living in a democratic society. Moreover, those studies also argued that the transformative, innovative and fundamentally changed "curriculum leadership" should be adopted to change inequality and marginalization in schools, and create a more impartial and democratic school atmosphere (Mafora, 2013).

However, such a leadership process is a broad-based reform effort. Therefore, Henderson and Hawthorne (2000) further treated the school as a whole, elucidating the curriculum vision and proposing innovative themes such as transformative teaching, curriculum design and planning, curriculum evaluation, and school culture, as the connotation of transformative curriculum leadership. Transformative curriculum leadership is carried out on these overlapping and interrelated innovative themes jointly; among those there are continuous interactions, as shown in Figure 1.



Note. Modified from Henderson & Hawthorne (2000, p. 19).

Figure 1. Connotation of transformative curriculum leadership

Based on Henderson & Hawthorne (2000)'s work, there are few studies focusing on the alternative schools' need for curriculum innovation and the role of the principals (Chan, 2019; Hsieh, et al., 2021). With that, the authors used as a framework the four facets of: curriculum vision, teachers teaching literacy, curriculum design, curriculum evaluation, and school culture (Table 1) through which to analyze a KIST principal's curriculum leadership, thus avoiding possible deviation from the research topic (Yazan, 2015), and helping a localized dialogue with the school's environment.

Table 1. Research and analytical framework table

Students' learning effectiveness (E)	
1. Curriculum vision	E1: Principal's leadership in promoting students' learning effectiveness in terms of curriculum vision
2. Teacher teaching literacy	E2: Principal's leadership in promoting students' learning effectiveness in terms of teacher teaching
3. Curriculum design	E3: Principal's leadership in promoting students' learning effectiveness in terms of curriculum design
4. Curriculum evaluation	E4: Principal's leadership in promoting students' learning effectiveness in terms of curriculum evaluation
5. School culture	E5: Principal's leadership in promoting students' learning effectiveness in the process of school culture transformation

## Research design and implementation

This study discusses the contextual problems of the uniqueness and complexity of one school's culture and atmosphere, therefore, the case study method is suitable for the case description and analysis (Yin, 2009). We used campus observation and document analysis methods to understand the practices of principals' transformative curriculum leadership in KIST schools. On the whole, the variety of evidence sources supplemented and verified each other to make research results more explanatory (Yin, 2009) and enhance data dependability.

The case school was established in 1948 with the longest history among the eight KIST schools. By interviewing the key figures of this school, we may have a holistic understanding and a contextualized picture to investigate the school and the transformation process. In August 2017, it was resumed as a school and was taken over by a private fund as one of the first KIST schools. Although, by regulation, the qualification of being principal is open and flexible, the fund cautiously employed an experienced principal befitting of the position. There are six classes from grade 1 to grade 6. Some teachers are from the non-profit organization TFT (Teach for Taiwan). The school attracts students by focusing on characters, and the number of students has increased from 25 at the beginning to 101 in the 2019 academic year. Since August 2018, the school has become a school with full enrollment and has been selected as the Top 100 School of education innovation in 2019 by Taiwan's well-known education media.

We used purposive sampling to select interviewees, based on Patton's (2002) demonstration on the rules of selecting interviewees whose inside information is richer

and crucial. Therefore, we conducted the interviews with experienced employees from the case school, including the principal (Code P), one director (T1), one group leader (T2), one teacher (T3), one parent (G), and one foundation staff member (F), totaling six people. The interviewees are all presented in codes. The interview outline is based on Table 1, modified from relevant literature, and then reviewed and revised by experts and scholars. The interview period was from February 2020 to June 2020. Data were collected through school visits or telephone interviews, with each interview lasting about 90 minutes. The interview ended only when the researcher determined that the data has saturated, so as to achieve thick description and present the interviewees' diverse viewpoints, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research.

The collection and analysis of qualitative research data are generally carried out simultaneously and alternately (Acun & Yilmazer, 2019). After collecting the data in this study, the interview contents were first transcribed, and the relevant data were numbered and coded. The numbering method is data source\_interviewee code (or data name). For example, "I\_T1" represents the interview (I) record of the director. "O\_P" means observation (O) notes on the interview with the principal. "D\_2019 Foundation Public Welfare Report" represents the public welfare report document (D) issued by the Foundation in 2019. The first step of data analysis was open coding. We repeatedly read the transcripts to obtain an holistic picture, then followed with segmenting coding, checking the meaning and naming. Conceptualized content is divided into several categories. With that, we constructed core categories via selective coding, for example "Clarify and transform the KIST curriculum vision: from confusion to consensus". It is an analytical process based on similarities and differences, in which data are compared (Timonen et al., 2018). The boundary is not linear or fixed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), but an iterative process (Cohen et al., 2011). Words in qualitative research have meanings only after such an interpretation process (Denzin, 1994).

Next, we integrated all the data and conducted a literature review to promote transferability of the research data. Finally, the concepts, categories, processes and themes related to the purpose of this research were verified and described.

## Analysis of the principal's transformative curriculum leadership practice in a KIST school

The new curriculum model of the case school underwent a process of change from turbulence to stable development. The details are discussed in the following sections.

### Clarify and transform the KIST curriculum vision: From confusion to consensus

With a sense of mission to support the disadvantaged, the Foundation and the principal of the case school established the KIST school in an attempt to improve education in rural areas. During the interview, the principal expressed a strong sense of educational mission (O\_P).

We decided to step into this area because of the accumulation of factors

such as the lack of family function and learning motivation for students in rural schools, the high workload of teachers without much support, which led to a vicious circle of teacher loss and the urban-rural divide with low learning results, which makes rural education unable to improve steadily. (I\_F)

We agree with the two core concepts of knowledge and character of the KIPP, and it is possible to implement these concepts in Taiwan. At that time, the school was going to be abandoned, and students could not receive proper education because of their background. So we founded this school, and wanted to make some effort. (I\_P)

However, some teachers lacked experience in curriculum development. At the same time, parents in the community viewed school innovation with skepticism, while local educational authorities and communities also held high expectations. As a result, the school was in a chaotic situation of organizational deconstruction and reconstruction.

There are some novice teachers in the school, and their concept of curriculum is relatively weak. Some parents believed in traditional schools, and thought that the traditional way of learning with pen and paper is better for their children. They thought that private management of public schools is not a good idea. (I\_P)

The school has a contract with the Foundation and the Education Department, which expected the school to achieve zero remedial teaching, with academic test scores that are 10% higher than the county average. Therefore, the pressure on this school is greater than that on regular schools. Besides the fact that students' scores are reviewed, there is also the invisible pressure from the Foundation, the media and the community. (I\_T1)

In the face of the above potential crises and demands, the principal held daily morning meetings in the first year of school, professionally guiding the teachers on aspects of school affairs, teaching and class management, and class observations and discussions.

The first year was really hard. At that time, I had to connect everyone together very quickly. Therefore, in the 10-minute morning meetings, we cared for and encouraged each other to strengthen the concept and original intention of KIST. The evening meetings were held at 4:30 p.m. to lead teachers to conduct professional dialogue and reflection on teaching. These policies are still an important part of our school culture. (I\_P)

This awareness and action of the ideology behind the demonstrative reflection of words and actions, as well as the normative system, helps the consensus to reach the ideal (Habermas, 1971). The principal formed the school's communication mechanism through the morning meetings, evening meetings, and other ceremonies. Upholding the professional perseverance of "fifth level leadership" emphasized by Collins (2001), the

principal continuously clarified and strengthened the curriculum vision of the Foundation, and urged teachers to hold similar curriculum vision and values (I\_T2). It is inevitable that different opinions followed the dialogues. The principal actively pays attention to teachers' various needs in teaching and uses strategies to improve their daily work.

Till now there exists some different opinions. I will send directors or crucial figures to explain to them. And if it is necessary, I will do the communication in person (I\_P).

This process is indeed difficult, from the first year to the present, the principal has realized through self-transformation that only the democratic, cooperative, and trusting leadership view can push the curriculum forward (I\_P). In addition, it is very important for schools to communicate with parents to carry out the teaching plan (MWCC, 2018), and parents' recognition and support are very important (I\_P). After the principal assumed office in 2017, two open seminars were held. After the beginning of the school year, he also used a parent-teacher forum, parent observation week, and family day activities to transform parents' values, and paved the way for long-term development (I\_T1).

Before the KIST school began official operations, the principal, along with the directors and teachers, visited each family to share with them the KIPP concept. The purpose of doing so is to correct the rumors and let parents know what we are going to do. (I\_T2)

I was really moved to see parents and children go all out on family day. During class observation, what surprised me most was that students respected each other and participated attentively, which made me realize how much effort the school and teachers have made for the students! (I\_G)

### Encourage teachers to reflect and enhance their abilities by following standardized structure and indicators

After working at the KIST school, the teachers inevitably carried with them their former teaching habits. In the morning and evening meeting, the principal encouraged teachers to reflect on their "habits", and inspired the teachers to reflect on the curriculum practice and teaching practice "taken for granted" in the past, thus resulting in the transformation of teachers' pedagogical thinking.

Sometimes I unconsciously reveal what I have received from traditional education. I think a child is the biggest mirror, and he/she will resist and let you see what you are now, so that I have to reflect and correct my teaching practice. I think it's a big turn for me. (I\_T3)

In addition, KIPP defines the “Framework for Excellent Teaching” as a teaching guide for the teachers. The four elements of the framework are interlinked, including self and others, classroom culture, teaching cycle, and knowledge (D\_KIPP Framework for Excellent Teaching, I\_F). In teachers’ teaching beliefs, this is a very important teaching criterion (I\_T2).

In addition to the vision of excellent teaching based on the rigorous standardized teaching indicators of the “Teaching Excellence Framework”, the principal also emphasized the solidity of class and encouraged teachers to use innovative, caring, cooperative and other teaching strategies to drive academic performance and promote students’ academic progress by moral characters (I\_P).

The principal attached importance to teachers introspection and thinking, emphasized by “transformative teaching,” and explored and transformed deeper ideology behind the teaching scene. At the same time, the teachers were encouraged to use standardized teaching indicators and diversified teaching strategies to enhance students’ learning motivation. Compared with the technical evaluation emphasized by traditional teaching, the principal attached importance to the “enactment” of the teachers’ teaching rather than just the “implementation” (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000), in order to encourage the teachers to become “mentors” rather than “expositors” and “pedagogues.” Such internal driving force is more important than the structural innovation of the school. Only the active participation of teachers is the key to the success of the school educational reform (Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1988), which is important to the follow-up curriculum design and comprehensive transformation of KIST schools.

In the 2016 academic year, we started to develop the multiple assessments. In the second semester of the 2018 academic year, the teachers took the initiative to add quality-oriented assessment of the new curriculum. Since then, the content of the assessment has changed qualitatively, and become better. I feel very happy that teachers have made such an independent change. (I\_P)

### Curriculum deliberation of progressive, cross-school joint preparation, designing literacy-oriented curriculum in line with students’ interests

In the practical curriculum design and planning, the principal, considering the initial conditions and limitations of the school, decided to adopt a compromise and gradual approach, and first selected textbooks approved by the government for curriculum development.

When developing the curriculum in the early stage of the school, on one hand, considering parents’ lack of confidence in the school, it was inappropriate to change the curriculum completely; on the other hand, most teachers could not develop teaching materials independently, so they used the approved textbooks first, while continued to improve their teaching and learning strategies. At the same time, teachers were also encouraged to adapt textbooks. (I\_P)

After that, the principal adopted a steady strategy for curriculum deliberation, including reserving a weekly time in advance for discussion and revision of the curriculum between teachers in the school and external teachers. The discussion was also open to parents' opinions, such as the after-school club preferred by the students. (I\_T2) Moreover, at present, KIST schools in Taiwan also conduct joint curriculum preparation through an inter-school alliance, in the same form as the KIPP model in the United States. This is the teacher community activity (D\_2019 Foundation public welfare report) of KIST schools in the winter and summer breaks, which is also an important force to promote the expansion and integration of school curriculum.

KIST schools in Taiwan also have teachers to prepare curriculum in winter and summer breaks. Six KIST schools conducted a four-day field curriculum preparation jointly during the 2020 summer break to discuss curriculum planning for the new school year. (I\_P)

The results of the above-mentioned curriculum deliberation are reflected in the KIST schools' focus on linking the literacy-oriented curriculum practice with students' life experience. The school not only selected the approved textbooks as the guarantee of learning performance to ensure students' academic performance, but also constructed and practiced the curriculum course jointly by teachers and students to exercise students' character traits such as perseverance, social skills, and optimism.

We like to design courses with both students and teachers. Taking the proposal of marine public welfare project as an example, we guided students to submit proposals in groups, and then selected a worthwhile "beach clean-up" proposal with complete ideas to participate in the competition. Then, we led all the students to attend a 5-day 4-night beach clean-up program to experience the marine environment and social learning. This is the use of activity-based curriculum design to develop a school-wide curriculum. (I\_P)

The school's "beach clean-up" program cultivates students' inner literacy by means of three-S integrated learning: subject learning, self-learning, and social learning. It emphasizes the concept of curriculum enactment and responds to the concept of transformative curriculum design and plan (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000). In the face of the future world, such integrated learning is still an important aspect of students' learning interest, but how to gather and localize the learning is a diversified challenge that teachers in the case school must face in the future curriculum design and transformation.

We didn't create KIST just for these schools. Our greater mission is to help schools across Taiwan to meet the educational goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (I\_F)

We learn from the concept of social and emotional learning (SEL) from foreign SDGs. But how to collect and transform it into the needs of students, in my opinion, is the current difficulty encountered by this

public school under private management. It is in a completely different direction from the previous curriculum structure. (I\_T2)

### Incorporate data-based performance benchmarks and focus on the evaluation quality of students' performance and school curriculum

In terms of curriculum evaluation, the case school adopted the form of evaluation week to evaluate students' multiple abilities. The assessments were not only paper and pencil-based evaluations, but also operational assessments for listening, speaking, reading and writing in the subjects of mathematics, nature, and society (I\_P, I\_T1).

Please use your tablet to record the video to export the trapezoidal area formula with verbal instructions and upload it to the class video platform. Please write a review and reflection on the math evaluation. (D\_2019 Mathematics Paper of Fifth Grade)

In addition, the campus decorations, including the chalk painting column on the first floor, character posters on corridor walls, blackboard graffiti on staircase walls, and wall stone collage works were all done by students (I\_T1, O\_P). This indicates that teachers adopt diverse and adaptive teaching and evaluation methods, so that every student has a sense of participation. The students are assessed not only by standardized tests.

Another focus of transformative curriculum evaluation is to ensure the quality of the overall curriculum (Henderson & Hawthorne, 2000). The school foundation introduced the spirit of performance responsibility of corporate operation into the school. Every quarter (3 months), the principal reports the school's progress to the board of directors, and also communicates the current status and obstacles of the school with the local educational authorities. This is one part of the curriculum evaluation management, aiming to achieve zero remedial teaching and test scores 10% higher than the county average (I\_P). With that, the fund will receive the first priority of renewing its contract with the local government and extra subsidies as a reward. This kind of evaluation mainly relies on the mechanism of a weekly teaching plan and evaluation cycle design, which are expected to complement each other and improve the quality of the school curriculum.

In our evaluation cycle design, the teachers have two tasks based on the results of the students' evaluation. The first is the analysis of the evaluation results, including the analysis of students' weakness and remedial methods. The merits and demerits of the evaluation items need to be reviewed to make appropriate corrections in teaching. Another task is to provide quantitative evaluation results and a qualitative evaluation description for parents' reference. (I\_P)

From 2018 to 2019, the case school saw both progressive and regressive performance in the two performance data of the "literacy test compliance rate" and the "grade failure rate of learning support growth test (see Table 2)". Although the overall

performance has not achieved the level of “comprehensively improving students’ academic performance,” it still shows an improvement trend. (I\_T1)

Table 2. Academic performance of the case school

Literacy test compliance rate			Grade failure rate of learning support growth test						
			2018 School year			2019 School year			
Grade	2018 School year	2019 School year	Grade	Chinese	Math	English	Chinese	Math	English
1	91~100%	0~40%	1						
2	41~70%	41~70%	2	0%	13%	-	5%	0%	-
3	71~90%	71~90%	3	10%	15%	-	6%	20%	-
4	71~90%	71~90%	4	5%	16%	0%	10%	10%	10%
5	91~100%	41~70%	5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%
6	41~70%	71~90%	6	-	25%	50%	-	9%	-

Note. Revised from Chengzhi Education Foundation (2020, pp. 26-27).

### Creating a democratic dialogue venue, and shaping the school culture community

School is the field of public dialogue and communication among teachers, government, parents, and other educational partners. Compared with the scientific, rational and standardized curriculum management mode that has been adopted in the past, democratic dialogue is rather a difficult approach (Dewey, 1939/1989), which is reflected in the process of curriculum development in the case school.

The teachers are mostly young; thus they want to discuss questions or know why. Therefore, the principal has met with obstacles and challenges in communication. He has continued to learn and adjust his communication style. (I\_T1)

School meetings provide opportunities for teachers to participate, communicate, and discuss democratically. I like participatory leadership. Every teacher can offer advice and contribute his/her thoughts, not necessarily what the principal says. (I\_P)

I often arrive at school ten minutes before the school dismisses, so that I could sit by the flower bed and listen to the evening meeting of teachers and students. They would engage in conversations with respect and gratitude that is full of positive energy. Thanks to the principal and teachers for their kindness. I made the right decision to transfer my child to this school two years ago. (I\_G)

The principal changed the traditional top-down curriculum management beliefs. Such self-transformation is conducive to embracing the opinions of different parties, promoting the spontaneous participation of the school members in public affairs

(Bohman, 1996), strengthening their sense of control and subordination to the curriculum, as well as their sense of loyalty to the school (Deng, et al., 2018; Moreeng & Tshelane, 2014), so as to build a working environment and way of life with respect, trust, tolerance and mutual care.

In addition, the principal set an example to work together with the teachers to build a friendly relationship (Wang et al., 2016). Because they are honest with each other, the team is as close as family members; they are willing to speak up when faced with difficulties. This contributes to the unique culture of teachers trusting each other and showing weakness. Such close connections make the teachers willing to follow the leader even in the face of challenges (Jacobson et al., 2005).

The common core values of the school team are consistent. We are honest and respectful to each other. We are both a team and a family. What the principal needs to do is to make everyone closer, work more smoothly, and make the chain of school culture firm and strong. (I\_P)

The school was very messy when it was founded. We saw the principal pulling weeds, cleaning, washing the floor with a high-pressure washer and doing it himself. He shaped the team culture with such a leadership style. The principal steps out of his position to work side by side with us, so we are willing to stay here despite the hard work. (I\_T2)

## Discussion

Via inductive coding, our analysis has clarified the principal's curriculum leadership behavior, which positively enhances our understanding of the story. For example, Table 3 illustrates the core category of "curriculum vision".

Table 3. Coding process of the case school: Curriculum vision (e.g. Curriculum vision)

Core category	Open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
1. Curriculum vision	Environmental factors, educational mission	Vision	Clarify and transform the KIST curriculum vision: from confusion to consensus
	Lacked experience in curriculum development, parents with skepticism, communities held high expectations	The school was in a chaotic situation	
	The principal and teachers hold similar curriculum vision, parents' recognition and support	Recognition and support	

Specifically, in the initial stage of school establishment, the principal perceived the environmental factors that affect the development of the school in a chaotic and perplex context, and adopted a different leadership approach (Leithwood et al., 2020), which is very important to school development. The principal held the same sense of mission as the Foundation, and elucidated the school curriculum vision through a ritualistic communication mechanism, and strengthened the educational value to achieve its preset

comprehensibility claim and consensus (Habermas, 1979). This is the primary work to drive curriculum innovation. Then, the principal encouraged the teachers to criticize and reflect based on the standardized structure and indicator of KIPP, emphasized the teaching “enactment” rather than just “implementation,” to encourage the teachers to become “mentors” rather than the leaders’ roles of “expositors” and “pedagogues”. This is consistent with Henderson and Hawthorne’s (2000) emphasis on changing teachers’ existing cognition in teaching before curriculum development. Such “flipping” of the teachers’ plays can lead the teachers in the process of developing a new educational approach. Through cross-school and cross-domain curriculum communication and discussion through the progressive and inter-school alliance, the teachers could think broadly about curriculum development and no longer solely follow the textbooks. Although the school still had to face the challenges of curriculum convergence and localization, the dialectical process adopted by the teachers concerning the curriculum vision and practical results, as well as deliberation, results in designing a literacy curriculum that integrates learning and life, and could help the students learn more effectively. The teaching thus took into consideration of both students’ scores and the school curriculum. Based on this mechanism of democracy and public dialogue, the KIST school members were open to different opinions, and developed their self-speculative attitude on knowledge (Habermas, 1996). This strengthened the sense of participation and loyalty, and built a close relationship between curriculum stakeholders to form a common cultural community.

These leadership behaviors interacted among the forces of the school, the Foundation, and the local educational authorities regarding the curriculum, and mutually influenced the curriculum vision, teaching, curriculum design, curriculum evaluation, and school culture. As a result, the principal had to engage in self-transformation, so as to transform the traditional top-down curriculum leadership into the democratic, cooperative, and shared leadership. Second, the principal had to transform the teachers to attach more importance to the curriculum enactment rather than implementation. Third, the principal had to change the values of parents in the community, and lead the social transformation. These results confirm the leadership characteristics and connotation of transformative curriculum leadership theory, which is an important driving force for the development of new education models. Therefore, the leadership of the case school principal can be regarded as an empirical outcome of transformative curriculum leadership.

It is worth mentioning that the ultimate goal of these empirical results for KIPP schools is to improve the academic performance of disadvantaged students. However, the academic performance of the case school, as listed in Table 2, did not fully achieve this goal. Mathematica’s 2015 assessment report declared that the academic performance of students in all KIPP schools has improved (Tuttle et al., 2015). The reason may be that the laws concerning the private management of public schools in Taiwan do not strengthen the leadership power of principals in the same way that the KIPP in the United States does. The research results indicate that the principal of the case school mainly played the role of transformer, which leads to a longer period of time for the principal to show leadership effectiveness. On the other hand, alternative education in Taiwan emphasizes loosening the rigorous approach in the traditional educational mode, as well as autonomy. Thus, based on the local situations, the case school chose to focus on the literacy-oriented curriculum practice for moral character education, rather than

making strict requirements on “extending teaching time” like KIPP in the United States. In fact, whether the success of KIST schools should be quantified by reading and math assessment scores, or by zero remedial teaching and the academic scores reaching 10% higher than the county average, are questions to be further considered. From another perspective, the two-year experiment of the KIST school, with its extension to a junior middle school program in the 2020 school year, seems to demonstrate a new path for principals’ curriculum leadership and school governance in Taiwan. The results of principals’ leadership are often not immediately visible. Such comparison is also a reminder that more factors should be taken into consideration when discussing the outcomes of public schools under private management.

## Conclusion and reflection

From the perspective of Henderson and Hawthorne’s transformative curriculum leadership theory, this paper presented the leadership of the principal of a KIST school in Taiwan in developing a new education model. The results show that the curriculum development in the case school is not a one-stop reform, but a progressive course, during which the transformative curriculum leadership of the principal played an important role of transformer. This has made principal’s transformative curriculum leadership as a driven force of school transformation.

Although the case school still has to face the challenges of curriculum convergence, localization, and performance accountability, the above results can be seen as an epitome of development of alternative schools in Taiwan, and still contain unique values of the times for educational anthropology. From a macroscopic perspective, the curriculum reform of KIST schools is to promote the legalization of school autonomy through the relaxation of laws and systems, in response to the voice of rural areas. It started directly with changing the school, giving the principal more support and confidence to process transformative curriculum leadership. Through the process of the inter-school alliance and internal democratic deliberation curriculum, the reform promoted the generation of localized knowledge, and constructed the school-based curriculum system with the greatest learning interest of disadvantaged students as the main concern, with the goal of resisting the restriction and limitations of the national curriculum. Although there are still some arguments about the effectiveness of the case school in improving students’ academic performance, such a new education model in Taiwan’s educational reform is in the process of questioning the complicated dilemma of educational justice in rural areas. It not only reflects the value of transformative laws, but also restructures the subjectivity of school education, which indeed effectively provides a reference framework for policy correction and solving the contemporary problems of rural education.

Although this type of schooling model works, it has to consider some issues we expose. First, the definition of success of KIST schools by local educational authorities often falls into the myth of instrumental rationality and performance thinking, such as setting the standards for learning support, learning assessment and academic performance test results, or interpreting school performance based on the increase or decrease in the number of students. Although KIPP observes the leadership power of

principals and uses extended teaching time and other performance measures to achieve its educational goals, there is likely some regional variation. However, the local educational authorities in Taiwan should consider the local integration of “transferability” and provide more autonomy to schools; otherwise factors other than the above-mentioned quantitative data, such as the essence of education, teacher quality, family capital, and support network may be neglected in this wave of educational experiments and value shaping process.

Second, the Foundation and the school use standardized tools and mechanisms such as the KIPP “leadership structure and functional model,” “Teaching Excellence Framework,” and the “evaluation cycle design” of the school as guidance for leadership and teaching. Their operation strategies imply the exploration of running the school in the spirit of enterprise performance and accountability. Such temptation may pose a challenge to teachers’ professional autonomy and school humanistic characteristics. The principal should play the role of “transformer” to guide teachers to make good use of standardized tools, and prudently handle the conflicts and contradictions between internal and external values.

KIPP has established an education model for disadvantaged students, with high standards and strict requirements, with a special focus on assistance in the character and academic performance of students. Although KIPP is aware of the potential difficulties of disadvantaged students’ future development, it is not necessarily effective. Disadvantaged students come from families with single parents, intergenerational upbringing, economic weakness, and weak cultural capital. The teaching mode with high standards and strict practice may make up for the deficiency of their starting point, and improve their academic performance. However, higher levels of creativity and integration may be limited, affecting their ability to face the future world. In fact, education alone cannot completely change the students’ outcomes. Adverse family and social environment are also factors affecting students’ development. The government should think comprehensively and devote itself to the governance of rural areas, and provide support to disadvantaged families from the perspective of collaborative governance, which is conducive to changing the disadvantaged status of rural students.

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