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Reigniting the Passion for Learning: A Systematic Attempt in Taipei

Abstract Despite being ranked highly, the 2012 PISA result shows that the M-shape distribution of Taiwanese students is top of the 65 participating countries. This shows that the gap between high and low achievers in Taiwanese schools is the biggest. This paper aims at exploring Taipei's responses to this M-shape phenomenon. It starts from mapping out the context of education reform in Taiwan and introducing measures of helping to ensure equity in education in order to close the gap between high and low achievers. Following this, the data collection process is described and the researcher's reflections are provided. The discussion then moves to recent initiatives on reshaping school culture such as through school-based programs, establishing the Curriculum Development Circle, and on reclaiming teacher professionalism and cultivating the passion for learning among learners at senior high schools in Taipei. This paper offers international readers insights into attempts to strike an equilibrium between maintaining high performance and striving for equity in Taipei.

Keywords education reform, equity for learning, senior high school, Taipei

Introduction

Taiwan, an island with 23 million people, is well-known for its rapid economic development in the 1980s and 1990s, and advancement in the information technology industry. Taiwan is also well-known for students who consistently top internationally benchmarked tests of student achievement. Taiwan was ranked 9th in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and 2nd in science and 3rd in mathematics (8th grade) in the Trends in International

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Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2012 (MOE, 2012). However, the data from these international assessments also showed some pressing issues that require attention in Taiwan's education system. For example, according to the PISA results, Taiwan is ranked top, together with Singapore and Hong Kong. However, Taiwan has the largest gap between high achievers and low achievers in mathematics (OECD, 2013). In other words, the M-shape distribution of Taiwanese students also makes it top the achievement gap list out of 65 countries and regions. It is a significant alert for Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE) to face up to this long existing M-shape phenomenon. How to maintain an equilibrium between the existing high performance and providing opportunities for low achievers to level up their performance has become a pertinent issue in Taiwan's public debate on education reform. Indeed, achieving equity in education is one of the key issues that needs attention and is the most recent initiative of the MOE in launching its 12-year Basic Education plan.

The case study of Taiwan is interesting as the development of education is uneven between urban and rural areas. The MOE has been implementing various policy initiatives that have attempted to reduce the gap, but without much success. The Educational Priority Areas (EPA) is a typical example (Yeh & Sheu, 2011). One criticism is that the EPA improves the "hardware" such as school buildings and facilities in rural areas but does not provide the "software" such as high-quality and passionate teachers. The effectiveness of the EPA is presently under review. Another issue is that disadvantaged students in rural areas are taken care of by the government (e.g., the EPA) while disadvantaged students in urban areas are usually ignored because urban areas are regarded as having sufficient educational resources. However, the M-shape is not only between various cities and counties across Taiwan but also between high and low achievers within the same city such as Taipei. The Department of Education (DOE) in Taipei recognizes the widening gap between high and low achievers in schools (Tan & Wu, 2009) and has made a systematic attempt to change conventional teaching practices so that the gap between high and low achievers may be reduced. This, to some extent, is to help achieve equity in educational outcomes.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate how the Taipei municipal government prepares its schools to face the upcoming challenges brought by the introduction of the new 12-year Basic Education initiative. The key question is: What has the

Taipei municipals government done to reignite students' passion for learning and teachers' passion to teach with professionalism? This paper first maps out the Taiwanese context of education reform and the first curriculum reform in the first half of the 20-year reform movement. The discussion then moves to how the Taipei municipal government has reacted when facing the uncertainties brought by Taiwan's central government policy of implementing the 12-year Basic Education initiative in 2014. The discussion then zooms in on a number of recent initiatives, including establishing the Curriculum Development Circle among senior high schools, reshaping school culture through school-based programs, and reclaiming teacher professionalism and cultivating the passion for learning among learners in Taipei. The issue of equity is discussed in alignment with the changes in teaching and learning in Taipei. A conclusion is offered with suggestions for future research.

Education Reform in Taiwan: The Context

Taiwan has made deliberate efforts in introducing waves of education reform, like many other countries around the world. However, when the most recent education reform in Taiwan was launched, it aroused severe public criticism and debate. Many people consider 1994 to be the beginning of education reform because the 410 Demonstration for Education Reform took place on 10th April 1994. The former Minister of Education, Tu Cheng-Sheng (2007) called the demonstration a landmark in Taiwanese history. However, other academics trace it back even earlier to 1984 or 1987 (Chou & Ching, 2012; Liu, 2014) because they consider the period from either 1984 or 1987 to 1994 as a period of restructuring Taiwanese education. This paper adopts the most widely accepted starting point of education reform in Taiwan, the year 1994, as the beginning point of discussion.

In the Taiwanese context, education reform is viewed as a by-product of a bigger democratization process. The first set of directions of education reform can be found in the five propositions proposed by the Commission on Educational Reform (CER):

- Decentralizing control over educational processes;
- Appropriating educational needs for each individual;
- Establishing multiple channels to education;

- Promoting educational quality; and
- Establishing a lifelong learning society (as cited in Lin, Wang, Li, & Chang, 2014).

Some key themes can be teased out from the above propositions. As Chou and Ching (2012) summarized, themes of Taiwanese education reform are “pursuing diversity and excellence” and following the principles of “deregulation and empowerment” (p. 30). Meanwhile, Law (2002) indicated in his case study that market forces were introduced to Taiwanese education in order to reduce the Ministry’s control over education. To a large extent, education reform in Taiwan resonates with key ideas of the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM) and has been influenced by the reform movement in the US, like the case of Australia (Graham, 2013).

It has been more than 20 years since the education reform in Taiwan was first enacted. There are various works examining its impact (Chin & Wen, 2014) and lessons learnt (Lin et al., 2014). There are two major curriculum changes in the first and second decade of the education reform in Taiwan respectively. In the first 10 years, the Grade 1–9 Integrated Curriculum had a huge impact on primary and lower secondary curriculum as well as on teachers’ practices. Lin et al. (2014) summarized the first curriculum change with a focus on identifying its major aims as follows:

The Grade 1–9 Integrated Curriculum was the most important curriculum reform in the 2000s and it sought to develop students’ capability of responding to the challenges posed by globalization in the 21st century. The curriculum aimed to cope with two major systematic problems: the control of the education system by the state and the examination pressure. It was expected that this curriculum reform could change the long-lasting, widespread school practices that received the greatest criticism (e.g., rote learning, cram school attendance, and endless practice and tests) in Taiwan’s education system. (pp. 816–817)

The reform efforts have good intentions and they try to confront the major issues facing the education system. As Chin and Lai (2006) indicated, this curriculum reform is the biggest in the history of curriculum development in Taiwan but has not been successful because there was not enough preparation or proper auxiliary planning such as up-to-date teacher preparation programs,

textbook selection, student assessment, and training for in-service teachers. In addition, these curriculum reform policies were not able to cascade down to teaching practices. Moreover, the curriculum reform has been left with the following important areas for improvement, as outlined by Chen and Fan (2014):

- There is a need for better understanding of “empowering the learners to learn”;
- There are issues related to testing-oriented education;
- There is too much lecturing but not enough interaction and hands-on experience; and
- There is a gap between what students learn and what the real world needs. (Art. II)

Therefore, there have been continuous calls for further curriculum reforms. At the end of the second decade of Taiwanese education reform, MOE initiated another large-scale reform extending the existing nine-year compulsory education to a 12-year Basic Education plan in 2014. In this new initiative, curriculum reform is at the core of the 12-year Basic Education plan and the scale is bigger than the previous plan because it involves curriculum reform from primary to upper secondary levels, that is, the reform of the whole school curriculum except for higher education. Although there is criticism of the lack of preparation (Lee, 2012), some local authorities such as DOE in Taipei and in New Taipei City consider it as another opportunity to shift the paradigm of teacher-centered teaching to student-centered learning.

Equity in Education

The concept of “equity” in education has various definitions. The development of this concept in Western contexts is summarized by Yang (2014):

... Not only did its meaning change drastically with time, but its exposition by different scholars also differed. In Europe and America, the concept began by emphasizing equality in the opportunity to enter school and receive an education, and later expanded to include equality in educational content and process. In essence, therefore, the term refers to equality in “opportunity” or in “standpoint” and “starting point,” not equality in “results” or “simultaneous advance.” With regard to content, it not only includes equality in the opportunity to go to school but also in the educational content, experience, and

environment. In scope, it includes both basic national education and education applicable to individual talent. (p. 42)

It is crucial to point out that, in terms of content, equal opportunity for schooling is as important as educational content and experience. I would like to argue in the later part of this paper that the systematic attempt of Taipei to improve teaching and learning and consequently to reignite teachers' and students' passion for learning is a good way of offering an educational environment with better equity. Although the issue of equity in Taiwanese education is not new and it is explained in more detail below, there is rarely a discussion of equity from the angle of offering a more equal educational environment with a greater focus on teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill this gap in analyzing equity in education in relation to the teaching and learning environment.

As mentioned above, the gap between high and low achievers is big but this does not mean that the equity issue is ignored in the Taiwanese context. Before the education reform movement started in 1994, MOE put in various efforts and resources attempting to reduce the gap and offer equal opportunities to Taiwanese students regardless of their family background, birthplace, ethnicity, and gender. Shen (1998) argued that the first phase of offering equal opportunities in education started right after the end of Japanese colonial period because the Kuomintang government abolished racial segregation in formal schooling set up by the Japanese colonial government. It can be noted that the issue of equity was embedded in the education system since the establishment of the Taiwanese government.

In the past 50 years, various means have been applied and deployed by the MOE to increase the level of equity in education in order to allow for social mobility in the Taiwanese society. For example, the positive discrimination policy for indigenous students taking entrance exams was introduced in 1960s and the program called the Educational Priority Area to reduce the achievement gap between urban and rural areas was put into practice in 1995 (Sung et al., 2014). In recent years, gender equity (Hsieh, 2014), education equity in higher education (Liu & Cheng, 2012), and the equity issue in education spending (Tao, 2010) occupied a more significant role in Taiwan's education reform. Nonetheless, the equity issue related to teaching and learning in schools has rarely been explored.

However, the role of equity in education is challenged by another force of education reform, namely market forces and deregulation. This challenge is illustrated by Chou and Ching (2012) as follows:

It is the case that since the marketing and deregulation were introduced into Taiwanese education reform schemes beginning in the 1990s, this trend has been reinforced. As more and more reform programs come into play, such as different versions of textbooks and multiple channels of entrance exams for high school and university, the grading competition among schools and families accelerates. According to *Business Week* in Taiwan, Taiwan's former profile as one of the most equitable societies in Asia has moved into a different phase in the last ten years. (p. 63)

Apart from the phenomenon mentioned above, Chou and Ching (2012) further pointed out an expected consequence of education resources redistribution, due to a reorganization of the new five Special Municipalities which took place during 2010 and 2014. Taipei Municipality is the only municipality not affected.

Methodological Remarks: Research Design, Reflection, and Ethical Issues

The qualitative approach is adopted for data collection. Data, analysis, and findings presented in this paper are my preliminary effort to document what happened during the latest curriculum reform in Taipei. In other words, data and discussion in later sections of this paper result from a pilot study focusing on how the DOE in Taipei applied various means to reignite learners' and teachers' passion in learning. The changes in Taipei schools represent a systematic attempt because it has mostly been led by the municipal government's DOE and has influenced most of Taipei's secondary schools.

Data used in this paper was mainly drawn from two sources: one being official publicly available documents; the other being interviews with two superintendents from the DOE who possess extensive knowledge on the three aspects of the reform discussed in this paper. These two interviewees, called Betty and Iris here, are in charge of the curriculum development for secondary schools including junior and senior high schools. The rationale of choosing interview as one of the qualitative data collection methods is that the researcher is able to "get the story behind a participant's experiences" (McNamara, 1999).

Therefore, the interview method fits this study because both Betty and Iris are highly experienced in curriculum development and implementation. Semi-structured interviews were applied for this study. I developed several guiding questions from my analysis of documents. During the interview process, I added various follow-up questions where needed. Before taking the position of superintendent, Betty and Iris were both experienced teachers in secondary schools. Iris also has experiences as a school head of department. Two interviews were conducted differently based on the availability of the interviewees. The interview with Betty was conducted face-to-face while the interview with Iris was conducted online.

When I first planned to work on this paper, the intention was to document the systematic attempt of reigniting learners' passion for learning at senior high school level through literature review and document analysis. However, the more I dug in, the more difficulties I encountered in getting sufficient and informative documents. These initiatives I intend to explore are not confidential but there was not much information released, even for those related to the purpose, call for project proposals and list of schools participating in these initiatives. Thus, I approached the superintendent Iris and learned that most documents are not open to the public due to lack of manpower in the DOE to make them public in online and print forms. Since it was difficult to get published documents, I decided to make use of the semi-structured interview method to collect first-hand data. Both interviewees were well informed about the purpose of the interviews, their rights and the use of data. They are both given pseudonyms in this paper. Also, their consent was acquired and recorded prior to the start of each interview.

Back to the Basics: An Alternative Approach to Enhancing Equity in Education

In this section, the paper will describe and discuss systematic attempts to improve school quality at senior high school level and the quality of teaching across different levels of schools in Taipei. Three major initiatives were proposed to prepare schools in Taipei for the potential changes and challenges brought about by the 12-year Basic Education initiative brought in by the central government. The first initiative was to establish a Curriculum Development Circle to enhance inter-school collaboration. The second initiative was to establish a Leading Program of Curriculum and Instruction for senior high

schools and vocational schools, and the third initiative was the promotion of student-centered teaching. To some extent, it can be argued that the last two initiatives overlap with each other because the teacher-centered approach covers all levels of pre-university education including senior high schools. In order to change the teacher-centered approach in schools, these initiatives were proposed to shift the culture of teaching from teacher-centered to student-centered. Moreover, the emphasis on Back to the Basics implies teaching and learning and student-centered approaches as the core of the education reform. My argument is that equity in formal schooling improves when overall teaching practices are improved and the school culture provides positive reinforcement.

The Curriculum Development Circle: Collaboration between Schools

The Curriculum Development Circle was established in 2011 with the original aim of figuring out responses to challenges brought up by 12-year basic education. In order to prepare senior high schools and parents in Taipei for the drastic systematic changes in senior high school admission, the members of the Curriculum Development Circle mobilized from various senior high schools in Taipei determined the procedure and criteria for different channels of admission including “Open Admission” and “Special Talent Admission.” Betty explained the beginning of the Curriculum Development Circle because she was the coordinator of this circle as well as the representative of the DOE.

After one year, the original task was accomplished. With the permission of the DOE, the Curriculum Development Circle planned to shift the focus from responding to change in admission to facilitating the development of “featured curriculum/school-based curriculum” among senior high schools. Betty explicated this change of the Curriculum Development Circle as follows:

On the 19th of July 2012, we plan to change our aim from the discussion on admission to the development of featured curriculum which is closely related to 12-year Basic Education. Under the 12-year Basic Education initiative, the main course of this reform agenda is curriculum and instruction. Without a change in curriculum and instruction, any other change in this system is in vain. At the senior high level, developing the featured curriculum was the focus. Then, we invited all 26 municipal senior high schools

to come for a briefing session. Fourteen out of 26 schools decided to participate in Curriculum Development Circle on a voluntary basis. From July to December 2012, the Curriculum Development Circle was in the preparation stage for its new task related to featured curriculum... (Betty, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

The Curriculum Development Circle has three subgroups: the curriculum development subgroup, the teaching and instruction subgroup, and the academic affairs subgroup. The curriculum development subgroup is responsible for macro-curriculum development and we invite academics from universities as consultants and reviewers. The teaching and instruction subgroup focuses on the micro-classroom practices related to teaching and learning. The academic affair subgroup deals with the legal and administrative issues related to curriculum development and teaching and learning in senior high schools. The operation of the Curriculum Development Circle is highly systematic which means we have a good planning and implementing system. (Betty, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

From what Betty described, it is clear that Taipei's DOE made a brave move to create an alliance among senior high schools and let school representatives who are also practitioners make curriculum decisions. 26 senior high schools were participating in this circle in 2016, comprising principals and heads of academic affairs. They have been supervised and supported by superintendents who are in charge of curriculum from the DOE. Iris further elaborated on the target audience and resources of each subgroup as follows:

The curriculum development, or the curriculum leaders' subgroup, as we now call it, serves the school leaders, teacher leaders and the teachers involving in the cross-school professional learning communities. Then, the teaching and instruction subgroup is for teachers in different subjects and in the cross-school professional learning communities. The third subgroup is for heads of academic affairs in schools and staff in the DOE. The best resource we have is human resources because we can invite experts from higher education institutes and other organizations. (Betty, personal communication, January 19, 2015)

According to Iris, cultivating the curriculum and instructional leaders is one of the major tasks of the Curriculum Development Circle. This circle is the first of

its kind in Taiwan. Therefore, it is apparent that the DOE is willing to try a new strategy to facilitate changes in schools. Moreover, the task related to the development of featured/school-based curricula in the second stage of the Curriculum Development Circle started in accordance with the competitive program initiated by the DOE.

In 2013, the Curriculum Development Circle also set up a database to incorporate teachers with leadership potential, pedagogical expertise, and professional learning community experience. At the senior high school level, the Curriculum Development Circle was the major drive to promote the student-centered approach in teaching and learning practices.

Since 2014, the Curriculum Development Circle has started funding cross-school professional learning communities (PLCs). The number of cross-school PLCs was 17 in ten subjects in 2014 and 25 in 14 subjects in 2015. These cross-school PLCs functioned to cultivate seed teachers in different subjects for various schools with an understanding of the student-centered approach in learning and teaching. Moreover, new teaching approaches were on trial by the teachers in these cross-school PLCs. Teachers involved in cross-school PLCs are expected to be potential curriculum leaders at the senior high school level in Taipei, as exemplified by Iris's interview.

Leading Program of Curriculum and Instruction for Senior High Schools and Vocational Schools

In order to provide senior high schools and vocational schools with high-quality curricula and instruction, the DOE of Taipei's municipal government initiated a five-year Leading Program of Curriculum and Instruction for Senior High and Vocational School in May 2012. This Leading Program was for both public and private senior high school and vocational schools. As previously stated, the focus of this paper is on senior high schools. The reason why senior high schools were chosen is that they are expected to suffer more after the implementation of 12-year Basic Education. This kind of program is not unique in a global or local context. In other countries, there have been the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program in the US (US Department of Education, 2014) and the Beacon School Program in the UK (BBC, 2001). In the local education context, there have been flagship programs in New Taipei City and the School Actualization Program

(SAP), both supported by the MOE.

To participate in this Leading Program, schools have to devise development plans and send them to the DOE of Taipei's municipal government for review. The school development plan should contain the following aspects (DOE, 2012):c

- The school is able to develop a school-based curriculum;
- The principal has to demonstrate the capacity for practicing curricular and instructional leadership; and
- There are proactive PLCs to continually improve teaching and learning in the school with a focus on the student-centered approach.

The reviewers of these plans are composed of a group of university professors, experienced principals and one or two representatives from the DOE. Three key criteria are applied to evaluate the development plan. They are:

- SWOT analysis and strategies: A focused SWOT analysis on the curriculum and instruction, and feasible strategies based on this analysis;
- Curriculum design and implementation: The school needs to provide the structure of the school-based curriculum and its features. Other aspects related to the development of a high quality school-based featured curriculum include teacher capacity, syllabus, course contents and required resources; and
- Execution: Several aspects are listed to identify if the school can execute its curriculum development as planned (They are principal leadership, PLCs in school, resource management and the performance of school in the last round of school evaluation, DOE, 2012).

From the content and evaluating criteria, it is clear that the Leading Program emphasizes curriculum development and implementation, especially the featured curriculum in senior high schools. Two key factors related to the success of school-based curriculum development are principal's curricular and instructional leadership and the PLCs in schools. These two are regarded as the foundation for school curriculum reform.

The chosen school is going to receive a maximum funding of NT\$5 million (about US\$160,000) per year. The funding is for three years but there is a condition that the school has to pass the annual evaluation at the end of each year to secure funding for the next year. The status quo of this Leading Program is illustrated by Iris as follows:

Twenty three out of 26 municipal senior high schools are funded by the Leading program this year [2015]. We [the DOE] do not want to put too much pressure on [senior high] schools so we did not ask for too much paperwork. Too much paperwork escalates the workload in schools. Some feedbacks from schools are positive. Statistically, after the Leading Program, there are school-based elective courses equal to 977.5 credits in 21 schools in this program in the past two years. In total, the number of students participating in these courses is 49,879. The number of teachers teaching these courses is about 1,400. 616 pieces of new curricular material have been developed. The number of teachers doing professional development keeps increasing. (Iris, personal communication, March 5, 2015)

In 2013 and 2014, 21 municipal senior high schools received funding from the Leading Program, while two more joined the program in early 2015. In terms of the outcome of this Leading Program, it did boost the pace of curriculum development in these schools. Furthermore, Iris mentioned that there will be another program after the five-year Leading Program completed. That means this kind of competitive program works, at least from the DOE's perspective. Meanwhile, it can be argued that this is a consistent and lasting policy to improve the school-based featured curriculum and teachers' professional development.

The underlying logic of this program is that, once schools develop their own school-based, featured curriculum and have well-operated PLCs, schools can continue to improve their own curriculum and instruction (DOE, 2012). By doing so, most of the schools can be seen as being high quality. Then, a fair opportunity for students to enroll in a good quality school is offered. To a large extent, this is a good way to have equity in education, or at least, at the senior high school level.

Promoting the Student-Centered Approach in Teaching Practices

Another initiative is to promote student-centered approaches in learning to school leaders and teachers. This idea is embedded in the previous two initiatives. In other words, this can be viewed as the overarching philosophy of the aforementioned initiatives. The two initiatives of the Curriculum Development Circle and the Leading Program aim at realizing student-centered approaches in daily teaching and learning in senior high schools. In Betty's interview, she mentioned that one of the key student-centered practices, the school as learning

community, was introduced to teachers in Taipei in 2012, with an emphasis on ideas and practices borrowed from neighboring countries, such as Japan. One of the key themes in making school a learning community is through lesson study which has been proven effective in instructional improvement (Lewis, Akita, & Sato, 2010). The major advocate of this “school as learning community” practice is Professor Manabu Sato from Japan who also initiated an international organization called “International Platform for School as Learning Community.” Influenced by Sato’s idea with the media promotion of parenting magazine, the movement of school as learning community becomes a trend in Taipei, New Taipei City and other parts of Taiwan.

However, Sato’s ideas and practices are developed from his experience of working with Japanese schools. While implementing this in Taiwan, the idea of school as learning community needs to be re-contextualized so that it can be applied to the Taiwanese context. A localized practice called “leadership of learning and learning community” has been developed by a group of researchers based on certain adjustments of Sato’s ideas and on experiences from Taiwanese school practices (Pan et al., 2014). This practice spread very fast in Taipei. The number of teachers who have open classrooms and conduct lesson study has increased faster than before.

Besides this “leadership of learning and learning community” practice, there are other innovative approaches to learning, such as self-directed learning and flipped classroom, being developed by local school teachers. All these new approaches may differ in their teaching strategies but one thing they have in common is that they all give students autonomy while learning. In short, in one way or another, teachers in Taipei all tried to promote student-centered learning. It means that the philosophy of teachers has started changing from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogies. However, it is necessary to admit that these changes are still in process. Most in-service teachers need to be well-equipped in pre-service teacher education programs in order to master the up-to-date student-centered pedagogies. Workshops, overseas visits, conferences, and lectures have been offered to in-service teachers to educate them about these practices.

Concluding Remarks

According to the discussion above, it is clear that the DOE of Taipei's municipal government has attempted to make change systematically, especially in introducing pedagogical reforms in senior high schools. These initiatives share a similar starting point: To better respond to the coming challenges brought by 12-year Basic Education, a systematic policy change has taken place in Taiwan's government. However, after completing the goal of the first stage, the DOE of Taipei's municipal government shifted the direction of the Curriculum Development Circle and started the Leading Program to improve the quality of teaching and learning in senior high schools across Taipei. Based on the elaboration of Yang (2014), the educational content and environment can be part of a means to bring about equity in education. Improving the quality of teaching and learning on a municipality-wide scale, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to improve equity in senior high school education. As Lee, Lee, and Low (2014) emphasized, equity in education is achieved through quality improvement in pedagogies. When there is quality teaching, students who fall behind can catch up faster, and thus, the gap between high and low achievers can be reduced over time.

However, there are some remarks I would like to make in order to avoid misinterpretation of the arguments in this paper. First, it is crucial to point out that what happened in Taipei cannot be viewed as indicative of the entire island. In other parts of Taiwan, there is not much city- or county-wide effort to do what Taipei has done. The equity issue may be more severe in other cities and counties. Second, the systematic attempt in Taipei is still in its infancy. More evidence is required to provide a better judgment on its impact on teaching and learning, although some preliminary evidence from schools has shown positive outcomes. Last, the two superintendents I interviewed do have their vision and strong belief in promoting these changes but there is no guarantee that their successors are going to continue what they have achieved so far. To sum up, although there are positive signs of making changes in schools in Taipei, there are still uncertainties in the practices of improving equity through systematic attempts to make sustainable improvements in teaching and learning practices in Taipei. How effective these systematic attempts have been in Taipei has yet to be reviewed.

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