

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Hull</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: C25: Education</p>
<p>Title of case study: The international reach and significance of portrait methodology upon individuals and organisations</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This methodological approach to researching leadership utilised 70 in-depth interviews and written ‘portraits’ of UK Headteachers and Hong Kong (HK) Principals to examine how personal and professional issues affected their practice. Individuals in both locations reported that reflection upon this procedure led to significant life-changing decisions. Furthermore, the HK researcher who became involved in the research persuaded the Hong Kong government to invest significant funds in using the approach to support leadership in a group of 13 special schools, thus demonstrating the reach of the impact, through both the extent and diversity of its effect.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The methodology from which this impact derived began as (i) an investigation of school leaders’ perceptions of perceived challenges (ongoing since 2004) (Bottery et al. 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2012b). It has also been used (ii) to investigate the challenges faced by Headteachers in difficult schools (2008); and (iii) how Headteachers implemented sustainable development approaches (2009) (Bottery et al. 2012a). It is currently being used to support principals in the Hong Chi Special Schools Association in Hong Kong (on-going since 2013).</p> <p>The methodology consists of taped and transcribed semi-structured interviews, followed by written ‘portraits’ of individuals derived from the transcripts (Bottery et al. 2009). Each portrait consists of the interviewer’s impression of how a particular leader engages with their work, and the challenges they face. Every assertion within a portrait is supported by quotations from the transcript of the interview. Each portrait is sent back, along with the transcript, to each leader for their thoughts and comment. Initial research was carried out in England, and subsequently developed in Hong Kong with researchers at the Hong Kong Institute of Education and Macau University.</p> <p>The results from these projects demonstrate that this methodology provides significant data on leaders’ perceptions of challenges they face, because it provides considerable assurance to the interviewees that any responses will not be used or disclosed to other parties without their express permission, thus facilitating greater honesty of response. Moreover, subsequent discussions with these leaders revealed that it facilitated deep reflection on their part after reading the transcripts and their portraits. This reflection led to major decisions by a number of individuals on how they performed their role. These claims are substantiated by the outputs in peer-refereed journals referred to above and in section 3. Moreover, in conversations following their reading of their portraits, a number reported how they had made career-changing decisions, and ascribed these decisions wholly or in part due to the impact that the process had on them. Further investigation has subsequently determined this effect more formally.</p> <p>In addition, the involvement of a senior Hong Kong researchers, Dr. Wong Ping-Man, had such significant personal impact that he (a) applied for and won funds to conduct more portrait research in Hong Kong and the UK; (b) persuaded the Hong Kong government to fund an initiative by the Hong Chi group of special schools to use this approach in helping sustain their principals; (c) to invite Professor Bottery to facilitate the project’s beginning, and to perform the majority of interviews and write the portraits .</p> <p>The lead researcher at Hull University in projects (i) - (iii) was Professor Michael Bottery; support was given by (i) Dr. PM Wong (Head of Department); Dr. PH Wong (Principal Lecturer) and Dr. G. Ngai (Associate Lecturer) at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. In project (ii) support was given by Dr. John Smith and Mr. Nigel Wright (senior lecturers, University of Hull). The lead researcher in</p>

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project (iv) is Professor M. Bottery, with the assistance of Dr. G.Ngai (Institute of Education, Hong Kong, and Dr PM Wong, Reader in Education, University of Macau.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- (1) Bottery M. (2007) Reports from the Front Line – English Headteachers' Work in an Era of Practice Centralisation. *Educational Management, Leadership and Administration*. Vol.36 no.1
- (2) Bottery M. Ngai G., Wong PM, and Wong PH (2008a) Leaders and contexts: comparing English and Hong Kong perceptions of educational challenges. *International Studies in Educational Administration* Vol.36, no.1, pp. 56-71.
- (3) Bottery M. (2008b) Pictures of Resilience *Education 3-13*. Vol.36 no.3
- (4) Bottery M., Wong PM, Wright N, and Ngai G. (2009) Portrait methodology and educational leadership – putting the person first. *International Studies in Educational Administration* vol. 37 no. 3, pp.84-98
- (5) Bottery M., Wright N., and James S. (2012a) Personality, moral purpose, and the leadership of an education for sustainable development. *Education 3-13* vol. No. pp. 1-15.
- (6) Bottery M., Ngai G., Wong PM and Wong PH (2012b) Values, priorities and responses: comparing English headteachers' and Hong Kong principals' perceptions of their work. *School Leadership & Management*. Vol.18 p.1-15.

Grants

1. 2006: (M. Bottery, PM Wong, PH Wong, and G Ngai: \$156,000HK (approximately £12,000) from the Institute of Education, Hong Kong; to investigate perceptions of current challenges by Hong Kong Secondary Principals.
2. 2008: (M. Bottery, N.Wright, and S.James): £5000 from IfL research fund, University of Hull to investigate examples of good practice in environmentally sustainable schools.
3. 2012: Dr PM Wong: \$1,000,000HK (approximately £80,000) from the Hong Kong Education Development Bureau to provide support for principals in the Hong Chi association of special schools.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Many of the 70 headteachers and principals who experienced the portrait process informally reported impact after the process, and all of those formally interviewed about it, remarked on the highly positive experience of talking about their values, visions, and challenges in the initial interviews, and of the reflections generated by the interview transcripts and portraits. No two impacts were ever quite the same, as these were occasioned by the location of a particular individual within a particular context. Nevertheless, the overwhelming impression was one of gratitude that they had been given the opportunity to discuss their challenges in a private and non-judgmental situation. Such positivity was seen in the 2012 comments of UK Headteacher A (corroborative source 1), for even though Ofsted was critical of some of his practice, he still felt that a focus on the social needs of pupils and parents should remain a priority in his school, and the portrait process had strengthened his resolve: *'...It reaffirms who you are and what you are, and if our values don't fit within a certain organisation, it's not necessarily you that's at fault...'*

Hong Kong principal B (corroborative source 2) described how the process had highlighted for him the things that he valued, and that *'...mentioning creativity impacted on me a lot...and therefore afterwards I spent quite a lot of time on how to promote creativity in our school.'* Moreover, upon leaving the principalship in 2010, he now began working with the Chung Ying Theatre *'...to produce new musicals for all students in Hong Kong...'* and he was very clear that *'... this would not have happened without the impact or without the portrait.'*

UK principal C (corroborative source 3) described how being a *perfectionist*, she always was driven

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to do her best, and the process in 2009-10 made her realise that the changes that the school now needed were things she no longer had the drive to undertake, and that reading the portrait made her realise that it was time to change her job – which she subsequently did. She then ascribed the process as critical to arriving at this decision: ‘... *The portrait process had a direct and long lasting effect on my leadership role and I am grateful for its contribution to changing my life*’. Finally, UK principal D (corroborative source 4) described the portrait process as ‘*cathartic*’, as it brought to the surface and allowed him to articulate thoughts about retirement he hadn’t fully recognised, and which now became a subject of intense reflection and personal debate for him. He decided to retire shortly after in 2009, and ascribed the portrait process as a critical driver in this decision. As he said ‘*Before [the portrait process] it might have been a throw-away comment, but now it was something I needed to think about.*’

These then are strong examples of individual impact, some of which translated into impact directly affecting their organisation and beyond (such as the job change by headteacher C and the retirement by headteacher D). However, impact of the approach is also shown in the take-up of the approach by other organisations. A UK example is CfBT, who employed Professor Bottery to run three-day workshops for Headteachers working in difficult schools in Lincoln in 2008, with the aid of two university colleagues. The feedback interview at the end of the session (corroborative source 5) strongly suggested that the process had been very beneficial to all in their reflections. Interest in the approach is also demonstrated internationally through funded invitations to Professor Bottery to talk about the approach to teachers, academics and students in the Czech Republic (2009) and South Africa (2011). The strongest example currently comes from the work of Hong Kong academic researcher F, (corroborative source 6) who engaged in collaborative research when the approach was first used in Hong Kong, and bid for money to permit himself and a colleague further involvement in Hong Kong and the UK. He bid for, and succeeded in gaining (2011) a grant of over \$1, 280, 000 HK (approximately £80,000) from the Hong Kong government’s Quality Education Fund entitled ‘Special School Leaders Development Programme (ref. 2011/0183) to support principals in the largest group of special schools in Hong Kong – the Hong Chi association, as well as bringing Professor Bottery to Hong Kong to lead the research aspect of this process. This funded project is on-going. Professor Wong comments: *The approach has filled in a gap in principal development and training programmes in HK. So far, programmes have not taken into serious consideration the specific needs of individual schools and principals. In addition, they haven’t helped principals who, for whatever reasons, are unwilling or unable to attend the formal programmes. This approach provides them with another alternative and one I am very enthusiastic to pursue (corroborative source 6)*

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- (1) Former Headteacher A: Craven Primary School, Hull: evidence of personal impact of the process;
- (2) Former Principal B: Northcote Primary School: evidence of personal impact of the process;
- (3) Former Headteacher C: Handsworth Primary School: evidence of personal impact of the process;
- (4) Former Headteacher D: North Cave Primary School; evidence of personal impact of the process;
- (5) Transcript of CFBT Lincoln Headteachers feedback discussion on the impact of the portrait approach.
- (6) Academic researcher F: Reader in Education, Macau University (the special school impact): evidence of his adoption of the methodology, the Hong Kong research grants, and the use and purpose of the portrait approach for the Hong Chi programme;