

# **Who's the Boss?: Exploring the Academic Leadership Styles of Principals in Non-traditional Preschools**

**Lissa Aireen L. Moti**

Principals play a vital role in running an entire institution as they provide leadership and a strategic directional path for their constituents to follow. They face challenges in carrying out multiple administrative functions in addition to their key position as the overall visionary leader. The study explores the academic leadership styles of principals/school heads of non-traditional preschools. Specifically, it aims to (a) investigate the distinct leadership style practices of three principals/school heads from different institutions; (b) determine their roles within their respective schools; and, (c) identify their current management approaches. The overall purpose of the study is to contribute preliminary findings on the leadership style practices of school leaders in non-traditional preschools in the Philippines, which is an understudied population. A multiple case study was employed that compiled narrative accounts from interviews. Thematic analysis resulted in four major themes: collaborative culture, collaborative visioning, developing lifelong learners, and innovation in education/pedagogy. Analysis of these themes proposed a Filipino theory that was aligned with available literature that can be further investigated in future endeavors.

**Keywords:** *principals, school heads, nontraditional schools, leadership styles, management practice*

## Introduction

Principals or school heads are at the forefront of their institutions. They face complex, multifaceted roles and responsibilities as educational leaders (Parson et al., 2016). They are characterized as change agents who work with a limited and constantly evolving sphere of influence—they are leaders, administrators, and middle managers who mediate tensions between policies-as-designed and policies-as-implemented all at once (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006, as cited in Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). School leaders face challenges of increasing complexity and frequency as they perform their functions and provide direction and support while seeking to influence conditions related to teaching and learning (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010, as cited in Brooks & Sutherland, 2014).

A preschool principal is the [designated] head, deputy, director, or supervisor of a school in the early childhood setting (Carr et al., 2009, as cited in Leung, 2018). As principals, they oversee all things associated with running their institutions. They also assume functions and roles such as being a member of the school board, a teacher, and an administrative worker. Some are appointed to this position by way of selection or nomination based on extensive teaching merits. Others are assigned into the role by way of inheritance because the institution is a family-owned enterprise passed on to the next of kin or family member to take over the business.

This study explores the leadership styles of preschool principals/school heads in selected non-traditional preschools in Metro Manila who are in the field of early childhood education and who perform multi-task functions or various professional roles such as overall school director, owner, and administrator. The study aims to describe their professional roles within their institution, identify their academic leadership styles, and show how they apply certain management practices in their schools. It also attempts to suggest a theory that is aligned with an existing local management theory which can be further investigated in future research endeavors.

Participants in the study are currently the principals or school heads of selected non-traditional preschools in Metro Manila which all employ a progressive curriculum. Being non-traditional, the chosen schools do not implement the traditional pedagogy where the “performance of the learner is given importance rather than the learner itself, with the teachers as the instruments of knowledge” (Papong, 2014 p. 66).

The exploration of the leadership styles and management approaches of selected school administrators in non-traditional preschools in Metro Manila led to the discovery of the dynamics of their academic involvement in decision and policy making. Five levels of decision making were enumerated by Weddle (2013, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015) who explains how at each level the amount of time and decision-making involvement increases. At level one, the leader makes the decision alone and announces the decision later on; At level two, the leader gathers input from individuals and makes the decision; Level three has leaders collating input from the team; Level four focuses on consensus building with the leader as a member of the team that comes up with a unified agreement; and at level five, the leader seeks consensus and delegates to team members. Furthermore, it is also shown by various perspectives on leadership (leadership as a process or relationship, leadership as a combination of traits or personality characteristics, and leadership as leadership skills) that, before assuming their positions as academic leaders, the school administrators are already performing multi-functional roles over and above their being classroom teachers.

The need to pursue this kind of study is deemed a worthwhile contribution and addition to the existing body of literature on local school leaders in non-traditional schools since most of the present studies currently available are conducted on principals in the traditional school setting.

## Leadership Theories

Significant leadership theories would help much in understanding the experiences of the principals of non-traditional schools and their corresponding academic leadership styles. Charry (2012, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015) identified nine major leadership theories.

Great Man Theory is based on the heroic contributions of great male military leaders that follow the mantra, “great leaders are born not made”. Trait Theory suggests that to be an effective leader one must have innate qualities, intelligence factors, personalities, and behavioral characteristics. Contingency Theory states that there is no specific leadership style that is fitting for every situation but is subject to change depending on the work circumstance. Charry (2012, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015) further indicated that success depends on several variables-- leadership styles, qualities of followers, and situational features. Situational Theory describes leaders who act and decide on the spot in accordance with the status quo at the workplace. It indicates that there is no one single leadership style that is best suited to a particular task and that choosing the best course of action is based on situational conditions or circumstances. Meanwhile, Behavioral Theory posits that great leaders are made not born, in contrast to the Great Man Theory. It depicts leaders who assume a particular type of behavior acquired from training and observation or copied from other leaders. Participative Theory identifies leaders who value collaboration, involve all of the members in the organization, and consider the inputs of constituents into account. Transactional/Management Theory bases leadership on a system of rewards and punishments where employees are given rewards when successful or reprimanded or punished for failures (Charry 2012, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Relationship/Transformational Theory shows leaders form connections with their followers, inspiring them toward reaching their full potential. Charry (2012, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015) added that leaders with this style have high ethical and moral standards. Skills Theory focuses on the knowledge and acquired set of skills/abilities as the

basis for effective leadership and successful performance. It also advocates training, exposure, experiences, and skills development to prepare followers for future leadership positions.

## Leadership Styles of Principals

For leaders to motivate their constituents, school principals use six different styles of leadership according to Amanchukwu et al. (2015). Autocratic Leadership Style is a form of transactional leadership that has the leader in full control and with decision-making power over followers whose inputs are seldom considered. This style works best in crisis management situations where quick decisions must be made. Bureaucratic Leadership Style is based on fixed procedures and well-structured management with leaders who require constituents to follow orders and rules precisely.

Charismatic/Transformational Leadership Style describes leaders who lead and inspire their constituents to be productive members of the organization. Leaders use their charisma in communicating, persuading, and influencing constituents to perform their best in the workplace toward goal achievement. Transformative leaders are individuals who encourage principled levels of judgement through dedicated effort, inspiring followers to higher levels of performance outcomes (Clift et al., 1995). Similarly, Hoy and Miskel (2005) explained that transformational leaders are proactive leaders who raise the level of awareness of subordinates regarding their individual collective interests and empower them to strengthen their commitment to achieve the organization's objectives. Transformative leadership is also one where leaders address issues of equity, diversity, social justice, and oppression (Shields, 2004, as cited in Parson et al., 2016). It also focuses on the principals' role as critical to teacher learning, creating inclusive schools, raising expectations for all students, and addressing institutionalized racism (Kose, 2007, as cited in Parson et al., 2016). However, the downside of this leadership style is the risk of project failure or the organization falling apart because of the leverage of confidence placed

on the leader over the employees (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

Democratic/Participative Leadership Style is composed of leaders who value collaboration with followers via team involvement, engagement, and participation in the decision-making process. A democratic process that promotes free flowing of ideas and group equality is implemented. Participative leadership also involves the collective decision-making of a group (Clift et al., 1995). Bush (2003) further described this form of leadership to be relevant to the collegial model that indicates both leaders and staff to have shared values and common interests as participation in the organization is justified by democratic principles.

Instructional leadership emphasizes how principals support the learning and teaching components for their students' growth (Bush, 2003) by paying specific attention to the professional development of teachers (Southworth, 2002, as cited in Parson et al., 2016). It also focuses on modeling, monitoring, and valuing professional dialogue and discussion (Southworth, 2002, as cited in Bush, 2007). This is an important dimension because it targets the school's central activities that also provide an overall framework for teaching and learning (Bush, 2007).

Transactional Leadership Style meanwhile is similar to Transactional Theory and puts the leaders on top of things through transactions of either reward or consequence/punishment depending on the followers' output and work compliance. Hoy and Miskel (2005) defined transactional leadership as having leaders who motivate followers through the process of exchanging rewards for services rendered or promises of reward for the efforts put in by the subordinates to meet their immediate self-interests. Leaders who implement this style focus on specific tasks and use rewards and punishments to motivate followers. Transactional leaders utilize a form of exchange with the follower that satisfies one's needs in exchange for the work delivered (Bass, 1985a, as cited in Hoy & Miskel,

2005). This type of exchange is also deemed to be political in nature within the organization as the principals and school heads possess the power of authority arising from their positions as the formal leaders of their institutions (Bush, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

### **The Principalship in Singapore: A Model Incorporating Educational Theory and Leadership Styles**

Among the varying studies on successful principalship, Singapore is noted to produce relevant studies on educational leadership of principals in the primary and secondary schools. According to the McKinsey Report (2010, as cited in Dong & Ng Foo Seong, 2014), Singapore is identified as one of the best performing and most robust school systems in the world whose success is attributed to its establishment of an integrated and coherent educational system with a strong emphasis on student academic achievement. A neighboring Southeast Asian nation, Singapore shares with the Philippines an Asian culture where lessons and insights on successful leadership practices can be drawn.

Wang et al. (2015) did case studies on four primary schools in Singapore which focused on successful school leadership of principals. These principals were discovered to be effective in improving the capacity-building initiatives of their respective schools that focused on redesigning school structures to enhance the working environs of the teachers, reinforced professional capacity of their faculty and non-teaching staff members, and continued meaningful linkages with stakeholders of the school community. Their success as leaders was attributed to their contributions in their respective schools strengthened by their empathetic and caring ways, personal qualities, beliefs, and values. Ng (2003, as cited in Wang et al., 2015) noted that these principals took responsibility for the holistic development of their students and followed the ability-driven education paradigm practiced in Singapore, where it is highly encouraged to implement a variety of strategies in both the academic and non-academic programs of

the schools. A 6E model was developed from the International Successful School Principalship Project that described the collective context of the themes on educate, envision, energize, engage, enable, and embrace that reflected the principals' adherence to achieving academic excellence.

Ng et al. (2015, as cited in Wang et al., 2015) reviewed Singapore principals' leadership qualities, styles, and roles indicating that they were influenced by a systemic leadership training program in becoming vision providers and change agents. Factors that led to successful leadership in Singapore primary schools included a reflection of the predominantly Chinese culture where there was a strict system set in place and human resources reinforcing the tight alignment of this system with a strong "leader-teacher compact" in addition to practicing sustainability, scalability, succession, and high performance across the whole Singapore educational system (Wang et al., 2015 p. 271; Dong & Ng Foo Seong, 2014).

Several studies support the finding that, wherever there is a keen sense of control from those in the high-level positions, genuine shared decision-making and collective engagement flourish. Wang et al. (2015) concluded that a huge part in shaping Singapore's leadership practices was attributed to societal and cultural values of collectivism, hierarchy, and economic pragmatism evident in Asian culture. In addition, a strong sense of agency, deeply-held core values, and moral and ethical purpose are also attributes of successful principalship (Ho & Meng-Huat Chua, 2019).

### **Philippine Style of Leadership/Management Decision Making**

Following McKinsey's 7s Management Model, Castillo (2016) devised a framework from the results of the experiences and practices of three progressive preschools in Metro Manila. The study evolved from the observed lack of quality and formal structures in Early Childhood Care and Development Programs (ECCD) and inadequacy of studies on leadership and management in the field of early childhood education. The study identified best management practices and leadership styles

on core management elements on systems, styles, and shared values within the institutions. Findings showed interrelatedness, and interconnectedness appeared in their sense of leadership and management, hypothesizing that innovation was the management approach in progressive preschool institutions. Castillo (2016) further said that administrative roles should be interrelated with the importance of inclusion even at the primary level. The Train Management Model of Progressive Schools was the model developed that combined their documented practices. The model showed a graphical representation of a steam engine train on railroad tracks. The front engine train represented leadership and the two box cars as management practices (Castillo, 2016). The wheels depicted core management elements that in their absence will derail the train and will make it go off course in providing quality progressive preschool programs. The railroad track signified the fundamental core of progressive education.

Franco (1982) presented four alternative styles of Filipino management: 1) Management-by-*Kayod* and the Realist Manager, 2) Management-by-*Libro* and the Idealist Manager, 3) Management-by-*Lusot* and the Opportunist Manager, and 4) Management-by-*Suyod* and the Reconsider Manager. The study claimed that Filipinos believed that most followed the Management-by-*Kayod* style and were Realist Managers. Franco explained that Realist Managers were those who worked day in and day out, seven days a week including holidays fueled by an inner zeal, as represented in the Filipino term *kayod*. This manager type sees work as a pleasure in life. An example to support this type shows how young and talented MA and PhD holders who initially believe they are idealist managers eventually discover that their degrees are purposeless and ineffective in their choice of career. This leads to a shift in becoming realist managers. The article concluded with a lasting statement, "In any organization today, the cry for top managers is very loud, *Pinoy* management should be able to answer this need" (Franco, 1982, p. 291). Focusing on this style of leadership encourages the idea to reconsider Filipino values in leadership and management.

### ***The Social, Values, and Communication Frameworks in Filipino Leadership and Management***

Further exploration of the Filipino behavior in specific social, value, and communication frameworks will provide insights into their social and cultural orientations (Jocano, 1999). The author discussed how these frameworks revolved around the workplace in the Philippine context.

**The Social Framework.** Three core elements fall under the social framework: personalism, paternalism, and familism. The concept of personalism describes how Filipinos give emphasis to interpersonal relations and face-to-face encounters. Jocano (1999) defined it as a personally defined way of sharing a burden or a feeling of moral obligation to assist someone in trouble; it is also viewed as having the ardent desire to be counted and to be part of a collective, which is called groupism. The author explained that Filipinos were more “groupists” than “individualists” by social orientation where the welfare of others was prioritized.

Paternalism, the moral base of leadership and followership in Filipino cultural context, refers to concerned leadership because it is not authoritarian, dictatorial, or coercive, but the “right way of leading” an organization (Jocano, 1999, p. 40). This refers to the perspective of assuming father roles, who may be strict, is a disciplinarian, and abides by the rules of consultation, persuasion, and consensus. Jocano (1999) emphasized that paternalism was functionally translated in Filipino as *makamagulang na pagpansin* (elderly concern). This type of leader must display responsibility and compassion, and is conscientious.

The third social framework, familism, or *makamag-anak na pananaw*, means looking at people and regarding them as members of one’s own family. This displays the “group egalitarian spirit” of equal treatment among members. Jocano (1999) observed that Filipinos in general were family and group oriented more than being ego-oriented because of how the family was valued as the central unit of concern. Overall, the familism

perspective in the work setting explains how leaders and managers operate as the guardians while employees are the wards. Leaders must always implement egalitarianism and cooperation as their guiding principles.

**The Value Framework.** Sensitivity is one of the value feelings that Filipinos are known for. In fact, they are oftentimes described as an “overly sensitive people” whose feelings are regarded more than logical reasoning and who are immersed in establishing harmony with natural and social events (Jocano, 1999, p. 42). The concept of *asal*, which is also equated to character, is introduced as an internal code of ethics as the overall value framework of Filipino behavior. Jocano (1999) explained this context as:

Despite changes in the Philippine environment, most Filipinos continue to emphasize the *asal* principles in assessing behavior. Most assessments are seldom based on logical reasoning alone; they are evaluated in terms of reasons and feelings. It is not merely being right that is important. It is the feeling that one is right that accounts for the decision making in Philippine society. (p. 43)

The value framework *asal* comprises three basic elements: 1) *kapwa* 2) *damdamin* and, 3) *dangal*. Among the three elements, *kapwa* will be highlighted as it aligns with the current study. Jocano (1999) defined *kapwa* as the perceived state of being part of or being on equal terms with others, like being members of the same organization, peer group, nation, or race. Filipinos stand out in terms of relational values different from Western societies because of the emphasis on interpersonal relations. The essence of equality in *kapwa* relations is upheld in these supportive norms through: *pakikisama*, *pakitungo*, and *pakikiramay*.

***Pakikisama.*** Jocano (1999) defined *pakikisama* as the general rule used to define relationships primarily in social situations or the desire or demand to “get along with someone”. This means to be concerned about, to be supportive of, and to concede. It is the common notion of having shared

expectations with an individual for the good of the group or the majority, in the spirit of harmony, friendship, and cooperation.

**Pakikitungo.** Adapting to situations over which one has no control is described as acting humbly, being civil, and relating to others in the most appropriate way. However, Jocano (1999) pointed out that *pakikitungo* was ego-oriented in the way that it depicted how an individual behaved towards others in specific situations. An example is how an employee will act when the superior is around, or how co-workers interact with an experienced colleague in the same department. A leader can be known for harmonious relations with others effectively (*mahusay makitungo*) and for being accommodating and approachable (*madaling pakitunguhan*). On the other hand, some troubles in formal organizations can result from the transgression of this norm (Jocano, 1999).

**Pakikiramay.** *Pakikiramay*, from the root word *damay*, means to express sympathy, share in somebody's sorrows, or show compassion or pity toward another and describes a strong moral undertone of *kapwa* explaining how Filipinos are culturally compassionate as a people (Jocano, 1999). This norm is evident in times of crisis where Filipinos are moved by stories of sufferings of other people or sad life episodes.

**The Communication Framework.** Filipino communication techniques include *pagsasangguni* (consultation), *paghihikayat* (persuasion), and *pagkakasundo* (consensus). Among the three, *pagsasangguni* is the approach that shows the Filipino practice of valuing the opinions and inputs of significant others before making a decision because it strengthens individual identity within a group (Jocano, 1999). Consultation involves the participation of both parties in decision-making via indirect ways without offending people. Thus, good relationships are maintained, enhancing interpersonal and intergroup cooperation.

## Methods

The participants of the study were three principals/school heads of non-traditional preschools. These were the only participants that responded out of the eight invitations sent out. The study utilized a multiple case study approach. Results from the interviews generated narrative accounts on their actual practice as school administrators. Interview results were compiled based on categories from the questionnaire until descriptions and broad themes emerged, grounded on related literature. Findings were analyzed qualitatively that led to four leadership styles evident among the participants.

### Participants' Profiles

The participants of the study were the principals or school heads of non-traditional preschools that employed a progressive curriculum at the time of the investigation. The schools where the participants worked were collectively termed as non-traditional because they did not apply traditional pedagogy in their curriculum.

Participant A is female and was 49 years old and the school director, school administrator, owner, and founder of a progressive preschool at the time of this research. She had already been a school head for 16 years, but she was previously a teacher performing administrative duties during the first 10 years of the establishment of her school. Prior to putting up School A, Participant A taught at the kindergarten level in School B and was previously a grade one teacher of a school in another municipality. School A is a family-owned corporation with Participant A acting as the school director while her mother was the treasurer, and sister was the bookkeeper.

Participant B is female and was 46 during data gathering. She had already been the principal for three years of School B, an early childhood education unit of an established institution offering primary, grade school, high school, college, graduate, and adult programs. She also taught at the college department of School B, handled subjects such as Foundations of Education,

Instructional Materials Production, and Music and Movement. She was a former grade level coordinator of a public school in the U.S.A. before coming in as the preschool administrator of School B.

Participant C is female and was the youngest among the participants at the time of the research at 42. She had been the school director of School C for 18 years. She headed a non-sectarian and co-educational institution that implemented the Montessori curriculum. Participant C first became the Principal of the Preschool Department of School C. She taught grade one English before becoming the school director. School C is also a family-owned institution. Participant C's mother was the founder-directress of the school in 1992.

### Data Gathering, Instrumentation, and Data Analysis

All three participants signed a consent form sent via email. The data gathering process was conducted via a series of email exchanges as all three participants requested this mode of communication given their tight schedule. Follow-up questions were settled via messenger at instances when the participants agreed to a real-time form of communication.

An interview guide was constructed to explore the leadership styles and practices of principals/school heads in the concerned non-traditional preschools. Interview questions were structured into three major sections: (a) demographic information; (b) professional foundation and experience; and (c) professional role in their respective institutions. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze qualitative data gathered from the written responses of their interviews. Patterns and themes were then identified from the data.

### Results and Discussion

Results of the study revealed four major themes that showed the leadership style practices of the participants involved: collaborative culture, collaborative visioning, developing lifelong learners,

and innovation in education/pedagogy. Developing themes are discussed individually based on the qualitative data gathered from the interviews. The actual responses of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

### Collaborative Culture

Principals/school heads of non-traditional preschools established collaboration and partnership to maintain a culture of openness embedded in the workplace. They practiced cooperative learning among colleagues through regular sharing of best practices and operationalizing theories together while maintaining a strong home-school partnership.

Participant A valued interpersonal relations and face-to-face dealings with people in her school including the parents of the students. She emphasized this with her extensive role in the supervision of instruction, involvement in teacher evaluation and student discipline, curriculum development, and management of finances and human resources. Participant A empowered her teachers to act on immediate class matters; for conflicts arising in the classroom, however, she and the teachers involved deliberated and conducted a collaborative decision on the issue. Regarding financial matters of the school, she would decide after consultation with the school's board members. Participant A showed the value framework on *asal*, how she practiced the three supportive norms, *pakikisama*, *pakikitungo*, and *pakikiramay* in her educational leadership role. On managing issues and concerns, she would communicate directly to the involved parties and call for a meeting. According to her, delegation of concerns was key; however, when pressing issues could not be addressed on the teachers' level, she stepped in. She also practiced *pakikisama*, *pakikitungo*, and *pakikiramay*.

The organizational culture of School B was fundamentally grounded on empowering each other and empowering teams working on common goals following the three C's - connecting, collaborating, and co-creating. Participant B highlighted the importance of the 3 C's in her work in the regular

preparation of periodic reports for the President's Council and constant meetings with other basic education unit principals in School B. She was responsible for the total development and supervision of School B. According to her, to be an effective school administrator, one must be visionary, creative, innovative, trusting, and empowering with unwavering integrity, commitment, and positive energy to inspire others. For her opinion/take on what could be the best leadership style that was suited for her position and school, she said that a school administrator should have a strong point of view. The set-up in School B was bound by the Administrative Board composed of Principal B, Assistant Principal, and Administrative Officer. This group would convene for policy/decision-making, in coordination with the Basic Education Unit Council of the whole institution composed of the principals of the Lower, Middle, High School, and Adult Education. Thus, there is a much broader scope of *pakikisama*, *pakikitungo*, and *pakikiramay* in play because Participant B must report and be accountable for School B and to the higher ups or big bosses of the institution.

The *pagsasangguni* and *pagkakasundo* among the basic education units of School B explained Principal B's specific roles:

Areas of responsibility include initiating and overseeing the implementation of long-range development plans for the academic and non-academic programs of the unit, supporting the development of human resources, preparing and administering the unit budget, supervising and evaluating academic and non-academic staffing requirements including appointments of the school's positions, overseeing the implementation and evaluation of the unit's enrollment and admissions, presents periodic reports to the President's Council and annual reports to the President, and represents the unit in various professional and educational organizations.

The experiences of Participant B can be linked to the findings of Castillo (2016) on interconnectedness and interrelatedness as the

framework of experiences in her study.

For Participant C, an effective school administrator must have a firm grasp of the school policies. She remained a pro-active and consistent leader by being present in all school events. The social structure of School C showed Participant C's comprehensive role as the school head. She oversaw daily operations and school management in the preschool, grade school, and high school departments. She had two Vice-Principals who each reported to her all matters that needed her attention or approval. Issues pertaining to the whole school and its community members were discussed with the Board of Directors.

Participants A, B, and C adhered to a consultative leadership style collaboration as an indicator of leaders and teachers working together (Wang et al., 2014 as cited in Wang et al., 2015).

### Collaborative Visioning

Collaborative visioning involves the process of setting, developing, cascading targets and expectations, and articulating the shared vision to the community (Wang et al., 2015). By doing this, every member in the community becomes involved and committed to achieving the goals.

Participants A, B, and C organized strategic planning meetings and activities to articulate the vision/mission of their respective institutions, setting achievable future targets and goals with shared decision-making. Having a unified vision is a quality of a successful school leadership (Notman & Henry, 2009, as cited in Wang et al., 2015).

Participants A and C highlighted that as a community of educators and administrators they could share experiences, concerns, and provide solutions regarding the practical aspect of school administration. Both believed in the importance of attending seminars, online courses, and local and international conferences in educational administration to balance theory and practice and to stay current about worldwide trends and directions. Participant C also suggested obtaining current pedagogy and educational tools globally

while Participant B believed in professional development and continuing studies by attaining a Master's degree in Education and pursuing a Doctorate degree in Educational Management or Designing Education. Participants A, B, and C also articulated their visions for their respective institutions five years into the future.

### **Developing Lifelong Learners**

All participants in this study demonstrated a form of instructional leadership which targeted enhanced approaches for curriculum and instruction that would shape the educational program of their respective preschools. Involvement in leading, coordinating, deciding, developing, and maintaining quality early childhood educational programs defined their roles. As explored by Wang et al. (2015), similar policies were employed by the participants in their schools to improve the desired learning objectives and student achievement.

Participants A and B implemented the progressive education principles of John Dewey while Participant C applied the Montessori method. Collectively, their school philosophies advocate the learner- or student-centered approach and the teaching of lifelong skills. Their role as the principal/school head is vital to the overall efficiency of the school's functions and success in teacher instruction which leads to greater achievement of the learners.

### **Innovation in Education/Pedagogy**

Innovation in education/pedagogy stems from the participants' adherence to constant updating of oneself as the school leader and owner. All the participants in the study advocate the betterment of the individual through continuing education and advanced studies. All of them completed a Master's degree. Participant A majored in Family Life and Child Development while Participant B and C majored in Education.

All of them explained that it was their postgraduate degrees, experience as former teachers, and immersion in multiple roles that equipped them for the leadership role they were

fulfilling. The roles they fulfill as the school's representatives at meetings with the Department of Education and other institutions or agencies all over the country paved the way for them to be creative, become forward-thinkers, and innovative leaders. This was evident in the visions they set forth for their respective preschools.

Participant A highlighted the importance of forming a community of educators and administrators for constant sharing of experiences, exchange of best practices, and attendance in online courses where readings on school administration trends would be made available. Participant B would encourage her teachers to pursue further studies in the fields of Educational Management or Designing Education. Participant C meanwhile emphasized attending local and global seminars and conferences "to be current and on trend with what is happening globally."

Table 1

## Summary of Participants' Narratives Based on the Developing Themes in the Study

Developing Themes	Participant		
	A	B	C
Collaborative Culture	In our school, we employ teacher aides who did not even finish their high school program and would have otherwise turned out to be 'kasambahays'. But we train them to be effective and efficient at their work. When they resign from their work and recognize they are more skilled, more confident, and are better learners than ever before, then my work is done.	Setting the course for inspiring direction, and by holding a strong vision, inspiring others, and taking risks, lead through culture - by setting norms that support creative work and preparing teams for challenges, and lead alongside others - by staying present and engaged with the work of the team.	Having a daily presence in everything that is happening, even in small matters, is key. Parents want to know that decisions made on their complaints and concerns are dealt with promptly and fairly. Teachers know also that all memos, notices, or office issuances are all penned by me and discussed with the school board for final decisions.
Collaborative Visioning	I wish to be known in our area as the premier progressive preschool that offers mainstreaming for children with special needs, provides enrichment classes before or after school that espouses and practices mindfulness. I would like... to be known not only as a preschool but as a family center because for a preschool to be successful, it needs its major players involved and empowered: the children, the family, and the teachers and staff.	Five years from now, the [School B] will be celebrating its 65 <sup>th</sup> anniversary in early childhood education. We will continue to champion the 5C's of 21 <sup>st</sup> century learning – communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and compassion – through decision-thinking, robotics, STEAM, project-based learning, service-learning, and spirituality.	Our vision has always been to be a landmark in education in the city of (. . .). We believe we've already achieved that as the Department of Education-Division of (. . .), has always been our partner in uplifting the education status of the city. We envision this to be the same in five years if not better.
Developing Lifelong Learners	I know all the children and sit in meetings if I see the need for it or if the teacher asks me to. If the child is overcome with emotions and needs to leave the room because he/she is destructive or is distracting others, and the teaching team cannot handle the situation on their own, I come in.	I am responsible for the total development and supervision of the school. I oversee the safety of all faculty, staff, and students. I am always present in all school events and even wear costumes for specific celebratory activities like Book Reading Week, Buwan ng Wika, etc. as my way to lead by example.	No specific response given.
Innovation in Pedagogy	It was both my masters program and sheer practice that prepared me. My master's program taught me the theories and gave me an avenue to get into discussion with educators and administrators, present and future. It was immersing myself in being an administrator, school director, school owner that really trained me for the role with real concerns in real time.	My degrees in both Psychology and Education especially my teaching experience and leadership roles I have taken prepared me for my current role. It also helped that I have the best role models – the principals who have preceded me.	We always attend seminars and conferences, both local and international, to be current and on-trend with what is happening globally. You cannot rely on what is available in Manila alone.

Note. Sourced from Personal Communications with Participant A, B, and C (March 2019)

### Factors Affecting Leadership Styles

Overall, the four themes that emerged in this study on collaborative culture, collaborative visioning, developing lifelong learners, and innovation in pedagogy led to factors that determine leadership styles in terms of decision making as discussed by Ibara (2010, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015). The effectiveness of a leader's decision making style is affected by: size of an institution/organization, degree of interaction/communication, personality of members, goal congruence, and level of decision making. The size of an institution/organization affects leadership when it evolves over time and eventually grows, which will result in an increase in the number of employees, thus affecting the decision-making process to address organizational issues and problems. The degree of interaction/communication refers to the relational approach between two or more individuals based on social and organizational structures aimed at achieving goals (Ololube, 2012, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Leaders must therefore keep the quality and quantity of interaction/communication channels intact in case organizational issues arise since an institution/organization is composed of a diverse group of members with varying personalities.

Leaders must be adaptable to the uniqueness of individuals and be able to balance participation within the organization structure. Goal congruence is applied to an institution/organization that ensures that all its operations, activities, and members support the attainment of a common goal (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Lastly, leaders with different degrees of decision-making will also affect leadership styles. This will depend if the leader is effective or not in making choices for the institution/organization including the implementation of rules within.

The leadership styles of Participants A, B, and C could be affected by factors based on the size of an institution/organization, degree of interaction/communication, personality of the team members, goal congruence, and level of decision making (Weddle, 2013; Ibara, 2010, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Amongst the three

participants, Participant A had the smallest school size and student populace. She described herself as a "small preschool owner who is a one-woman team," thus referring to herself as being a "hands-on leader." Participant A's interaction/communication with her team was done on a personal level where it was easy for her to call for meetings since she only had fewer than ten teachers. This also supported her narration that School A was "run like family" and that she knew the personalities of all the school staff.

Participant B meanwhile worked in School B situated on a big school campus space that housed basic education units and a higher educational institution. She followed a hierarchy in the organizational structure and reported directly to the President's Council. Participant B's narratives on School B's systematic school operations and well-coordinated activities across all units depicted a strong application of goal congruence because of its status as an established institution.

Participant C mentioned the humble beginnings of School C. The family was granted a property where they established the big school that they were operating. School C was a family-owned institution where Principal C sat as Secretary of the Board of Directors which met weekly for decision and policy making. Her involvement in the school went as early as her college years. Participant C's family-owned School C has grown in size through the years and has expanded from preschool to grade school and high school, with a total of 2,200 students and 120 teachers. In this small school set-up, Participant C sat as the principal for all three departments. Her position as a member of the family that owned the school also put emphasis on goal congruence and level of decision making. This is supported by the five levels of decision making mentioned by Weddle (2013, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015) explaining that the amount of time and involvement spent increases at each level. Channels of communication were also evident according to her description of "having a daily presence in everything that is happening even in small matters". Similar to Participant A, Participant C identified herself as "very hands-on."

### Limitations

The study acknowledges its limitations in having only a few principals/school heads on board over a brief period. Only three participants responded to the call for participants. Regrets received indicated that school officials were busy with year-end school activities as the timeframe of the study coincided with the end of the academic year. Therefore, this limitation in the number of participants underscores the need for further research on a larger scale. It is recommended to have more participants involved to have enough data to analyze that may eventually lead to the formulation of a grounded theory. The scope can also be extended to principals of non-traditional schools from other localities to investigate the experiences in a diverse cultural setting with varying school environments.

### Conclusions

Evidence of social and cultural orientations of Filipinos by Jocano (1999) showed that Participant A demonstrated a sense of personalism, paternalism, and familism in how she performed her role as the school head. Participant B exhibited paternalism as her social framework orientation. Her viewpoint on the best leadership style indicated a strong moral base of her leadership. As Jocano (1999) pointed out, an individual has the “right way of leading” an organization where the leader is morally right and at the same time responsible and compassionate. Participant C demonstrated the two alternative styles of Filipino management expounded on by Franco (1982), *Management-by-Libro* and the Idealist Manager coupled with *Management-by-Kayod* and the Realist Manager.

Participants A and C were similar in terms of displaying a paternalistic form of social framework because of their being daughters of the owner who wanted to continue the legacy of their mothers. Both apply a concerned type of leadership just like how a father displayed authoritarianism acting as the disciplinarian, compliant with rules of consultation, persuasion, and consensus (Jocano, 1999). Participant C exhibited a strong value framework on *asal*, like Participants A and B,

where everyone had the sensitivity known for a Filipino leader.

The analysis of the framework orientation is affirmed by the leadership model proposed by Wang et al. (2015) that showed the characteristics and behaviors of successful school principals with a strong sense of “collective endeavor” within a respectful working environment inherent in Asian cultural values.

The current study aligns with the framework of Castillo (2016) on the proposed Train Management Model of Progressive Schools as the overall local theory applicable for progressive preschools as it targets the progressive education movement. Drawing on the current findings from the three principals/school heads, this study attempts to suggest the concept of the Finger Puppet Management Theory which systematizes the leadership styles culled from the emergent themes of collaborative culture, collaborative visioning, developing lifelong learners, and innovation in education/pedagogy.

The proposed theory shows interrelationships, interconnections, and interrelatedness as depicted through the colorful finger puppets. The hand represents the school and the thumb, the school leaders. The fingers represent the themes generated from the analysis on collaborative culture and visioning, developing lifelong learners, and innovation in education/pedagogy. The finger puppets illustrate the visionary and creative aspects evident among the participants of the study. See Figure 1:

**Figure 1**

*Proposed Finger Puppet Management Theory*



Note. Original Illustration of Finger Puppets. Own work.

The suggested Finger Puppet Management Theory revolves around the collective function of the fingers, a symbiotic relationship to achieve the goals, vision, and mission of the school. This cannot succeed without the cooperation and collaboration between school leaders and other stakeholders of the institution. This depicts the non-traditional preschools' set-up where, if the thumb functions alone, difficulties may be encountered. When all fingers of the hand are coordinated and agree to collaborate to innovate, successful leadership and management will transpire. Proposing this theory is an attempt to integrate in existing literature the principals/school heads' roles and leadership styles or practices as well as published models on instructional and/or transformational leadership. Overall, it highlights the significance of partnerships and linkages in running a school efficiently. Each finger serves a part of the hand that contributes to the act of grasping or holding something intact.

The author recognizes that there may be a negative connotation in the word "puppet" as being manipulated by an external force. However, puppets as used in the paper's context connotes unity among the individual fingers working together to achieve a task and purpose. The choice of using finger puppets stems from their being commonly used in preschools as a teaching tool or a prop in storytelling and presenting a lesson or concept.

The suggested theory featured the Filipino concept of management by culture discussed by Jocano (1997, 1999). Representation of all the elements of the Finger Puppet Management Theory reflects the social and cultural context of Filipinos, how people regard social, value, and communication frameworks and their supporting norms of personalism, paternalism, familism, *asal*, *pagsasangguni*, *paghihikayat*, and *pagkakasundo*. The totality of the hand manifests close-knit family ties of Filipinos.

The current study is significant given its preliminary findings and limitations. It contributes to the literature on Philippine non-traditional schools as it sheds light on the behind-the-scenes experiences of principals. The themes identified are

consistent with available studies that act as springboard for future research particularly in the Philippine setting.

Results recognize that principals/school heads in non-traditional preschools are analogous to administrators in regular or traditional schools where they may have complex, multifaceted roles, and responsibilities as educational leaders (Parson et al., 2016). These roles may include pedagogy, supervision of instruction, curriculum development, handling of financial and human resources, and other administrative functions. Findings support the perspective of Jocano (1999) that leaders, managers, and supervisors should recognize management as a social and cultural encounter embedded in interrelationships, interconnections, and interrelatedness (Bush, 2007; Papong, 2014; Castillo, 2016; Sadovnik et al., 2017) amid their multitude of roles.

That being said, the participants revealed that being part of the study was an insightful exercise. It enabled them to practice their own reflexivity toward the scope of their profession and involvement in the workplace. They felt that school leaders are seldom included in studies such as this as compared to teachers and learners. Now, who is the boss?

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### **About the Author**

**Lissa Aireen L. Moti** is married to a housing executive, mother of three boys, and an educator by profession. She is currently an assistant professor at the College of Human Kinetics, University of the Philippines Diliman, specializing in Adapted Physical Education and yoga. Prior, she taught in the secondary level for five years. She is a UP alumna from kindergarten to high school at UPIS, finished BS Human Ecology at UP Los Baños, Master's in Education Major in Special Education at the College of Education where she is also enrolled for her PhD studies in Educational Psychology. Her research interests include yoga for special populations, Adapted PE, women athletes. Her diverse work experiences from teaching the deaf, PWDs on conservation, doing Cetacean research work on humpback whales in the Babuyan Islands, while balancing an athlete's life as a member of the Philippine Sport Climbing Team, molded her into finding her niche in this noble profession.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lissa Aireen L. Moti at [llmoti@up.edu.ph](mailto:llmoti@up.edu.ph).