Learning Project for Improving Principals' Understanding of Authentic Leadership: A Case Study of Chinese Principals Studying in Finland

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ABSTRACT

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Having one of the best education (Ruzzi, 2005; Tilastokeskus, 2019), Finland became a popular destination for international education stakeholders. Private and public organizations offer learning projects for international educators, and Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) is one of them. The study explored the successfulness of an annual learning project for Chinese school principals, offered by TAMK Global Education.

Specifically, this qualitative study aims to find out the development of the learning project and of the Chinese principals' learning. The theoretical framework consists of project-based learning and authentic leadership focusing on the core components. The case study approach is utilized, and interview data from six Chinese principals were analysed with the method of qualitative content analysis.

The findings reveal a variety of authentic leadership components in different phases of the learning project. The development of the participants' understanding of authentic leadership and the progression of the learning project are discussed based on the findings. The study also makes managerial recommendations on learning projects for Chinese educators, which may provide insights to organizations that offers similar activities.

The study concludes that the Chinese principals' understanding of authentic leadership developed as the learning project progresses, and the learning project is successful as it meets various features of a learning project. However, it can still be improved based on the participants' feedback and multiple research of project-based learning.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Principals have always been regarded as a key to a school's success (Barth, 1990; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). The importance of principals' roles has been recognized by the China educational policy makers to improve the quality of the school by implementing various educational reforms (Feng, 2003). The reforms include updating the national curriculum, improving the system of admission, building a holistic evaluation system, supporting education and research, motivating school development and facilitating compulsory education projects (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), 1985; CPC, 2019). Teachers and principals are the backbone players for achieving the above goals.

The management skills of school principals are not enough to meet today's educational challenges, and to carry out educational reforms, principals must be equipped with better educational leadership skills (Teske & Schneider, 1999). In fact, improving principals' leadership skills is significant in building a high-quality team of educational stakeholders to facilitate quality compulsory education (CPC, 2019). Therefore, there is an increasing need in training school principals in China over the years, to equip them with new educational concepts and create a sustainable environment for educators. The Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China has given support for principals and teachers to go abroad to participate in learning projects (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2011). Under the national policy, local municipalities are active facilitating leadership training or learning projects for school principals.

In recent years, Finnish education has caught the global attention with its own characteristics and remarkable performances in Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) results (Reinikainen, 2012; Välijärvi, 2002). According to different studies and reports, Finland has one of the best education systems and Finnish education is among the best in the world (Ruzzi, 2005; Tilastokeskus,

2019). Educators from around the world are highly interested (Välijärvi, 2002), making Finland a more and more popular destination for educational visits and business trips. Finland has the advantages to become a leader in global education, as its education enjoys a high reputation and there is a need for education expertise of all education levels from Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). Therefore, education export is brought to light. Public education providers and private companies are trying their best to deliver the expertise and experience of Finnish education to the world. According to Finnish National Agency of Education, Finnish teacher training has been sold abroad and Finnish expertise in early childhood education has attracted international interest (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017).

Along with this background, various organizations around China have contracted their counterparts in Finland for teacher and leadership training projects. As a big player in Guangzhou Province of Southeast China, Guangzhou city has been actively seeking educational expertise from overseas. As a facilitator of education policies and reforms from higher levels, Education Bureau of Guangzhou Municipality is responsible for teacher and leadership trainings funded and supported by the government (Gzedu.gov.cn., 2019). Therefore, Education Bureau of Guangzhou Municipality got into contact with Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) about teacher and leadership training. TAMK is a multidisciplinary, international university of applied sciences in Finland. TAMK Global Education is a special unit that is responsible for TAMK's own education export activities. In this background, Bureau of Education of Guangzhou Municipality sends school principals annually to TAMK for a leadership learning project abroad as a part of their long-term leadership training.

I worked as a project coordinator for this annual leadership learning project for two years when conducting the research for my Master Degree. Therefore, it was of my personal interest to find out if the learning project succeeded in supporting the participants' learning and what could be done to improve the quality of the learning project. However, Bureau of Education of Guangzhou Municipal-

ity is not the only organization who is interested in Finnish teacher and leadership training. As mentioned previously, both public and private organizations in China and Finland are actively implementing Finnish education export to China.

During implementation of a learning project, difficulties may present themselves due to the differences in culture and desired content and ways of learning. Therefore, it would be beneficial to understand what the Chinese principals would like to learn, how they learn, and how to improve the quality of the learning projects to achieve better learning outcomes for the Finnish organizations. Specifically, the aim of the study was to find out the principals' previous understanding and knowledge about leadership, how their learning happened and developed during the learning project, and what learning outcomes will they take into practice in the future.

1.2   Structure of the Study

To achieve the above-mentioned aims of this research, I would need to decide which theories and concepts could help me to achieve the aim. As the leadership training is a learning project itself, I wanted to dig deeper into the topic of project-based learning. Considering my job responsibilities, the theory of project-based learning would not only help me with this project of research, but also give me an opportunity to contribute to various projects with different characteristics in the future.

Among a variety of project-based learning research, one notable and intriguing theory is learning project theory discovered by Poell and Van der Krogt in 2003. Different from most project-based learning theories in the field, focusing on learning from projects in school settings, this theory explains the features nature, creation and features of each phase of learning projects in workplace settings. The three phases proposed by Poell and Van der Krogt (2003) concerning the creation of learning projects are the orientation phase, the learning phase and the continuation phase. Guided by the three phases, interview questions were formed and understanding of the learning project became easier. In addition, the

theory offers multiple types of learning projects that are applicable to real life organizational situations (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003).

Moreover, another theory had to be exploited to understand truly how the Chinese principals' learning developed. Since the Chinese principals especially would like to learn about Finnish education and leadership, the characteristics of Finnish education should be paid attention to. According to multiple research, Finnish education is well known for its trust and authenticity, manifested in mutual trust among principals, teachers and students and being able to act according to the true self. Therefore, I found the theory of Authentic Leadership most relevant to my topic, as it deals with the authenticity in leadership and trust in leader-follower relationship. Especially, the generally agreed four core components of authentic leadership (Kernis, 2003; Gardner et al. , 2005; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Avolio et al., 2009), namely, *self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective* could be used to analyse Chinese principals' learning development and their understanding of successful leadership.

After understanding the overview of both theories, I started to build structure for my research. First, key concepts, theories and frameworks will be explained referring to the previous research in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. The literature review introduces the main features of both theories, including the creation of learning projects and four core components of authentic leadership theory. Besides, the implementation advice of project-based learning theory and the outcomes of authentic leadership were also mentioned. Second, research design and methodology are explained in Chapter Four. This chapter contains the introduction of the context of study, research questions, research method, data collection and data analysis. Third, research results and findings will be shown in Chapter Five. The results were categorized based on the phases of the learning project. In each category, different themes emerged from the answers of the interview, and the relationships between themes will be explored. After that, Chapter Six provides analysis to see if the Chinese principals' learning has deepened and the

project has gone according to the theory. In the same chapter, summary and conclusions of the research will be presented, along with recommendations for TAMK Global Education to improve project quality as well as suggestions for future research.

2 PROJECT-BASED LEARNING THEORY

2.1 Definitions and Features of Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is a learning model that is conducted in a form of a project. The projects usually involve the solution of a problem or questions, and various educational activities, that give students initiative or autonomy to work as a group over a period of time, and end with a tangible result (Adderley, 1975; Thomas, 1999; Arthur, DeFillippi, &Jones, 2001; Helle, Tynjälä, & Olkinuora, 2006). Poell and Vander Krogt (2003) define project-based learning by defining learning project in an organizational context. According to them, learning project is an organized learning program where a group of people wants to learn systematically together about a theme relevant to their work or development, and who have the legitimacy and resources to do it.

Specifically, the members of the group must have the desire to learn together, and the theme should be relevant to all members, although members can have different viewpoints on the theme. The aim of learning projects in organizations is to improve participants' performance and personal development (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). Moreover, the participants will create and acquire knowledge within projects and transfer it to other parts of an organization (Scarbrough, Swan, Laurent, Bresnen, Edelman, & Newell, 2004). According to Tynjälä et al., two aspects of project-based learning can be considered crucial: 1) projects involve a solution of a problem; 2) they usually result in an end product (Tynjälä, Pirhone, Vartiainen, & Helle, 2009).

The project work is collaborative, so all participants must contribute to it (Helle et al., 2006). The participants often work together during the project, but it

is possible that the group will not work together in the near future (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). Besides participants, another important role in a learning project is the learning advisor or coach, with group process skills, systems thinking, and personal competencies (O'Neil, 1999).

Thomas (2000) identified five essential characteristics or criteria of projects: centrality, driving question, constructive investigations, autonomy and realism. 1. The centrality means that the projects are central to the curriculum and the central teaching strategy. 2. The driving question refers to the questions of the project and drives the students to encounter the central concepts of a discipline.. 3. Constructive investigation shows that the project must involve construction of new knowledge by the means of investigation, such as process of design, decision-making, and problem-solving. 4. Autonomy indicates students' choice, unsupervised work, and responsibility. 5. Realism can be easily understood through the words authenticity and real-life challenge.

Similarly, Helle and associates (2006) concluded five features of project-based learning relevant to cognitive psychology: problem orientation (similar to driving question), constructing a concrete artefact (emphasis on process of learning and an end product), learner control of the learning (learner's autonomy), contextualization of learning (authenticity and real life learning environment), multiple forms of representation (interdisciplinary knowledge and application of theory). These features can be summarized as follows in Table 1. Table 1 summarized the main features of project-based learning and guided the understanding of project-based learning in this study.

TABLE 1

Features of Project-based Learning Derived from Literature (Thomas, 2000; Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003; Helle et al., 2006)

	Thomas, 2000	Helle et al., 2006	Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003

Relevance	**Centrality**: Projects being central to curriculum		The theme is relevant to their own development for their work
Problem-driven	**Driving question:** The question drives students to learn	**Problem orientation:** A problem or question serving as a drive for learning activities	
Construction of new knowledge and an end product	**Constructive investigation:** A goal-driven learning process where new knowledge is constructed and investigations are carried out	**Constructing a concrete artefact:** Students going through the construction process Feedback can be formal or informal Process of learning is emphasized Similarity with knowledge building Involve vertical and horizontal learning	Ideas and plans are developed at the end of the learning project, and should be adopted in the follow-up activities.
Learner-centered	**Autonomy:** Students' choice, unsupervised work time, and responsibility	**Learner control of the learning process:** Students' decision on pacing, sequencing and content of learning Utilizing students' prior knowledge and experience	The opinions and views of the team members are important to achieve their learning results
Authenticity and simulation	**Realism:** Tasks, roles of students, working context, end	**Contextualization of learning:**	Workplace and course-based learning are the main components,

	products are realistic, not school like.	Learning environment where students can practice skills needed in real life The role of teacher is a coach, a model.	new learning situations can be designed (training or role-playing)
Personal development and transfer of knowledge		**Potential for using multiple forms of representation:** Projects enhance students' knowledge, theory and practice. Projects can serve to build mental models with experiential knowledge	The aim is to improve participants' performance and personal development.

After reviewing the literature, Poell and Van der Krogt (2003) summarized some conclusions from the previous research: the methods and adjustment are as important as the project management; learners should be put in an important concern during the learning project; the diversity in the structure and delivery of projects are neglected.

To make learning project more easily understood, Poell and Van der Krogt (2002) proposed four types of learning projects: the liberal, contractual learning project; the vertical, regulated learning project; the horizontal, organic learning project; the external, collegiate learning project. The liberal, contractual learning project refers to individual making their own program of learning activities with colleagues and superiors. It is self-directed and self-responsible, with a focus on optimizing and continuing the learning. The vertical, regulated learning project puts experts and line manager in an important position concerning preparation, execution and evaluation of the learning. The horizontal, organic learning project means learners solving a difficult problem as an autonomous team with the help of supervisor. In the external, collegiate learning project, professionals from different organizations learn as a group, reflect and continue the learning by sharing with their colleagues afterwards (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003).

The above mentioned four types of learning projects could give educators ideas on creating and facilitating learning projects, strategies to use, experiment of new practices; on the other hand, the phases of learning projects give participants guidelines of elements to focus on, topics to discuss, and tools to analyze the development of learning projects (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003).

The external, collegiate learning project is a suitable model for TAMK Global Education's leadership learning projects. In TAMK Global Education's leadership learning projects, principals from different schools come to Finland as a learning group, they reflect as they learn, and will share the insights, experiences and codes from Finnish education with their fellow colleagues when they are back in China. Moreover, they will translate what they learn in Finland to their own organizations as another part of continuation of learning.

2.2 Creation and Implementation

No matter which type the learning project falls into, there are three universal phases concerning the creation of learning projects: the orientation phase, the learning phase, and the continuation phase (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). TABLE 2 summarizes the distinguishing elements and concrete results of each phase. In this study, Table 2 was used to guide the interview questions and analyze how successful the learning project had been.

TABLE 2

Three Universal Phases of All Learning Projects, (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003)

Phase		Elements	Results
Orientation Phase	From an idea to learning contract	Mobilizing the participants Analyzing learning theme	Participants see opportunities to contribute to the project.

		Contextualizing the project	An action plan is generated.
		Drawing up a learning contract	
Learning Phase	From learning contract to learning result	Executing: interaction Optimizing: quality control	Build on experiences and use them to optimize the quality of the learning process.
Continuation Phase	From results to permanent effects	Giving fresh impetus to everyday learning Improving the organizational learning system	Ideas and plans are developed. Team members follow up on learning in other ventures.

Table 2 shows the three learning phases of learning projects and the elements and results of each phase. In the orientation phase, participants will come up with a learning plan in which they see opportunities to contribute to the learning project. Different activities happen in this phase. First, participants gather together to reflect on their motives, wishes, views and plans to become clear about what they want and how they can contribute. Second, they analyse and make principles for the learning program and expected result. Then, the participants should make connections with the context and try to make the project succeed. At last, a learning contract that includes the agreement on the participants, content, and the place of learning is generated (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003).

There are three criteria to assess the quality of a learning project: the learning views of the participants, their work views and its relevance to their work (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). According to Poell and Van der Krogt (2003), the last

phase of learning projects is continuation phase, which aims at translating participants' gain into their everyday learning and working context. The two elements of this phase are giving fresh impetus to everyday learning and improving the organization system. In the first element, participants examine their learning results and conclude ways they can use them in everyday working life, and the learning methods (learning in a project group). In the latter element, participants systematize learning experiences using three methods (communicate and cooperation; systematizing learning materials; interview and group discussion; comparing different learning projects for new insights) (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003).

The learning phase consists of executing, where the participants should reflect, give feedback, conduct discussions develop new ideas, and optimizing the learning project, where participants examine often the process, progress and procedures. Tynjälä, Pirhonen, Vartiainen & Helle (2009) found out that project-based learning is in line with the constructivist view of learning, when comparing to their course of discussion in information systems. The application of learning projects shown in TABLE 3 can serve as advice to improve project-based learning. Table 3 was utilized to help the author understand the application of learning projects.

TABLE 3

The Application of Learning Project with the Constructivist View (Tynjälä, Pirhonen, Vartiainen & Helle, 2009).

Features of constructivist learning environments	Application in the project-based course
Considering participants' previous knowledge	Beginning phase: Reflection on previous experiences through discussion
Focus on participants' meta-cognitive skills	Participants reflect on own learning and weekly discussion with teachers; Participants plan a system for time management
Negotiation and sharing of meanings through collaboration	Support collaboration with mentoring

Process-driven assessment to cultivate meta-cognitive skills, authentic tasks	Self-assessment: with a focus on learning process + assessment by teacher and workplace mentor

The above findings would serve as a tool to study TAMK Global Education's leadership learning projects when it comes to the creation and implementation.

3 AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP THEORY

3.1 Definitions of Authenticity

There have been various definitions about authenticity without an agreed one. The word itself has its root in Greek philosophy, meaning "Know Thyself" (Gardner 2011; Harter 2002). More specifically, Harter (2002) further explains the concept by including one's personal experiences, i.e. thoughts, emotions, needs, beliefs and processes. When it comes to behaviors, authenticity also implies in acting and expressing oneself upon one's true self, qualities, and beliefs in workplace (Avolio & Luthans, 2003). Erickson (1995) believes that since no one can be completely authentic, so it is more reasonable to describe a person as being relatively authentic. Kernis explains authenticity is a part of self-esteem and authenticity refers to one being clear of one's true self in one's daily work and life. (Kernis, 2003; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005)

Interestingly, Chan, Hannah and Gardner (2005) explain authenticity by what it is not: first, authenticity is not sincerity, as sincerity happens usually in one's relationships with other, while authenticity is a state of being oneself no matter one is alone or with people. Second, authenticity is not about influencing the perceptions that other people might have on a person, as it will make one hide their true thoughts, or say what others would like to hear. As said above, authenticity

manifests in relationship with self instead of others. Managing impression will make one betray the relationship with oneself (Chan, Hannah & Gardner, 2005) Third, authenticity cannot be confused with self-monitoring. Authenticity or inauthenticity is a state of being oneself and of self-behaviors, while self-monitoring emphasizes more on deciding on one's social behavior (Chan, Hannah & Gardner, 2005). Moreover, it is proposed that authenticity and morality develop together and reinforce each other (Chan, Hannah & Gardner, 2005).

With their historical literature review, Kernis and Goldman (2006) conclude four aspects of authenticity: 1) self-understanding: self-examination, organizing one's actions, behaviors rooted in self-knowledge 2) actions expressing one's value and agency, 3) accepting oneself: willingness to acknowledge and accept oneself, and 4) orientation to others. In brief, the overview of the documents presents authenticity as different mental and behavioral processes where people discover and build up themselves and maintain them over time. Then they conceptualize its four key components: awareness, unbiased processing of self-relevant information, behavior, relational orientation (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

3.2   Definition of Authentic Leadership

The definition of authentic leadership has been advanced throughout the years (Gardner, 2011). According to Gardner (2011), the first attempts to define authentic leadership were about being authentic through leadership and leadership authenticity. Rome and Rome (1967) suggests that an organization is authentic through leadership, meaning it accepts its uncertainty, takes responsibility for error, and plans and grows flexibly. Later, different interpretations of authentic leaders and authentic leadership are proposed, mostly focusing on the relationships between leaders and followers (Henderson and Hoy, 1983; Bhindi and Duignan, 1997; Beley, 2001; George, 2003; Gardner, 2011).

Bhindi and Duignan (1997) propose that authentic leadership is based on authenticity (authentic self), intentionality (leadership vision through shared meaning), and sensibility (being sensible to others' feelings and needs). George (2003,

p.12) explains three characteristics of authentic leadership: "knowledge based, values informed and skillfully executed". In addition, George (2003) mentions that authentic leaders lead with aims, meaning and values and are followed by people with trust and confirmation.

The definition of authentic leadership was first proposed by Luthans and Avolio (2003, p. 243) as a "process that draws from both positive and psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the parts of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development." At the same time, they hold that authentic leaders are confident, optimistic, moral-oriented, and lead with their authentic values and beliefs (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Later, a model focusing on positive emotions is proposed by Avolio and colleagues (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans & May, 2004). They believe that authentic leaders possess positive emotions and hopes, show trust and optimism, so they could influence followers' attitudes and behaviors (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans & May, 2004).

Finally, Avolio and Gardner (2005) hold that authentic leaders are aware of their identity, personality, values, and strengths. Besides, they are aware of the situations they are working in. Besides, authentic leaders usually are considered as role models because they display a range of positive leadership characteristics such as confidence, hope, resilience and their behaviors match their words. (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Rather than studying authentic leadership through relations with others, Shamir and Eilam-shamir (2005) propose a life-stories approach to study the development of authentic leaders. In their study, they link authentic leaders to the concept of self and how it is related to one's behaviors (Shamirv & Eilam-shamir ,2005). More specifically, they define authentic leaders as people with four main attributes: self-concept, self-resolution/self-concept clarity, self-concordant, and self-expressive (Shamir & Eilam-shamir, 2005). In the same light, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa (2005) propose a self-based model of authentic leader and follower development, concentrating on the components of

self-awareness and self-regulation (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005). Based on the previously Kernis' (2003) argument of four components of authenticity, they conceptualize four key components of authentic leadership: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation. This proposal is refined together with other literature by Walumbwa and colleagues (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008): *self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective.* These remain as the universally agreed four key components of authentic leadership that will be exploited also in this study.

To foster the four key components of authentic leadership, Walumbwa and colleagues (2008) propose that authentic leadership is a behavior pattern of the leaders that can enhance positive ethical atmosphere. Afterwards, Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009, p. 423) renew the definition in their literature review of leadership, and define authentic leadership as "a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers' input".

From the above-mentioned understanding of authentic leadership, it is not hard to infer that authentic leadership is supposed to have a positive effect on organizational growth and leader-follower relations. In fact, authentic leadership has been proven to enhance leader-follower relationships and work outcomes (Leroy, Anseel, Gardner & Sels, 2015; Bank et al., 2016).

3.3   Core Components of Authentic Leadership

The components of authentic leadership, *self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective, trace* back to the components of authenticity by Kernis (2003): awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational. Later, Kernis and Goldman (2006) proposed the four aspects of authenticity: self-understanding, actions expressing one's value and agency, accepting oneself, and orientation to others, and at the same time conceptualized four key components of authentic leadership: awareness, unbiased processing,

behavior, and relational orientation. This conceptualization is refined together with other literature by Walumbwa and colleagues (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008). They originally composed five distinct components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized regulation, balanced processing of information, and positive moral perspective, then combined the internalized regulation processes and authentic behavior into internalized moral perspective. Therefore, there is general agreement on the four core components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency and internalized moral perspective (Kernis, 2003; Gardner et al. 2005; Kernis & Goldman 2006, Walumbwa et al. 2008; Avolio et al. 2009) that will be next treated, respectively.

3.3.1   Self-awareness

Self-awareness is understanding and reflecting, having an awareness of and trust in one's values, identity, emotions, motives, desires, and self-relevant cognitions (Kernis 2003, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans et al. 2005). It is about how one makes meaning of the world and understands one's strengths and weaknesses and trait characteristics (Kernis 2003; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Bank et al., 2016). It also includes being aware of one's inherent polarities, which means that individuals with high level of authenticity have multifaceted personality aspects and utilize self-awareness with different people and surroundings (Kernis, 2003). According to Avolio and Gardner's self-model (2005), self-awareness has the following elements: values, identity, emotions, motives and goals.

Values are important components of the self, when internalized. It means one is true to one's core values in spite of the social pressure (Erickson, 1995; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Avolio and Gardner (2005) point out that self-transcendent values, including universal values (such as social justice and equity) and benevolent values (such as honesty and responsibility), together with positive other-directed emotions are crucial in the development of authentic leadership.

Being a concept one develops about oneself, personal identity could be the basis of self-awareness. According to Erickson (1995), personal identities are

formed over time as a result of the person's reflections on how he or she interacts with others. Gardner and Avolio (1998) think about leader identification as the process of individuals including the leader role into their own personalities. During the process, authentic leaders not only view themselves as leaders, but also as positive role models that can be trusted (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Moreover, positive psychological capital is to enhance self-awareness to achieve positive self-development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

When it comes to emotion, it is agreed that emotional self-awareness is fundamental to emotional intelligence, which is key to effective leadership (Michie & Gooty ,2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The awareness of emotions and their consequences are important for authentic leaders to make value-based decisions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Goals and motives is the difference between self-views and possible selves (Lord & Brown, 2001; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Markus and Wurf (1978) have described that self-views show an individual's action based on the characteristics and environment, while possible self is about a person's imagination of his or her hopes and fears concerning the future. Avolio and Gardner (2005) believe that authentic leaders might be motivated by the their hopes and fears for the future to achieve goals and growth.

3.3.2   Balanced Processing

Balanced processing comes from unbiased processing proposed by Kernis (2003). Kernis (2003) referred to unbiased processing as "objectivity and acceptance of one's positive and negative aspects, attributes and qualities". It can be accepting and recognizing poor performance, certain emotions, different personal qualities and so on (Kernis, 2003). The balanced processing refers to authentic leaders considering and analyzing all the relevant information, including others' opinions and ego-relevant information into decision-making process in an unbiased manner (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner & Carlson, 2015; Bank et al., 2016). With balanced processing, it is helpful for the leaders to make the right decision for the team or organization, instead of focusing on his or her own opin-

ions. With a sense of security, authentic leaders are more open for negative feedbacks that might be ego threatening, so they could make decisions that are beneficial to the organization (Gardner & Carlson, 2015).

3.3.3 Relational Transparency

Relational transparency originates from the relational nature of authentic leadership by Kernis (2003). In his opinion, the relational nature means that one values openness and truthfulness when dealing with people who are close (Kernis, 2003). Moreover, authentic relations include openness, self-disclosure and mutual trust (Kernis, 2003; Gardner et al., 2005). This means in practice to show one's authentic self, including expressing true thoughts and feelings, and to build bonds of trust with others (Gardner et al.,2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008; Bank et al., 2016). While expressing transparent emotions and feelings, Gardner and associates (2005) believe that authentic leaders should control themselves in not showing inappropriate emotions and in sharing thoughts and feelings in close relationships.

3.3.4 Internalized Moral Perspective

Internalized moral perspective relates to people acting according to their true self, i.e. according to their values, preferences and needs (Kernis, 2003). Kernis (2003) believes that authenticity is shown in a free and natural way, instead of one feeling compulsory to show one's true self. However, when one's true self is in conflict with social norms, authenticity might be shown on an awareness and processing level (Kernis, 2003). Therefore, Gardner and Carlson (2015) believe that authentic leaders "share their true thoughts and feelings openly, while maintaining dignity appropriate to the workplace and context". In this sense, an internalized moral perspective is also a form of self-regulation, influenced by internal moral perspective and values, and the consistency between them (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Bank et al., 2016).

3.4   Outcomes of Authentic Leadership

Researchers consider that authentic leadership has a positive effect on the leaders, followers and organizational growth. According to Gardner et al. (2011), the main outcomes of authentic leadership are personal and organizational identification, positive leaders modeling, trust, follower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, job performance, leader and follower well-being, and follower withdraw behaviors. It is not hard to understand the reason how the above mentioned definitions and discussions connect authentic leadership with key words, such as positive psychological capacities, positive ethical climate, developed organizational context, and positive self-development (Lutherans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008).

In their study of authentic leadership, authentic followership and basic need satisfaction, Leroy and colleagues (2015) found out that, there is a positive relationship between the three, and that the work performance is related to the interaction of authentic leadership and authentic followership. Similarly, Walumbwa and associates (2008) believe there is a positive relationship between authentic leadership and supervisor-rated performance. Furthermore, they point out some outcomes including high organizational commitment, follower satisfaction with supervisor and work performance (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Wong and associates (2010) found out that authentic leadership has a direct influence on personal identification, engagement, voice and perception of quality. In their meta-analytic review, Bank and associates (2016) proved that authentic leadership is strongly linked to job satisfaction, task performance, effectiveness, turnover intentions, and organizational performance.

4   IMPLEMENTATION ON THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1   Context of the Study

The current study is based on an annual leadership learning project provided by TAMK Global Education. TAMK Global Education is responsible for carrying out multiple educational activities of cooperation with Latin America, Egypt, Russia and Asian countries (Orenius, 2018). The activities include, for example, teacher and leadership training, double degree programs, and staff and student exchange.

For the past few years, TAMK Global Education has trained thousands of teachers and principals from China. In the learning project of this study, the aim was to improve Chinese educators' pedagogical and leadership skills by experiencing Finnish education during their three weeks stay in Finland. 25 participants, mainly principals from different schools in Guangzhou municipality formed the learning group and went through various learning activities such as lectures, workshops, seminars and school visits. Three participants were assigned with different roles, namely, group leader, coordinator and study coach. During the learning process, they not only participated in the learning activities provided by TAMK, but also wrote learning diaries, conducted peer or small group reflection and discussion. The final product of this learning project was a reporting article to be published.

The participants were selected by the local educational bureau based on their work performance, competencies and values. The program is part of the Guangzhou Excellent Educators Project that started in 2017. Every year, a group of 20-30 selected teachers and principals from Guangzhou city participate in various learning activities. The program starts with theoretical lectures and seminars by Chinese teachers of Beijing Normal University in different periods of the year, accompanied with assignments, such as reading and writing. The participants

are able to have a general knowledge of pedagogical and leadership background in Finland during the learning happening in China and come to Finland for a more authentic and intensive learning experience.

I decided to choose this project as my current study for the following reasons. First, I work in TAMK Global Education, and have been working on different teacher and leadership learning projects, so it would be beneficial to know the quality of our work and the possible ways to improve it. Second, the particular group exploited in this study consisted of principals only, while participants of other projects were usually a mixture of teachers and leaders. Moreover, the participants had succeeded in improving their schools' learning outcomes and teacher management in their own schools. Consequently, I presumed that it would be meaningful to study their learning process and their reflections upon Finnish educational leadership and education as a whole. I also believe that their insights are helpful to understand how we could improve our education services.

4.2   Research Questions

The study aims to explore the learning process based on the theory of project-based learning and cognitive development concentrating on authentic leadership of the participants in order to find out how the project was carried out and how their learning developed. By analyzing the above issues, I could also find out how TAMK Global Education can improve future training projects for Chinese school principals. To achieve these aims, I stated three main questions:

1) What were the participants' previous experience about the learning project and knowledge of authentic leadership?

2) How did their learning process progress and knowledge develop?

3) What would be suggestable changes or other issues to take into their future work to achieve more authenticity?

According to Poell & Van der Krogt (2003), different types of learning projects have generally the same phases: the orientation phase, the learning phase and the continuation phase, with various activities during each of these phases.

First, I would like to find out the participants' experience and activities before coming to Finland: if they have had learning activities and discussion to analyze the learning theme and reach a learning contract in the orientation phase.

Therefore, the first research question includes the following sub-questions based on project-based learning theory and authentic leadership theory:

1a) What did the participants already know about Finnish education, namely what is their previous learning foundation/basis?

1b) What were their understanding of leadership and authentic leadership?

1c) What were the participants' expectations for the particular learning project?

As to the second research question, I would like to know the participants' practices and see if their learning developed according to the theoretical aspects in the learning phase. Therefore, the following sub-questions were used as interview questions to support this study:

2a) How often the participants reflect, discuss, and interact?

2b) What gains on knowledge and attitudes do the participants get?

Third, the continuation phase involves permanent effects (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). Therefore, I would like to find out in particular:

3a) What issues do the principals find important in the future to increase their authentic leadership?

3b) What issues the participants would apply from the learning project onto their daily work?

4.3   Research Method

The current study uses a case study as a research design method to study the learning project, and adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to find out answers to the three main research questions.

Case study research is a qualitative approach where a real-life, bounded system is studied using data collection from different sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Besides, case study research identifies a specific research that is bounded,

for example, in place and timeline (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The current study explores a learning project for Chinese principals offered by TAMK Global Education. The learning project is a specific real-life case that happens in a specific place (Finland) and is bounded by time (three weeks). It is not hard to infer that the current study is a case study research. There are three variations of case studies, namely, instrumental case study (one issue, one bounded case), intrinsic case study (focus on an unusual case) and collective case study (one issue, multiple cases) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the author focuses on one issue, the successfulness of the learning project, and tries to illustrate the issue in the research findings. With the above features, the current study could be seen as a single instrumental case study. Exploring the learning project of a group of Chinese principals, the study also manifests some features of ethnography research. The ethnography research describes and interprets a culture-sharing group and their shared patterns of culture, in order to analyze data through description of the culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the current study focuses more on the TAMK Global Education's leadership learning project and the learning process of the participants, than the shared culture patterns of the participant group.

When it comes to the strategy of data analysis, qualitative content analysis is used. Qualitative content analysis interprets manifested and latent meanings from the content of data, and represents a systematic and objective means to describe and quantify phenomena (Cavanagh, 1997; Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012; Saldana, 2011). In this study, the meaning from the participants' interview data will be examined and analyzed, in order to find out how the learning project progressed and how the participants' understanding on leadership developed.

One method of qualitative content analysis is thematic analysis. It has been regarded as not only flexible, but also a tool to be used across different methods. A theme is an implicit topic that gathers a group of repeated ideas and helps the researcher to answer the research question (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen &

Snelgrove, 2016). The aim of this method is to identify, analyze and report patterns, and interpret different aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun& Clarke, 2006). In this study, the author would like to identify and analyze the patterns of the participants' learning process, understanding of authentic leadership, and interpret different aspects of authentic leadership, in order to improve the quality of the training project. The process requires the researcher to go back repeatedly to data during the analysis process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). According to Vaismoradi and associates (2016), there are four phases in theme development: "initialization", "construction", "rectification" and "finalization". The author will follow the phases of theme development to generate themes from the research data.

4.4   Research Data

The research data involves the participants' answers to the interviews that I conducted. Being responsible for the project, I had the chance of easily reaching the participants and getting to know them. Considering the credibility of the research, participants were chosen both purposively and randomly. I tried to choose participants of different ages and genders to get a broader point of view for project-based learning and authentic leadership.

Data should be reliable and accurate in order to conduct an accountable research (Elswick et al., 2016) to answer the research questions. Therefore, interviewee selection was carefully done based on several different criteria: 1) Participants were Chinese principals with an appropriate length of leadership experience, 2) They accepted face-to-face interview and being voice recorded, and 3) They were willing to give their honest opinions and share their leadership practices and stories. The interviews were done in Chinese language to ensure a deeper understanding and analysis of the content of the interview. Based on the criteria, six Chinese principals were chosen to participate in the interviews. Table 4 shows general information of the participants for the interview in terms of age, gender, years of leadership and educational background.

TABLE 4

Interviewees for the Research

Participants	Gender	Age	Years of leader-ship	Education Background
A	M	50-55	11	Master's degree concurrently working
B	M	45-50	12	Bachelor's degree
C	M	45-50	16	Vocational degree, bachelor's de-gree concurrently working
D	F	50-55	8	Bachelor's degree concurrently work-ing
E	F	50-55	6	Master's degree in education
F	F	45-50	5	Bachelor's degree in a non-education field

The interviews were conducted in hotel cafeterias or TAMK campus according to the interviewees' convenience, as the interviewees had a tight schedule of rich learning and cultural activities.

The data come from the in-depth interviews, which were built based on the techniques by Collin (2015): 1) Participants receive the standardized question-naires first, and then their answers are recorded; 2) Open questions should be asked and participants should be given time to think; 3) Remain patient, neural and curious towards participants' responses. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), if the data is collected through interviews, open-ended questions should be applied, followed by targeted questions about the predetermined categories using the theory. Therefore, interview questions are made to collect data based on the theory of three different phases of learning project by Poell and Van der Krogt (2003). Table 5 shows the open-ended interview questions that was utilized in the interview.

TABLE 5

Open-ended Interview Questions

The Orientation Phase
1. Why did you participated TAMK Global Education's learning project? 2. How clear were you with the learning objectives and structures, and your role in the learning team before coming to Finland? 3. What did you want to do differently to achieve more authenticity leadership in your school in the future?
The Learning Phase
4. During the training, how often/much do you reflect, give feedback to others, and develop new ideas with the group? How much progress are you making? How relevant is the learning content to your work? 5. What knowledge, skill, and attitudinal gains for a principal have you got from the learning project? What Finnish experience do you think you can take into your working life as the first step? (open answer) 6. In what ways does this learning project help you improve your future job performance? (Open answer) 7. How honest are you with your teachers, how optimistic are you with the school future? (Can you lead the school by being a confident, optimistic, and high-moral role model to your staff and teachers?)
The Continuation Phase
8. How much do you think you will apply and translate the experiences/ideas gained from the learning project into your future work?
General questions about satisfaction
9. How satisfied are you with the practical issues, i.e. instructor abilities, instructional materials, TAMK Global Education's support and facilities? Any suggestion for improvement? 10. How do you think TAMK Global Education should improve its learning project for better serving Chinese principals' needs in the future?

4.5   Data Analysis

I started with transforming the interview data into textual format, read, and re-read the transcripts in order to have a general understanding of the main issues (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). For a detailed comparison and classification, meaning units were highlighted and coding was created employing four types of codes: conceptual code, relationship code, participant code, and setting code (Vaismoradi et al., 2016) According to Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009), authentic leaders shows transparent and ethical behaviors, and make open and considerate decisions when it comes to followers' input. Therefore, conceptual codes involve the participants' understanding and vision of authentic leadership. The relationship codes indicate the relationships and attitudes towards followers and stakeholders when conducting daily leadership work. According to Poell and Van der Krogt (2003), the quality of the learning project concerns the criteria of the participants' learning views, their work views and the relevance of the learning project. Therefore, the participant code contains the participants' perspectives of the learning project: their positive and negative feelings, and the learning process. The setting code is in accordance with the three universal phases of learning projects (Poell &Van der Krogt, 2003), namely the orientation phase, the learning phase and the continuation phase. In this background, the setting code includes information and experiences of the participants when it comes to their previous knowledge and the plans on the learning topic.

Since the interview questions were designed clearly chronically based on the three phases of the learning project, the data could be logically put into three big categories, namely, the orientation phase (previous knowledge and understanding), the learning phase, and the continuation phase (what participants will take into their future work). Another category is for the practical advice on improving future learning projects.

After writing down the codes, I wrote reflective notes to further compare and deepen my understanding of the data in each category. After data was viewed again, I labeled the data as clusters of codes after classifying and comparing the

similarities and differences of a wide range of initial data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). By comparing and combining clusters of code, I tried to develop themes in a cautious manner. The theme development process can be seen from Table 6, 7, 8 and 9. When it comes to the next phase, Vaismoradi and associates (2016) believe that both immersing and distancing the researcher in and from the data is of great importance. Therefore, I distanced myself form the data before restudying it, in order to get more results that are comprehensive.

TABLE 6

The Orientation Phase (answers to interview questions No. 1-3)

Initial code		Clusters of codes		Themes
Research oriented Prioritize, Management Should be curious and always learn Be strong-willed to have influence Be confident and honest Thinking into the future Leading instead of being led	⇒ ⇒ ⇒	Academic and management abilities Lifelong learning Positive personalities	⇒ ↗	Leaders' qualities
For the best of the students Focus on students' learning skills rather than performance Education should be individualized Individuality in learning plans	⇒ ⇒	Educational goals Individuality	⇘ ↗	Goals
Teachers as important facilitators Current system discourages teachers	⇒	Educational values	⇒	Values
Emotional intelligence is important to principals Honest with teachers Earn teachers' trust	⇒ ⇒	Self-emotion Emotional consequences	⇒ ⇒	Awareness of emotions and consequences

TABLE 7

The Learning Phase (data from answers to interview questions No. 4-7)

Initial code		Clusters of codes		Themes
Make students confident Respect students' differences Traditional evaluation hinders teachers Respect differences between teachersChina education needs more cross-subject curriculum Learning content should be from real-life Hands-on experience better than lecturing	⟶ ⇒	Considering others' feelings and opinions Considering relevant information	↘ ↗	Being Fair-minded

Inspired and amazed by trust culture A new understanding of trust	⟹	Mutual trust culture	⟹	Building trust
Feedback should be positive	⟹	Appropriate interaction		

TABLE 8

The Continuation Phase (answers to interview questions No.8)

Initial code		Clusters of codes		Themes
Need to develop trust culture Make teachers feel secure with me	⟹	Building mutual trust	⟹	Mutual trust
Share educational concept and values with teachers inside school	⟹	Sharing learning results	↘	
Often meet and discuss with other principals Share my education values with the society	⟹	Sharing values	⟹	Being genuine
Exercising autonomy and being pro-active inside the framework and social context	⟹	Maintain dignity	↗	
Setting visions as next step Always positive, smiling Encouraging teachers Proactive	⟹	Improving leadership practices	⟹	Awareness of self-development
Encourage cooperation between teachers Teachers should be multidisciplinary Learning by doing Cross-subject curriculum	⟹	Change current organizational ways of working	↘	Fair decision-making
Give teachers chances to develop Students' happiness comes first No bad student Deepen concept of individuality	⟹	Considering followers'	↗	

	opinions and needs		

TABLE 9

The Elements of a Successful Learning Project (all answers)

Phase	Codes		Themes
Orienta-tion Phase	Forming learning the group of principals Assigning roles in the group	⟹	Gathering participants
	Attending training sessions in China Reading books on Finnish education Research online about Finnish education	⟹	Familiarizing learning content
	Learning for better leadership Curriculum design ideas How to facilitate the policy of suitable education Better teacher training	⟹	Setting learning goals
Learning Phase	Daily reflection in pairs or group Learning diary Online group discussion	⟹	Frequent reflection through interaction
	Putting people first New understanding of trust culture Needs for change in current learning and teaching Obstacles for the change	⟹	New understanding and views
	Helpful to my work Good authentic learning environment Thought provoking	⟹	Relevant and useful to work
The Con-tinuation Phase	Sharing my opinions and thoughts	⟹	Examining learning results
	Building a new school culture Changing teaching methods	⟹	Making action plans
	Variety in teachers and coaches Liked guided reflection sessions		

	More school visits Interaction with local teachers and students Materials in advance	⟹	Advice on future learning projects

In this method, I was able to develop themes based on phases of a learning project and refined them according to the theory. After the refinement, themes of four different categories remain to be analyzed.

5   FINDINGS

5.1   Authentic Leadership Components in the Orientation Phase within the Learning Project Theory

Themes under authentic leadership developed in the Orientation Phase of learning project theory are 1) leaders' qualities, 2) goals 3) values and 4) awareness of emotions and consequences. The participants were asked questions about their previous leadership experience, their intended goals for the learning project and perspectives on authentic leadership.

5.1.1   Leaders Qualities

Under the theme of leadership traits, sub themes of academic and management skills, life-long learning, positive personalities and future oriented mindset were summarized. Academic abilities mean that leaders should be capable of research and be research-oriented. This was highly valued and exercised by the participants. Over half of the participants had pursued a higher academic degree after working as a principal. Almost all the participants had done research and read books on Finnish education and attended training sessions in China before coming to Finland. Two participants "had publications on their educational insight" and mentioned the importance of principals being academically competent.

" I think being a principal should be research-oriented. He should see the problems that other people cannot see"

Management skills refer to general skills for a leader when dealing with daily work. The participants mentioned skills such as skills to prioritize, skills to delegate and skills to change risks into opportunities.

"I have a strong administration team and team members are responsible for their own teacher teams. When I would like to make some change, the administration team and teacher teams will take care of it."

"When I started as a principal in my current school, I faced many difficulties. You should always prioritize and handle the principal problem, then things will turn up gradually."

Lifelong learning attitudes were frequently mentioned by the participants. They think principals should learn from their teachers and students, and should be curious and passionate about learning new things.

"Principals should always be curious, wiling to change and willing to learn."

"I appreciate this opportunity to attend the learning project in Finland. Only when you learn in a different environment, you can open your eyes and have better understanding and inspiration."

Future orientation refers to the ability of looking into the future and being ready to change for the future. Participant A expressed his opinions by saying that *"the goal of education or principals' work is to cultivate better citizens for the future"*, and that as a leader, *"if you are future-oriented, you will be led instead of leading."*

All participants believed that leaders should have certain qualities to be able to influence the followers and the society. Participant B shared his successful stories of winning respect by being strong-willed and insisting on what he believes.

"By being strong-willed, you will be influential and gain respect from the parents, teachers and authority"

Over half of the participants held that leaders should have the qualities of being confident, positive and passionate. Participant E mentioned that *"Passionate principals can easily influence the teachers and the school culture"*. Participants B, C and F are very confident about the future of their school.

5.1.2   Goals

Goals is the second theme that emerged from the participants' answers. It includes the educational goal of putting students in the center and the individuality. More than half of the participants believed that education should be always for

the best of the students. Almost all mentioned that one of school principals' mission is to support and help their students to be happy, loving and better learners.

"We should not emphasize on scores from tests anymore, because factual knowledge is temporary. The most important thing is that the students could learn learning skills for life."

"I would like to pay more attention to my students' wellbeing and feeling of happies in campus.

Besides, all participants held that education should be individualized and they were all impressed by individuality in Finnish education. Three participants mentioned that individuality is in accordance to the current Chinese national policy of providing suitable education. Suitable education means that schools should abandon the old "one size fits all" educational concept and try to meet different needs of different students. Many expressed the wish to have individual learning plans for their students as done in Finland, but some mentioned the difficulty of *"too many students but not enough teachers"* and the fact that *"usually after teaching 6 years, the teacher cannot remember each student's name because is it usually one teacher for 40 to 100 students"*. However, almost all participants agreed that the individuality is their goal in conducting the concept of "suitable education". Besides, all participants understood that a fast-changing world requires change in working ways and future skills from the students. Other participants agreed in a similar way, holding that it is important for principals to have visions and goals for their school. Many have the desire to learn from Finland to upgrade their school curriculum for the future.

"We should respect the natural education rules, and build curriculum according to fast changing societal needs."

5.1.3   Awareness of Emotions and the Consequences

The third theme of authentic leadership in the orientation phase is the awareness of emotions and the consequences. It refers to the awareness of self-emotion and the emotions when interacting with others. Almost all participants

agreed that always appearing positive and passionate will influence the teachers in the same way. Participant E held that *"emotional intelligence is key to a principal's leadership"*. She also shared her experience of earning uncooperative teachers' trust by being always positive, honest and caring. In the end, *"the teachers who were very uncooperative at first ended up always wearing a smile"*. Participant B believed that *"principals should not criticize teachers in anyway. Instead, you should make the teachers understand the you are helping them"*. Participant C held that leaders should know to control their negative emotions when interacting with followers: *"I try to always wear a smile in school even if I have a really bad mood or I am extremely stressed"*.

5.1.4 Values

The last sub-theme from data concerning authentic leadership in the orientation phase was values. It refers to the values that the principals hold despite the difficult social context.

Many participants thought highly of being authentic as their values. Participant D and F mentioned the bad practices of faking information for better school ranking and decided to stay true to themselves. Participant D believed that *"Being authentic gains respect from others"*. Second, many participants expressed the difficulty to change the current evaluation culture in terms of teacher performance, student learning outcomes and so on. Participant D pointed out that the current evaluation culture discourages most teachers by selecting a few "Teachers of the Year". When it comes to the evaluation culture towards the students, most participants expressed the pressure from the parents and the whole society who insist on keeping the evaluation system. However, most participants told that they would like to stay true to their values and act flexibly in the context. In particular, participant C pointed out *"It is hard to totally abandon the standard tests in school, but we can be flexible and use the test outcomes to help students improve where they did not learn so well"*.

5.2 Authentic Leadership Components in the Learning Phase within the Learning Project Theory

During the Learning Phase, two themes of authentic leadership emerged as predominant: 1) being fair-minded and 2) building trust. The participants answered questions concerning the learning phases, such as relevance of the learning project to their work and their knowledgeable and attitudinal gains from the learning project.

5.2.1 Being Fair-minded

During the learning phase, all participants expressed a deeper understanding of putting people first and the importance of human resources. Three sub-themes were summarized: a) considering others' feelings and opinions and b) considering relevant information.

All participants had a new understanding of the importance of people. They were impressed by how much human resources are valued in Finland. Participant A was mostly touched by the concept of people orientation and individuality: "*The concept of putting people first was encouraged in China on paper, but I witnessed with my own eyes how it is one hundred percent facilitated.*" Participant F was impressed that the education stakeholders, namely, teachers, principals, parents and the society have the same concept that human resources are the most important resource in this country. First, it is a known fact that most students are under pressure from their parents, teachers and even the society to get good grades in exams: "*In Finland, almost all agree that test score is not the only indicator to evaluate a student. But in China it is*". Participant D and E expressed the concerns about this fact. Therefore, they believe that students should "*feel confident about themselves and they should be respected more*". Second, many participants emphasized the importance of teacher during the learning phase. Three participants explained that traditional evaluation mechanism hinders the teachers' career development by ranking teachers. Therefore, Participant E proposed that principals

should respect differences between teachers. Third, participants had a deeper understanding of individuality in the learning phase. They were all impressed by what they saw about individuality during school visits.

Besides, participants also showed the ability to take relevant information into consideration. In general, the participants gained a deeper understanding of Finnish education in a practical level in the learning phase. Consequently, they learnt to see things related to their work such as teaching methods, the meaning of subject and curriculum differently.

First, half of the participants had a new understanding of subjects. According to them, subjects are quite independent and separate in Chinese schools. For example, it is ignored that real-life problem solving usually requires knowledge from different subjects learnt in school. Participant C gained new perspective of the meaning of subjects. Participant A found that multiple skills can be taught in one class despite the subject. Participant A described that he observed manners, decision-making, knowledge of real-life objects and mathematic skills can be taught via one learning activity of buying virtual fruits. It is more effective than teachers telling students without engaging students in activities. Participant D realized the need to connect each subject for a multidisciplinary curriculum in her own school. Second, almost all the participants expressed their deeper understanding of teaching and learning. Participant E expressed the excitement from her STEM class experience, and learnt that hands-on experience is an effective way to learn and to motivate students.

"I cannot describe how excited I was when I finished the LED night light I made with my own hands. I am an art student and have never been interested in sciences. If sciences classes are taught like this, I believe no one will think science class as boring."

Participant F expressed one of her gains that learning content should come from real-life after observing Finnish classes. In addition, it was brought up that in class, teachers should encourage the students to think instead of remembering. From a comparative perspective, the participants realized that learning is for the students' future life and that skills are more important than factual knowledge.

In this way, the participants had some ideas on what they would like to change in their future work.

5.2.2   Building Trust

Building trust is the second theme of authentic leadership in the learning phase within learning project theory. In the learning phase, the participants were amazed by seeing how trust works in Finland. Trust culture not only refers to the mutual trust between principals and followers (teachers and students), but also an organizational or societal culture that is based on trust. When talking about attitudinal gains in the learning phase, Participant A expressed how stunning it was to witness and experience the trust culture in Finland. He explained that *"trust culture has been heard and encouraged in China, but has not been facilitated well. Now I could witness it with my own eyes, it is unbelievable"*. Participant C had a more comprehensive understanding of trust in the learning phase:

"I am impressed by trust culture. Before, my understanding of trust only meant trust between my teachers, and me but now I understand that trust should be the basis of the whole team or the organization. It is an ecosystem."

Participant B attached trust culture to great importance. He believed that factual knowledge can be learnt through time independently, but leaders need more inspiration and sparks of ideas.

"The key in the learning project is that I got inspired by trust culture. Once you are inspired and motivated, you'll feel more energetic and active to make the change."

In addition, Participant F pointed out that principals should work hard to earn teachers' trust. One of the effort is to control from inappropriate feelings or emotions when interacting with teachers. She mentioned, *"Feedback to teachers should always be positive"* when talking about her attitudinal gains.

5.3 Authentic Leadership Components in the Continuation Phase within the Learning Project Theory

Four major themes appeared in the continuation phase of the learning project: 1) enhancing trust culture, 2) sharing opinions and values openly, 3) awareness of self-development and 4) unbiased decision-making. The themes were developed from the data in the continuation phase of the learning project, where the participants answered questions concerning what would they apply in their future work.

5.3.1 Enhancing Trust Culture

All participants realized the importance of enhancing trust culture in their future work. Participant A mentioned there existed trust culture in some level in China, but it is highly necessary to deepen the trust culture in his future work. In interpersonal relationship, most participants expressed the thought of being more trusting and understanding towards teachers.

"*I will not criticize teachers if they do something wrong. Instead, I should try to understand them more and give them more recognition.*" In practice, Participant B said that" *I will give teachers more trust. If some teachers don't do a good job, I should give them more support than punishment.*" Similarly, Participant E told that she would not value much the standardized evaluation of the teachers. Instead, she should give teachers more trust, understanding and respect. One way to do so is to "*give teachers tasks that they are really interested in*". Besides building a trust culture inside school where there is strong trust among principals, teachers and students, Participant D believes the trust culture should be an ecosystem where all the stakeholders, including authority, parents, and the society, are involved.

5.3.2 Being Genuine

The second theme emerged from the continuation phase of the learning project is being genuine. It refers to a) sharing opinions and values openly and b) maintain oneself despite difficulty.

There were multiple ways the participants planned to share their opinions and values. First, all participants decided to summarize the learning and share the gains and results from this learning project within their schools. Participant B pointed out the importance for principals to share the new educational values and concepts gained from the learning project with the teachers. Participant B decided to *"share the new concepts with teachers and discuss what could be done together for change."* Participant D explained in more detailed that she would" try *to change the teachers' mindset and for example, ask them to focus more on individual students"*. Second, the participants mentioned that they would share their educational values to other shareholders, such as other principals, parents and the society. Participant A told that a seminar *"where all the principals participated in this learning project share their gains to the society"* would be held after they go back to China. He also mentioned the plan to *"discuss together with other principals on good educational concept and practices, and how to apply them in school"*. Besides, all participants were given the task by the Education Bureau of Guangzhou Municipality of writing learning reports and publishing articles to make more influence in the society about what they learn in Finland. Participant F also expressed the determination to *"create a public social media account to share good educational values to the society."*

The second sub-theme of being genuine is to maintain oneself despite difficulty. Half of the participants discussed the difficulty to focus truly on individual development and wellbeing, because it is almost impossible to change the current evaluation and ranking culture in China. However, participants decided to do the right things they can do and be flexible within the current evaluation culture. Participant F decided that she would *"create own evaluation culture inside the school, as the current ranking culture could impair a student's self-awareness"*. Participant D mentioned similarly: *"Our school has cancelled the practice of ranking Teachers of the Year, because it turns out more teachers feel discouraged by this practice"*.

5.3.3   Awareness of Self-development

The third theme in the continuation phase is the awareness of self-development as a leader.

Many participants thought of vision as important, and that they should improve their understanding of visions to create and realize visions. Participant B thought highly of vision: *"The next step for me is to create visions for our school. Once there is vision, the school will know where it is heading. It is principals' responsibility to share the visions with all the stakeholders"*.

Multiple participants talked about being emotionally intelligent in their future work. Participant C said that he would always smile to his teachers at school even if he has bad mood. Participant E decided to appear always positive and more encouraging towards teachers, giving them opportunities to develop.

Other self-development aspects included improving leaders' soft skills such as public speaking, negotiation skills, time management skills, delegation skills and so on. Almost half of the participants showed the decisiveness to learn constantly to be a better leader.

5.3.4   Fair Decision-making

The last theme in the continuation phase is fair decision-making. Participants talked about their plans in detail when answering interview question number eight. Their plans concern a) considering followers' opinions and needs, and b) change on the current way of working.

All participants discussed their understanding of the importance of teachers and student, when talking about plans. All participants mentioned their plans on relationships with the teachers. Professionally, half of the participants mentioned the importance of teacher training. They understand the difference between China and Finland is that Finnish teachers are well-trained before becoming a teacher, while Chinese teachers usually learn in in-service trainings. To make teachers more professionally qualified to improve learning, the participants

showed the decisiveness to provide teachers with more training and platform to develop themselves.

"I should always support teachers to develop themselves and give them the platform to do so."

Besides, the participants also discussed respecting students and focusing on their wellbeing. Traditionally, students are only valued by their grades in exams. After the learning project, many participants understood better the importance of students. In general, they would like to think more for the students in their work, and influence the teachers to do the same.

"I think it is important for me to know if the students are happy and progressing every day in school. The most important thing is not the score."

"I would like to build a culture in my school that there is no so-called bad student. Evaluation should be flexible and diverse"

"I want to redesign the physical campus. This time, I will consider what students like most, and use pictures and words to their liking."

When it comes to changing the current ways of working, the participants were inspired during class observation during the learning project and were able to admit unsatisfying performance of their current work. Almost all participants realized the importance to improve teacher's professional competences to meet the needs of the future. Participant D saw the need for teachers to be multidisciplinary instead of being professional only in their own subject of teaching. Participant C urged teachers of different subjects to have more cooperation together. In terms of the interaction between teachers and students, Participant A would *"encourage teachers to do more learning activities with the students and have students do assignments in teams"*. Participant F had a plan to carry out some pilot classes for cooperation of teachers from different subjects.

According to the participants, learning in Finland is different from that in China. Learning in Finland is more about cooperation, learning from and for real life, and different subjects can be learnt together. Almost all participants were impressed by the Finnish learning practices, such as phenomenal based learning, project based learning and the multidisciplinary curriculum. Participant E spoke

highly of transversal skills in Finnish basic education, and the connection of different subjects in the curriculum. After experiencing a STEM class as a student, Participant F would like to carry out more modern learning activities and changes inside school. Half of the participants mentioned the idea to upgrade school curriculum as their plan to improve students' learning.

"I would like to conduct more classes that integrates skills and knowledge from different subjects, such as STEM course."

"I plan to take the concept of transversal skills and cross-subject learning such as phenomenal based learning into school curriculum."

Moreover, participants talked about detailed plans to improve the way of working in school. Participant E admired that Finnish basic education is research-based and teachers have good academic background. She decided to emphasize research and science more in her future work. Participant A, B, D and F all agreed on building up a pilot team of young and open-minded teachers to facilitate the change. They believed that the organizational learning system will gradually change. Participant F also had an idea of *"building a platform in school where companies, entrepreneurs and parents could engage in educational activities to support students' learning and growth"*.

In the continuation phase, the participants had a comprehensive view of their future work. They shared ideas on what they would do in the future and showed a better understanding and competences of authentic leadership.

5.4   Elements of A Successful Learning Project

After developing themes of authentic leadership in different phases within a learning project, all data and the established clusters of codes were put together for theme development on a successful learning project. The themes were developed according to three phases of a learning project, in order to better compare to the theory.

5.4.1   Themes of the Orientation Phase

Participants have somewhat similar ways to prepare for the learning project, as the project is initiated and organized by the local education bureau. However, there are three sub-themes under this, namely gathering the participants, familiarizing the topics, and setting learning goals. First, participants are gathered by the local educational bureau for meetings and discussions, where they get to know each other and are assigned with different roles in the group.

"I was the leader of this group. My responsibility is to support and serve all the group members for their learning in Finland, thus to improve the quality of this learning project."

Second, participants got familiar with the topics or the learning content. Various educational activities were conducted about Finnish education to contextualize the project. Participants were gathered for lectures introducing the main characteristics of Finnish education, and were given a reading list for more information. Before they left for Finland, a briefing meeting was held by a few people from last year's project, to familiarize the participants with Finnish society and culture.

"We were given information about Finnish education, such as PISA result, highly-qualified teachers, and trust culture. Also I read books like Finnish Lessons."

"I got to know the basics of Finnish education from the lectures in summer at the Beijing Normal University, there we had lectures and workshops on Finnish education."

Third, the general learning objectives and content were set by the education bureau, but the participants decided on their own what they would like to focus on learning after analyzing the problems in their own work. Most participants would like to find out how to do "suitable education" for the students in their own way, as it is the current policy in basic education in China. Besides, there are some repeated issues they would like to find out and improve in their own work: 1) modern pedagogy, 2) teacher training, 3) trust culture, 4) leadership.

"There is a general framework on learning objectives. Personally, I want to find out more about teacher training in Finland, as we all know that Finnish teachers are the best of the best, while many Chinese teachers are under-qualified because of historic reasons.

""I would like to know more about STEM education, because one of my aims is to carry out STEM classes in our school to interest the students."

Most of the participants appeared motivated about the learning project when talking about the preparation for this journey. Some participants seemed more proactive than others did, as they did much research on Finnish education. In general, the preparation for the learning project can be assumed as enough.

5.4.2 Themes of the Learning Phase

Three themes emerged under this the process of learning: 1) frequent reflection through interaction, 2) new understanding and view and 3) relevance and usefulness to work. The ways of interaction in learning were summarized as making daily notes, frequently reflection in pairs or groups, and writing blog posts on social media. Through these methods, the participants can reflect on their work, give feedback, and develop new ideas. Moreover, they participate in training sessions, school visits, and workshops organized by TAMK Global Education.

"I make daily notes and reflect with my roommate every day. We discuss what we have learnt or seen today, and how we can translate Finnish experience into our schools."

When talking about gains in the learning phase, the participants discussed issues of human-orientation, trust culture, individuality, needs to change and obstacles of change. First, participants were amazed and inspired about witnessing Finnish trust culture in school. They explained that they used to hear it but after witnessing, they recognized the need and possibility to achieve it in their future work. Second, they all agree human should be the most valuable resources to a country. After seeing Finnish education and its individuality, the participants reflected that the "one size fits for all" Chinese education needs a change. Besides, the traditional teaching and learning ways should also change: passive learning to active learning, subject-based curriculum to cross-subject based curriculum, teacher as the owner of knowledge to teacher as the coach to help students. At this point, participants were able to see and understand differently about their daily work. One of the most frequently mentioned topics is the trust culture,

which amazed the participants and inspired them to facilitate it in their future work.

"The visit to Lumate centre and the workshop are very impressive. It helps me to think and reflect on how to improve learning in my own school."

"The learning inspired me a lot. The most important thing is that my mind and values have been changed, and I am more positive about the future of my work and my school. I will continue building trust culture in my school."

"I changed my attitudes and mindset. I learnt to respect the differences of students, and be more tolerant and positive towards every child in school. The key to achieve this is the multi-dimension of evaluation."

The theme of relevance and usefulness to work consists of participants' perspectives on the learning activities, learning content and their learning progress. Most participants think the learning content is highly relevant to their work, and that the project is helpful to improve their performances in future work. Participant E and F appreciated the authentic learning environment by saying "seeing is believing". Participant A and F liked the fact that the Finnish teacher had the experience of working as a principal, making the learning more authentic and convincing. Participant C, D and F especially were amazed by the real life stories of the Finnish teacher and found motivation and direction.

"I think the content is very relevant to my work. I can see issues in a more comprehensive way. The training is helpful to my future work, I can learn a lot from the Finnish teacher, her qualities, her perseverance, and the way she organized the lectures to activate learning."

5.4.3 Themes of the Continuation Phase

In the continuation phase, themes emerged were: 1) activities and plans to improve work and 2) advice for future projects.

First, all participants were required to share their gains from this project openly. They must involve in follow-up activities designed by the local education bureau, such as seminars, a learning report and a certain amount of published

articles. In this way, good educational values and concepts would be shared to public. Besides, the participants had different plans on what activities they would carry out, but all the participants had rich plans considering their personal characteristics and working context. Participant A, B and D planned to share his gains to teachers inside his school and build up pilot teams to facilitate his values in small scale. Participant F planned to build up a social media platform where she could share openly her educational values to the society.

"I have decided to reach out to more educators, students and parents through a public social media account. Also, I plan to attend seminars and even create public social media account where I can share my thoughts after this trip."

Second, longer-term plans for the participants were about translating the learning results into their everyday working life and their own schools. The main plans mentioned were: 1) updating school curriculum, 2) encourage teachers' collaboration across subjects and lifelong learning, 3) improving evaluation system, and 4) building a trust culture. Almost all the participants mentioned that they would like to improve the learning system and mindset inside the school by carrying out new managerial practices, to build collaboration between the teachers, and cultivate students with transversal competencies.

"I think one of the focus areas for my future work is to encourage teacher collaboration. I will create working teams for teachers of different subjects and age groups."

"Evaluation should be diverse. We cannot use the same standards to assess every student. It is hard to change the paradigm of standard tests currently, but we can have analyze the results differently, to find problems and then solve the problems for the student. "

"I will give teachers more security, support and trust. I don't want teachers to feel insecure when interacting with me. I will always show positive emotions in front of them, encourage them and admit my own shortcomings and mistakes."

The follow-up activities and plans can be considered as the first step of actions after learning, it is the internalized learning results after reflection.

However, there were also some constructive feedback such as a smoother connection between lectures, more diversity in teachers and school visits, and more

support and guide during learning. Many participants expressed wishes to pay more visits to schools for a better understanding of Finnish education. They would like to visit schools in the city and in rural areas to witness the equity and equality in Finnish education. Moreover, they would like to have more support during the learning project. It is understood that they have been used to the traditional way of education: receiving and conducting instructions without being able to have their own thoughts and opinions. Therefore, the participants suggest that the Finnish teachers could guide them to think and reflect by asking open-ended questions. Some even would like to have group reflective discussion on a daily basis after learning. Additionally, the participants were interested to experience the Finnish education by talking to parents and students, for a holistic understanding of the Finnish education. Lastly, the participants would like to learn from more than two teachers and experts during the learning project.

In this chapter, findings of this study were presented in the order of the research questions. The first three findings were different themes of authentic leadership manifested in each phase of the learning project. The aim is to understand how understanding of authentic leadership developed during the learning project. In the last finding, all interview data were taken into consideration to conclude themes on project-based learning theory. To get a better understanding of the findings, Table 10 was made as a summary of the above-mentioned four findings. In this way, themes within both authentic leadership theory and project-based learning theory are summarized according to the research questions.

TABLE 10

Themes Generated within Authentic Leadership Theory and Project-based Learning Theory Organized according to the Research Questions

Research Question	Themes under Authentic Leadership Theory	Themes under Project-based Learning Theory

1. What were the participants' previous experience about the learning project and knowledge of authentic leadership?	Leaders' qualities Values Goals Awareness of emotions and consequences	Gathering participants Familiarizing learning content Setting learning goals
2. How did their learning process progress and knowledge develop?	Being Fair-minded Building trust	Frequent reflection through interaction New understanding and views Relevant and useful to work
3. What would be suggestable changes or other issues to take into their future work to achieve more authenticity?	Mutual trust Being genuine Awareness of self-development Fair decision-making	Examining learning results Making action plans Advice on future learning projects

The above-summarized themes would provide a general idea on the previous experience and knowledge of the participants, how their learning developed, and how the future learning projects of TAMK Global Education could be improved.

6   DISCUSSION

6.1   Key Findings

Key findings will be presented according to the three main research questions on participants' previous knowledge, learning process and progress and the suggestable changes for future work.

The participants' previous experience can be put into two categories: the previous learning experience and the previous leadership experience. The previous learning experience that the participants had in common were: 1) gathering participants, 2) familiarizing learning content and 3) setting learning goals. The participants were gathered together by local education bureau to attend various learning activities and briefing meetings before coming to Finland. Besides attending training sessions and workshops together, they also familiarize the learning content on their own by reading. The general learning goals were set by the local education bureau but each participant had their own learning goals. When looking at the participants' previous leadership experience, the major themes from the interview data were 1) leaders' qualities, 2) goals, 3) values and 4) awareness of emotions and its consequences. It can be inferred that the participants attached importance to the above themes and possessed these competences before the learning project.

The key findings on the learning process and progress will be presented separately. When it comes to the learning process, three findings emerged as important elements: 1) frequent reflection through discussion, 2) new understanding and views, and 3) relevance and usefulness to work. The three themes showed how the participants learnt, their gains and their opinions towards the learning project. The learning progress manifests in that the participants saw the need to be fair-minded and to build trust in their leadership work. They talked about issues they had not considered as extremely important: considering others' feelings and opinions and considering all the relevant information. More importantly, they were impressed by trust culture in Finland and saw the need and possibility to build it in their work.

To answer the third research question, it is worth to examine the themes in the continuation phase of the learning project. In terms of the continuation phase, the participants will mainly examine learning results and make action plans in the future work. They also gave advice on how to improve the future learning projects. Their understanding of authentic leadership in the continuation phase is more comprehensive. It includes building mutual trust between leaders and

followers, being genuine in terms of maintaining oneself and openly share opinions. They also were aware of self-development in their future work. When discussing about plans to improve their work, the participants had a holistic picture. They planned to not only change the current ways of working, but also put followers' feelings and needs first.

6.2   Key Findings in Comparison with Theory

In this chapter, I compare the key findings with the theory following the order of research questions. In each section, key findings are compared with two specific theories: 1) the four core components of authentic leadership in Chapter 3, and 2) the phases and features of learning projects based on Table 2 and Table 3. The four core components of authentic leadership, namely, self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and internal moral standards were all found in participants' answers in different phases of the learning project. Specifically, self-awareness manifested in the Orientation Phase, therefore will be discussed in 6.2.1. In the Learning Phase, the participants showed the competences of two new components of authentic leadership: balanced processing and relational transparency (in 6.2.2). All the four components of authentic leadership emerged in the Continuation Phase, therefore will be discussed in 6.2.3.

6.2.1   Participants' Previous Learning and Leadership Experiences

In the orientation phase, main activities the participants were involved in were gathering the participants, familiarizing the topics, and setting the learning goals. The themes were present in the findings of Poell & Van der Krogt (2003), where elements in the creation phase of a learning project are mobilizing the participants, analyzing the learning theme, contextualizing the project and drawing up a learning contract. The findings of Poell and Van der Krogt (2003) and this research highlight the importance of the activities for participants to familiarize with the learning theme and place, especially when the two factors are unfamiliar to the participants.

However, by comparing the findings of this research and other researches, two elements were missing from the data. First, this finding slightly contradicts a feature of analyzing the learning theme that the participants make an analysis of the problems in their work to create the principles of the learning program and results. Instead, the learning program and results were co-created by the organizing parties, the staff members from the local education bureau and TAMK Global Education. It is seen from the data, that the participants analyzed and reflected on their own, thus had their own expectations of the learning program. Besides, the participants were generally satisfied with the learning structure and objectives set by the authority, but it could be more beneficial if the participants could analyze the learning theme in groups and involved in the creation of the learning program. Similar findings were present in the study of Tynjälä, Pirhonen, Vartiainen & Helle (2009), where taking into account participants' previous knowledge and conceptions are characteristics of constructivist learning environment in project-based learning. The participants' conceptions and analysis of the learning theme is of importance in creating learning structure. It was also pointed out that reflection through previous experiences should be done through discussion. The second missing feature was the learning contract. No participant spoke of the existence of a learning contract that was produced by working on the other three sub-themes mentioned. Although learning goals were mentioned, they were not written down or considered as part of the learning project.

However, it is crucial that the participants are involved in and support the creation of the learning project in the orientation phase, as it allows the participants to see the possibilities for development and play their roles in the learning project (Poell & Van der Krogt, 2003). This is an important aspect that educational organization must acknowledge and try to involve participants in creating the principles and structure of the learning program through survey or other methods.

Participants' previous leadership experience, in other words, their understanding of leadership equaled with themes of the research question one as to

leaders' qualities, goals, values and awareness of emotions and their consequences. First, leaders' qualities manifest in academic competences and personalities such as confidence, positivity, passion and strong will. Participants also believed that if those personalities could effectively encourage and motivate teachers. Participants' previous understanding of leadership is in line with the component of self-awareness in authentic leadership. According to Kernis (2003) and Gardner et al. (2005), self-awareness refers to understanding and having an awareness in one's values, identity, emotions, motives, desires and self-relevant cognitions. Leaders' qualities mentioned by the participants refer to the personal identity of leaders. Personal identities are formed over time when leaders reflect their interaction and influence with the others (Erickson, 1995). When mentioning leaders' qualities, the participants' examples included how it positively influenced their followers. This proves the finding of Avolio and Gardner (2005) that authentic leaders see themselves as positive role models as well as leaders.

Second, participants' goal of achieving student-centered learning and individuality in education relates to the notion of goal and motive by multiple researchers. Previous researches concluded that leaders' goal is the different between self-views (the view on current self and environment) and possible selves, which is a person's imagination of hopes for the future (Lord & Brown, 2001; Avolio & Gardener, 2005). The difference between self-views and possible selves could motivate authentic leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In the study, the participants were motivated to learn from Finnish education on how to achieve their goals and dreams of the future education. Third, the values of the participants in the orientation phase mainly shows in realizing the importance of the teachers and the benevolent values such as honesty and responsibility. This fits the description of value in self-awareness by Avolio and Gardner (2005). The participants considered that the current evaluation system might discourage the teachers. It can be inferred that the participants are able to be true to their values in spite of the social pressure (Erickson, 1995; Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

The last theme of the participants' previous leadership experience was awareness of emotions and their consequences. Participants attached importance of

emotional intelligence to leadership, which is related to the notion of emotional intelligence being key to effective leadership (Michie & Gooty 2005; Avolio & Gardener, 2005). In addition, Avolio and Gardner (2005) believe that the awareness of emotions and their consequences can help make value-based decisions for authentic leaders. It can be inferred that in the learning phase, the participants' understanding about leadership is in accordance with the component of self-awareness under authentic leadership, but no strong evidence showed that the participants' previous understanding of leadership included other components of authentic leadership.

6.2.2 The Development of the Learning Project and Participants' Understanding

As was discussed previously, the themes emerged from the learning phase were 1) frequent reflection through interactions, 2) new understanding and views, and 3) relevance and usefulness to work.

The interactions in learning and the participants' feedback have a positive effect on the learning outcomes and customers' satisfaction level. This is consistent with Poell and Van der Krogt's (2003) learning phase theory, where executing and optimizing the learning project are on focus. Nearly all the participants mentioned that they reflected on their own, in pairs or groups, or via social media on a daily basis. This also relates to the findings of Tynjälä et al. (2009), that in the project-based course, students should reflect on their own learning in journals or through discussions from a constructivist perspective. One of the most enjoyed activities during the process was school and organization visit, where participants could be engaged in authentic learning environment with the guidance of a coach. This relates to the findings of Thomas (2000) and Helle et al. (2006), where an authentic learning environment and the coaching role of a teacher are important factors of project-based learning.

Besides, the participants realized they were making progress as the learning project carried on, as they all expressed their new understanding and views of different aspects of education. This is consistent with Poell and Van

der Krogt (2003)'s finding that knowing they are making progress is the key to learning results. Moreover, the participants were able to obtain a relatively clear view of the learning views, work views and the learning project's relevance to their work. Almost all participants have attached high relevance of the learning project to their work. This relates to the finding of optimizing the learning project by Poell & Van der Krogt (2003), where three criteria, the participants' learning views, work views and the project's relevance to work decide the quality of the learning project.

However, the data did not touch on the topic of assessment in the learning project. Bell (2010) suggested that assessment in project-based learning should be authentic, and focus on reflection, self and peer evaluation. Tynjälä and associates (2009) also pointed out the importance of student self-assessment focusing on the learning process, and that the self-assessment focusing on the learning process combined with assessment by the teacher could help foster meta-cognitive skills. The non-existence of assessment in data could result from the design of the questionnaire and the learning program. The questionnaire only used the word "reflection" instead of "assessment", so the participants did not mention anything concerning assessment. Besides, the assessment in the learning program were scattered in daily discussion in a non-formal way, but was not written down in black and white for the participants to notice. The participants were not familiar with the concept of assessment and self-assessment; therefore, they do not know what and how to assess in a learning project. It is of high importance to understand the background and learning competencies of the participants. I suggest that the aspect of assessment during the learning process should be taken into consideration when planning a learning project, and that instructions and examples should be given for a better understanding and execution for the participants.

The participants' understanding of leadership in the learning phase included 1) being fair-minded and 2) building trust. First, being fair-minded meant considering teachers' and students' feelings and opinions, and considering relevant information in leadership work. This relates to the core component of balanced

processing under authentic leadership by various researches (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner & Carlson, 2015; Bank et al., 2016). It is also in line with Walumbwa and Weber's (2009) definition of authentic leadership that authentic leaders make decisions while accepting followers' input. Enlightened by the idea of student-centered learning, the participants recognized the importance of giving teachers and students enough respect and making them confident. Considering others' opinions and feelings is a part of balanced processing and is helpful for authentic leaders to make the right decision (Walumbwa et al., 2008), and it prevents leaders to make decisions based on only their own opinions (Gardner & Carlson, 2015). Besides, participants were able to recognize the unsatisfying performance in current work, such as a lack of hands-on experience, real-life phenomenal and cross subject curriculum. It relates to an aspect balanced processing proposed by Kernis (2003) as objectivity and the acceptance and recognition of poor performance. It can be said that participants' understanding of authentic leadership deepened as it comes to balanced processing, another core component of authentic leadership.

Besides balanced processing, the participants' gains on leadership also included building trust. It mainly included building a mutual trust culture and having the appropriate interaction with followers. The participants attached importance on openness and being trusted by the followers in their daily work before the learning program. This in line with the research of George (2003) and Avolio & Gardner (2005) that authentic leaders are role models followed by people with trust. When they mentioned in the attitudinal gains from the learning program, it is not hard to tell that the participants' understanding deepened in the learning phase. The participants believed more respect should be given to the differences of the students and those of the teachers in their future work. In this way, trust on followers will generate. This notion is related to trust being an important process where authentic leaders influence followers' attitudes and behaviors (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans & May, 2004).

Referring to Margaret Meacham (2007), motivation and self-development increase when followers trust their leaders. Moreover, an authentic relation is dependent on openness, self-disclosure and mutual trust (Kernis, 2003; Gardner et al., 2005). The participants were also able to see an ecosystem of trust culture from a societal perspective, believing that an ideal trust culture was where authorities, principals, teachers, students and parents could trust each other.

Another issue under building trust is appropriate interaction with followers. Most participants attached importance to positive feedback given to teachers in their daily work. This relates to the notion of authentic leaders not showing inappropriate emotions in close relationships (Gardner et al., 2005). Mutual trust and appropriate interaction belong to relational transparency, a core component of authentic leadership. As seen from above, the participants had knowledgeable and attitudinal gains in the learning phase. It manifested in the fact that their understanding of authentic leadership increased to two new components of authentic leadership: balanced processing and relational transparency.

6.2.3   Important Issues for Future Work

Data related to the important issues for improved future work were found in the continuation phase of the learning project. The participants' understanding of authentic leadership and their plans in the continuation phase will be discussed in this part.

Participants' plan for future work in the continuation phase included examining and sharing the learning results and making action plans. They plan to engage in follow-up activities such as sharing their gains in seminars and to improve the organizational learning system such as building a new school culture and shifting paradigms. The above are considered as productive ways to make an influence and systemized learning. Referring to Poell and Van der Krogt (2003), participants should examine what and how they have learnt after the project ends, and utilize various ways to systematize the learning experiences. By doing this, training transfer, the transfer of knowledge and skills learned in training to the workplace (Broad and Newstorm, 1992), can be realized. At the end of

the learning project, the participants were given a group task to present their learning outcomes by presenting their dream school. After the learning project, they would write reports, publish articles and hold a provincial seminar to share their learning results. These activities are utilized to achieve the training transfer. Besides, the participants all expressed their own plans to transfer the training gains to their future work.

According to Poell and Van der Krogt (2003), learning and transfer activities should be seen as related elements in a coherent learning program. They also suggest that external parties must be stimulated to follow up the participants' learning in other ventures. However, this element is missing from the data and the learning project. The participants' continuous activities are usually followed in a non-official manner by TAMK Global Education. It would be meaningful for TAMK Global education set up a system of follow-up actions to better understand how the learning project influences the participants. Besides, external parties such as the local education bureau would also benefit if they constantly follow up the participants' learning in other ventures.

In the continuation phases, participants' understanding of authentic leadership manifested in the themes of mutual trust, being genuine, awareness of self-development and fair decision-making. Mutual trust emerged at the first time during the learning phase, and was discussed in the previous section. Mutual trust is considered as part of relational transparency, a core component of authentic leadership. It can be inferred that relational transparency is one of the most important issues that the participants would like to develop in their future work to achieve more authenticity.

Being genuine meant sharing learning results, educational values openly, and maintain dignity at the same time. The participants showed a strong determination of openly sharing their refined educational values focusing on trust and student-centered learning. The participants' plan is related to internalized moral perspective, which means authentic leaders act according to their true self and values and show their feelings and thoughts freely and openly (Kernis, 2003; Gardner & Carlson, 2105).

Besides, the participants also highlighted exercising their autonomy within the current framework and working culture. This is in line with the notion of maintaining dignity appropriate to the context (Gardner & Carlson, 2105) and the consistency between moral perspectives and values (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Moreover, the participants thought of continuously improving leadership skills and practices as important in their future work. The awareness of self-development relates to self-awareness in authentic leadership. The participants showed the competence in self-awareness as they had an awareness of self-relevant cognitions and understood their weaknesses (Kernis 2003; Gardner et al., 2005), so they could see the necessity of always improving their leadership skills. The last important issue from the participants' answers is fair decision-making. As highlighted from the answers, participants found it important to change the current organizational ways of teaching and learning, and to consider the followers' feelings and opinions when making the change. This is in line with the objectivity in balanced processing within authentic leadership. The participants understood that the notions of analyzing all relevant information and considering the followers' feelings and opinions are important for authentic leaders to make the right decision proposed by multiple researchers (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Gardner & Carlson, 2015; Bank et al., 2016). It is not difficult to say that the participants understood balanced processing, core component of authentic leadership.

Concerning the activities in the continuation phase, the participants would examine learning results and made action plans. The activities proposed by participants are in line with the main learning project theory. However, there is a lack of systematic manner of following up the participants' learning after the learning project. This might be important for future learning projects of TAMK Global Education. The participants' understanding of authentic leadership has improved effectively. The themes from the data during the continuation phase are in line with the four core components of authentic leadership. It can be said that in the continuation phase, the participants showed better understanding and competences of authentic leadership.

6.2.4   Advice from Participants

It is also meaningful to discuss shortly the practical suggestions and feedback from the participants. As mentioned above, the participants were satisfied with the physical environment and most of the learning arrangement. They especially benefited from the guidance of a lecturer as a coach when visiting schools. In the future work, it is worth keeping up the good traditions. Some of the suggestions and wishes from the participants can be taken into consideration for future projects. These include having more than two Finnish teachers and more support given, such as guided reflection and discussion and detailed instructions of learning activities. However, some requests are hard to achieve from a practical perspective, and reasons should be explained to the participants who do not understand the obstacles so well. The request of more school visits could be accomplished but it is not easy to arrange a visit to rural schools with few students. It might disturb the normal operations and activities of the school. On top of that, the regulations for this learning group by Chinese authorities is that the participants can only stay in two cities in Finland, and they are Tampere and Helsinki. Accordingly, it is almost impossible to arrange a school visit to a rural school with few students. The other request of talking to students and parents is also quite difficult to realize. Firstly, it is not easy to get a number of parents and students together when everyone is available and that everyone is interested. Additionally, there is the language barrier that most participants cannot understand English. It is not reasonable to hire dozens of interpreters for this purpose. Lastly, it is not ensured that the participants would gain much considering their lack of independent study and reflection skills.

6.3   Managerial Recommendations

Some recommendations can be made according to the results and conclusion of this research, to improve the quality of TAMK Global Education's leadership learning project. In general, it can be recommended to truly consider the cultural differences including language barriers, social contexts, cognitive skills, and the

ways of thoughts and behaviors. Moreover, reflecting on project-based learning theories and improving different phases of the project are also recommended.

In relation to this research, the first notion can be made is that the participants of this research seemed mostly satisfied with the execution and the learning outcomes of this project. Yet, something can always be improved. In general, the aspects that could be improved from the manager's point of view is related to the orientation and execution of the learning project to better facilitate the participants' learning processes.

The first managerial recommendation stemming from the research is that TAMK Global Education could participate in the orientation phase in some manner and contextualize the participants with the learning conditions and content. This could be done to have the participants analyze the learning content and participate in the creation of the learning project by drawing up their own learning contracts. As known to all, it is not easy to carry out a multicultural learning project, especially when the participants and the organizing party face the difficulty of differences in time, space and culture. The space and time differences can be overcome, but it is hard to overcome the difficulties of managerial practices in China.

The participants are from different schools and with various academic backgrounds owning different cognitive skills and learning habits. Moreover, the people who are in charge of organizing this project are staff members from the education bureau, who might understand differently what the participants desire to learn. However, some things can still be done to improve the orientation phase if more effort is made. It is possible to conduct video calls in the orientation phase before the participants come to Finland. During the video calls, a brief introduction to the learning project can be made, and instructions of analyzing the learning content and drawing up learning contracts can be given by TAMK Global Education. The video call could happen when the local education bureau mobilize all the participants before coming to Finland. It just needs a lot of communication and coordination. In this way, the participants would consider themselves bound to the project and be willing to play their roles in the project as a whole.

Secondly, it is highly recommended that TAMK Global Education would take care of a quality control during the execution phase to optimize the learning project. Opportunities of regularly examining the progress of the learning activities should be offered to the participants. It can be conducted via constant feedback and reflection. When examining the progress, the instructions and criteria are suggested to be given to the participants considering their backgrounds and level of assessment mastery.

The three criteria that are related to the quality of the learning project, namely, 1) the learning views of the participants, 2) their work views and 3) its relevance to their work (Poell & Van der Krogt , 2002), could be applied. By doing so, the participants could obtain a clear idea of the project quality and help improve the project in those respects. Moreover, short discussion sessions on quality control could be conducted. The participants should be explained clearly, which of their feedback or suggestions are practical and which are not, and the reasons behind it. Besides, it could be beneficial to introduce assessment activities into the execution phase. To achieve better results, the participants should be provided with the tools and time for self-assessment during the execution phase. Along with the self-assessment, teachers' assessment is also important. With self-assessment and teachers' assessment, the participants would have a clear understanding of how much they contribute to the learning project and how their learning goes.

Additionally, TAMK Global Education could familiarize with the participants' backgrounds, culture and their social context. As the participants do not understand English, it is more effective for TAMK Global Education staff to make preparation materials and hand out Chinese translation of learning content taught in lectures in advance. It is suggested that TAMK Global Education do a general background research on the participants' basic information such as their school types, language competences, leadership experience and style, previous education level, their expectations and so on. It can be carried out in the form of an online survey. Once the basic information is known, it is easier to tailor make the learning content better to their desires and wishes.

Moreover, it is suggested that the Finnish experts and teachers get to know the current trends, educational policies and culture to have a better focus on the learning content provided for the participants, and more fruitful discussions with the participants. As seen previously, the participants were most impressed with the trust culture and transparency in Finland, due to a lack of trust and transparency in Chinese culture and working life. Bearing that in mind, the Finnish experts and teachers could have a focus when talking about the importance of trust and transparency in leadership and all aspects of life. When doing learning activities such as group discussions, reflection sessions or workshops, the Finnish experts could take into consideration that the Chinese education does not really teach students how to work in a team. Therefore, it is more effective if abundant instructions and guidance could be given before and during the activities.

Finally, it is suggested that TAMK Global Education find a way to follow up the participants' learning in other ventures after the project is complete. An online survey could be sent to the participants twice a year for following up. Information could also be collected from the local education bureau. Even more so, TAMK Global Education could join forces with the local education bureau to develop an ecosystem of follow-up, which could be used for the future participants for all the other learning projects they participate in.

6.4   Limitations and Future Research

First limitation of the study focuses on Chinese public school principals. Accordingly, the study might not give a holistic view of the opinions of Chinese teachers (followers) and leaders from other levels and types of education on TAMK Global Education's leadership learning project. Therefore, more research will be needed in the future to fully understand how to examine and evaluate TAMK Global Education's leadership learning project.

Secondly, although the research data gained was enough large to answer the research questions, more questions should be asked about the understanding of

authentic leadership and project-based learning to gain more details of the participants' learning. Besides, the questions were asked and answered in Chinese, and then the answers were translated into English. Some information might have gotten lost in the translation.

Thirdly, the research questionnaire was done only once during the learning phase. Hence, the answers from the participants might not be authentic enough. The results would be more accurate if the participants were asked the questions concerning orientation phase before the learning project starts, and the questions about continuation phase after the learning project is completed. Besides, the same questionnaires could have been done with other principal groups for multiple times to get data that are more accurate.

Additionally, the participants being members of governmental organizations and the party could endanger the authenticity of the answers. Some participants could have spoken of things over positively on their understanding of leadership and the current situations at their work for the sake of being politically correct and the "face culture". The positive aspect of this is that the participants would have given the most authentic answers when asked about opinions on how to improve this learning project, considering there is no power relation between TAMK Global Education and them.

Nonetheless, the limitation of this research did not hinder fulfilling the purpose of the research. Moreover, the information gathered from this study offered deeper understanding of the leadership learning project, the customers' needs, preferences and gains, and how to improve the project in the future. In addition, the study helped increase my own understanding of project-based learning and authentic leadership, and the principles of conducting scientific research.

This research also indicates sources for future research. More research in authentic leadership and project-based learning is needed in higher education. Specifically, research on different understanding and execution of authentic leadership under different cultures could be done and more research on learning pro-

ject where the participants are from different organizations is needed. Digitalization and globalization will also change the ways of conducting learning projects, therefore, update research is required in this area.

A potential direction for future research is towards teachers and other followers. Future research could also compare teachers' and leaders' different understandings of authentic leadership. Even though this research only focuses on school principals and their understanding of authentic leadership, the opinions from the followers are also important to help the school principals understand leadership better. There is also a possibility for future research to focus only on the followers.

Future research could also be made on learning projects made for principals of private schools to see if the results are similar. It would be interesting to find out if the leadership practices and concepts are different. Moreover, research could also be conducted on learning project for school principals from other countries than China, to find out how much influence a culture is on the learning. Research could also be done with quantitative method to find out if the aspects have a relationship with each other.

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