This paper provides an overview of key themes identified through analysis of extensive interview data collected from the eight case study schools (4 in each country). This analysis traced the critical path of leadership actions that senior and middle leaders employed over time; detailed what each of these actions entailed; and highlighted their perceived consequences in relation to improvement in teaching, learning and student achievement.

**Focus**

The case studies focused upon the ways in which reforms were mediated differently between schools by principals, senior and middle leaders and teachers in order to assess the extent to which their primary intentions had been translated into practice and whether their focus on improving the leadership of learning and teaching in schools and classrooms had been effectively realized and sustained.

**Methods**

Data were collected over three phases. Firstly, school principals identified policy initiatives which had the greatest impact on their schools and explained how they interpreted/mediated policy. Second, interviews with senior and middle leaders (n=6-8) and classroom teachers (n=6-8) permitted progressive focusing (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976) on how policies were understood, communicated and enacted in each school. Third, a further visit explored emergent themes with key staff members.

**Analytical framework**

We build on and extend the work of Ball et al. (2011). Comparative analysis of data from both countries led to the emergence of an explanatory framework used to guide the single- and cross-country analysis.

**Findings**

Findings from both countries revealed responses to policy initiatives to be underpinned and mediated by the extent to which they corresponded with the values held by the principal. In England, schools utilize these values to negotiate educational policies that are subsequently shaped to accommodate their priorities. Systems and structures established by senior leadership, therefore, inform and shape the enactment of policy in correspondence with the values that direct the schools' improvement agenda. In Hong Kong, while schools have a shared macro-policy context, leaders also prioritize policies for enactment based on criteria pertaining to their own leadership values and school mission. Furthermore, enactment is shaped by contextual features such as schools' language of instruction and reservoir of human and fiscal resources; by leadership distribution, especially the degrees of freedom allocated to middle leaders and teachers; and by synergies found between mandated policies and school initiatives. Similarly, in England, the level of agency ascribed to middle leaders, as enactors of policy at departmental level, is central to this process.