

17

In Search of a Diverse Curriculum

Toward the Making of a Postmodern Hong Kong in the Twenty-First Century

EDMOND HAU-FAI LAW

In 2007 and later in 2010, McKinsey and Company published their report, “How the world’s best performing school systems come out on top.” The report focused on the infrastructure of a select group of school systems and identified key features that accounted for their success in international tests and assessments. The top three countries—known as “sustained improvers”—include Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. All three countries achieved excellence according to the report (Mourshed, Chijioko, and Barber 2010). Among the six factors that accounted for their success, three are related to the core themes of this chapter:

1. decentralized pedagogy and perpetuation of innovative practices,
2. leadership for change, and
3. empowerment of teachers and school leadership.

The public expenditure per student as a percentage of GDP per capita of Hong Kong, however, was low compared with South Korea, Japan, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The table below summarizes expenditures per pupil as a percentage of GDP in selected countries. However, in his recent Policy Address, Mr. Tsang, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), repeatedly emphasized that the percentage spent on education accounts for approximately 17.5% to 18.5% of the total public expenditure in fiscal year 2011 to 2012, as estimated by the Government (The 2012–2011 Budget, February 23, 2011, Appendix 24).

The question remains: what makes these Asian countries successfully produce children with high aptitude for science, reading, and mathematics? The issues are quite complex. Professor John Biggs of Hong Kong University was puzzled by the following paradox, evident in the early twentieth century (Biggs, 1996). On the one hand, child-centered progressive education was considered the most effective pedagogical strategy in cultivating personal

TABLE 17.1
Public expenditure per pupil as a percentage of GDP per capita in selected countries

	2009		2010	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Hong Kong	13.8	16.7	15.1	18
South Korea	23.1	23.6	–	–
Singapore	10.7	16	11.5	17.5
Japan	–	–	23.7	24.3
Finland	20.5	36.1	–	–
UK	24.5	31.1	–	–
USA	22.4	25.2	–	–

(UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012)

autonomy and in enhancing the individual potential of children. It emphasized the intrinsic values of life-long learning, the importance of learning skills, and the roles of children in constructing knowledge and developing their own individuality. Major Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and mainland China have a long history of Western influence, especially in terms of progressivism in educational thought. Japan introduced Froebel’s child psychology in the Meiji period, whereas Apple, Pinar, and Giroux’s works have influenced contemporary Japanese educators (Hashimoto 2003; Abiko 2003; Asanuma 2003). South Korea has also had a clear record of being influenced by contemporary Western curriculum specialists such as Bloom, Tyler, and Bruner and Marxist scholars such as Freire, Carnoy, and Althusser. The more recent works of Pinar and Apple explain their impact on contemporary educators in South Korea as well (Lee 2003). Mainland China and Taiwan share similarities in their contemporary history of education (Hwang and Chang 2003; Zhang and Zhong 2003). The influences of the educational thoughts continue their engineering function in shaping both theoretical works and educational practices in schools in contemporary Asian countries.

TABLE 17.2
Performance of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematical, and scientific literacy in PISA 2009 (top ten in all domains)

Reading		Mathematics		Science	
Countries	Mean (S.E.)	Countries	Mean (S.E.)	Countries	Mean (S.E.)
Shanghai, China	556 (2.4)	Shanghai, hina	600 (2.8)	Shanghai, China	575 (2.3)
Korea	539 (3.5)	Singapore	562 (1.4)	Finland	554 (2.3)
Finland	536 (2.3)	Hong Kong	555 (2.7)	Hong Kong	549 (2.8)
Hong Kong	533 (2.1)	Korea	546 (4.0)	Singapore	542 (1.4)
Singapore	526 (1.1)	Chinese Taipei	543 (3.4)	Japan	539 (3.4)
Canada	524 (1.5)	Finland	541 (2.2)	Korea	538 (3.4)
New Zealand	521 (2.4)	Liechtenstein	536 (4.1)	New Zealand	532 (2.6)
Japan	520 (3.5)	Switzerland	534 (3.3)	Canada	529 (1.6)
Australia	515 (2.3)	Japan	529 (3.3)	Estonia	528 (2.7)
Netherlands	508 (5.1)	Canada	527 (1.6)	Australia	527 (2.5)

Source: HKPISA Centre (2011). The Fourth HKPISA Report PISA 2009 Executive Summary. Hong Kong: HKPISA Centre, CUHK.

On the other hand, the results of international assessments have indicated that, for a long time, the countries that lack progressive traditions have topped the table. Hong Kong, together with other major Asian countries, continues to do well. The following table shows a concrete picture of the performance of the children who come from the top ten countries.

One might easily attribute the achievements of student learning to the cultural values embedded in the Confucian heritage of these countries. Effort and hard work have been considered essential to academic success rather than motivation and natural capacity for learning.

... a traditional Chinese society ... maintains a strong emphasis on hard work and the belief that ineptitude can be overcome through diligence, and people think that one's own efforts will supplement any lack of natural endowment. Under the influence of such a tradition, Hong Kong has over the years nurtured a lot of distinguished talents and high quality schools. (Education Commission, 2000, p. 39)

Notably, countries with a Confucian heritage overemphasize examinations, accord excessive priority to rote learning and memorization, and depend heavily on teacher talk and transmission models. Confucian perspectives on learning are quite different from these stereotypical views of pedagogy that are commonly associated with these countries. Confucian traditions state that

Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application? Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another's behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself? Learning without thought is labor lost;

thought without learning is perilous. (Confucius, *Analects and Great learning* "Da Xue")

These quoted passages show that Confucian traditions value thinking, investigation, authentic learning, the experimental nature of learning, self-reflection, application, and a personal attitude toward learning. I believe that these concepts of learning and pedagogy resemble modern progressive thought on education. How these cultural values and traditional practices operate and function in the learning processes of children and young adults in Hong Kong remains a key research question.

In Search of a Quality Curriculum (1982–2001)

In the 2003 version of this paper, I deliberately selected a range of key curriculum issues and concerns based on endeavors of the educators, teachers, policymakers, parents, and the community at large in search of a quality curriculum for the twenty-first century. The selection of the themes and the research studies was arbitrary, and the choice of Tyler's curriculum framework was convenient. The key observations and arguments made there were as follows:

1. The definitions and the understanding of curriculum and curriculum studies have been so diverse that I took a liberal approach in understanding the theories and practices of curriculum. Tyler's framework facilitated the organization and explanation of my thoughts.
2. The educational system during the colonial period was characterized by its political affiliation with British traditions and values. Thus, a traditional and rationalist approach to educational organization and practice was adopted (Morris 1996). The fund allocated to education remained minimal compared with the budget allocated to education in some developed

countries in East Asia, Europe, and America, including Japan, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

3. In 1982, a visiting panel submitted a report to the Hong Kong Government outlining their key observations and recommendations on the issues and problems crucial to the provision of an effective educational system in Hong Kong. The Llewellyn report paved the way for the foundation of a modern educational system and practice in Hong Kong.
4. In search of a quality curriculum and educational experiences for children in Hong Kong, student-centered educational philosophy and principles became the foundational orientations in educational planning and pedagogical reforms in Hong Kong since 1972. These reforms were formalized in 1982 by the Llewellyn Report. Traditional practices and understanding became outdated and were considered ineffective modes of educational thinking. However, resistance from teachers in classroom practices in various forms was well acknowledged by teaching professionals and policymakers.
5. Education Commission Reports 1–6 revealed that the educational system in the 1980s and the 1990s focused on its internal effectiveness and structural issues, which eventually paved the way for the search of a quality curriculum in 1999 and 2001.
6. The planning and implementation of major curriculum reform from 1989 to 1999 was immature. However, this built the foundation for a new wave of curriculum reforms in 1999 and 2001.
7. Decentralization of educational management and curriculum decision making were key themes in curriculum reforms from 1982 to 2002.
8. The policy bias toward a Western conception of learning effectiveness overlooked the role of Confucian cultures and the traditional practices in Hong Kong.
9. Curriculum diversity has been a function of the social, religious, and political backgrounds of school management, which means that Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are also functions of the liberal attitude in the governance of the school system in Hong Kong. These religions have a direct impact on these various “backgrounds” in shaping the curriculum experiences of the children.

In summary, Hong Kong’s experience in searching for a quality curriculum has been a question of how a harmonious compromise can be achieved between Western progressive thought in education and Eastern traditional practices in a socioculturally different milieu. The former is characterized by its emphasis on the development of personal autonomy, whereas the latter focuses on communal preferences and the priority it gives to the hierarchical harmony embedded in the structures of human relationships and institutions.

The Changing Nature of the Hong Kong Educational System (1997–2012)

Hong Kong’s sovereignty was returned to Mainland China in 1997. Kennedy depicted the period from 1998 to 2012 as a period of “post-colonial release” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 98) in the sense that the first major reform in educational structure was the British orientation of requiring three years of junior secondary, two years of senior secondary, two years of A-level examinations, and three years of undergraduate study. The new model is known as the 334 model because it comprises three years of junior, three years of senior, and four years of undergraduate study, implemented in 2009.

The cluster curriculum framework, which has streams or clusters of subjects, was replaced by a model with a core of four subjects: Chinese, English, Mathematics, Liberal Studies, and electives in the senior secondary level. The underlying philosophy of an “academic rationalist” approach with very strict subject boundaries based on a collection code curriculum was replaced by a curriculum that emphasizes choices and flexibility (Morris and Chan 1998). Therefore, subjects in schools are grouped under disciplines to allow greater flexibility in organizing learning across traditional subject boundaries.

The two public examinations were replaced by one examination toward the end of senior secondary as the general entrance requirement for university courses. This change was instituted to re-orient the pedagogical and learning approaches away from the examination-dominated curriculum (Kennedy, 2011). The shift to a progressive curriculum for effective learning and development of personal autonomy was well received. This framework added a socio-economic but local function that will produce a generation of human resources for knowledge creation and innovations in the knowledge-based economy of Hong Kong.

[L]earning is driven by the needs of the knowledge economy for ideas and innovation. This learning . . . draws from the broadest conceptions of progressivist teaching and learning principles. Its emphasis is not so much “child-centered” progressivism but rather social efficiency that focuses on the role of schooling in the provision of a skilled work force. (Kennedy 2011, p. 92)

One may argue that this “added value” of a progressive curriculum is a traditional and Confucian perspective of the function of education deeply rooted in the cultural values of a Confucian-oriented Chinese society (Education Commission 2000, p. 39). In Kennedy’s view, this change signals “an end of the colonial education system and the beginning of a locally developed and internationally recognized system of education” (Kennedy 2011, p. 110). Professor Cheng (2009) conceptualized the major reform policies, and they are summarized in the following table:

TABLE 17.3
Characteristics of educational reforms (2001–2009)

Macro level	Re-establishing a new national vision and educational aims; Re-structuring educational systems; Diversifying the market-driven approach to educational provision.
Meso level	Increasing parental and community participation in the management and financing of school education.
Site level	Increasing accountability; Demanding teacher quality and students' standards; Decentralizing management and curriculum.
Operational level	Strengthening ICT in teaching and learning; Re-orienting teaching and learning toward student-focused approaches; Emphasizing assessment for learning.

(Adapted from Cheng 2009)

From Nurturing Civic Responsibility to Engineering a National Identity (1999–2012)

Many, including the new Government in Hong Kong, were surprised that on July 29th, 2012, approximately 90,000 people, including students, parents, and teachers, took to the streets to protest the imposition of a national education program for the primary and secondary students to be implemented in 2013. That was the first time that these people protested against an educational program on political grounds. That was also the first time that the protesters made their political vision on educational aims that steer away from political indoctrination or any attempt by the Government to impose a political view and perspective on the school curriculum. The materials in one of the teachers' handbooks funded by the Government but published by a pro-Beijing teacher organization directly praised the Communist Party as "united" and "selfless." The teachers, parents, and students claimed that the national education program was "toxic milk powder, poisoning the next generation" of children in Hong Kong (*South China Morning Post*, July 30, 2012, p. 1).

Prior to 1997, the year that Great Britain returned Hong Kong's sovereignty to Mainland China, the aims of education seemed to avoid problems and controversies. The aims covered the major aspects of human development, such as intellectual, aesthetic, physical, and social. They appeared universal and uncontroversial to Hong Kong citizens (Education and Manpower Branch, 1993). The appeal for a national education and national identity as the aims of the educational system began as early as 1999 based on a consultation document on educational reforms, which was later adopted in the formal educational reform document in 2000.

To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled

with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large. (Education Commission 2000, p. 30)

The development of national identity permeates the school curriculum across pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. The development of this identity becomes one of the five essential learning experiences under the domain of moral and civic education (Curriculum Development Council 2001, p. 20). "[T]he promotion of national identity and commitment to society and the nation are imperative for realizing Hong Kong as part of China as well as an international Asian city" (Curriculum Development Council 2000, p. 42).

Interestingly, the promotion of national development in schools among schoolchildren has not been mentioned at all by the chief executive of the Hong Kong Government in any of his policy addresses from 1998 to 2006. In his policy address in 2007–2008, he mentioned specifically that the Government would respond actively to the appeal by President Hu Jintao of the People's Republic of China on June 30th, 2007, for a national education for the youth in Hong Kong to love "our motherland and love Hong Kong." He further asserted that the national program should "foster among young people a sense of affinity with our motherland and heighten their sense of national pride and identity" (clause 119). The importance of cultivating a strong sense of national identity was repeated in his policy addresses in the years 2008–2009 and 2009–2010. In his policy address in 2010–2011, he stated specifically that a national education should be developed into a school subject tentatively called "moral and national education" to be implemented in 2013–2014.

In May 2011, a curriculum guide on Moral and National Education for primary one to secondary six was announced and promoted publicly (Curriculum Development Council 2011).

The protests reflect the conflicts between the well-established core values of Hong Kong as a city of diversity (in which the school systems have radical and different aims of education based on their governing and management bodies) and the urgency on the part of the central Government to engineer a strong sense of national identity with Mainland China, including the recognition of the Communist Party as the legitimate and sole representative of the Chinese people. The school curriculum in Hong Kong becomes a battleground between two contrasting ideologies that are deeply rooted in two different cultural and political traditions. Unification with the motherland has been identified with the uniformity of thoughts and ideologies by those who have strong affiliations with the central Government in Mainland China. However, the majority of Hong Kong people take for granted that the core values of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan city lie in its political and cultural diversity, which is embedded in its political and

educational structures. Hong Kong society shares many characteristics with a postmodern society, such as diversity, openness, and individuality. Currently, the insistence on the part of the current Government to implement a curriculum that is used for a particular political ideology may run against the postmodernist values embedded in diverse lifestyles within the political and social infrastructure in Hong Kong. Notably, in the 2000 Education Commission Report, one of the visions of the reform was:

[T]o construct a diverse school system: to inject diversity in education ideologies, modes of financing and focus of curriculum, so that learners have more choices and multifaceted talents will be nurtured. (Education Commission 2000, p. 5)

Curriculum Research (2003–2012)

I adopted two strategies to survey curriculum research in Hong Kong. First, I downloaded all papers that have two key words, “Hong Kong” and “Education,” from the ERIC database. I was able to download 1,835 papers and categorized the 892 papers published between 2012 and 2009. Second, I asked my research assistant to download all research papers from each personal profile of faculty from Hong Kong University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Baptist University, and Hong Kong Institute of Education. These may overlap with the ERIC database. Third, I also downloaded all the press releases of the biggest and most influential teachers’ union in Hong Kong from 2002 to 2012. I found that their major concerns in terms of the educational and curriculum policies include their implementation from the perspectives of frontline teachers (<http://www.hkptu.org/mainindex.php?content=wisnew/newsrelease.htm>).

Given the number of publications, I will be highly selective in my choice of research papers and publications that relate directly to the key concerns and issues that were identified and discussed in the early part of this chapter (Yeung, Lam, Leung, and Lo 2012). I start with one written by Professor John Lee in 2009 on a comprehensive review of the research publications in international curriculum journals, local Hong Kong journals, and from ERIC database from 1980 to 2008 (2009). He found that more papers and publications related to curriculum practice than those related to the curriculum theories emerging in the 1990s and the 2000s. He classified them into eight broad categories:

1. Curriculum policy and history
2. Teachers’ curriculum beliefs and conceptions
3. School-based curriculum development and leadership
4. Subject-based curriculum and current curriculum reforms
5. Student conceptions of learning and change
6. Curriculum implementation and evaluation
7. Special local curriculum issues
8. Curriculum studies beyond Hong Kong

Lee observed that not many research publications were based on postmodernist or re-conceptualist approaches, although some theoretical work was identified. Second, studies on school-based curriculum development dominated; scientific studies or experimental approaches were rarely found. Third, numerous methodological preferences were found over case studies and historical narratives. Similarly, few studies employed action research, experimental testing, a critical approach, and an ethnographical approach in curriculum studies. Fourth, research on core school subjects such as languages and mathematics was dominant, whereas cross-curricular issues were very few. Fifth, theoretical orientations mostly follow Anglo-Saxon traditions, whereas practical curriculum issues elicit more research attention other than theoretical explorations (Lee 2009, p. 113).

The lack of theoretical pursuit in curriculum studies is a complex issue that is related to the orientations of Government policy in allocating resources for research studies. The Quality Education Fund, which was established by the Government in 1998 to provide competitive additional funding for enhancement initiatives by schools, has a strong impact on research activities and collaboration between university faculty and schoolteachers. The practical and professional relevance of innovations and curriculum projects have been the key criteria for successful applications for funding. Theoretical explorations do not interest policy makers or decision makers whenever funding is concerned. In addition, the quantitative aspect of curriculum engineering work dominated the 1980s and 1990s, whereas in the twenty-first century, educational reforms shifted to concerns on quality of learning and teaching (Cheng 2009).

Gender, inequality, ethnicity, and political issues emerged only recently as major educational discourses among stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and the community at large (Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union 2012). In the press release of the Professional Teachers’ Union on its request for Government actions to solve educational problems, one out of all ten requests was about the political and sociocultural issues of educational policy and practice. The requests pertain to the preparation of modern citizens for autonomy and independence, the implementation of an authentic education for civic responsibility, and their rejection of any form of indoctrination in national educational program. The other requests on the list include the protection of the wellbeing and the quality of life of teachers in their jobs and careers (Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union 2012).

Compared with the 892 papers between 2012 and 2009 available on the ERIC database, the following is evident:

1. Papers on gender issues, political, colonial, and reproduction aspects of the school curriculum and policy account for approximately 22 papers.
2. Papers on teacher beliefs, teacher education, and teacher development account for 95 papers.

3. Papers on the secondary curriculum and education account for approximately 45 papers.
4. Papers on higher education account for approximately 46 papers.
5. Special education and early childhood education have more representation than other aspects of the school curriculum.

In his early review of the research publications, Professor Lee noted the lack of papers or research studies on the postmodernist tradition and the re-conceptualist framework that has likely continued since 2008. This may be one consequence of the deliberate orientation by the funding agencies in Hong Kong and the policy of the assessment criteria on the practical relevance of educational research studies. The priority given to research applications and proposals, which have clear and direct practical relevance, affects the research directions of the researchers in the faculties of education in Hong Kong universities.

Re-Orienting and Consolidating Pedagogical Principles and Practices (1972–2012)

Western progressive principles such as Dewey's or the child-centered approaches to teaching and learning such as Piaget's and Bruner's have been well-received clusters of educational thoughts and were well-adopted in educational policies in Hong Kong (Llewellyn et al. 1982). However, at the operational level in classrooms, progressive approaches have often been diluted and mediated, which is considered an inauthentic version of its original philosophical and educational principles: "AA (Activity Approach) is found to have, to some extent, degenerated into a form of teaching very similar to the traditional one" (The Board of Education 1997, p. 45).

Colleges of education taught progressive educational thought and its implications on pedagogical design and practices in classrooms. When I was undergoing a reading in-service training course at Northcote College in 1979, I listened to lectures on Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and other progressive educationalists. My field experience and practice were all modeled after progressive educational principles. This progressive tradition in education courses for teachers continues in other education faculties in Hong Kong. In my study on the pedagogical strategies adopted by professors and faculty in a department of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, I found that progressive principles had been well infused and used in curriculum design and pedagogical practices in training and educating future teachers (Law et. al. 2007, p. 253). The Government did not only accept in principle the values of "small class teaching" (Policy Address 2011–2012) but also began implementing it in primary and secondary schools. However, the change and the reduction of class size have been gradual. The acceptance of the policy change also resulted from great pressure from teachers' unions (The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union 2012).

Small Class Teaching (1974–2012)

The promotion of student-centered curriculum began in 1974. Additional resources were provided to schools that adopted Activity Approach (AA). Schools that implemented AA enjoyed smaller class sizes and more appropriate resources even though evidence on its effective implementation at the classroom level has not yet been established (The Board of Education 1997). The persistence in advocating student-centered approaches in teaching and learning continues at the policy, teacher education, and quality assurance mechanism levels. The reform proposals in 2000 make "student-focused" the first principle in reform (Education Commission 2000, p. 6). Furthermore, the role of the students to "construct a core of basic knowledge and develop their basic abilities and attitudes to prepare them for the building of a learning and civilized society" appears to be the only aim for the school education in the document (primary and junior secondary education) (Education Commission 2000, p. 31). From 2007 to 2008, the Government formally approved "small class teaching" as a policy. In 2009, the approach was implemented in primary one level. Students in primary one to six levels will be taught via AA beginning academic year 2014 to 2015 (Policy Address 2007–2008, clause 91). From 2009 to 2011, 70% of, or 302, primary schools in Hong Kong implemented the "small class teaching" scheme. The Government has reiterated its commitment to implement the "small class teaching" scheme in year 2011–2012 (Policy Address 2011–2012, clause 113).

Research studies on the effectiveness of "small class teaching" in Hong Kong were conducted and supported directly by the Educational Bureau in 2003 and subsequently in 2004. A total of 37 primary schools participated in the pilot studies. The studies aimed to identify the best pedagogical approaches and the necessary conditions for effective learning in "small class" environments (Chan 2010). In 2009, the results of the studies were released. The results showed that the differential student achievements were not convincing in favor of "small class teaching" (Chan, 2010). However, the decreasing fertility rate in Hong Kong made many schools and teachers adamant in implementing the scheme in 2003. In the following years numerous schools had been "killed" (a local Chinese terminology used to vividly describe the critical situation confronted by the teachers and the schools) (Chan 2005, p. 23) due to a very low enrollment rate. This crisis caused by the decreasing number of students in the primary schools has prompted the teachers to strongly demand smaller classes to save their jobs.

Learning Study (1995–2012) One key strand in research studies on pedagogy in Hong Kong has been the pioneering work of Professor Lo and her colleagues on the introduction of a theoretical element called Marton's Variation Theory into the work of Lesson Study. This theory has traditionally been used in developing and improving

pedagogical practices in Japan (Marton 1988; Lo 2009). Lesson Study has been implemented by many scholars in the United States and elsewhere as an effective way to enhance teachers as professional decision makers at the operational level, as well as an effective way to improve student-learning achievements (Stigler and Hiebert 1997). The role of the teachers in Lesson Study is similar to the conception of teachers as researchers (Stenhouse 1975; Elliott and Yu 2008). The development of Lesson Study in Hong Kong has incorporated a systematic and theoretical approach in the conceptualization of its function and operation. Hence, Professor Lo initiated the change in name to “Learning Study” to distinguish it from the other models of Lesson Study in Japan and other countries.

The basic assumptions and features of Learning Study in Hong Kong are as follows:

1. Teachers are engaged in cycles of lesson review, design, enactment, analysis, reflection, and redesign;
2. Teams include subject experts, theory experts, and classroom subject teachers;
3. Teachers follow a package of procedures and processes;
4. Data collection methodologies include pre-test, post-test, and interviews before and after the lesson enactment;
5. Variation theory provides pedagogical guidance in designing lessons;
6. Teaching focuses on the critical features of the object of learning; and
7. Learning indicates a change in one’s way of seeing or understanding the object of learning.

Learning Study has spawned school-based innovations as it deliberately injects in the lesson design not only the theoretical but also the systematic dimension in its planning, design, and analyses. The project on Learning Study started with two schools in 1995. From 2005 to 2008, a project called “Variation for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning” attracted 120 schools in Hong Kong. The evidence of its effectiveness in enhancing student achievements, especially among low achievers, has been significant and well documented in many research papers published in international journals (Lo et al. 2005; Ko 2007; Lo 2009; Ko 2011; Cheng and Ko 2012).

Assessment for Learning The negative impact of excessive and selection-oriented public examinations as well as the different forms of assessing students’ learning achievements and learning approaches has been well acknowledged by educators and the Government in Hong Kong (Education Commission 1990, p. 62). Excessive public examinations distort the intrinsic motivation of learning and orient students to adopt surface approaches to learning at the expense of deep and meaningful learning. Report Number 4 of the Education Commission revealed that the positive impact of public examinations and assessments

of student learning should be emphasized and brought to the best interests of students in terms of effective learning. Therefore, the formative purpose of assessments and examinations should be addressed in schools (Education Commission 1990, p. 64; Biggs and Tang 1998).

Another issue discussed in the report is the lack of alignment between the attainment targets and the school curriculum at different grade levels. The clear attainment targets at each grade level would give students clear learning targets and give teachers clear teaching objectives to plan their lessons and pedagogical strategies. The achievements are criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced. Following this framework, every student can achieve their targets of learning outcomes at their own pace and their achievements were well recognized in their progress reports. The Government and the teachers implemented this “target related assessment” policy until its termination in 1999, when new reform proposals were initiated. However, several key concepts were retained despite the confirmation of the new curriculum reforms in 2001.

I think that the most essential concepts are the formative function of assessing the outcomes of student learning and the adoption of a wide range of assessment instruments to measure various types of learning outcomes (Curriculum Development Council 2001, p. 80). Research studies that fall in with this line of policy orientations have been numerous. They investigated whether the aspects of the new assessment policies and their implementation strategies could be applied in Hong Kong schools. A few of them explored the theoretical aspects of the new assessment policy (Ngan 2011; Berry 2008; Bryant and Timmins 2002; Falvey et al. 1994).

From Teacher Participation to Distributed Curriculum Leadership (1982–2012)

The failure of the centralized models of research, development, and dissemination in the educational reforms of the 1960s has led to the emergence of a contrasting theory about social development and human learning. Teacher participation in professional school activities has been known to enhance not only teacher professionalism but also their ability to make pedagogical and curriculum decisions at operational levels that match the needs of the learners. Logically, pedagogical decisions enhance learning effectiveness. These beliefs were disseminated worldwide, reaching Hong Kong. As a colonial tradition, educational experts were asked to review the educational system in Hong Kong.

In 1982, the Llewellyn Report was completed. This report was a significant milestone in the modernization of Hong Kong’s educational system and its practices. One of its recommendations was to institute a policy that would provide teachers space in making curriculum decisions (Llewellyn 1982, p. 56). This was positively accepted by a key decision-making body, the Curriculum Development

Council. In 1987, a scheme was established to encourage school-based and teacher-led curriculum innovations until its termination in 2001. This period of teacher participation in curriculum decision making was characterized by its focus on school subjects with a clear goal of producing suitable materials for teaching and learning from the early stage to a mature stage. In the context of this scheme, the teachers were involved in the whole process of reviewing, planning, designing, experimenting, and evaluating the innovations (Lam and Yeung 2010, p. 74).

Following Marsh's conception, teachers engaged in curriculum deliberation (Marsh 2010, p. 288). This decentralization of the school curriculum was criticized for its lack of a clear policy. In particular, people wondered about the ultimate aim of SBCD even though the teachers were involved in curriculum deliberation. Some people remarked that the curriculum designs were still individualistic and sporadic. In 2001, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) encouraged schools to adopt a more dynamic and interactive model by setting up "curriculum development teams" in curriculum deliberation. The CDC policy in 2003 strengthened the institutionalization of the mechanisms and the practices of school-based curriculum development by establishing a senior post in curriculum leadership, a positional leadership that served as the change agencies in the school administrative structure (Education Bureau 2003). This policy was significant because curriculum decisions at the operational sites were well recognized formally by the authority and teachers were formally rewarded. Teacher leadership in curriculum deliberations was considered a career path for active teachers involved in curriculum innovations. What was even more important was the alternative strategy recommended by the Government agency. This distributed and collaborative model of using curriculum development teams was considered effective and efficient in bringing about innovations and changes in schools and among teachers (Curriculum Development Council 2002).

A research question arises regarding which mechanisms and under what conditions could SBCD function efficiently in effecting changes in school culture and teacher professionalism. Law and his research team (1999–2012) embarked on a series of design-based studies on this issue about the effective mechanisms and processes in teacher curriculum decision making. Based on the key educational principles and wisdom generated over the years in Western literature, he and his research team designed an intervention in an elementary school from 2003 to 2005. This intervention was replicated in 2008 in another elementary school. The intervention entailed the establishment of three curriculum development teams, each of which focused on one core subject (English, Chinese, or Mathematics) in the school curriculum. The teams were formed and regulated based on the following principles and wisdom found in Western literature about effective human learning. Learners learn more effectively if they learn in

practical situations, in creating new knowledge, in a collaborative manner, in achieving clear aims, and in cycles of learning processes (Lave and Wenger 1991; Shulman and Sherin, 2004; Engestrom 2008).

Their findings show that an elaborate style of leadership in teams expands spaces for teacher participation and therefore enhances teacher ownership and empowerment while making curriculum decisions. By contrast, a restricted style of leadership in teams asserts the hierarchical domination of a positional leader, therefore narrowing the space for teacher participation. The former model allows quality teacher learning, whereas the latter restricts opportunities for teacher ownership and empowerment processes (Law 2011; Law et. al. 2010; Law, Galton, and Wan, 2010; Law and Wan 2008; Law, Galton, and Wan 2007; Law 2006; Law and Wan 2006). The research studies have also shown Asiatic cultures and their core features, such as the priority of social harmony and the preference for a cooperative mode of communication that mediates the interactive models in team meetings. Consequently, they influence the leadership styles realized in the interactions among team members. A less hierarchical and positional leadership results in more space the teachers have in expanding their professional sphere of ownership and empowerment.

Trends and Future Directions

In Hong Kong, research studies are closely related to key policy directions and reform agendas, such as pedagogical reorientations toward student-focused practices and individualization of learning and assessment, decentralization of decision making among central agencies toward school-focused innovations, and distributed models of teacher curriculum deliberation and empowerment. The search for an effective and quality pedagogy and curriculum began as early as the 1970s and continues to the present. However, the search aims at negotiating a curriculum for the diverse needs of different ethnic and cultural groups within the infrastructure of Hong Kong society. I believe that the search for a diverse curriculum is the search for a curriculum that allows for a postmodernist Hong Kong.

In the 2003 version of this chapter, I concluded that the search for a quality curriculum in Hong Kong has been a history of finding a compromise between the Western conceptions of effective learning for personal autonomy and the Eastern pragmatic approaches to the practical functions of school learning. I was suspicious of the domination of Western thought over educational policy and curricular practices in Hong Kong and other Asian countries, which have adopted policies of similar lines. This bias toward Western thought has misled policy implementations because they conveyed negative images of the traditional practices in these countries. The replacement model found resistance from teachers (Law 2006). I have argued that the essence of Confucian thought in education shares some commonalities with progressivism, which emphasizes the role of students in learning and the

experiential aspect of learning and development. Thinking and reflection are equally valued in traditional Confucian thought. Policies should be geared toward finding a way to ensure the harmonious hybridization of two broad educational ways of thought in Hong Kong and its realization in the school curriculum and practices.

This search for a quality curriculum has encountered a new turn toward a curriculum that can accommodate demands for the cultivation of a stronger national identity among future generations. This turn for a more politically oriented curriculum with an explicit intention to “unify” the consciousness of the younger generations was met with the strongest resistance from parents, teachers, and the community that share a set of core values prevalent in Hong Kong society. These core values, such as liberty and freedom of speech, have been well developed to the extent that different religious and political affiliations could set their school aims and shape their curriculum toward their own cultural and political bias without being accused of indoctrination. Unlike their counterparts in France and other countries with secular school systems, Hong Kong schools have their own political and religious inclinations and affiliations such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam. Many other affiliations could have their own preferences in shaping the school experiences of their students.

These cultural and religious diversities in the school curriculum practices offer choices for parents and students. They also form the core value of a civil and liberal society that allows the greatest freedom of choice in lifestyles and ways of thinking. The promotion of a national education program runs against the core values of Hong Kong. In my observation, Hong Kong has been in the process of moving toward a postmodernist society, which accommodates the greatest diversity of lifestyles, choices in schools for children, and political activities within the broadest framework of a legal system based on civil liberty and freedom. The search for a curriculum in the next 10 or 20 years will be a search for a curriculum that offers the greatest freedom of choices and life preferences for those who seek the greatest liberty within a civil society.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my colleagues—Dr. Ngan Ming Yan, Dr. Ko Po Yuk, Dr. Chan Kam, Wing Paul, and Dr. John Lam—who contributed their papers and research reports in the preparation of this chapter. Special thanks are extended to Professor John Lee and Professor Kerry Kennedy for their generosity in sharing their scholarship and research experiences. I am especially indebted to the late Professor Colin Marsh for many years of personal friendship and continuous support.

References

Abiko, T. (2003). Present state of curriculum studies in Japan. In W. Pinar, (ed.). *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.425–434). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- Analects. Retrieved from http://www.wfu.edu/~moran/zhexuejialu/Analects_PEM.html
- Asanuma, S. (2003). Japanese educational reform for the 21st Century: The impact of the new course of study toward the postmodern era in Japan. In W. Pinar, (ed.). *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.435–442). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Berry, R. (2008). *Assessment for Learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Biggs, J. (1996) (ed.) *Testing: To Educate or To Select?* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co.
- Biggs, J., and Tang, C. (1998). Assessment by portfolio: Constructing learning and designing teaching. In P. Stimpson and P. Morris, (eds.), *Curriculum and Assessment for Hong Kong: Two Components, One System*. Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press.
- Board of Education (1997). *Report on Review of 9 year Compulsory Education*. Hong Kong Government: Government Printer.
- Bryant, S. L., and Timmins, A. A. (2002). *Portfolio Assessment Instructional Guide: Using Portfolio Assessment to Enhance Student Learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.
- Chan, K. W. (2005). Aims of small class teaching: Implications from the student achievement guarantee in education project in Wisconsin. *New Horizon in Education*, 51, 23–28. (Original in Chinese)
- Chan, K. W. (2006). *The Road of Small Class Teaching in Hong Kong: Cooperative Learning*. Paper presented at the Conference on Education Development in Chinese Society, Macau, April 2006. (Original in Chinese)
- Chan, K. W. (2010). School development: Small class teaching and cooperative learning. In Yu, W. M., Chan, K. W., Hui, S. K. F., and Hui, C., (eds.). *Curriculum Leadership and School Development: A Collection of Action Research Projects II* (pp. 43–53). Hong Kong: Academic Professional Book Centre. (Original in Chinese)
- Cheng, C. K. E., and Ko, P. Y. (2012). Leadership strategies for creating a learning study community. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 9(1), 163–182.
- Cheng, Y. C. (2009). Teacher management and educational reforms: Paradigm shifts. *Prospects*, 39, 93–89.
- Confucius. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius>
- Curriculum Development Council (2000). *Learning to Learn: The Way Forward in Curriculum Development, Consultation Document*. The Hong Kong Government: Government Printer.
- Curriculum Development Council (2001). *Learning to Learn: Life-long Learning and Whole-person Development*. Hong Kong Government: Government Printer.
- Curriculum Development Council (2002). *Learning to Learn: Direction of Curriculum Development*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Curriculum Development Council (2011). *Moral and National Education Subject: Curriculum Guide for Primary One to Secondary Six*. Hong Kong Government: Government Printer.
- Education and Manpower Branch (1993). *School Education in Hong Kong: A Statement of Aims*. Hong Kong Government.
- Education Bureau (2003). *To Introduce a Teaching Post Responsible for Leading the Curriculum Development in Schools for Five Years: 2003/2004 Policy Arrangement. (EDB circular Sept. 2003)*. Hong Kong: Education Bureau.
- Education Commission (2000). *Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong Government: Government Printer.
- Elliott, J., and Yu, C. (2008). *Learning studies as an Educational Change Strategy in Hong Kong. An Independent Evaluation of the “Variation for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning” (VITAL) Project*. Hong Kong: SPFEO, HKIED.
- Engestrom, Y. (2008). *From Teams to Knots: Activity-theoretical Studies of Collaboration and Learning at Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Falvey, P., Holbrook, J., and Coniam, D. (1994). *Assessing Students*. Hong Kong: Longman.
- Great Learning (Da Xue). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da_Xue

- Hashimoto, M. (2003). Japan's struggle for the formation of modern elementary school curriculum: Westernization and hiding cultural dualism in the late 19th Century. In W. Pinar, (ed.). *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp. 417–424). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Hong Kong Government Policy Address, 1998–2012, Retrieved from <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk>
- Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union Press Releases from 2003–2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hkptu.org/mainindex.php?content=wisnew/newsrelease.htm>
- Hwang, J. J., and Chang, C. Y. (2003). Curriculum study in Taiwan: Retrospect and prospects. *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.595–606). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Kennedy, K. (2011). Transformational issues in curriculum reform: Perspectives from Hong Kong. *Journal of Textbook Research*, 4(1), 87–113.
- Ko, P. Y. (2007). Interpreting differences in learning in terms of differences in the pattern of variation and invariance in teaching—the Hong Kong Learning Study. *Journal of the Nagoya University*, 2007, 3, 1–15.
- Ko, P. Y. (2011). Critical conditions for pre-service teachers' learning through inquiry—the Learning Study Approach in Hong Kong. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, 1, 49–64.
- Lam, C. C., and Yeung, S. S. Y. (2010). School-Based Curriculum Development in Hong Kong: An arduous journey. In E. H. F. Law and N. Nieveen, (eds.) *Schools as Curriculum Agencies*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Law, E. H. F. (2003). In search of a quality curriculum in Hong Kong. In W. F. Pinar, (ed.). *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.271–283). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Law, E. H. F. (2006). A Growth Model of Teacher Development for Hong Kong: A Curriculum Perspective. *Educational Practice and Theory*, 28 (2), 97–102.
- Law, E. H. F. (2011). Exploring the role of leadership in facilitating teacher learning in Hong Kong. *School Leadership and Management*, 31(4), 391–407.
- Law, E. H. F. et.al. (2007). Teacher educators' pedagogical principles and practices: Hong Kong perspectives. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(2), 247–261.
- Law, E. H. F., Galton, M., and Wan, S. (2007). Developing curriculum leadership in schools: Hong Kong Perspectives. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(2), 143–159.
- Law, E. H. F., Galton, M., and Wan, S. (2010). Distributed curriculum leadership: A Hong Kong case study. *Education Management Administration and Leadership*. 38(3), 286–303.
- Law, E. H. F., and Wan, S. (2006). Developing curriculum leadership in an elementary school: A Hong Kong case study. *Curriculum and Teaching*, 21(2), 61–90.
- Law, E. H. F., and Wan, S. (2008). "The Impact of a School-based Curriculum Leadership Innovation Upon Teachers and Pupils: A Case Study in Hong Kong." In J. C. K. Lee and L. P. Shiu (Eds). *Developing Teachers and Developing Schools in Changing Contexts* (pp. 177–206). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press.
- Law, E. H. F., Wan, S., Galton, M., and Lee, J. C. K. (2010). Managing school based curriculum innovations: A Hong Kong case study. *The Curriculum Journal*, 21(3), 313–332.
- Lee, J. C. K. (2009). The landscape of curriculum studies in Hong Kong from 1980–2008: A review. *Educational Research Journal*, 24(1), 95–133.
- Lee, Y. (2003). Politics and theories in the history of curricular reform in South Korea. In W. Pinar, (ed.). *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.541–552). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Llewellyn, J., Hancock, G., Kirst, M., and Roeloffs, Y. K. (1982). *A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong: Report by a Visiting Panel*, Hong Kong: Government Printer.
- Lo, M. L. (2009). The development of the learning study approach in classroom research in Hong Kong. *Educational Research Journal*, 24(1), 165–184.
- Lo, M. L., Pong, W. Y., and Ko, P. Y. (2005). Making use of learning studies to cater for individual differences. In Lo, M. L., Pong, W. Y., and Chik, P. M., (eds.). *For Each and Everyone: Catering for Individual Differences through Learning Studies* (pp.27–40), Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Marsh, C. (2010). Re-examining the conceptual models for school-based curriculum development. In E. H. F. Law and N. Nieveen, (eds.) *Schools as Curriculum Agencies*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Marton, F. (1988). Describing and improving learning. In R. R. Schmeck, (ed.). *Learning Strategies and Learning Styles* (pp. 53–82). New York: Plenum Press.
- Morris, P. (1996). *The Hong Kong School Curriculum: Development, Issues and Policies*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Morris, P., and Chan, K. K. (1998). Cross-curricular themes and curriculum reform in Hong Kong: Policy as discourse. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 20(6), 509–520.
- Mourshed, M., Chijioko, C., and Barber, M. (2010). "How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better?" McKinsey and Company. Retrieved from http://www.mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Education_Intro_Standalone_Nov%2026.pdf
- Ngan, M. Y. (2011). *Theory and Application of the Contemporary Educational Assessment for Learning*. Singapore: Pearson.
- Shulman, L. and Sherin, M. G. (2004). Fostering communities of teachers as learners: Disciplinary perspectives. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(2), 135–140.
- South China Morning Post, "Rally Leaders Reject National Study Offer," July 30, 2012, Hong Kong.
- Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Stigler, J. W., and Hiebert, J. (1997). Understanding and improving classroom mathematics instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79 (1), 14–21.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Reports, Table 19 Finance Indicators by ISCED level" Retrieved from <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx>
- Yeung, S. S. Y, Lam, J. T. S., Leung, A. W. L., and Lo, Y. C. (2012). *Curriculum Change and Innovation*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Zhang, H., and Zhong, Q. (2003). Curriculum studies in China: Retrospect and prospects. *The International Handbook of Curriculum Research* (pp.253–270). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.