

Chapter 3

CURRICULUM MAKING IN THE NEW CURRICULUM REFORM: STRUCTURE, PROCESS AND MEANING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the mechanism of curriculum making in the new curriculum reform. It analyzes the structure, process and meaning of curriculum making at the national, local, school and classroom levels. The chapter shows that the experience of China's curriculum reform instantiates a larger institutional and organizational process of curriculum making in the international arena. It concludes by addressing the complexity and challenges involved in using state-based curriculum making as an instrument for the reform.

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The beginning of the 21st century saw many countries (e.g., China, Singapore, and Norway) embarking on curriculum reform as a response to the challenges of globalization. They were engaged in the endeavor of state-based curriculum making (or remaking)—including curriculum planning, development and implementation—an undertaking that involves articulating a reform vision and goals, translating the vision and goals into the official curriculum, and implementing the curriculum in schools and classrooms. Many governments have developed and institutionalized structures and processes that regulate and support curriculum making activities for curriculum reform according to their distinct social, cultural and economic conditions (Rosemund, 2000).

This chapter deals with the *mechanism* of curriculum making in China's new curriculum reform, that is, with the *structure* and *process* that the Chinese government has put in place to regulate and support curriculum planning, development and implementation in the reform movement. The new curriculum reform was initiated in 2001, which represented a national response in the education arena to the challenges of globalization and to the rapid developments and changes in China's social, economic and political context over the past twenty years. The reform vision is encapsulated in the notion of *quality education* (*suzhi jiaoyu*)—a term that is used to stress the importance of helping *all* students achieve broad and

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balanced moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic development in order to meet the needs of the nation in the 21st century (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). This signals a radical departure from examination-oriented education that has plagued students and teachers in China for many decades. The government has formulated a new national curriculum structure, curriculum standards, and regulations concerning curriculum implementation, curriculum evaluation, teacher education and professional development which together are supposed to steer classroom teaching toward a kind that is in line with the vision of quality education. To facilitate and support the reform movement, the government has put in place a tripartite system of curriculum administration that distributes responsibilities for curriculum making among the state, localities and schools.

The chapter analyzes the *structure* and *process* of curriculum making which are embedded in and shaped by the three-tiered system of curriculum administration. By way of a curriculum making framework (Doyle 1992a, 1992b), it discusses what curriculum making entails at the national, local, school, and classroom levels. The chapter concludes by addressing the complexity and challenges involved in state-based curriculum making as an instrument for the new curriculum reform.

THE STRUCTURE OF CURRICULUM MAKING

In dictionaries the term *curriculum* is relatively simple, referring to programs, courses of study, textbooks, and syllabuses. But the term is rather complex and highly contentious in academic literature (see Jackson, 1992). In public and political arena the term is inextricably associated with the notion of education. All public and political discourses concerning education and educational policies ultimately become *curricular* (Connelly and Xu, 2011). Further, curriculum exists in many levels, policy, program, school/classroom (Connelly and Connelly, 2008). Over thirty years ago, Goodlad and associates (1979) argued that curriculum is “made” in different locales or places: in state departments of education, in local school boards, in schools, and in classrooms. They wrote:

Curriculum planning goes on wherever there are people responsible for, or seeking to plan, an educational program. When state legislators pass laws regarding the teaching of the dangers of drug abuse, the inclusion of physical education, or requirements outlining the time to be spent on given subjects, they are engaging in curriculum planning. When local school boards, decree that reading will be taught according to a hierarchy of specific behavioral objectives, they are involved in curriculum planning. When school staff decides to use television broadcasts as a basis for interesting students in current events, they are engaged in curriculum planning. When individual teachers decide to use selected library books for enriching language arts offerings, they are involved in curriculum planning. (Goodlad and associates, 1979, pp. 27- 28)

State departments of education, local school boards and schools constitute the U.S. system of curriculum administration that regulates and structures curriculum making activities. In that system curriculum making is largely localized; curriculum planning and development are largely the business of local schools and school boards, and the federal

government and states do not have much control over what is taught in schools (Cohen and Spillane, 1992).

The perspective of Goodlad and associates, albeit articulated in the U.S., is useful for describing how curriculum making is regulated and structured in China. Like in the U.S., the curriculum in China is made in different places: in the Ministry of Education (MOE), in provincial or municipal departments of education, and in schools and classrooms. Unlike in the U.S., curriculum planning and development in China are centralized at the Ministry in Beijing and geographically distributed to provincial or municipal departments and schools—during the new curriculum reform movement.

The adoption of the tripartite system of curriculum administration has created a new structure of curriculum making. According to the new structure, there are three levels of curriculum making, the national, the local, and the school, each of which involves a particular group of players, with clearly-defined roles and responsibilities.

- At the national level, the key players include ministers and officers at the Ministry. Their main responsibilities include: articulating the vision of quality education and defining its nature and basic tasks; developing national curriculum standards in view of the vision; stipulating types of curriculum and ratio at different grade levels; developing criteria and guidelines for compiling and developing curriculum materials; formulating or reformulating the assessment and evaluation system; and formulating policies of curriculum management and development.
- At the local level, the key players are leaders and officers in a particular provincial or municipal department of education. Their main responsibility include: formulating plans to implement the national curriculum for their province or municipality in view of their distinct local needs; and developing locally-based curricula according to the particular geographic, cultural and economic conditions of the province or municipality.
- At the school level, the key players are classroom teachers and school leaders. Their main responsibilities include implementing the national and local curricula. In addition, working within the framework of the national and local curricula, they are required to plan and develop specific courses or select courses based upon their school traditions and strengths, student interests and needs. In other words, they are to participate in what is called school-based curriculum development (SBCD) (MOE, 1999, 2001).

The curriculum planning and development activities of these three groups yield three distinct kinds of curriculum, the *national curriculum* (curriculum structure, programs and subjects developed by the Ministry), the *local curriculum* (special courses developed by local departments of education), and the *school curriculum* (special courses developed by individual schools) (MOE, 2001).

This is a sharp contrast to the structure of curriculum making in China before the new curriculum reform. For many decades, curriculum planning and development were exclusively the business of the central government, and local governments and schools were primarily responsible for implementing the curriculum handed down from the central government, without freedom to develop locally or school-based courses. Consequently, such

a top-down structure created a highly-centralized and uniform national curriculum that, many have argued, was incapable of meeting the diverse needs of China—a populous, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation with very uneven economic, social, and educational developments in differing provinces and municipalities. The current three-tiered system of curriculum administration is designed to meet such diverse and complex needs in the nation. To a certain extent, it allows centralization to be reduced in a way that the power and authority over curriculum planning and development are shared among the central government, local governments and schools. In addition, it allows a certain degree of adaptation at local and school levels during the implementation process, therefore enhancing the adaptability of the national curriculum to the varied needs and situations of provinces or municipalities, local districts and schools (Zhu, 2007). Through establishing the tripartite system of curriculum administration, the Ministry ascribes more active roles for provinces/municipalities and schools in curriculum planning, development and implementation.

I now turn to another aspect of the mechanism—i.e., the *process* through which the curriculum reform was envisioned, planned, and implemented in schools and classrooms.

THE PROCESS OF CURRICULUM MAKING

As indicated earlier, in curriculum reform the *process* of curriculum making involves formulating a reform vision and goals, translating the vision and goals into curriculum structures, programs and courses of study, and implementing reform-induced changes in schools and classrooms. This is a very complex undertaking requiring coordination and cooperation among different groups of players across the entire school system. How such a process unfolds has to do with how curriculum making is structured or organized in the school system which, in turn, has to do with the system of curriculum administration.

Congruent with the three-tiered system of curriculum administration, curriculum making in the new curriculum reform was initiated and coordinated by the central government, and progressively proceeded with support and involvement of professionals and stakeholders at the provincial/municipal and school levels. The government first articulated a reform vision and goals and developed a new curriculum framework and sets of curriculum standards. The framework and standards were then progressively introduced to a handful of schools and districts selected in different provinces and municipalities across China for initial implementation or field-tests. Experiences and ideas gained from those pilot schools and districts were then disseminated to other schools and districts. There are three phrases of making the new curriculum: (1) planning and development, (2) initial implementation, and (3) full implementation.

Planning and Development

Three key events characterize the planning and development phase: a national survey, an initial drafting of a curriculum reform framework and curriculum standards, and the official release of the framework, curriculum standards and related documents.

- During 1996-1998 the Ministry conducted a national survey to ascertain the current issues and problems confronting the education system. The survey sample consisted of 16000 students and 2000 teachers and principals in 9 provinces and municipalities across the nation.
- In 1999 an expert group was formed to deliberate on the vision and aims of the new curriculum and to draft a reform guiding framework. The group consisted of ministry officers, educational theorists, curriculum specialists, subject matter experts, and school teachers. Meanwhile, the Ministry was engaged in the task of developing curriculum standards for 18 school subjects, reviewing and revising textbooks and teacher guides according to the standards.
- In June 2001 the Ministry issued the *Guidelines on Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Experimental)* containing the reform framework which outlines fundamental and systemic changes in the system.⁵ In addition, the Ministry released 22 curriculum standards for compulsory education (grades 1-9), 16 curriculum standards for regular senior high schools (grades 10-12), and a document concerning revamping the evaluation and assessment system for middle and primary schools (Zhu, 2007; also Feng, 2006; Guan and Meng, 2007).

Initial Implementation

The initial implementation phase can be characterized in terms of progressive adoption and refinement. The Ministry started with identifying a pilot district in each province and municipality to pilot the new curriculum. The experimentation was then extended to other districts after the curriculum was revised and refined based on what were learned from the implementation in the pilot districts. The acquired experience, understanding and insight were shared among other districts. Here are four important signposts during the initial implementation journey:

- In 2001 38 districts in 27 provinces and municipalities were designated as national experimental areas for curriculum reform.
- In 2002, more than 500 districts in all provinces across China were chosen as provincial experimental areas.
- In 2003, on the basis of experimental results and feedbacks, the Ministry revised all curriculum standards, student textbooks and teacher guides.
- In fall 2004 the Ministry issued the curriculum standards of all school subjects and related documents for compulsory education (Grade 1 to 9) (Guan and Meng, 2007; Zhu, 2006).

⁵ The framework includes eight essential components: (1) purposes and objectives, (2) curriculum structure, (3) curriculum standards, (4) learning and teaching process, (5) development of instructional materials, (6) curriculum evaluation, (7) teacher education and development, and (8) implementation of curriculum reform (MOE, 2001).

Full Implementation

Full implementation came into force during 2004 and 2005. In 2004 there were 65 to 70 percent of students in the whole nation using the new curriculum. By fall 2005, all elementary and secondary schools had taken up the new curriculum at the starting grade levels (Guan and Meng, 2007). The implementation has continued since, until the new curriculum was adopted across entire China (Feng, 2006).

Throughout the implementation process a wide range of support has been provided to teachers, primarily by means of teacher professional development. The government has implemented what is called the “Continuous Education Project” which aims at systematically training or retraining the entire population of teachers. A variety of professional development opportunities—including short courses, seminars, school-based workshops, summer programs, etc.—has been introduced to equip teachers to teach the new curriculum (see Xu, 2009).

Taken as a whole, the making of the new curriculum involves a ten-year progressive, step-by-step, and evolutionary process. It is very unlike the conventional direct implementation depicted in the literature—characterized as an execution of the reform blue print set by a central government. The Ministry believes that the simplistic view of direct implementation is no longer adequate in view of the complex situations of China at a time of rapid change. The process of curriculum making in China’s new curriculum reform presents a striking contrast with the one in the UK curriculum reform in 2000s, where the new national curriculum was “quickly” handed down to schools and teachers by the government for implementation. The new curriculum reform in China, Halpin’s (2010) observed, entails a journey where the government “were working with key stake holders over an extended period to create and establish one” (p. 258).

MAKING THE NEW CURRICULUM: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Tyler’s (1949) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* is often used by reformers and educators to justify a prescriptive way of thinking about standard-setting and curriculum making. It prescribes the following four questions as fundamental to the work of curriculum making:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

This way of thinking about curriculum making, Westbury (2008) argued, is “idealistic” and rather than “realistic” because Tyler Rationale does not describe what curriculum developers actually do when engaged in curriculum making.

What does it mean to participate in curriculum making at the national, local, and school levels? In the preceding section I have described three different groups of key players

involved in shaping or reshaping the curriculum across the system in terms of roles and responsibilities. Now I describe what they actually do by way of a curriculum making framework developed by Doyle (1992a, 1992d) and Westbury (2000)—a perspective that focuses on the kind of activities and discourse involved in making the curriculum.

Curriculum making, broadly construed, operates across three distinct domains or contexts, namely *policy*, *programmatic* and *classroom*, each of which is associated with a particular kind of curricular discourse and/or activity.

- In the policy or institutional arena, curriculum making centers on policies and discourses at the intersection between schooling, culture, and society. It embodies a conception of what schooling should be with respect to the society and culture. Curriculum-making at this level “typifies” what is desirable in social and cultural orders, what is to be valued and sought after by members of a society or nation (Doyle, 1992a, 1992b).
- In the programmatic domain, curriculum making centers on translating the aims, ideals, and expectations at the policy level into an operational framework that provides the ultimate base for the work of schools and classrooms. It transforms the abstract curriculum (aims, ideals, and expectations) at into school subjects, programmes, or courses of study embodied in curriculum documents and materials provided to a system of schools. The process of constructing a school subject or a course of study involves “framing a set of arguments that rationalize the selection and arrangement of content [knowledge, skills, and dispositions] and the transformation of that content” for school and classroom use (Doyle, 1992b, p. 71).
- In the classroom context, curriculum making centers on the pedagogical interpretation of the programmatic curriculum by a teacher. It involves transforming the programmatic curriculum embodied in curriculum documents and materials into the classroom curriculum characterized by a cluster of events—jointly developed by the teacher and a group of students within a particular classroom (Doyle, 1992a, 1992b). Classroom curriculum making involves further elaboration of the programmatic curriculum, making it connect with the experience, interests, and the capacities of students (Westbury, 2000).

These three domains of curriculum making provide a useful frame of reference for understanding the kind of curriculum work conducted at the national, local, school, and classroom levels. I will show that the national, local and school curriculum making operate across the policy and programmatic domains, and in classroom, teachers need to be viewed curriculum makers in implementing the new curriculum.

Policy Curriculum Making

Curriculum making in the policy arena is the province of the central government represented by the Ministry. It involves articulating the aims and vision of schooling as well as formulating the reasons or rationales for the aims and vision. The ultimate goal of quality education is to help students achieve broad and balanced moral, intellectual, physical and

aesthetic development and a high level of character building. More specifically, the aims of quality education include:

- enabling the development of a new, well-educated, idealistic, moral and patriotic generation who will love socialism and inherit and cherish Chinese tradition;
- helping students develop an awareness of socialist democracy and laws as well as respect for state laws and social norms;
- helping students cultivate desirable worldview, values and attitudes;
- helping students develop a sense of social responsibility;
- helping students developing an innovative spirit, practical skills, a knowledge base of sciences and humanities, and an awareness of environmental protection issues; and
- helping students develop good physical health and psychological qualities, healthy aesthetical tastes and lifestyles. (MOE, 2001)

Underlying the aims of quality education are three kinds of discourse—economic, political, and educational—that provide justifications and rationales for the new curriculum. The economic discourse foregrounds the emergence of a global economy and the rapid economic developments of China (e.g., the establishment of a market economy, the entry into the World Trade Organization, etc.), pointing to the need for a creative, innovative, and self-motivated future work force. The political discourse highlights the new social and political conditions of China (e.g., a move towards decentralization in governance, the emergence of a legal system of education, and the implementation of nine-year compulsory education), arguing for a new national curriculum that is more responsive and adaptable to the changing diverse social and economic needs of the nation (Feng 2006; Huang, 2004). The educational discourse critically questions the predominance of examination-oriented education, and in so doing, calls for a kind of student-oriented education that centres on developing well-rounded individuals (Liu and Qi, 2005). These discourses provide support for a vision of schooling in which the curriculum needs to be:

conducive to the universalizing of nine-year compulsory education, be attainable for the overwhelming majority of the students, embody the basic requirements for citizenship, and be **focused on fostering the students' motivation** and ability to undertake lifelong learning. Under the prerequisite that all students should achieve the basic requirements, the curriculum for regular senior middle school has been arranged in several optional levels to give students more choices and development opportunities, and to lay a solid foundation for them to cultivate competencies in life skills, hands-on practice and creativity. (Zhu, 2007, p. 224; also MOE, 2001)

In other words, curriculum making at the national level provides the “institutional frame” of decisions on curricular changes and the discourses that give legitimacy to those decisions (Mosenmund, 2007). It conveys the vision and expectations that the government has for the “inner work” of schooling across the school system (Westbury, 2008). The vision, expectations and discourses in turn provide an important frame of reference for subsequent programmatic curriculum making.

Programmatic Curriculum Making

Programmatic curriculum making is largely a national undertaking carried out by the Ministry. However, certain responsibilities are delegated to local provinces, municipalities and schools. The three-tiered system of curriculum administration gives meaning and shape to the discourses and activities of making the programmatic curriculum at the national, local and school level.

At the national level, the task of programmatic curriculum making entails translating the vision, aims and expectations of quality education into a *curriculum structure* (consisting of various domains and related school subjects or programs) and *curriculum standards* that are the ultimate basis for the national system of schooling, together with a set of *enabling conditions* about classroom teaching, curriculum evaluation, teacher education and professional development. The new curriculum structure divides the school timetable of nine-year compulsory education into five domains: (1) academic learning (history, geography, science, Chinese, mathematics and foreign languages) (53 percent), (2) moral education (8.5 percent), (3) arts and music (10 percent), (4) physical education and health (10.5 percent), and (5) integrated studies and elective subjects (community service, information technology, inquiry/project-based learning, and vocational and technical education) (18 percent). The new curriculum is enlarged and enriched by incorporating a significant ratio of integrated practical activity and elective subjects (Zhu, 2007). Conventional academic subjects are retained in the curriculum, after being pruned of complicated, difficult and out-dated elements.

The new curriculum standards consist of statements of what students should know and be able to do in different school subjects over the course of schooling, with respect to three dimensions of content: (1) knowledge and basic skills; (2) attitudes and values; (3) competencies in application and problem solving (MOE, 2001). Three sets of curriculum standards are created for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools respectively. For a school subject like science, the construction of curriculum standards entails interpreting and theorizing the content in a way that links the content backward to the policy purposes of the school subject (e.g., developing competencies) and forward to the (enacted) curriculum in schools and classrooms (see Deng, 2010). It is intended to facilitate the use of constructivist approaches to classroom teaching, encouraging inquiry learning, cooperative learning, experiential learning, critical thinking and creativity. The introduction of curriculum standards also signals a shift from the past emphasis on knowledge transmission to a broader stress on the development of competencies, attitudes and values in students.

Furthermore, programmatic curriculum making involves outlining a set of conditions or regulations that are necessary for implementing quality education in schools and classrooms—pertaining to classroom teaching, curriculum evaluation, and teacher education and professional development—conditions that purport to provide support for classroom teachers in the implementation process (see MOE 2001).

In short, at the national or ministerial level, the task of programmatic curriculum making is to articulate a curriculum structure and curriculum standards, alongside a set of enabling conditions, which serve to steer or prescribe the curriculum or forms of teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. It spells out what the schools should be teaching at various grade levels, how that teaching should be categorized and sequenced in terms of “domains,” “subjects” and “courses,” as well as how teaching should be undertaken (Westbury, 2010).

At the local (provincial and municipal) level, educational officers in a provincial or municipal department of education participate in programmatic curriculum making through articulating an operational plan for implementing the new curriculum according to the special situations and needs of the province or municipality. They work out how best to reinterpret the new national curriculum, meshing it sensitively with local situations and needs. In addition, working within the national curriculum framework, they develop locally-based courses (15% of the curriculum) that reflect the history, culture and economy of the province or municipality.

Likewise, at the school level, teachers and school leaders participate in programmatic curriculum making through school-based curriculum development. Apart from implementing the national and local curricula, they are expected to explore and select appropriate curriculum resources according to the school context, developing school-based courses (5 percent of the curriculum) relevant to students' interests and backgrounds.

Overall, within the three-tiered system of curriculum administration, locally and school-based curriculum developments are organizational strategies employed by the Ministry to engage provincial/municipal officials, school leaders and classroom teachers in the task of enhancing the responsiveness and adaptability of the national curriculum to the diverse local situations, issues and concerns. Locally and school-based courses are supposed to provide students with opportunities to study what has happened in their homeland through courses that are not included in state-mandated curriculum—courses that address local social, economic and cultural issues and traditions. Zhu (2007) offered the following examples:

A course on grafting technology of watermelon seedlings devised by a rural school in Ning'an County, Heilongjiang Province, enabled local farmers to increase earnings from watermelon planting and sales. A history course offered by schools in Mengjin County, Henan Province, re-examined the history course on why the city of Kaifeng turned from a booming city into a pile of underground ruins during the Northern Song Dynasty (A.D. 960–1127). A course adopted by schools in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, examined that City's historical contributions as the starting point of the celebrated seaward Silk Road during the heyday of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907). (p. 229).

Teachers as Curriculum Makers

Classroom teachers are the ones ultimately responsible for carrying out the new curriculum in classroom. In the new curriculum reform teachers are construed as not passive curriculum implementers *but* active curriculum makers. They are supposed to interpret and transform the new curriculum into activities or events in which students actively participate in questioning, exploring, and constructing knowledge (MOE, 2001). Teachers are supposed to engage students in cooperative, experiential, meaningful and reflective learning, enabling them “to have dialogues with the objective world, with other people and themselves” (Zhong, 2006, p. 378), and helping them develop competencies, positive values and attitudes.

A classroom teacher is a curriculum maker also in the sense that he or she interprets and transforms the new curriculum using his or her personal practical knowledge, in consideration of curriculum commonplaces—the teacher or self, students, subject matter, and milieu (see Clandinin and Connelly, 1992; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). This process is shaped by

various school local factors—others teacher, students, school principals, parents, etc.. However, the interpretation and transformation necessarily reflect a teacher's understanding of the potential of the new curriculum contained in curriculum documents and materials. Working within an organizational framework of public schooling, classroom teachers are the “intermediaries” between the policy/programmatic curriculum and the classroom curriculum (Reid, 2006).

The above discussion shows the different functions of curriculum making in the policy, programmatic, and classroom arenas, as well as the institutional differences between the Ministry, and local departments of education, schools and classrooms—in terms of curriculum tasks, responsibilities and concerns. The Ministry, local departments of education, schools and classroom teachers are engaged in three different curriculum making tasks, each of which is characterized by a distinct kind of curricular discourse and practice. Different players at different levels bring to bear their distinct ideologies, beliefs and concerns on their curriculum making task.

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CONCLUSION

I have discussed the mechanism of curriculum making in the new curriculum reform through analyzing the structure, process and meaning of curriculum making at the national, local, school and classroom levels. The analysis supports certain general assertions about state-based curriculum making in the context of a worldwide emergence of curriculum reform over the last two decades.⁶ The idea of state-based curriculum making “captures a wide-ranging set of activities and processes emerging within webs of societal and cultural ideologies and symbols, politics and organized interest groups, organizational and administrative structures and processes, and local understandings, beliefs and practices” (Westbury, 2008, p. 50). As a reform instrument, state-based curriculum making is rooted in a government's awareness of its own development and internal and external situations. In responding to the new development and new situations, a government establishes and institutionalizes a structure and process that channel a reform vision and expectations into the official curriculum and into schools and classrooms (Rosenmund, 2000). The structure and process of curriculum making are embedded in and shaped by the political, administrative and educational infrastructures of a country (Rosenmund, 2007). In other words, China's reform experience can be viewed as an instantiation of a larger institutional and organizational process of curriculum making in the international arena.

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Further, the case of curriculum reform in China exemplifies a typical way of using curriculum making as an instrument by the state to manage and regulate the work of schooling—a method that has been widely employed by many countries across the world. As Westbury (2008) observed, through developing national curriculum standards, a government projects to schools a range of authoritative formal decisions about and expectations for what schools teach, how that teaching should be undertaken. Those decisions are linked with textbook approval and adoption, teacher preparation and professional development, assessment and evaluation. Spaces that have not been available for locally and school-based

⁶ For example, the introduction of British National Curriculum, of American states' standards, and of the new curriculum frame and guidelines in Norway.

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curriculum development are made available. In short, the case of China typifies an international pattern of curriculum making.

The new curriculum reform in China bears resemblance to the systemic reform (also called *standards-based reform*) in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s as well. There are three integral components embodied in the US reform: (1) establishing challenging academic standards for what all students need to know and be able to do; (2) aligning policies—such as examination, teacher professional development—and accountability programs to the standards; and (3) restructuring the governance system to delegate to districts and schools the responsibilities for developing specific approaches that meet the standards (Goertz et al., 1995). Unlike the US reform, the new curriculum reform in China stresses *holistic* rather than ambitious academic standards. Nonetheless, it is *systemic* in that the reform requires educational changes to be integrated around a set of curriculum standards or outcomes, an alignment among various parts of the education system (textbook development, teacher professional development, etc.), and some form of decentralization that empowers educators and leaders at the local levels to make independent decisions. Policymakers and reformers in China seem to have learned or adopted ideas from the US standards-based reform. In fact, as many have pointed out (e.g., Zhang, 2005; Jiang and Lu, 2005), the constructivist assumptions about knowledge, teaching and learning that underpin the kind of teaching practice envisioned in the new curriculum reform are adopted from the US reform.

How successful is the instrument of state-based curriculum making in the new curriculum reform? Success inside the classroom is still not very evident. Today classroom practice remains largely unchanged; it continued to be driven by examination preparation. As Zhao (2007) observed,

According to a recent national study by the Ministry of Education, although many educators seem to have accepted the concept of “quality education” and some teachers have changed their teaching practices, by and large the focus on the whole child remains lip service. “Quality education is loudly spoken, but test-oriented education gets the real attention,” notes the report. As a result, competition among students remains fierce, schools and teachers continue to teach to the test at the expense of students’ physical and mental health, test preparation overrides national curriculum requirements, and some schools resort to militaristic ways of managing their students. Under intense pressure, students spend all their time and energy on schoolwork. (p. 73)

The experience seems to conform a decade of research in the US that classroom practice is resistant to change (e.g., Cohen and Ball, 1990a, 1990b; Cuban, 1993). As indicated by Zhao (2007), the extant assessment and examination system militates against the new curriculum reform. High-stakes examinations powerfully steer teachers to teach to tests rather than to the broad aims of quality education, hence narrowing the overall curriculum experience in classroom. When adopting the ideas of standards-based reform from the US, policy-makers and reformers in China did not seem to have fully recognized the constraint on curriculum reform imposed by the existing examination and assessment system. In other words, they seemed to have overlooked the precondition of alignment of curriculum standards with assessment/examination policies entailed in a systemic reform. In the US school system high-stakes examinations are literally nonexistent. Tests and examinations in general are not directly (or only loosely) tied to the intended curriculum, and are not used for selection purposes (Cohen and Spillane, 1992).

Another important constraint—that has not received sufficient attention from Chinese policy-makers and reformers—has to do with the entrenched cultural beliefs about the nature of knowledge, teaching and learning held by Chinese teachers. Partly due to the pervasive examination culture, Chinese teachers tend to view knowledge as a body of facts, concepts and principles contained in officially-approved textbooks, upon which students are tested during examination. Accordingly, they are inclined to define teaching in terms of giving out or imparting knowledge codified in school textbooks, and learning in terms of acquiring, memorizing and practising this knowledge (c.f., Waktin and Biggs, 2001). These beliefs seemingly contradict constructivist assumptions about knowledge, teaching and learning. Yet they are so widespread that they steer their thinking toward the traditional kind of teaching practice (Cuban, 1993). Therefore, to propose that teachers shift from traditional practice to the new practice envisioned in the curriculum reform is a proposal that they fundamentally transform their cultural beliefs about nature of knowledge, teaching and learning. Yet changes in teachers' beliefs are extremely difficult because they often challenge the core value held by teachers (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991). This was also a challenge faced by American policymakers and reformers when implementing standards-based reform (see Cohen and Ball, 1990a, 1990b; Cohen and Spillane, 1992).

In short, when learning or borrowing the policy practice of standards-based reform from the US, China reformers and curriculum makers did not sufficiently analyze the constraints imposed by the institutional and cultural context of schooling on the new curriculum reform. Without such an analysis and without introducing necessary modifications and changes, policy learning would become primarily “policy copying” (Mok, 2007). Classroom practice remains largely unchanged because the reform clashes with the high-stakes examination and assessment system, and with teachers' cultural beliefs and assumptions.

There is an urgent need to fundamentally reform the high-stakes assessment and examination system—particularly college entrance exams—if state-based curriculum making is to render significant changes in classroom practice. State-based curriculum making, teachers' professional development, and the assessment/examination system are among the instruments of systemic reform that are used to change classroom practice. These various instruments need to work together in a way that supports, rather than hinders, the implementation of quality education in schools and classrooms.

Furthermore, curriculum making at the national and provincial levels depends, for its effect, on classroom teachers who, as mentioned before, are ultimately responsible for carrying out the new curriculum in their classrooms. Providing teachers with extensive opportunities to learn what they need to know in the light of the complex demands of implementation and engaging them in such learning are crucial for changing classroom practice. In particular, they need opportunities to re-examine their instructional beliefs and assumptions. Only then will they be able to undergo changes in their instructional beliefs (Cohen and Barnes, 1993). Furthermore, the professional learning opportunities for teaching, Cohen and Hill (2001) argue, need to be grounded in classroom practice, allowing teachers to seriously study the new curriculum and related student work.

Last but not least, state-based curriculum making is embedded in and shaped by the “multiple layers of contexts” (Talbert and McLaughlin, 1993) —including students, parents, teachers, schools, local culture, local departments of education, the Ministry, and so forth. The new curriculum reform thus needs to be viewed as a national enterprise, one in which the national, local and school leaders have as much to learn as classroom teachers. Parents and

local community leaders have a lot to learn as well, if they are to embrace and support a new paradigm of education (c.f., Cohen and Spillane, 1992).

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