



<i>Presentation Title</i>	Decoding the Curriculum as Progressive Education from a Pre-service Teacher's Block Practice in a Primary School in Hong Kong – What We Have Learned?
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**Decoding the Curriculum from a Pre-service Teacher's Block Practice
in a Primary School in Hong Kong –
Progressive Education versus Teacher-Centered Education**

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Abstract

This paper examines how the curriculum as text is decoded from a pre-service teacher's lived experience from her block practice in a primary school for about two months. An ethnographic study approach was adopted with critical incident and reflective journal writing as data collection methods. The data analysis was performed by a self reflective process by the researcher in the field, a research partner was employed as critical friend to facilitate critical reflection during the process. The findings showed a contrast of the pre-service teacher's view with another five serving teachers in the context of a primary five English teaching team, which can be characterized as "an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory" (Pring, 2007) versus "memorization and drilling means learning". In the study, the pre-service teacher carried out project learning on a unit theme in her block practice despite of the disagreement from the teaching team, the serving teachers in the teaching team were found to have developed conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political dilemmas that prevent them from using learner-centred methods even they were recommended in the curriculum documents. The study suggests a case on how the curriculum text is interpreted in a complex process by the actors in schools, it suggests the need of re-culturing school to support learning and teaching by reevaluating the existing practice in classrooms in the 21st century.

Keywords: curriculum reform, Chinese classrooms, teacher career development

Progressive Education Philosophy

Many discussions on the education literature in recent decades suggested that progressive pedagogies are preferable as it regards learner as active player in the learning process. Traditional education modeled an elitist curriculum through centuries was criticized as it aimed to classify learners. Teaching as one of the important activities in education is debatable to whether it serves self-development or only to train out people with the qualities that the society expected to be right. At the turn of century, a pedagogical movement called progressive education began to make great impact over the world, progressive educators promote the idea that humans are social animals who learn best in real-life activities with others; learning should be organized around the learners with consideration of abilities, interests in a democratic education system (Dewey, 1956). The progressive pedagogies are characterized by "learning by doing" (Dewey, 1963) a slogan which underscores real life experience as essential in learning.

Early progressive educationalists championed child-centred pedagogies as a main feature of teaching. Pring (2007) explained child-centred education by a metaphor that the child is the sun and education should revolve around the child. Child-centred philosophy posed a great challenge on the mechanic and controlling methods of learning which mainly influenced by early behaviorist learning model. Dewey (2004), the father of progressive education, considers education as a tool that can help learners gain knowledge from experience effectively, therefore, education should not be a matter of telling and receiving, but an active and constructive process for learners. Progressive education also advocates much the same instructional approach as constructive learning approach does, which encourages investigation, discovery and problem solving. Learning never meant memorization and learning does not happen by externally imposed content. Rather, memorization and other cognitive skills are the aids to learn in the process, and the starting point of all learning is the child's common experience (Dewey, 2004).

Within a large pool of literature on progressive education developed for over two centuries, Kohn (2008) summarize the following as pedagogical guides on progressive teaching methods:

- Emphasis on hands-on project and experiential learning experiences
- Thematic teaching and integrated curriculum are recommended
- Integration of community service and service learning projects into the daily curriculum
- Emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and problem solving skills
- Understanding through activity is promoted as opposed to rote knowledge
- Social learning, group work, and social skills are encouraged
- Project learning is recognized as an important means
- Learning contents should be useful to the future needs of the society
- Wide range of learning resources are used
- Emphasis on life-long learning

- Processes of learning is integral in learning
- Assessment is a part of learning that includes learner feedback
- Assessment is production, projects, and case studies but not paper-pencil test

Representative progressive teaching methods can refer to the 1800s. Parker was a progressive educationalist earlier than Dewey; he led reform in US in Quincy and Chicago's Cook Country Normal School (Cavanaugh, 1994) by applying child-centred theories of Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi. He advocated learning in context and he promoted field trips across the local countryside for geography classes rather than coercing them to recite the geographical jargons. He had his students created their own stories for "reading leaflets", which replaced both the primers in grammar schools and the rote learning that went with them (Windschitl, 2002). Project learning was another recommended progressive pedagogy which was recommended during Dewey's time, Dewey (2004) mentioned that "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience". In project learning, learners in group are expected to perform an in-depth study of a particular topic and to produce the correspondence findings by integrating different skills and disciplines. Throughout such learning process, young people are "learning how to learn" (Motschnig-Pitrik & Holzinger, 2002).

Dewey (2004) believed that a theory apart from an experience, even it is memorized, doesn't learn, it tended to become a mere verbal formula, a set of catchwords used to hinder thinking, or genuine theorizing, unnecessary and impossible. For example if students learn cooking a pancake, they should learn it through the cooking processes by a recipe. Memorizing the recipe of pancake does not mean one can cook a pancake. Progressive educationalists reject content-based learning as learning should be regarded as a matter of constructing ideas, Pring's (2007) illustrated the same point with a famous slogan known as "an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory".

Progressive Education in Hong Kong Curriculum - a Text Versus the Reality?

Curriculum reform in the 21st century has largely based on the constructivist approach of teaching and in many ways represented progressive philosophy. Explicitly in the text of curriculum documents, it mentioned that "teachers should be encouraged to use varieties of student-focused learning strategies." (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, p.90). The 2000 curriculum blueprint rejects content-based teaching as progressive education does, suggesting that "by using a wide range of resources rather than relying solely on textbooks, teachers can help develop learning modules to suit the interests, needs and abilities of their students" (Curriculum Development Council, 2000, p. 13).

The curriculum documents of Hong Kong also recommended activity- and project-based teaching approach as a mean to enhance students' learning, suggesting that "a variety of learning activities in the form of science competitions, experimental projects, independent study projects and issue-based learning projects are essential to develop students' capabilities in science." (Curriculum Development Council, 2000, p. 93). The education reform in Hong Kong presented the picture of pleasurable learning, naming the task of "enabling our students to enjoy learning" as a priority in the reform" (Education Commission, 2000, p. 30).

However, while textual reform documents specify change in education, whether the intended change can be implemented is always questioned. When progressivism applied in the 1950s in US, it created great demands and tensions in schools, the comment noted by Cremin (1961) can be of the same relevance in the current 21st century reform, which suggested teacher's competence as a crucial problem:

“Familiarity with a fantastic range of knowledge and teaching materials, while the commitment to build upon students' needs and interests demanded extraordinary feats of pedagogical ingenuity. In the hands of first-rate instructors, the innovations worked wonders; in the hands of too many average teachers, they led to chaos” (Windschitl, 2002, 348).

Teachers' belief was a major resistance noted from reform experiences in Hong Kong (Morris and Scott, 2003; Po and Lo, 2008), which was emerged as a complicated issue. In Hong Kong, the cultural environment has shaped a set of values for teachers which make education reforms difficult. While much virtue has been found in the Chinese culture as an ancient civilization, severe criticisms have been made to Chinese education in the current literature, these studies pointed to the common feature that keeping children under control was regarded as the prerequisite of teaching book knowledge. Such control was a main feature of Hong Kong teachers in managing the learning environment, as suggested by Hue (2006). In an earlier review, Ho & Crookall (1995) found that parental and child training attitudes were characterized by over-control, overprotection, and harshness; placing great emphasis on proper behavior, and neglecting (even inhibiting) the expression of opinions, independence, self mastery, creativity, and all round personal development. Summarizing a bred of studies on Chinese education, the literature altogether reflecting a pattern of Chinese values in education which is embedded in the beliefs of teachers and students

- students are socialized to respect, not to question the authority of teachers
- students regard written words as the authoritative source of knowledge and wisdom
- teachers stress the need for memorization and repeated practice in the learning process
- teachers and students believe that diligence holds the key to good academic performance
- students believe that good academic achievement is a route to personal success which would in turn bring glory to the family

The above Chinese way of learning and teaching assimilates largely the absolutist epistemology and the behaviorist model of learning which were being criticized in the literature as mechanic, which ignores humans as an individual in learning process (Cavanaugh, 1994). The Hong Kong classroom features were characterized as ‘Three Ts’: teacher-centered, textbook-centered and test-centered (Adamson, Kwan & Chan, 2000), in fact, education in Hong Kong was predominantly a highly utilitarian means to economic and vocational ends (Lam, 2007). The emphasis on schooling has so far been by necessity on academic success, this at some cost to personal development and sense of personal fulfillment to the majority of students. Although changes are underway, the cultural values as described above may continue to pose great constraints.

Ball (2000) mentioned that policies are texts that are encoded via struggles, compromise, authoritative public interpretation and reinterpretations and they are decoded in complex ways via actors' interpretation and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills,

resources and contexts. Given the complexity of Hong Kong specific cultural situation and the traditional ideology of its school education favouring an elitist model, decoding of the 21st century curriculum reform documents by teachers is an interesting subject of study as their responses can help check the effectiveness of the current reform policy. Progressive pedagogies do seem to become the rhetoric of education today but this teaching approach may be destined to be a problematic fate in Chinese societies, which regards knowledge as authority and learners as passive recipients of knowledge. It is understood that reforms are not transmitted and implemented in a vacuum, there are social, institutional and personal circumstances that affect ways in which policies are interpreted by those who put them in practice.

Within the context of teaching primary five English a Hong Kong primary school, this paper addresses a study report of how the new curriculum was decoded by a Hong Kong inhabited foreign pre-service teacher, who is also an advocator of progressive education, and in what way she contrasted with the practice of other serving teachers who met in her teaching practice. The study draws on a wider discussion on curriculum reform policies and practice.

Methodology

Research Questions

- How a pre-service teacher decoded the new curriculum of the 21st century?
- How a pre-service teacher is contrasted with others in-service teachers in school under the 21st curriculum reform?
- What implications will be drawn to teacher education and curriculum reform?

Research Approach

An ethnographic method was adopted for the study. Ethnographical studies serves to see for oneself what is happening and to report on one's finding in a detailed field diary (Fetterman, 1989); it is always fundamentally about comparing two different world-views, and usually starts out from specific aspects in the subjects' way of life which deviate from the corresponding aspects in the researchers' way of life. It leads to "deep understanding" to the obscure aspects that lie behind one's own world view" (Alawsuutari, 1998). As this study is to understand the human beliefs in a social setting, and that a perceived difference of the researcher and the samples on their philosophy to teach was identified, the ethnography was a suitable approach for the researcher to find out the underlying values and meaning of the samples involved in the research setting.

Background and Setting

In the present study, the researcher came with curiosity on the question in mind about her interpretation of progressive education in the Hong Kong curriculum, versus the Chinese learning way in school and her perceptions of serving teachers she met in school, this became the point of inquiry for this study. The setting of this study was a primary school, the researcher was doing a placement there and the context she was placed was the English teaching team of primary level five.

Samples and Data Collection

One pre-service, student-teacher who was studying a one-year Diploma in Education in Hong Kong was the action researcher. The context of study was a primary school in the northern part of Hong Kong, the student-teacher used critical incident records and reflective journals as the method of data collection, as research instruments, which serves to make record the reflections of her inner talks and her analysis of the other players in the social setting. The teachers in the primary level five English teaching team was the source of reflection for the researcher; there were five teachers in total. The conversations and discussions in the collaborative planning meetings, English subject penal meetings, and other informal meeting with the five teachers are the source of data for this study. Another person, who was named a “critical friend” or “critical partner” in this research (Stenhouse, 1975), was a professor in the teacher education programme; the critical friend plays the role as the trigger of reflection (Kember, et al, 2000) to lead the early researcher – who was a student teacher - in the reflection process by providing perspectives and ideas to probe and enrich the domains of thinking of the researcher in the field. This acted as a triangulating process to supplement solitary self reflection (Lam, 2007a).

Data Analysis

Theoretical coding is used for analyzing the data of the reflective journals and critical incident records. Theoretical coding refers to the procedure of first of all handling the documentation of data by open coding, which is to discover the themes that may potentially form the patterns of understanding to give meaning to the situation being investigated (Flick, 2002). In coding, the data will be broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways, so the process is built up by the data itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the researcher read and sort all the reflective journals and labeling different ideas or themes emerged in her reflection and her contrast of views along these various themes, secondly she used the same categorization system to code the critical incident records and refine the categorization system. The conceptual labels are refined in categorizing the data and eventually the data are pool together and points are outlined to describe the situation being studied. During the analysis, the researcher is expected to perform critical comparison, to find out inconsistencies and illogical gaps, to reorganize and to re-establish codes, so that the analysis result can be refined. The data is finally reduced to theories or explanations which can describe in depth the understanding of the situation being studied. Varied in length, the total pieces of journal writings and critical incident records were about 35, which come from the various occasions during the eight-week of this study as shown below, one point to specify is that the researcher did not produce reflections and records by occasions but throughout the span of the research period of the two months.

Table 1 Data Collection Record

Occasions	Co-Planning Meeting	Focused Conversation with Teaching Team Chairperson/ Members	Informal Meetings and Conversations
No of times	6	6	Above 10

Discussion of Results

The analysis of the data informs the differences of the pre-service teacher’s view with the local Hong Kong teachers in the school setting; it documents the complex processes of the

pre-service teacher who were trying to decode the curriculum document in her teaching practicum. To present the findings, we assigned fictitious names for the samples in this study. Alice is used to represent the pre-service teacher; the other four school teachers in the teaching team are named Sally, Eva, Jenny, Ms Yuen and Mr Lo. The qualitative data was coded to denote the nature, R and C are used to stand for “reflective journal writing” and “critical incident record”, and a number is followed to suggest the sequential order such as R01 and C02.

Decoding the Curriculum – the Context

Alice, a pre-service teacher, was assigned to teach English to a primary five class, the research was framed in the context of the English teaching team of primary level five. At the research period, though she was a student-teacher, Alice was allowed to fully participated in the school with teaching team, she was assigned to teach a unit on “Festivals”, in the first few co-planning meetings Alice was asked to contribute ideas on how the theme would be organized and delivered to students, in a five-week cycle within that practicum period. As she was a believer of progressivism, she was very eager to propose “project learning” and that should be a method to delivery unit. This met with resistance as most teachers in the teaching team reserved to change from the traditional methods of direct teaching and they did not perceive the need to change even though they noted this has been a recommended approach in the key learning area of English by the government (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). Her complete participating role as a teacher enables her to input the reform idea of English teaching in the school. As a student-teacher, she found herself obliged to implement teaching that benefits students. Alice reflected her clear goal of applying project learning in the following,

There is the co-plan meeting every week, in which teachers are free to present their ideas on classroom teaching. Being a student-teacher, I was invited to participate in discussion on the improvement on teaching skills. I presented some of the ideas I learnt from PGDE, such as project work. As I was teaching the unit “Festivals” to primary 5 classes, I suggested that students can prepare a booklet, poster or power point presentation for their favorite festival. They can surf on the Internet, read books or newspapers and interview others in order to complete the project. They can also draw and use pictures to support their ideas. Other team members liked my idea, however, they were reluctant to apply this kind of activity to their classroom. As I was new in the school, I hardly found the reasons of their hesitation to the application of the project work . Therefore, I straight forwardly asked them why (C2).

Although Alice’s proposal on project learning met with resistance from the teaching team, Alice was not inhibited to carry out her ideas. Her support from teachers and the freedom allowed were considered as an important context for Alice to decode progressive ideas behind the curriculum text. Alice had a pleasant experience in actualizing her beliefs about the 21st Hong Kong curriculum,

I was a new teacher in this school but they provided me fully opportunities to use my own teaching strategies which I learnt from my Professional Teachers course in PGDE. My supportive teacher Ms. Yuen believes that new teachers have innovative ideas toward education philosophy and they are more familiar with new curriculum reforms .So, she always encourages me to use my own teaching approach such as group and pair work to develop students generic skills (R11).

The difference from the school serving teachers’ views and ideas did not act as a constraint for Alice in carrying out project learning, on the reverse, with her non-Hong Kong background as a native English speaker as well as her enthusiasm, she enjoyed the privilege of implementing new ideas on her own,

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Yuen believes that new teachers have innovative ideas toward education philosophy and they are more familiar with new curriculum reforms. So, she always encourages me to use my own teaching approach such as group and pair work to develop students' generic skills (R09).

She continued to value the progressive elements through the practicum and she also made lots of effort to convince others in the teaching team about the advantage of using progressive approach on students, Alice's reflection on her persistence on the progressive education ideas were illustrated below.

Themes Decoded from the Curriculum by Pre-service Teacher

Several themes emerged as Alice's beliefs of teaching in this study; they assimilated the progressive pedagogies which centred around student interest.

Children's Interest as Main Concern

Alice thought that arousing students' interest was the prerequisite of their learning; she determined to teach by a lively method instead of drilling grammar of which other teachers used to do in the school. She expressed her decision on putting up project learning with strong commitment,

However, it was my decision to carry out project work with my students, but I think it was not only myself but my students to do such work. If they are not interested in the project work, there is no point to force them. I believe students will perform better if they are interested in the task I gave. So I will keep it in mind. Later on, I discussed project with them and assured that the assessment of this project will not affect their final grades so that they will have more confidence to do my task (R8).

She thought teachers not only to make the lesson interesting,

Teachers should make learning interesting and centred it around students' interest, styles and needs. The curriculum should cover a wide range of interests that serve the needs of different children. Some students were good at writing but some were not, we should help them discover their interest, therefore they can gain satisfaction in learning (C2).

Cater for Children's Preferences and Styles

Your students may not be interested in learning through text book but they might show interest in the project. I explained maybe the students you are labeling as dull, lazy and slow can show their great achievement in the project work.

Alice assimilated Dewey's (2004) concern of appreciating diversities on students that "one who recognizes the importance of interest will not assume that all minds work in the same way because they happen to have the same teacher and textbook". She also tried to listen to students' concern and she allowed her students to choose the way they like to do in working out their project.

Participatory

For learners to enjoy learning, they must participate into it actively. Participation was another theme recurring in Alice's reflective journal. This did not only show on the various occasions such as group work and presentation as was involved in project learning, but on the management aspects of the education process with students such as recruiting student feedback,

If teachers also allow students to evaluate their teaching methods, it will be more useful. Actually, applying this strategy in my class and ask my students to evaluate my teaching at the end of each lesson informally is useful, such as I asked them "do you like the lesson", what you think how can we improve

it". And this evaluation helped me a lot to improve my teaching competence. This kind of strategy is no time consuming and does not require students do any paper work (C5).

And also to make students' voices known in setting up classroom rules,

Beside using group work and project based learning techniques I gave them opportunities to express themselves, especially when I designed classroom rules (C6)

Not only the classroom rules but I also encouraged them to comment on my teaching methods. At first they were hesitate to do this, but the free classroom environment finally encouraged them to express themselves (C3).

Authenticity

Alice believes that students learn best by engaging in meaningful task, this was the reason of pushing the idea of project learning for the theme on Festival, she reflected,

"an innovative teacher can take initiative to prove that through experience and happy environment students can learn or produce better than through repetition or memorization as it is also suggested by new curriculum reforms "reduce rote-learning, ask why things are as they are, and reflect on the answers." (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, p.114) (C2)

The idea of rote knowledge was rejected in her conception and her belief on students' innate interest in learning was eminent in her reflection,

you cannot impose students on something they did not want or you cannot make students learn if the contexts and methods do not suit them, you have to touch them, by giving them appropriate instruction and materials of which they feel like to do. This is teacher's professional job (R12)

She also pointed out the inappropriate use of grammar drilling which may kill the children's interests of learning,

Local teachers focus on grammar drilling in English teaching, but they did it in a way that demoralizes students because they presented formula to students and students just get to rote learning without understanding, young children would find this no fun as they cannot make sense of what they have learnt, eventually they gave up English; if we can begin grammar teaching by conversations and set it into a task-based, such as to learn from a field trip or a daily event, students will learn the vocabulary in their plays. By time, they naturally learn and develop interest in English (R14)

Dilemmas from Serving Teachers – Rejecting Progressive Pedagogies

Alice's reflection was largely contrast with other teachers. In her reflection, there were several dilemmas found rooting in teachers' communication which prevent them to change their inherent ways of teaching. It was obvious that Alice's recommendation on project learning posted challenges for other teachers in the teaching team as progressive educators faced at Dewey's time, such as the development of adaptive curricula to meet the needs of learners, managing an active classroom, and dealing with accountability issues regarding student learning. In this section, several areas of concerns were described of which the school teachers felt to be problematic in the new pedagogies for promoting in the current curriculum reform. Windschitl (2002) categorization framework was used to suggest the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political dilemmas as was felt by teachers to defy their action on implementing project learning. Conceptual dilemma refers to the struggles to understanding project learning to make it proper for teaching, pedagogical dilemmas as teachers felt project learning demands complex knowledge and design in the curriculum and teaching, cultural dilemmas appear when the redefinition of roles and expectations are expected from project learning that challenges the traditional values persisted in school, political dilemma are associated with resistance from various stakeholders in school communities that questions the

institutional norms and routines. The following brief description suggested the dilemmas of the serving teachers that versus Alice's commitment to project learning, a detailed illustration of these two sets of contrasting worldview towards project learning is presented in Table 2 as a summary.

Project Learning is an Embedded Teaching Approach that Serves Learner Diversities

Conceptually, teachers reflected the difficult gaps they had in accepting the validity of project learning as a method of learning English. Teachers thought that project learning is an extra thing alongside main teaching, Alice recalled both comments from Sally and Mr Lo, in their comment that "the teaching schedule is very tight and it does not allow us to do extra activities (project learning) (R8)". They also thought that this method of learning could have ignored the low ability students as they were too weak to search data and read information on their own, teachers also commented that "his (Mr Lo's) students didn't even understand simple things, he doubted about whether they could understand the complications of project (R20)"

Alice had a clear view that project learning is an embedded teaching approach and that this approach can ignite student learning interests, of different abilities, needs and learning preferences. She mentioned, "project work is not an extra activity, teacher can make it the part of their daily lesson plan for example if the topic is 'seasons' then teachers can ask students to collect information about their favorite seasons such as what do they like that season and what kind of activities they like to do in that seasons and they can broaden their discussion by adding special food they eat and clothes they wear in that season (R09)". The assumption of project learning is built upon student diversities, as Alice mentioned, it was how low ability students identified interest and found satisfaction through interesting subject matters and stimulating methods such as project learning,

students differ in their readiness to learn, in particular interests, and in how they learn. Student variance makes a difference in the learning process (C4)

all the learners have different abilities so they learn different things at different pace. In this situation project work is the best solution because it provides chance to learner to choose the contents that they are interested in and they are also allow to select the method of carrying a project that suits them (R17)

She believed that project learning can build up the confidence of learning for low ability students,

I explained may be the students you are labeling as dull, lazy and slow can show their great achievement in the project work (C4).

It is obvious that teachers' conception about learning were quite different from Alice, comparatively, Alice's voices about education refer also the affective and social aspects that help students developed in a democratic society, no matter how, the decoding of the new guide for 21st education did not seem to share with the same mission, as suggested in the curriculum text that "Using theme-based projects is a good way of providing an organizing focus for students' integrated use of knowledge, skills and strategies as well as an opportunity for generating deep learning."(CDC, 2000b, p.18) and "Project learning is a powerful learning and teaching strategy to promote self-directed, self-regulated and self-reflecting learning." (CDC, 2001, P.87)

Project Learning Changes Ordinary Practices as a Reform

Teachers' dilemma in the pedagogical side was obviously laid in the uncertainty about how

project learning is planned and delivered, which was foreseen to be complicated and daunting, in the reflective journals, Alice described their tensions such as “Jenny suspected that project learning may be useful but she mentioned that it was very complicated because even short project teachers have to spend extra time to plan and carry the project (R8)”, “Mr. Lo added that when students can learn the contents through different exercise listed in the text book within limited time then why we need to carry the project, a complicated and time consuming task? (R7).

The problem of assessment and how learning is measured was also perceived as a trouble to them to try on project learning. Eva and Jenny pointed out the issue of accountability and raised the concern of “not knowing what students gain through project learning”, they expected some rules of grammar to be learned but to them that could not link to project learning, they found hard to do assessment and they also thought that “it was not manageable when teachers have to supervised a lot of projects”. There seems to be a lack of readiness to change among teachers.

Culture and Political Environment Forge a Strong Resistance to Project Learning

The pedagogical dilemma also brought together the strong resistance carried over in the education system in the culture of Hong Kong. First of all, teachers had foreseen a change on the traditional role of students and teachers which they thought it would endanger the smooth management of the school administration; this was partly due to the misconceived nature of project learning. As they thought project learning was extra work from the normal lesson, they thought “students have to work hard to complete their project whether it is in the class or at home (R8)”, and that would cause an additional burden for student; Mr. Lo, who was an experienced teacher with above ten years experience, further recalled “it can be stressful for them (students) because they also get many assignments of other subjects, so students cannot give much time to project and enjoy it, it could be time consuming for students (C4)”. Teachers thought that students may “waste” time in project at the expense of “getting down to do homework” (R8). Teachers further remarked that “they had a tight schedule to meet and they have to complete the curriculum that linked to the examination syllabus (R7)”, they reflected that the study time was very tight during the term so project learning was not viable.

While project learning was mentioned as a good strategy of developing generic skills such as collaboration and self management, learning was thought of a competition by Mr Lo, he mentioned, “you emphasized that through project work students learn cooperation and collaboration but some smart students are habituated to act alone and don’t want others to interrupt in their work as they think they are the best”.

The traditional scene in a Chinese classroom of teachers being the authority to deliver the knowledge and students as passive and obedient receiver of knowledge was disturbed and the worries of teachers were interpreted in the classroom management perspective, “he said while carrying project work students are very excited and like to talk and show their project work to each others which would create discipline problems”, the others also agreed that “this may turn the class in chaos and becomes unmanageable”. To Alice, she was surprised about the distortion in their thinking in perceiving project learning, in fact, the teachers are trying to “patched a new framework onto old conception of teaching” as it was appeared in other studies such as Cohen (1991) and Duckworth (1987) the incongruence between teachers’ existing beliefs and the underlying philosophy of project learning reflected the cultural issues that we have visited in the literature review above. While Alice thought that “in this way the qualities of progressive education would automatically convert in traditional education where

students compete with each other rather than cooperate”, teachers thought that this new approach has caused much disturbances to the traditional beliefs such as the traditional beliefs of maintaining high control on students in classroom, learning the right knowledge and knowledge of the book, learning with diligence by memorization and repeated practice. What project learning presents such as “learning by doing”, “learner-directed learning”, “collaborative or group learning” have totally reshuffled the traditional pattern of teacher and student’s role in the classroom which causes the cultural dilemmas of what are found from the serving teachers in the study. Alice remarked in her reflection that the resistance of change was to the disadvantage of student learning,

Experienced teachers are not very familiar with it (project learning). They think it is a complicated and time consuming activity so they prefer their students to memorize the contents such as sentences structure and vocabulary through dictation and exercise listed in the text book; actually it is easy for teacher to follow their pre-planned lessons that do not require any additional work or instructions(reference)

After all, the school authority and the parents may act as another resistant to teachers, whose interest may jeopardize with the project learning methodology, the old system has defined norms and values that has been structured in institutions as in schools, the privilege which has been enjoyed in the society, such as the interest of the advantaged students and the accepted value of the Hong Kong society in passing the examination with good academic results. This has reflected in the study that, as Alice thought, was the barrier of reform which seemed difficult to remove “ I sense that teachers in Hong Kong local schools have much to do to secure themselves, they have a tight schedule and they are under pressure by school authority and parents to show them students’ good results, what do I expect from them in this project learning activity, I started to understand the significance of culture but I would be more convinced that what I am striving for my students in this school is important for them to think at this time (R18)”.

Table 2 Views on Project Learning Compared with Curriculum Texts

Sources Concerns/Assumptions	School Teachers' Dilemmas to Project Learning	Pre-Service Teacher's Beliefs on Project Learning	Curriculum Reform Texts
Conceptual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when students can learn the contents through different exercise in the text book within limited time, why teachers need to carry the project, a complicated and time consuming task? teachers won't be able to carry out project learning because some students don't even understand simple things, project is too complicated for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> project work is not an extra activity, it is part of the daily lesson plan. students may not be interested in learning through text book but they can be stimulated through project students being labeled as dull, lazy and slow can show their great achievement in the project work. students can learn through project than repetition or memorization. project work is the best solution for learner diversities because learner can choose the contents that they are interested in and they are also allow to select the method of carrying a project that suits them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Teachers can use different learning and teaching strategies to achieve the different purposes of learning and to suit the learning styles, abilities, interests and needs of students." (CDC, 2001, P.80) "Using theme-based projects is a good way of providing an organizing focus for students' integrated use of knowledge, skills and strategies as well as an opportunity for generating deep learning."
Pedagogical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> for even short project not only teachers have to spend extra time to plan and carry the project but also students have to work hard to complete their project. it is complicated and time consuming, its preferable that students can be trained to memorize the contents such as sentences structure and vocabulary through dictation and exercise listed in the text book. it is easy for teacher to follow their pre-planned lessons that do not require any additional work or instructions I do not know what they learn in project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can students learn through boring exercises? Do they show their interest in memorization? if students enjoy their work they don't feel it a burden and they can take learning as fun. I divided students in group and after detailed instructions I asked them to carry their project in groups, they know what to be expected of for assessment. I provided materials and I defined clear assessment task, I asked support from different units to achieve project learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Teachers play a crucial role in project learning by offering the sort of structure that enables students to take risks without fear of failure." (Life-long learning P.87) "reduce rote-learning, ask why things are as they are, and reflect on the answers." (CDC, 2001, P.114)
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the teaching schedule is very tight and it does not allow extra activities. it is an additional burden for student; it can be stressful for them because they also get many assignments of other subjects, students may not enjoy project. some smart students are habituated to act alone and don't want others to interrupt their work while carrying project work students are very excited and like to talk and show their project work to each others which create discipline problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students talk and share their ideas and feeling with each other is the nature of group work. if we look at the advantages such as students learn through collaboration and improve their confidence level through interacting with each others, we can tolerate noise. it is important to give opportunity for students to express and to encourage active participation. I asked my students to evaluate my teaching, I asked them "do you like the lesson", what you think how can we improve it" to give the sense of ownership to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Teacher can give students opportunities to express themselves openly and share their work in class and publicly to enhance their confidence."(CDC, 2001 P.79) To help schools develop a school-based curriculum which emphasizes the active role of learners in the learning process" (CDC, 2000a P.88).
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers have tight schedule and they are under pressure by school authority and parents to show them students' good results. I think we need to ensure examination result and this is the main job of teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there is no point to force students to do the things they don't like, students perform better if they are interested in the task, project learning is oriented towards student interest. I discussed project with the teaching team and assured that the assessment of this project will not affect their final grades to make them more confident. 	

Conclusion

This study has contrasted a pre-service teacher's view of teaching with another five serving teachers in the context of a primary five English teaching team, through the process of decoding the current curriculum document in the pre-service teacher's practicum of a two-month period, based on a qualitative study. The findings of the study addressed a strong commitment of a pre-service teacher on project learning as a progressive pedagogy, which can be conclusively described by the notion that "an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory" (Pring, 2007). The progressive qualities was also found to be consistent with the school curriculum reform in Hong Kong in the 21st century, which intended to eliminate the perception of "repetition and memorization means learning" in the traditional Chinese classrooms (Ho & Crookall, 1995). While progressive education approach was realized as important catalyst for change in Hong Kong society, this study also pointed to the fact that stakeholders in school had great doubt on it. They thought that project learning as a progressive pedagogy was an extra time-consuming activity and it was difficult to fit in the present work schedule of both teachers and students, and may not help low-achieved students; they also found that project learning did disturb the ordinary classroom routines which were intended to keep students under control and help them to learn the right knowledge without questions, as project learning has made much demands in curriculum development and teaching preparation, teachers were hesitant and defy using it in teaching. This situation informs educators and policy makers that curriculum reform was subject to a range of factors which is a complex process as a result we have seen in the interpretation of the actors in this study, the school teachers' view towards project learning, as a new method of teaching, had met with gaps in the conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political aspects which makes its application impossible.

The study can provide an important cross references to what is reviewed and discussed in the literature, on Chinese cultural norms and values in education. Firstly teachers in the study expected to have a class to teach instead of developing a community of learners who engaged actively in exploring knowledge, they may feel unnecessary to implement a learner-oriented approach, *and* they may doubt on the efficiency of a project learning approach compared with direct teaching. Secondly, the school administration which was set upon the expectations of schools, parents, and the society, mainly in passing the examination with good results was by nature jeopardizing with the explorative and democratic learning environment which was advocated by progressive pedagogies such as project learning. Eventually, the intention to protect stakeholders' interest was internalized to guide the practice of schooling and teachers' practice in classroom, teachers gradually did not appreciate other teaching approaches which may be good for learners, but they tended to think to maintain the interests of the key players and secure the present system which has been built by their interests. Thirdly, while the context of education has reinforced these values and norms, it was difficult for new teachers to contribute the pedagogical aspects to school, because the space of development is limited. New teachers would be required to adopt these values and practices that are culturally and politically endorsed. As emerged from this study, teachers' dilemmas in various aspects had altogether brought a strong resistance for piloting project learning in a teaching unit.

The cultural significances of the Chinese were evidenced in this study, with the selective education system preserved, it has brought to a sad phenomenon that Hong Kong school students had also suffered the pressure in school education, in fact this has created burden for the society.

The pre-service teacher's experience was a very positive case to illustrate a process of realizing self-satisfaction in teaching, while her mission and commitment had given a positive influence to the school in her attempt to illustrate a successful learning case in the school. However, this can be a very special case due to her non-Chinese ethnicity, the school seemed to have given much flexibility to the practicing teacher in developing alternative methods for the class she responsible, while the pre-service teacher herself may not have been influenced by the cultural norms and values as the local pre-service teachers. This informs important messages to think about the education of Hong Kong, it alerts us about the need to advance teaching methods and re-culture the school so as to encourage learning that benefit learners. On the other hand, it draws implications to the immediate need of schools to organize themselves to support learning and teaching by re-evaluating the existing practice in classrooms in the 21st century.

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