Over the last decades, school-based curriculum development (SBCD) has been widely applied in many countries to bring about innovations in schools and classrooms. The notion of SBCD and its practice, albeit the diversity in terms of policies and cultures in different countries, stems from the need for a more participatory educational system, responsive to local concerns. This book provides readers with an update of the concepts related to SBCD and vivid cases about how SBCD has been conceived and implemented in six Asian countries (including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan) and seven European countries (including Austria, England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and The Netherlands). The differences and commonalities in rationales and practices within and between the Asian and European continents make stimulating, new comparisons possible, elaborating and deepening the knowledge base about SBCD. This is a timely collection for school leaders and teachers, policy makers, support groups, educational researchers and students, especially in the domain of curriculum studies.
Schools as Curriculum Agencies
Schools as Curriculum Agencies

Asian and European Perspectives on School-based Curriculum Development

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During the 1970s and early 1980s, school-based curriculum development (SBCD) enjoyed a great following in the educational policy of many countries around the world. Curriculum decision-making was placed at the school level where professionals have contextual knowledge and are able to be responsive to local concerns. Although this approach aimed at placing decision-making at the school level, in many instances it only led to a bureaucratic load and a great number of written plans in which schools stipulated their goals and detailed methods. In the 1980s, the general policy climate in Anglo-Saxon countries changed, leading to the centralization of curriculum planning in combination with the standardization of educational goals. SBCD was relegated to the background in many countries.

In their influential book *Reconceptualising school-based curriculum development*, Marsh et al. (1990) discuss the theoretical aspects and historical roots of SBCD and the key factors contributing to or limiting the growth of SBCD. The book describes the role and development of SBCD in four countries: Australia, the UK, Canada, and the USA. In the book by Marsh and Morris (1991) entitled *Curriculum development in East Asia*, the authors stress the fact that the overall goals of curriculum policy, its form and priorities, must be understood in the context of the country (and schools) in question. The present book *Schools as curriculum agencies* may be considered a follow-up and an extension of these books: it provides an update on the more recent insights into the field of SBCD, and it presents cases from both Asian and European countries, comparing and contrasting the developments in these regions.

This book aims at providing insights into and illustrations of the application of the concept of SBCD as it is found in a number of Asian as well as European countries. The current educational policy landscape in Europe and Asia is changing. Again, in several countries, there has been a growing tendency towards increasing the autonomy of schools, reviving to some extent the rationale and aims of SBCD. Yet again, schools have been challenged to take the role of curriculum agencies by reexamining their curriculum and redeveloping it in accordance with their own mission and aspirations. All these are against the background of learning from the past experiences of these countries.

This book began by inviting scholars from 13 countries (i.e., in Asia: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan; in Europe: Austria, England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the Netherlands) and asking them to provide an overview of SCBD efforts in their countries. Their contributions provide answers to questions on the role of schools when it comes to their local curriculum development and division in responsibilities among schools, governments, and other
LAW AND NIEVEEN

(external support) agencies. The authors present general patterns in the SBCD practices in their countries as well as empirical materials that illuminate these practices.

To assure a strong connection to past experiences and conceptual overviews, we were fortunate to have Colin Marsh of the Curtin University of Technology, Australia, and Kerry Kennedy of the Hong Kong Institute of Education contribute to the book. They provide two overviews (one at the start and one at the end of the book) of the major trends and challenges for schools, policy makers, and support agencies from an SBCD point of view.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Jan van den Akker (of SLO, the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development and the University of Twente) for being a key initiator of this book. His generous support and inspiring suggestions have most certainly contributed to the quality of this book. We would like to thank all the authors for their cooperation during the preparation of the manuscripts and for their collaboration during the symposia on SBCD, specifically, during the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in 2008 and 2009. We would also like to convey our appreciation to Colin Marsh for providing supplementary feedback to the proposal of this book and again to the authors for their contributions. Finally, we are grateful to Peter de Liefdé of Sense Publishers for his assistance in publishing the manuscript.

It is our hope that this book will stimulate and support many groups and individuals (at the policy level, at the school level, and in support and research roles) around the globe to engage themselves in SBCD and to help in making it a successful endeavour for all involved, especially for the teachers and learners in their daily practice.

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INTRODUCTION
1. SCHOOL BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR NEW TIMES

A Comparative Analysis

INTRODUCTION

School-based curriculum development (SBCD) is by no means a new idea in curriculum discussions. Its origins can be found in Western curriculum discourse (Kennedy, 1992; Marsh, Day, Hanny & McCutcheon, 1990; OECD, 1979; Skilbeck, 1984). There is now a growing literature locating SBCD as part of Asian educational debate and discussion (Lo, 1999; Chen & Jing, 2000; Hwang & Chang, 2003; Li, 2006; Law, Galton, & Wan, 2007; Kennedy & Lee, 2008). This kind of “policy borrowing” (Phillips, 2005) is not unusual in education and the chapters in this volume attest to its widespread effect as we head towards the second decade of the twenty first century. There are a number of important issues that emerge from this broad context of “policy borrowing”.

First, given the length of time over which SBCD has been germinating as a policy idea, it is worth noting Bolstad’s (2004) view that there has been a time lag between its adoption in different jurisdictions. She identified the 1970s and 80s as the periods when SBCD emerged in different Western countries, although the rationale often varied. Yet by the 1990s this interest seemed to have waned just as SBCD emerged in Asia. By the new century a developing SBCD literature from the Asian region can be identified documenting and analyzing local experiences. These different policy trajectories for SBCD – one Western and one Asian - are important to keep in mind in light of the chapters that follow because an important feature of this book is that it enables comparisons of this kind to be further analyzed. Perhaps more importantly, the breadth of studies reported here highlight the significance of local context in constructing SBCD as tool for both policy and practice. This will be a recurring theme in the analysis that follows.

Second, the interest of Asian policymakers and academics in SBCD has not necessarily led to its indigenization. For example, Kennedy and Lee (2008, p. 107) pointed out in relation to the cases they reviewed,

SBCD remains a western construct being put to use in Asian schools in that small curriculum space that has been freed from national mandate.

This tension needs to be kept in mind whenever SBCD is being considered. As a Western cultural practice, SBCD may not suit all cultural contexts and many of its challenges may be different from Western experience – they may be cultural rather
than practical or technical. The indigenization of SBCD, therefore, should not be forgotten. There is some recent evidence showing the possibility of reconciling Eastern and Western cultural practices in education. Eliot and Tsai (2008) for example, have shown how action research can be viewed in a Confucian framework that aligns it better with Eastern values and ways of thinking. To date, SBCD has only been viewed through a Western cultural lens but it may well be time to rotate that lens if it is to be embedded as culturally appropriate in different contexts.

Third, SBCD, when viewed as a “borrowed” policy construct, is underpinned by a broad literature from both the West and the East. This can provide guidance for those seeking to implement SBCD in new environments. While SBCD may start out as a policy construct, it ends up as a practical curriculum process that becomes part of the lived experience of teachers and school communities. The chapters that follow in this volume are testimony to the diverse experiences and challenges of SBCD in both the West and the East and highlight general issues that can either support or hinder successful implementation. These cross cultural lessons can serve the needs of policymakers and practitioners alike and some reference will be made to them later in this chapter.

In order to structure this chapter, I shall firstly draw on other contributions to this volume as well as some more general literature to examine rationales for SBCD – both Eastern and Western. The reason for doing so, as many of the authors point out, is that definitional issues still abound and some attempt needs to be made to resolve them. Following this definitional exploration, I shall explore ways in which SBCD may be better embedded in local cultural practices. Finally, I shall review the lessons for implementing SBCD in both the East and the West in order to provide a guide to future practice.

RATIONALES FOR SBCD

Western Trajectories

Kennedy (1992) referred to the “democratic impulse” that fuelled SBCD in Australia in the 1970s. It was very much a reaction to highly centralised school systems that had emerged in Australia towards the end of the nineteenth century and were still in place by the middle of the twentieth century. Support for SBCD came in particular from a renewed Federal government interest in schools in a constitutional context where responsibility for education rested with State-level authorities rather than at the Federal level. As McInerney (2001) pointed out:

a key element in these early initiatives was a belief that schools needed to be more responsive to grassroots concerns and to the educational inequalities arising from the economic and social conditions of local communities. In short, what was needed was a more decentralised and participatory system of public education that encouraged innovative school-based curriculum developed in concert with local communities.

This view was very much in line with a newly elected social democratic government in Australia in 1973 and it highlights the political context in which SBCD is often
constructed. As the context changed in Australia in the 1980s, however, so too did the rationale for SBCD. As Kennedy (1992, p. 181) pointed out

if the democratic impulse helped shape reform in the 1970s, then corporate managerialism dominated the reform process in the next decade.

There was much less talk of SBCD during the 1980s, and a greater focus on centralized control even when devolution was a priority. At the Federal level, that had initially supported local involvement, there was a move towards even greater centralization with the talk of a more nationally consistent curriculum. Australia has not turned back from this centralist pathway and the recently elected social democratic government has returned to reliance on national curriculum and testing regimes to monitor student performance. There is little talk of SBCD in Australia these days.

The Australian experience cannot be generalized but the tension between centralization and devolution of responsibility for curriculum is a recurring theme in national curriculum policy making. The National Curriculum that emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980s was a key indicator of the predilection of governments for greater rather than lesser control over the school curriculum. The same can be said for the curriculum standards movement that developed in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Even more than centralized curriculum control, the emergence of national and international testing regimes in the 1990s and early 2000s signalled the demise of much government interest in SBCD. Monitoring student performance became a priority for many governments and therefore the need for more standardized curriculum aligned to testing regimes in many jurisdictions replaced thinking about SBCD.

The centralization/devolution tension is reflected in many of the chapters that follow. Nieveen, van den Akker and Resink report that the Netherlands is a country with currently the most decentralized educational policy in Europe. A reason for this is the widespread dissatisfaction with previous policy that led to incoherent curriculum change efforts, resulting in overloaded and fragmented programs. The Finnish educational system is largely based on trust on teachers and their expertise. Standardised national tests play a very limited role. Ropo and Välijärvi state in their chapter that this yielded remarkable results so far; learning results in Finland are on average among the best in the world. In Germany, disappointing international assessment results based on PISA resulted in the request of standards and school quality measures including quality control and accountability, external and internal evaluation and national testing for all schools. School development seems to be peripheral in this new public management. Schratz and Westfall-Greiter highlight the limited areas over which Austrian teachers can contribute towards curriculum making. While there has been some devolution of responsibility to schools, national control of curriculum dominates the policy process. The Swedish case is somewhat different from this where Blossing, Ekholm and Scherp report on a process by central policy makers over a long period to devolve more curriculum responsibility to schools. By the mid-1990s this meant that Swedish schools had more say over aims, time allocation, direction for subjects, teaching methods, selection of teaching
materials and assessment. This by no means meant total abrogation by central authorities in Sweden since centrally developed subject curricula were still meant to play a key role in school level curriculum decision making. The Irish case reported here by Dempsey, Looney and O’Shea provides a somewhat different perspective since it shows how a central curriculum agency seeks to enhance the quality of curriculum implementation by working much more closely with schools to achieve centrally developed objectives. The focus here is on teacher professional development and working with teachers rather than simply prescribing what is to be achieved. This is an important theme that is also reflected in Galton’s study on working with teachers to facilitate group work as a pedagogical strategy. This kind of work is clearly curriculum related but importantly it is not bounded by national bureaucratic structures. In many senses it seems a much more natural way to enhance both the curriculum and student learning. Nevertheless, it also raises issues about the definition of SBCD and I shall return to these later.

What is clear about the cases reviewed above is that in some countries centralized control of curriculum is the norm despite the social democratic flourish that influenced places like Australia in the 1970s. It is within that centralized policy space that SBCD in some countries in the West must now be viewed. Yet this should not be viewed in a totally negative way. Bolstad (2004, p. 7–8), for example, has suggested in relation to the New Zealand curriculum that there is a role for SBCD even in centralized systems. She identified four possible roles SBCD might play in this new “operational space”:

- better meet the needs and interests of students and the school community;
- embed school learning in local contexts, knowledges, and resources, to meet local and national aspirations;
- be responsive to new ideas and technologies in education; and take advantage of opportunities created by new curriculum and assessment structures.

In the New Zealand context, Baldwin (2007) showed how SBCD processes were used when teachers responded to the new Social Studies curriculum. Many of Baldwin’s recommendations were similar to the usual SBCD processes – planning together, sharing ideas and resources, involving parents etc. Nevertheless, the centrally developed directions for Social Studies are overriding – referred to by Baldwin (2007, p. 8) as a “challenge”. This approach of balancing central direction with adaptation to meet particular local needs, while confined to New Zealand in this example, suggests a kind of middle way that seeks the best of both worlds. It is a kind of mediated SBCD that also seems to characterize the processes reported by Blossing, Ekholm and Scherp in Sweden and Dempsey, Looney and O’Shea in Ireland. As will be shown in the following section, however, such an approach to SBCD is not confined to the West.

Asian Trajectories

The tension between centralized control and local curriculum needs has also been reflected in the Asian trajectories of SBCD. In Hong Kong, the Education Department
introduced school-based curriculum development projects in the late 1980s, but with
the following caveat from the Director of Schools (Kennedy, 1992, p. 184):

Whilst the Education Department encourages school-based curriculum, it is
considered essential for the projects to serve the purpose of complementing
the required knowledge, concepts, and skills offered to pupils in the centrally
devised curriculum.

Lo (1999) has provided a review of this first wave of SBCD in Hong Kong that
was more a bureaucratic response to the Llewellyn Report that has been critical of
teaching and learning in Hong Kong’s schools as well as the impact of an exam-
ination culture. A second wave of SBCD came in 2007 especially for primary schools
but, just as in 1988, it was in relation to a centrally designed curriculum. But there
are some important differences in emphasis added (Education Bureau, 2007):

Based on careful analysis of pupils’ needs, abilities and interests, schools’
ecological contexts, leadership style of the principals and middle management,
as well as the readiness of teachers, schools need to employ
the most appropriate
teaching, learning and assessment strategies and use diversified learning
materials to integrate the teaching-learning-assessment cycle in their school-
based curriculum. It is important to ensure that all pupils have equal oppor-
tunities participating in rich learning experiences that aim at promoting whole
person development and lifelong learning.

Just as Bolstad (2004) argued that SBCD had a role to play in the context of New
Zealand’s centralized curriculum, it has also been recognized that it has a role to
play in Hong Kong’s widespread curriculum reforms. The Education Commission
(2000, p. 36) highlighted the rationale:

“Teaching without discrimination” has been a cherished concept since ancient
times. We should not give up on a single student, but rather let all students
have the chance to develop their potentials. The aim of the education reform
is to remove the obstacles in our system that block learning; to give more
room to students to show their initiative and to develop their potential in
various domains.

This view has been articulated as the “no loser principle” (Kennedy, 2005, p. 187)
and it highlights the need for adaptations and accommodations that need to be made
at the school level. In policy terms this is one of the clearest rationales for SBCD
articulated as part of the new wave of curriculum reforms in Asia (Kennedy and
Lee, 2008). It envisages that a centralized curriculum will be “tailored” to meet the
needs of different students.

Taiwan’s experience, as reported here and elsewhere by Chang and Hwang, point
to a somewhat more politicized rationale for SBCD. Jeong, writing in this volume
about Korea, makes a similar point – changes to the political system led teachers to
expect a greater say in determining the school curriculum. Hwang, Yu and Chang
(2006), for example, linked the move to SBCD in Taiwan with broad social and
political changes that started to take place in 1987. Democratization of the political
system led to a similar impetus for an education system characterized by centralized decision making. Chen and Chung (2000, p. 3) have commented that the Curriculum Guidelines for Nine Year Compulsory Education were promulgated in 1998 with the hope to make every school a centre for educational reform, every teacher a curriculum designer, and every classroom a laboratory for classroom innovation. They also indicated that the ideas encouraging and implementing school-based curriculum development are imported from the West.

Yet the vision may not be quite as grand as suggested by Chen and Chung for Li (2002) has pointed out that only 20% of the actual curriculum is in the hands of schools and this focuses mainly on cross disciplinary and thematic units of study. This is an important caveat since it suggests the limited nature of SBCD in Taiwan as part of the general education reforms.

While SBCD plays this somewhat limited role in Taiwan and correspondingly in Korea, it nevertheless seems important to locate it as part of a larger process of liberalization with its roots in political and economic structures. One reason for doing so is that it recognizes that SBCD is often part of broader social processes, as was the case in the Australian experience reported earlier. Yet the Taiwanese and Korean examples also demonstrate that from a public perspective at least, the liberalization of education cannot be assumed to follow automatically from similar processes applied to macro structures. This accounts in Taiwan for the considerable opposition to education reform processes. While SBCD does not seem to have been the explicit target of this opposition, processes such as expanding the number of textbook providers, alternatives to the high school entrance exam and integrated curriculum have been signalled out for criticism. As Kennedy and Lee (2008, p. 56) pointed out educational reforms in Asia go in two directions: forward to the demands of ‘the knowledge economy’ and backwards to the traditions that have sustained these societies over time.

This dynamic is an important one but it appears to manifest itself in different ways in different parts of the region. The Japanese case reported here by Asanuma is a good example of this difference. A component of curriculum reform in the 1990s provided time for school-developed activity-based learning, a small concession to SBCD. Nevertheless, for the most part a highly prescriptive national curriculum remained in place. Yet there was much public criticism of this innovation that was fuelled by what were seen to be declining test scores by Japanese students in international assessments. As reported by Asanuma, the government’s response was to introduce “competency-based group instruction” and “the behavioural objectives approach” to overcome objections to the so-called ‘soft’ curriculum and to improve test scores. In reality, the Japanese curriculum has always been very tightly centrally controlled so unlike the Taiwanese example cited before there was no broad policy push away from this position. Yet it seems that even the slightest move to allow
more scope for local curriculum decision-making was not publically acceptable in Japan. Ironically, however, the move towards prescribing instructional strategies such as competency-based group instruction places a great deal of responsibility on teachers and depends for its success on highly skilled teachers. Galton’s chapter in this volume points to the complexity of achieving pedagogical innovations of this type so it cannot guarantee success easily even if it does deflect public opinion from so-called ‘soft’ curriculum options.

The Mainland Chinese case represents a different trajectory, although there are some similarities with Korea and Taiwan. The similarities lay in the use of legal and bureaucratic processes to implement SBCD. In Mainland China, as well as in Korea and Taiwan, SBCD is not a matter of high rhetoric as in Hong Kong or a simple division of curriculum time as in Japan. Rather, a matter of legislated mandates requires schools to put in place structures and processes to achieve certain objectives related to SBCD. The key difference between Mainland China and both Taiwan and Korea, however, is the political context. As pointed out above, political liberalization in Taiwan and Korea can account for those countries’ moves towards different forms of SBCD, but this is clearly not the case in Mainland China. Li and Shuai in this volume point to the 1999 decision of the Chinese Communist Party to introduce a three tier curriculum management system in which 80% would be determined nationally, 15% locally and 5% at the school level. There is some recognition here of the importance of schools as sites for independent curriculum decision-making but it is only a token recognition within the political framework of the authoritarian state.

The common feature of all these Asian cases is that none of them indicates centralized curriculum decision-making has in any sense been abandoned in favour of SBCD. Rather, SBCD is seen to be an adjunct to current reform efforts. This generalization holds true irrespective of political context. Democratic impulses in Taiwan and Korea have not yielded different outcomes from authoritarianism in Mainland China. This analysis could equally be applied to the cases discussed from Western countries. Democratic impulses no longer drive SBCD in the West but rather SBCD is seen as a means to an end. This is an important point to make and marks a significant contribution by this collection of chapters. It also leads to important definitional issues that can now be addressed.

Li and Shuai writing about SBCD in Mainland China in this volume refer to different ways that Chinese scholars have conceptualized SBCD. One group refers to “school based curriculum” by which they mean the 5% add on approved by the Chinese Communist Party. Another group talks about “school based” curriculum development by which they mean the adaptation of all curriculum experiences, national, local and school based, to meet the particular needs of schools and students. These two extremes are useful ways of conceptualizing the scope of possibilities for SBCD not only with reference to China, but internationally. Marsh’s contribution to this volume takes up this conceptual issue by suggesting a change in terminology,

‘school based’ is closer to the extreme of individual schools being responsible for all curriculum decisions, whereas ‘school focused” could be represented as a middle position between centralized and decentralised extremes.
Marsh also provides a matrix of possible SBCD activities that highlights the micro-level possibilities for schools and teachers. The advantage of this matrix is that it can help to identify who has authority with respect to its different components. Thus it is one way to locate the spaces for SBCD in centralized systems of education. Teo and Osborne in this volume, for example, show how these spaces have been created in Singapore and Law, van den Akker and Wan show how similar spaces exist in Hong Kong. For the future, and in the context of highly centralized systems of curriculum control, locating these SBCD spaces and enabling them for school-based curriculum action, may represent the best chances for SBCD in this new century.

ISSUES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SBCD

The issues discussed in this chapter so far have been largely theoretical and conceptual in nature drawing on contributions to this volume, as well as additional sources, to explore definitional issues related to SBCD. Yet SBCD is not just a theoretical construct as pointed out by Dempsey, Looney and O’Shea in this volume when they draw on Stenhouse’s central idea of “taking action” in addition to “thinking” and “talking” about curriculum. In order to focus on examining SBCD as curriculum action I want to draw on cases of SBCD in the preschool sectors in Hong Kong and Shanghai. I have deliberately used preschool examples to highlight the point that SBCD is not just an issue for the compulsory years of schooling. In Shanghai, for example, there are very high expectations for preschool education and consequently of preschool (Shanghai Municipality, 2006):

The curriculum reform in kindergartens shall be actively pushed forward. It is necessary to establish the idea of taking children’s development as the foundation, strengthen the practical study of nursing and teaching in kindergartens and the study of educational behaviour, highlight the quality enlightening education, and attach great importance to the potential development and personality development of children. It is necessary to explore the appropriate education for children and carry out all kinds of activities beneficial for the children’s development in body and mind, to cultivate the children to form such fine basic qualities as good health, liveliness, curiosity, exploring spirit, civilized manner, team-spirit, bravery, self-confidence and the initial sense of responsibility.

Against such a background, Li (2006) reviewed SBCD in two Chinese cities – Hong Kong and Shanghai. She used Shanghai as a baseline and identified two distinct approaches to SBCD. The first involved drawing on a range of curricula to decide which one best suits local conditions (“deciding on their own” / “school-based implementation”). The second, required staff to design their own curriculum (“developing school-based curriculum on their own” / “school-based developing”). By far the majority of teachers in Li’s Hong Kong interview study used the first approach referred to above adopting “one of the learning packages provided by local publishers” with only a small number even making adaptations to these.
Other modes of SBCD were identified (e.g., developing curriculum for a group of kindergartens, development by principals and head teachers and reliance on teachers). In each case, however, the numbers using these modes of SBCD were quite small. What this suggests is that even when space is provided for SBCD, teachers do not always take advantage of the full range of possibilities. Is this simply an artefact of this particular sample of preschool teachers or does it point to a broader issue concerning teachers and SBCD?

Contributions to this volume help to answer this question. Li and Shuai reporting Mainland’ China’s case indicate that teachers find it difficult to find concrete proposals from scholars on how to develop a school-based curriculum and they point to a lack of knowledge and skills on the part of teachers. Nieveen, van den Akker and Resink indicate that in some Dutch schools, teams experienced the available space as “obligated freedom”, showing no commitment to participate in design activities. Chang and Hwang writing about Taiwan’s experience with SBCD provide a long list of issues confronted by teachers including the tension between preparing students for examinations and finding time to participate in SBCD. One teacher in Law, van den Akker and Wan’s Hong Kong study referred to organizational issues that impacted on teachers’ participation in SBCD, “we need time to sit down and discuss… design materials… we need people help.” Marsh’s comments on this issue are very useful for they signal that SBCD requires not only a skilled teacher workforce but additional resources as well, “external funding from education authorities or by direct grants is usually essential for schools to reorganise their staff to bring about SBCD.”

This is a recognition that SBCD cannot be done on top of already heavy teacher workloads – additional staff are needed. In light of this it is not surprising that the attitudes of Korean teachers to SBCD seems quite negative so that Jeong reports that they often see SBCD as a burden. This attitude is perhaps understandable since the Korean case also reports, “there is no organizational system to support SBCD activity in Korea”. Thus it seems that the responses of preschool teachers in Hong Kong and Shanghai to SBCD reported in the previous paragraph are not isolated responses. There can be significant organizational barriers to the successful implementation of SBCD including lack of skills on the part of teachers and even a lack of understanding about the nature and purpose of SBCD. In addition, organizational arrangements within schools that do not recognize the additional workload imposed by SBCD can lead to alienation by teachers. Yet the implementation story is not all negative.

Teo and Osborne reporting the Singapore case indicate that the teachers in their study “untrained in curriculum development and unused to sharing their practice, have changed as they engage in teaching and dialogue about teaching as an embodied activity that they have personal ownership over.” These Singapore teachers worked with a Primary One (P1) class so there were no examination pressure and they had an explicit remit from the Ministry of Education. That is to say, the conditions for SBCD were conducive and, to use Teo and Osborne’s terms were “not imposed or alien”. A similar scenario is painted in Dempsey, Looney and O’Shea’s Irish case. It takes place at the other end of the schooling spectrum from that in Singapore – it
is focused on senior secondary curriculum. Teachers are very closely involved in the rolling out of the new curriculum and significant support is provided for teacher development by the centralized curriculum agency. There is a strong sense in the Irish case of “working with” teachers rather than simply providing instructions and directions. The same sense can be detected in the Swedish case that reported the use of “problem-based school development” that deals with the everyday problems of schools. Blossing, Ekholm and Scherp point out that Swedish authorities focus on asking schools to provide “activity plans” and while schools are compliant they are often more occupied with other perspectives on school life than the central authorities. Dealing with real problems and real issues and supporting teachers to do so seem to provide the conditions in which SBCD can flourish.

There is one final issue that impacts on implementation: leadership. It can be a negative influence as reported in the Taiwanese case, “everything about SBCD in our school was decided by the Principal” and the Mainland Chinese case “most headmasters cannot successfully play leading roles…. (because they are)… accustomed to their traditional roles… do not want to execute their limited curriculum power… (and)… cannot get sufficient guidance and funds from experts and the government”.

The Singapore and Hong Kong cases, however, provide some insights into a different kind of leadership, distributed leadership in which teachers themselves take responsibility for developing new curriculum. Teo and Osborne reported in Singapore there was a shift in leadership from those designated leaders to the individual teacher and while this shift was not unproblematic it was an important process for embedding change at the classroom level. Law, van den Akker and Wan deliberately manipulated leadership in the Hong Kong case in an attempt to share leadership as widely as possible with positive results. The kind of leadership practiced in the Singapore and Hong Kong cases are related to points made in the previous paragraph – teachers need to have a sense of ownership over what they are doing in order for the activity to be meaningful. A similar point is made in the Swedish case. Although it did not rely on distributed leadership, it highlighted the importance of leadership “characterised by clarity, with a holistic idea, a deep understanding of everyday work in the school having intrinsic motivation, and a bottom-up perspective as a point of departure”. Leadership matters for successful SBCD, and it can exert either a negative or a positive effect.

It is clear, then, that SBCD represents a very challenging task for all sectors of education including preschools. The question is: What progress have we made in responding to these challenges? Writing in the late 1980s a colleague and I made the following comment about an SBCD initiative in a local school in Western Australia (Kennedy, 1992, p. 189):

[Teachers] found their new role demanding both in terms of time as well as physical and emotional energy. Increased anxiety and stress were counter-balanced by exhilaration and a sense of achievement as the year progressed. These personal feelings of ambiguity and ambivalence are a common feature
of implementation as teachers attempt to work through their own reality of
the change and transform original plans into the practicality of the classroom
situation.

These tensions are still evident in a broad range of literature relating to SBCD.
Li (2006), drawing on Chinese sources, has pointed to the lack of expertise and
qualifications amongst Shanghai preschool teaching preventing them from engaging
in more than adaptation rather than creation of curriculum. She identified similar
problems in Hong Kong and highlighted that SBCD was often overlooked by school
managers. Chen and Chung (2000) also identified problems in the implementation
of SBCD in Taiwan’s basic education reforms. Interestingly, they showed the
differing perceptions of both administrators (lack of teacher ability to participate
in SBCD, lack of real empowerment and lack of evaluative mechanisms for the
curriculum) and teachers (lack of support from administrators and problems with
team work) so that problems were two-edged. Hwang, Yu and Chang (2006, p. 206)
point to similar problems in Taiwan but also focus on conceptual misunder-
standings of SBCD so that for some it means that “teachers have to develop their
school’s courses totally different from another school, and even have to construct
all teaching materials by themselves.” In one sense, then, the problems identified
over twenty five years ago are on-going in new contexts. We need to learn from
this and in particular policy-makers need to learn. There is no need to repeat
mistakes when “policy borrowing” can also build on “the wisdom of practice”. The
disillusion about SBCD by some teachers in Mainland China, Taiwan and Korea
might be avoided if authorities, and indeed scholars, familiarised themselves with
what is already known about SBCD implementation. The lessons are there to be
learnt.

Yet many of the contributions to this volume also show that there are also very
positive practices to be adopted to support SBCD. Building local ownership over
changes, providing adequate support for teachers to work through the changes and
adopting leadership practices that facilitate problem identification and the investi-
gations of solutions. The bureaucratization of change and change processes – for
example, directives form the Ministry of Education – is perhaps the least effective
way to change the school curriculum. Policy-makers need to look at their role in
a more facilitative way. Where system-wide change is the desired result policy
makers need to examine local strategies that can be harnessed to meet this system
objective. Even in an authoritarian political system such as Mainland China’s there
is no guarantee that policy objectives will be met or that one objective (e.g. the
importance of examinations) will not cancel out another (e.g. SBCD). The cases
in this volume from Sweden, Singapore, Ireland, Hong Kong and the Netherlands
come closest to providing ‘best practice’ advice on SBCD for policymakers,
school leaders and teachers. As this knowledge base on SBCD continues to
accumulate it provides signposts for the future. Implementation of SBCD has
been problematic in the past, continues to be problematic in some jurisdictions
but there are ways to facilitate it. This is an important lesson to be learnt from
this collection of papers.
A number of questions need to be addressed for the future:

*Are Teachers and Schools Ready for SBCD?*

Despite strong policy support for SBCD, the key issue remains teacher willingness and capacity to contribute since a number of cases in this volume have shown that creating the space for SBCD does not automatically lead to successful implementation. “Willingness” and “capacity” are two quite different teacher characteristics. Building capacity and developing a skilled teacher workforce may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for successful implementation. Li (2006, p. 224) has reported, for example, that some preschool teachers in her study opposed SBCD because in their perspectives “early childhood curriculum should be school-based by nature.”

In sites such as Mainland China, Taiwan and Korea, as reported in this volume, teachers also have negative attitudes to SBCD. These attitudes may be complicated and even influenced by a lack of skills. Both the attitudinal and skills issues will need to be addressed if teachers are to be “SBCD ready”. Educating teachers as curriculum developers, in both preservice and in service education programmes, needs to be a priority if SBCD, even in its limited form, is to become a reality. Marsh’s contribution to this volume provides some useful ways in which such education could be considered.

Yet it is not only teachers who need to be educated in this way. School leaders also need to be made aware of their responsibilities for curriculum leadership. Often this kind of leadership is neglected to focus on broader administrative processes for which schools leaders are also responsible – financial management, property management, governance etc. These are all important but it is clear from a number of contributions to this volume that school leaders need to do more than this. Perhaps what they need to do more than anything is to encourage distributed leadership in order to build ownership over change efforts. This will be a considerable challenge for those education systems where hierarchical leadership is the norm. Nevertheless, skilling of teachers and helping them to develop positive attitudes to SBCD will be of little value if the organizational structures of the school are not also supportive of SBCD and actively seek to promote and support it.

*Are We Asking the Right Questions?*

SBCD remains a Western construct (Chen & Chung, 2000, Kennedy & Lee, 2008). A Western curriculum development process can be adopted, and adapted, in other cultural contexts as contributions to this volume attest. Yet curriculum development processes are not the only issues of importance when taking curriculum action. Ang’s (2007, p. 1) comment regarding curriculum content for preschool education points to another important feature of curriculum action:

… numerous studies from Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore highlight the pedagogical conflicts of delivering a curriculum that is deemed
‘developmentally appropriate’ by Western standards, but culturally inappropriate by local standards. What they also demonstrate is a crucial philosophical dichotomy between what constitutes early childhood in different cultures and contexts. What appears to have emerged therefore is a widening gulf between notions of childhood in the West and the non-Western world, and this is evident not only in the policies and in practices of childhood, but in the philosophies and attitudes toward children.

This cultural issue is not confined to preschool education and it is at the heart of any curriculum development. It is the “what” of curriculum as distinct from the “how” of curriculum represented by SBCD. It is an issue often neglected in discussions of SBCD. The key point is this: both the “what” and the “how” of curriculum development needs to be subjected to the kind of cultural analysis suggested by (Ang, 2007). There are two questions to address:

– Can SBCD be sufficiently indigenized as a tool to meet the diverse cultural requirements of different education systems?
– How can SBCD ensure that the curriculum of schools is consistent with local cultural values but capable of drawing on other traditions where desirable?

Opening up SBCD to consider cultural issues would be an important extension of its function in a world where cultural issues have become increasingly important. In other words, can policy makers and professionals find the right accommodations between competing cultural views that can best meet the needs of young students in an uncertain and changing world? If SBCD cannot respond to this need, it may well lose its importance as a policy tool.

How to Reconcile Centralised Curriculum Control and SBCD?

What has been clear from all contributions to this volume is that governments irrespective of political persuasion are not likely to give up control of the curriculum. The democratic impulses noted in early Western versions of SBCD and later Asian versions have not resulted in greater local control over the curriculum. Some governments have legislated small slices of SBCD but it is a somewhat marginal concession in all cases. Thus it appears that centralized control of curriculum will remain the dominant motif in curriculum policy-making.

The issue, then, is what kind of adaptations or ad-ons are acceptable or encouraged in these centralised curriculum contexts? One way to look at this issue is to explore ways in which student learning might be enhanced within a broad centralized curriculum framework. Galton’s contribution to this volume clearly shows one way this can be done through intensive work and support for pedagogical innovation. The Irish contribution also demonstrates that intensive work with teachers on well-defined priorities seems to be a useful way of moving school-based change forward. Integrating curriculum development and teacher development in these ways is not a new idea but it may well be worth highlighting as an important strategy that both skills teachers and has the potential to bring about change.
Yet in those small spaces provided by central authorities for SBCD there needs to be more understanding and action concerning the possibilities that have been made available. Freeing students from examination pressures, introducing a specific local curriculum that reflects local relevance, introducing more cooperative forms of learning, meeting the individual needs of students and allowing students to pursue their own interests are all possible in curriculum spaces mandated for SBCD. Teachers need to be made aware of these opportunities but as the Japanese case in this volume reveals, so too does the public. Curriculum space is always public space – rarely is it personal or professional space. Working within this public space will always be a challenge for teachers, even with the right attitude and skills set. Without such skills, it will be impossible, as so many cases in this volume have shown.

CONCLUSION

SBCD has great potential to empower teachers to deliver meaningful and relevant curriculum experiences for all students. This is true whether SBCD is seen as an adaptation and enhancement process relating to centrally developed curriculum or applied to certain add-on curriculum components developed in a small SBCD space. As a curriculum development process SBCD is able to take into account the needs of specific students at school and classroom level. Yet the actual content that is selected for inclusion in any school-based curriculum is neither random nor neutral. The content of the curriculum – and therefore the student experiences that are constructed or emerge - must be culturally appropriate. The curriculum is itself a cultural expression of what a society values at any point in time and the same needs to be true of school-based curricula.

What is needed to achieve SBCD’s potential are teacher attitudes that value this potential, skills that can construct a curriculum drawing on relevant knowledge skills and values and a curriculum itself that is valid and meaningful for students and the society in which they are embedded. Becoming a skilful curriculum developer involves these three dimensions. The result should be that teachers are empowered to scaffold curriculum experiences to enable children to play an active and responsible role in their society and even to bring about changes to that society. This may be an ambitious objective for a relatively simple social process but it is one that makes education so crucial to social development.

It is a formidable challenge for everyone in education, and it is a challenge that starts in schools. As professionals engage with the “how” and the “what” of the curriculum, through study, professional interactions, informal dialogue and reflective practice, they impact on students and on the future of their societies. The contributions to this volume show how in different locations, political systems, cultural contexts and social environments differential progress has been made to bring about the kind of changes that are desired. The chapters that follow will unfold the stories of different national and local jurisdictions. They reveal that while some progress has been made there is still a way to go if SBCD is to achieve its true potential. Nevertheless, the stories show that there is commitment to, and possibilities for, new thinking. This is an important contribution for any collection of papers to make.
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2. SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN MAINLAND CHINA

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of this century, China initiated and launched a new round of basic education curriculum reform, of which school-based curriculum development (SBCD) was considered as a key feature. Ten years have passed since the introduction of SBCD. What significant progress has been made in the theory and practice of SBCD in mainland China? What are the main problems and difficulties? How does one project its development space in the future? Based on literature study and a survey, this chapter tries to research into these questions for purposes of communication and mutual understanding.

BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

With the deepening of reforms and opening-up to the world, China’s economy has experienced a gradual transition from planned economy to market economy. The latter of which, to some extent, has impacted reforms in the education management system. Along with the ongoing advances in political and economic reforms, the drawback of a highly centralized curriculum management system has incidentally been exposed (Jiang, 2001). Meanwhile, the world is changing rapidly and people have begun to demand for more rights; it has become imperative to give consideration to differences across areas and students. Throughout the world, there has been a tendency to empower local governments and schools on curriculum decision-making. Accordingly, the Chinese government (the key decision-makers) gradually provided this empowerment in order to prompt the diversification and characterization of school curricula. Against this background, SBCD has gradually become a hotspot of educational research in China. All these years, it has passed through a process of commencement, prosperity, and recession (see Figures 1 and 2).

From the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to the mid-1980s, China has adopted a highly centralized curriculum management system and accordingly, a highly centralized national curriculum mode of development. Therefore, local governments and schools had few chances to develop curricula, and with this, a rarity in the practice of SBCD.

From the mid-1980s to 1988, considering the actual situation of China, some curriculum experts conceived a three-level curriculum and three-level management process (Lu, 1990), and consequently actively advocated the three-level curriculum management. These mean that the central government, local governments, and schools all have their respective roles and responsibilities (Lu, 1994).
These theoretical studies provided a sound foundation for the reform of curriculum practices. Besides, relative education policies excluded some room for curriculum reform. In 1985, the Ministry of Education published the “Decision on Educational System Reform by the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party”, and local governments have thus obtained some educational management powers. Several local authorities, such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Zhejiang, began to carry out local curriculum development in the late 1980s. In 1996, another document, “Full-time General High School Curriculum Plan (Experimental)”, mentioned that schools
should “reasonably set the optional courses and activity courses”, and these courses should account for 20% to 25% of the total weekly schedule (Education Committee of China, 1997). This was the first time that the central government announced that schools, on a national scale, should design their own curricula to some extent. Teaching periods have also been guaranteed. These policies guaranteed some chances for schools, including their teachers, to participate in curriculum development.

SBCD prospered and peaked from 1999 to 2006, during which SBCD research and practices boomed rapidly. Efforts were made to balance the interests of the central government, local governments, and schools, searching for a reasonable combination on curriculum decision-making. It was at this time that the three-level curriculum management model was adopted and put into practice. In 1999, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council held the third national education conference and issued the “Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Implementing Quality Education.” Item 14 in the second part of this document reads,

adjust and reform the curriculum system, structure, and content; establish a new basic education system; and implement national curriculum, local curriculum and school-based curriculum.

This triggered the establishment of three-level curriculum management system. It is also prescribed that the national curriculum, local curriculum, and school-based curriculum account for 80%, 15% and 5% or so, respectively, in the whole national curriculum plan. Hence, SBCD practices were strengthened. In 2000, the Ministry of Education published “Full-time General High School Curriculum Plan (Revised)” that reads,

the optional courses that local governments and schools develop for themselves should account for 10.8% to 18.6% of the total weekly schedule. At the same time, schools should take the responsibility to set comprehensive practical activities for themselves, which should account for 8.8% of the total weekly schedule.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education issued “A Schema Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Trial)” in June 2001, pointing out that

the three-leveled curriculum management model is adopted to safeguard and promote curriculum adaptability to different regions, schools, and students.

Since then, SBCD in China has become an important topic. However, discussions need to be handled seriously and properly. In 2003, the “Program of General High School Curriculum (Experimental)” suggested guaranteeing schools reasonable and sufficient autonomy. Based on local conditions, schools can develop their own curricula, or implement the national curriculum creatively, such that students can have a wide range of choices in their studies. As a result of the promulgation of this document, SBCD in general high schools has also become a very important issue. Since 2001, several theme conferences have been held and on different scales nationwide, and for pilot areas of national basic education curriculum reform
for Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Many curriculum experts, administrative officials, and teachers came together to exchange their ideas and understandings about SBCD theories, to explore the conditions and procedures of school-based curriculum implementation, and to share their experiences and difficulties emerging from SBCD practices. All of these powerfully stimulated the theoretical research and practices of SBCD.

Since 2007, however, the popularity of SBCD has declined. The amount of literature relating to SBCD has reduced and its theoretical exploration access is in a plateau. Besides, the complexity of SBCD have made it difficult for frontline teachers to understand its spirit and meaning in such a short time. Many difficult-to-solve problems arose in actual practice. A number of schools, especially those with relatively poor conditions, cannot cope with the situation successfully, and have no choice but to give up the process. Obviously, SBCD lagged into a period of recession in 2007, and since 2008, relevant studies have declined sharply.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND FINDINGS IN RESEARCH

Through the untiring efforts of scholars, a series of achievements has been made on the theoretical research concerning SBCD, which mainly reflect the following perspectives: history of SBCD, theoretical basis, the concepts and values, forms of development activities, operating procedures, evaluation and resource development, among others. This chapter shall only deal with some main topics, such as the understanding of SBCD, school-based curriculum management and leadership, and some major steps of SBCD.

Understandings of SBCD

In terms of the implications of SBCD, it seems that Chinese scholars understand it in two ways: one group takes it as “school-based curriculum” development, while the other regards it as a “school-based” curriculum development. The former claims that the “three-level curriculum” emphasizes on finding a foothold in China’s pedagogical tradition and school-education reality. They advocate that with regard to connotation, the “school-based curriculum”, different from those in decentralized states, is a supplement to and unitary with the “national curriculum” and “local curriculum”. With mutual support, the three altogether combine to form a curriculum system of China’s quality education (Zhong, Cui & Zhang, 2001).

In contrast, the latter includes not only the schools’ totally independent curriculum development within the reserved space in the national curriculum plan, but also the school’s creative, “suitable-to-the-school”, “suitable-to-the-students” adaptation, and redevelopment of national curriculum; this has been called “school-based implementation of national curriculum” (Xu, 2008). Some scholars, however, disagree with this. They think that the SBCD only refers to schools’ total independent curriculum development within the reserved space in the national curriculum plan, and the school-based implementation of national curriculum cannot change the status
and nature of national curriculum, and hence should not be included in the field of SBCD (Xu & Wu, 2007). So far, these two views have not yet generated intense conflicts and arguments, perhaps because of the great gap in strength between them.

In fact, educational conditions change greatly from place to place in China. To actually implement quality education, we must make the curriculum suit the students by redeveloping the national curriculum and local curriculum to varying degrees, which is called school-based implementation of national curriculum and local curriculum. This has existed before the promulgation of the three-level curriculum management policy. The school-based curriculum proposed in the three-level curriculum management mainly refers to schools’ total independence in terms of developing curriculum within the reserved space in the national curriculum plan, which is derived from schools’ active implementation of activity courses, optional courses, and extraordinary activities in the process of gradual national decentralization. This belongs to the development of “school-based curriculum” (Cui, 2000). School-based implementation of the national and local curriculum is expected to be blended into the development of “school-based curriculum” to form the holistic “school-based” curriculum development mode. This is a process-emphasizing and cyclical dynamic development process, during which phased fruits are generated, that is, the school-based curriculum.

At present, most schools still follow the “school-based curriculum” development mode, and schools with strong leadership from schoolmasters have set foot on the journey of “school-based” curriculum development, while some others lay in lethargy between the two.

*School-based Curriculum Management and Leadership*

As a curriculum expert puts it,

Curriculum reform itself is a rugged, complicated course, full of struggle, competition and compromise (Ou, 2002).

The appearance of school-based curriculum is a result of redistribution of authority and resources within an educational system. In order to change the highly centralized mechanism of basic education management, the Ministry of Education published “A Schema of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Experimental)” in 2001, which prescribed the roles and responsibilities of the central government, local governments, and schools to promote curriculum management (The Education Ministry of China, 2001). According to the schema, while implementing national and local curriculum, schools have the authority and responsibility to develop or select curricula suitable for their students, giving consideration to the local and regional development, their own traditions and advantages, and the students’ interests and educational needs. Besides, it is also considered a right as well as a responsibility for schools and teachers to point out problems and difficulties that they have encountered during the implementation of the national and local curriculum. As a result, schools are entitled to some authority to develop their own curricula and teachers also enjoy
some opportunities to participate in curriculum development. However, the highly centralized curriculum management model may still have a lasting negative impact upon this new three-level one.

In recent years, scholars in China have paid more and more attention to a new expression of “curriculum leadership”. Some believe that although curriculum management and curriculum leadership emerged under different backgrounds, there is no obvious distinction between their connotations, only with their differing emphases (Ji, 2009). As part of curriculum management, curriculum leadership is deemed as only one of its functions in terms of helping realize the other functions of curriculum management (Li & Duan, 2004). Meanwhile, others insist that curriculum leadership is a new kind of management quite different from the traditional management of curriculum (Zheng & Jin, 2004). Based on hierarchical organizations, curriculum management focuses on the implementation of legalized knowledge (e.g., national curriculum standards and official textbooks). Bureaucratic powers can be executed to its maximum limit, while technological rationality is applied to tackle relationships between leaders and their followers. With different social status and different powers, all stakeholders are not equally treated within the curriculum management system.

On the contrary, curriculum leadership is centered on turning a school into a community, wherein everybody is equally treated and fully respected. They can fulfill authority to its utmost extent by cooperating with each other in a democratic way; morality and professional authority prompt the curriculum development. Legalized knowledge is emphasized in a different way, where teachers integrate their own experiences with reflection. All in all, they insist that it is urgent to finish a paradigm transformation, that is, from the bureaucracy-control paradigm to autonomy-reflection paradigm, since curriculum leadership is an increasingly important activity of schools against the background of new curriculum reform (Jin & Dong, 2007). We should try our best to realize the transformation from curriculum management to curriculum leadership, and thus, turn our schools into learning communities or learning organizations (Zhong, 2002).

We think it is necessary to clarify the similarities and differences between curriculum management and leadership, but it is even more important to put forward some concrete proposals on how to make sure that all stakeholders can really enjoy their curriculum authorities and cooperate with each other efficiently while carrying on SBCD.

**Major Steps of SBCD**

There is no disagreement in guaranteeing a healthy and orderly operation of SBCD. We should, however, follow a series of steps, such as establishing organizations, analyzing situations, setting goals, making plans, explaining and implementing, evaluating and revising, among others (Wu, 2003). Scholars in China have made some contributions in situation analysis, goal-setting, implementation, and evaluation, while little attention has been paid to establishing organizations, making plans, and revising school-based curricula.
Goal setting decides the general direction of SBCD and should be combined with situation analysis. Some experts suggest that the ‘strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats’ (SWOT) analysis, if applied properly, is a good approach to analyzing the situation of schools. All kinds of information about society, students, and subjects should be collected, such as through questionnaires, interviews, and observation. Next, the weaknesses and strengths of a school, and the opportunities and threats it faces need to be identified (Li, 2006). By systematically analyzing this information, general tentative goals can be established. Then, these general goals should be turned into more detailed specific objectives, and finally, these objectives need to be described using action verbs (Li, 2006). It needs to be mentioned that there are few studies on situation analysis and goal setting, including the relationships between them, and there seems to be much room to improve on these fields.

Implementation is a very important step of SBCD. It refers to the process of putting a school-based curriculum into practice, that is, to offer a school-based curriculum to students. It mainly goes through steps such as prototype evaluation, experimentation, diffusion, and adoption of the school-based curriculum (Wang, 2000). Undoubtedly, whether the implementation will succeed or not depends largely on the effectiveness of the development and utilization of curriculum resources. Most researchers agree that curriculum resources can be roughly divided into two types: “conditioned resources” and “material resources” (Wu & Lin, 2001). A number of strategies to develop and integrate school-based curriculum resources have been put forward, one of which is to integrate local curriculum resources into school curriculum resources during the process of developing school-based curriculum resources. Fortunately, it is realistic and possible to do such because there are numerous successful cases in many different parts of China concerning this approach (Zhang, 2003). However, controversies still persist on whether “human resources” can be a type of curriculum resources.

It is known that evaluation can fulfill many functions to guide, supervise, feedback, stimulate, and promote SBCD. However, as a bottleneck of SBCD, evaluation is really a difficult problem to solve. Some curriculum experts suggest that we should follow the “sustainable development” principle in its value orientation and stick to the “humanist naturalism” principle in its academic orientation (Li, 2004). The major elements of school-based curriculum evaluation can be summarized as “two aspects, three phases, four fields, and five subjects”. “Two aspects” refers to the school-based curriculum plan and the curriculum schema. “Three phases” refers to the stages of pre-implementation, during implementation, and post-implementation of a school-based curriculum. “Four fields” refers to goals setting, content selecting and organizing, implementation, and assessment. “Five subjects” refers to the education authorities from higher administrative departments, school-based curriculum committee, peer teachers, teachers themselves, and the students and their parents (Lin, 2004). However, some studies reveal that students and teachers lack systematic knowledge and technical skills of assessment. Even more, it may be unrealistic for them to take the work independently. Immediate measures should be taken to help the subjects work together efficiently. As such, it
is essential for us to establish a union made up of students, schools, the appraisers that students and schools entrust their rights with, among others. Needless to say, it is a precondition for the entrusted to master relevant theories and skills of educational assessment. Accordingly, social agencies in charge of education evaluation should have the abilities to offer services for curriculum evaluation (Zhang, 2003).

EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES IN PRACTICE

In recent years, some investigations have been done on the general situations of SBCD in practice. The earliest was conducted at the beginning of the new basic education curriculum reform (Cui, Shen, Wang, Lin & Fu, 2002); others have likewise been conducted in recent years. Most of them survey primary and middle schools, and some kindergarten levels (Li, 2007). Most of them aim at a holistic situation of SBCD, and some only target specific grades or subjects, such as physical education (P.E.) in senior middle schools (Jin, Ji & Wang, 2007; Fang & Yang, 2007) or life science in middle schools (Shen, Yan & Zheng, 2007). Some of them cover developed coastal areas (Yao & Zhu, 2008), while others cover underdeveloped rural areas in the northwest. Overall, these investigations cover nearly all parts of China, including the East (Cui, et al., 2002), Northeast (Wu & Su, 2005; Yu, Zhao & Zhang, 2009), North (Yu & Li, 2008), Northwest (Chen & Qu, 2008), Southeast (Fan & Guo, 2008), and South (Li & Shuai, 2010), among others. The results help us grasp the general situation of SBCD in China, including teachers’ understanding of the topic at hand, the implementation of school-based curriculum, and its effects and outcomes as well.

Teachers’ Understandings of SBCD

Results show that most teachers have thoughts about the importance, characteristics and difficulty associated with SBCD, reflecting their consciousness and sense of responsibility in the process.

As for the significance of SBCD, most teachers think that SBCD can promote students and teachers, help schools shape their own characteristics, and help deepen and further the new basic education curriculum reform. However, most teachers in rural areas think of it as meaningless. Even those who consider it significant cannot expound on its significance (Yu & Li, 2008). Of the teachers offering school-based curricula, most have some idea of the goals of the curricula they are teaching. However, in some areas, more than half of the school leaders think that SBCD is but a requirement from higher administrative authorities (Fang & Yang, 2007). Overall, most teachers think it is important to carry on SBCD. However, there are others who are not aware of the importance of SBCD, and even think of it as a waste of time.

Most teachers have a general idea of SBCD, but not much on its details. They know little about the connotation of SBCD and the problems it attempts to solve. Some of them equate a school-based curriculum to activity courses, comprehensive courses, or optional courses. Some think that SBCD only means that schools and
their teachers should compile their own textbooks for their students. Few know about its specific operating procedures and most teachers do not have enough knowledge to develop a school-based curriculum.

With respect to the difficulty of SBCD, it is deemed absolutely complicated because much work needs to be fulfilled, such as making plans, setting goals, selecting contents, designing instruction, among others. Lacking in knowledge of SBCD and practical experiences, not all teachers have full awareness of its difficulties. Most teachers in coastal or capital cities, in experimental schools, or in key schools believe that they partially have the qualifications to carry on SBCD. Inversely, most teachers in underdeveloped rural areas or in ordinary schools think it is nearly impossible for them to carry on SBCD because of its complexities. Distressed by concerns and worries, they show no confidence and of course, are unwilling to participate in SBCD.

**Implementation Procedures of SBCD**

As mentioned above, the development of school-based curricula has to follow a series of operating procedures before it can be fulfilled. How should this be carried out in practice? We can safely draw some conclusions after thoroughly analyzing the empirical materials.

First of all, few schools have established special organizations, like the SBCD committee. Teachers are considered the main body of SBCD while students have few chances to enjoy their curriculum authority; they have been neglected. Even more, SBCD is often trapped within schools because there are not enough experts and other social personnel who can participate in SBCD processes. To sum up, the subjects of SBCD have not been diversified. Communication between schools seems to be insufficient, and the cooperation between universities and schools is far from satisfactory.

Goal setting determines the orientation and implementation of SBCD. Most teachers think that goals are generally consistent with teaching activities. However, some teachers think that SBCD mainly aims to broaden and deepen the students’ understanding of knowledge, with little reference to stimulate the interest and specialization of students. Many goals are unrealistic and impractical because of a lack of situation analyses and necessary curriculum deliberations, which are need to ensure their usefulness and feasibility.

Students’ personality should be respected, and we should focus on student interest while selecting and organizing contents of a school-based curriculum. In fact, SBCD should benefit not only the students, but also the teachers, schools, or the curriculum (Li, 2007). In middle schools however, generally speaking, the teachers are the ones who determine the contents, while in primary schools, it is the school leaders. Selection and organization of school-based curriculum contents are tied to leaders’ conception, schools’ features, teachers’ specialization, and logic sequences of knowledge; student interest and educational needs have not been paid enough attention to. Some teachers may take the interest of students for granted without any process of investigation. Moreover, teachers and students may sometimes have
complete different opinions about this issue (Zhu, Tang, Cui & Wang, 1999; Ma, 2007). Even though some investigations have been made, curricula will not be welcomed by students if the investigations are not scientific enough, or if the students’ interests have not been properly grasped.

As for implementation, most schools have been offering school-based curricula albeit varied across different places, schools, and grades. Results show that private schools and kindergartens have achieved a better job than their public counterparts (Li, 2007; Chen & Qu, 2008). Primary schools in the major cities and coastal provinces are excellent examples, 95% of which have been carrying on with their SBCD (Cui et al., 2002). Sharply contrasted, in some inland provinces, only 29% respondents think that their schools have carried on school-based P.E. curriculum development (Fang, Yang, 2007). In some northern rural schools, situations are even worse, where only 5% of the schools have offered some school-based curricula; 30% few of the curricula; and 65%, almost none (Yu & Li, 2008). The number of school-based courses offered to students varies greatly from school to school. Some offer nearly 100 different kinds of school-based courses, while some offer none at all. Generally speaking, most schools can guarantee one to five courses for one to three teaching periods per week, with each teaching period lasting 40 to 45 minutes.

Not all the curricula that the schools have developed for themselves were offered to their students. Upon the authors’ investigation (same as mentioned before), it was shown that only 10% of the respondents think that all of them have been offered to their students; 25% think that most have been offered to their students; 18%, about a half have been offered; 41% believe that only a few of the curricula have been offered to students; and 5% admit that none have been offered at all.

Evaluation is the focal point of school-based curriculum development, even then, many schools pay no attention to the evaluation of SBCD. Results show that 37% of the respondents have expressed that their schools have had experts, supervisors, and relevant people who could evaluate their curriculum; 43% say their schools have not done such evaluation; while 21% admit they know nothing about such a process (Fan & Guo, 2008). The majority of SBCD plans include evaluation, but the results of evaluation can hardly reflect the exact conditions of the implementation because many schools have no scientific evaluation standards or methods (Cui & Du, 1999).

**Teachers’ Intention to Participate in SBCD**

In April 2009, we (the authors) conducted an investigation on the teachers’ intention to participate in SBCD in Shenzhen. Results of the multivariate regression analysis (stepwise) have shown that five of six independent variables fall within the regression equation. They are described as “benefits for others”, “benefits for teachers”, “support from outside schools”, “nature of SBCD”, and “support from within schools”. The $F=309.343$, while $p=0.000$. We can safely draw the conclusion that the regression model is statistically significant and meaningful. The effect of all the five
independent variables can explain 66.7% change in teachers’ intention to participate in SBCD, of which “benefits for others” can explain 62.3% of the change. The $VIF$ is <4, which means that there is no serious co-linearity between independent variables (See Table 1).

Results show that the teachers in Shenzhen have a deep understanding of the significance of SBCD, and most of them are willing to take an active part in SBCD. Of all the influences on teachers’ intention, “benefits for others”, “benefits for teachers”, “nature of SBCD”, and “support from within schools” have positive effects, with “benefits for others” as the decisive factor. “Support from outside schools” has a negative effect and “teachers’ cost” has no impact upon teachers’ intention. Undoubtedly, everybody has his or her own familiar fields and habitual experience. People will feel safe, cozy, and comfortable with their habits; in contrast, participating in SBCD means more cost and much devotion. Teachers have to spend more time and more energy to adapt to new situations, and they unconsciously worry about the potential threats and negative influences that the reform and change bring to them (Cao & Lu, 2003). Despite these, most of the respondents hold the view that only if SBCD can help their students become well-rounded, or if it could promote their teaching efficiency and deepen the new basic education curriculum reform, it is worthwhile for them to participate in SBCD, even though it may threaten their sense of safety and may cost them more time and energy.

There are few investigations conducted about the teachers’ intention in other parts of China. Judging from the situations, as well as on the effects and outcomes of SBCD, we guess that the situation may be quite different in different regions and different schools.

### Table 1. Results of multivariate regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for others</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>16.995</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.487</td>
<td>0.623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for teachers</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>7.448</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.487</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from outside schools</td>
<td>-0.213</td>
<td>-5.787</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>3.138</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of SBCD</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>3.710</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>3.962</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from within schools</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>3.198</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>2.561</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = 0.667$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.665$, $F = 309.343$, $P = 0.000$

### Effects of SBCD

Many of the desired results have been achieved with the ongoing advance of SBCD. Many schools have developed a relatively mature mechanism and mode of curriculum development, and through SBCD, have stimulated the development of teachers and students, as well as the improvement of curricula. It has also simultaneously helped form school characteristics.

First and foremost, SBCD has assured students of much freedom and choice, stimulated students’ creativity, and developed their abilities as well as their personality.
As a result, the overall development of students has improved considerably. In schools where school-based curricula have been developed successfully, the number of students who have won prizes in various contests, such as the Idea Competitions and the Invention & Design Competition, is commendably increasing (Jiang, 2004). Meanwhile, students from different levels have been fully considered. Results show that 80% of the once-under-average students of a rural middle school began to understand themselves better and have become more confident after the implementation of school-based curricula. The progress made by these students has been well appreciated by both teachers and parents (Wu & Su, 2005).

Equally important, SBCD has promoted the development of teachers, helped improve their professional abilities, and enhanced their sense of identity with their teaching profession. In the 1990s, a middle school affiliated with Nanjing Normal University organized teachers to develop their curricula while carrying out an educational project named “Reform and Experiment on the Stratified Instruction of Compulsory Courses”. As a result, quite a few teachers achieved exceptional promotion to a senior academic title; many published monographs or participated in teaching material identification and editing, and 80% have published academic papers. High qualifications of teaching and researching abilities have begun to emerge (Lu, Zhang, Fu & Cui, 2000).

Besides, SBCD has helped schools form their unique characteristics (Luo, 2004). Many specialized schools have come into being in many different parts of China. Datong Middle School in Shanghai has fostered a special Datong Culture by developing various school-based curricula in the new basic education curriculum reform. With “less load, higher quality” as its educational slogan, a school affiliated with the Jingan Institute of Education holds the view that moral education is in bad need of school-based curricula, and thus, have developed some specialized moral curricula. Liuyi Kindergarten in Yanbian of Jilin Province meanwhile believes that physical strength is also a kind of national power, and that arts can help promote one’s virtues, and thus established their kindergarten-based curriculum with obvious physical and artistic characteristics (Gu, Lu, Wang, Yang & Lu, 2006). There are many other excellent examples, such as Xishan Senior Middle School in Jiangsu Province, a primary school affiliate of the Northeast Normal University, Shenzhen Middle School, Nanyou Primary School, among others.

The SBCD itself has also stimulated diversified development of curricula. Numerous excellent school-based curricula have in fact emerged rapidly just like bamboo sprouts that shoot out of the earth after a spring rain. For example, the development of school-based curriculum in some ethnic minority areas has outstanding creation and achievements not only on language and words, history, literature, music, drawing, and operas, but also on architecture, medicine, and astronomy (Li & Ma, 2006). There are many outstanding cases of school-based curricula throughout China covering a wide range of fields, including life science (Shen, Yan & Zheng, 2007) Shadi Culture (Xu, 2003), knowledge (Zhang, Chen, Yang, Liu, Zhou, Yao, Fu, Shen & Cui, 2000), among others. The experience of some schools even has a positive impact on the making of some national curriculum plans,
especially because they have set a good example for other schools and teachers to follow (Lu, Zhang, Fu & Cui, 2000).

However, generally speaking, SBCD in China remains in the preliminary stage. Professional support is so scarce that most schools develop school-based curricula all by themselves, and only by depending on the knowledge and experiences they learn from practice. There exists a sharp contrast between the great success of a number of schools and the hard times encountered by the majority.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

Although we have made rapid progress, we must be made fully aware that SBCD is just in its beginning stage. We still have a number of problems and difficulties to cope with, which are mainly shown in the following aspects: big gap between theory and practice, lack of authority sharing, the blocking of entrance examinations, and imbalanced development, among others.

Vague Concepts of SBCD

As is often the case, different scholars have different views about the basic concepts of SBCD and consequently, many issues remain unsettled. How can we understand SBCD? Is it a strategy or a process of curriculum development? What is the essential difference between school-based curriculum management and leadership? Other gray areas include the following relationships: between national curriculum, local curriculum, and school-based curriculum; between implementation of national curriculum and SBCD; between SBCD and school-based management; between curriculum development and compiling teaching materials; and between school-based curriculum and comprehensive practical activities, and extraordinary activities. Consequently, the vagueness of these concepts causes misunderstandings among teachers.

Worse still, influenced by the traditional paradigm of theory-centered research, most scholars focus on theoretical analysis of SBCD and pay little attention to case studies and empirical investigations. However, teachers badly need specific operating procedures and successful cases which they can follow. Teachers find it difficult to find concrete proposals from scholars on how to develop school-based curricula. Without clear guidance, they have no idea on what exactly should be done and how they can do it effectively. To summarize, there still exists a big gap between theory and practice. This, undoubtedly, has a tremendously negative impact on the theoretical research and the practices of SBCD.

Lack of Authority Sharing

It is known that all of the stakeholders including school leaders, teachers, students, curriculum experts, parents, and other social personnel, can take part in SBCD. The fact is, not all of them are fortunate enough to have a share of the curriculum authority. First of all, we still follow an “up-down” curriculum management model.
School-based curriculum is only a supplement to the national curriculum and local curriculum, and thus, schools do not have sufficient room to develop their curriculum. Secondly, although it has been advocated that teaching materials should be diversified, it is still impossible for the majority of schools and teachers to participate in editing teaching materials. Thirdly, most teachers cannot truly enjoy their SBCD authority for lack of knowledge and skills, and many other reasons. For the time being, they could not get to the core of the curriculum development system. It had been shown in a survey that headmasters and directors who are in charge of teaching are made the key decision-makers of school curricula; in contrast, most teachers have few chances to take part in curriculum development, or they only participate on a superficial level (Wang, 2008).

Fourth, most headmasters cannot successfully play leading roles for the following reasons: Accustomed to their traditional roles, many of them do not want to execute their limited curriculum power. Besides, they cannot get sufficient guidance and funds from experts and the government. Some headmasters do not understand SBCD very clearly. Also, they do not place themselves in an important position in curriculum development, and even think that it is none of their business (Ma, Wang & Xie, 2008). Only few headmasters, that is, those who have the ability, vision, knowledge, and courage to promote SBCD, can play an active role in the practices of SBCD.

Furthermore, students seldom take part in SBCD and their parents do not care about the school curriculum. What interests them most are the results of examinations and whether their children can seek further education in higher schools. Meanwhile, as a third force of curriculum reform, social personnel seldom takes part in curriculum development or may have participated in it inefficiently (Luo & Jin, 2007). Although experts have knowledge and authority, they can only enter schools with the help of headmasters. Some of them pay little attention to the practices of SBCD. Many administrators are not really aware of their roles on curriculum leadership. They do not have a strong sense of responsibility, and thus, have no obvious intention to get involved.

To conclude, it is a false impression that curriculum authority has been fully shared by all stakeholders.

Blocking of Entrance Examinations

It is a fact that educational evaluation reform lags far behind curriculum reform, and this situation is likely to last for quite a long time in the future. The percentage of students going to higher schools for further study is almost the only assessment criterion. It is the ultimate standard to judge the quality of a school, the leading capabilities of a principal, the teaching abilities of a teacher, and the learning abilities of a student. The subjects to be tested are mainly focused on compulsory courses, such as Chinese, Math, English, and similar subjects, which have been hardly touched on in SBCD. The test mainly takes the form of paper and pencils. As everybody knows, these paper-and-pencil tests cannot reflect a student’s overall development. Therefore, the teachers’ devotion to SBCD cannot
guarantee good results of the examinations, which in turn may erode the teachers’ enthusiasm to carry out the SBCD. Owing to the unreasonable criteria, it is not a rare phenomenon in schools to occupy the time of school-based curriculum, or increase students’ study load, pretending to offer them a school-based curriculum. Trapped in a dilemma, most teachers are seeking change. They have verbalized the situations this way:

It is a pity that some well-designed school-based curricula cannot be implemented if they cannot increase students’ scores in examinations directly. No matter how excellently the school-based curriculum has been developed, it can also be regarded as a total failure if the percentage of students going to higher schools is low.

**Imbalanced Development**

As a result of vague concepts, lack of authority sharing and the blocking of entrance examinations, SBCD in China has become quite imbalanced.

To begin with, the imbalance can be clearly seen between schools. On the whole, the general situation can be described as follows: It is better in coastal developed areas than those in the inland, better in urban than in the rural, better in key schools than in ordinary schools, and better in primary and junior middle schools than in senior middle schools. On one hand, SBCD in a number of schools has been vigorous, dramatic, and fruitful. Directed by students’ interests and needs for growth, the teachers in those schools have set the overall development of students as the primary objective and pay much attention to the integration of process-oriented evaluation into result-oriented evaluation. Many different kinds of colorful school-based curricula have been offered, bringing vitality to both the teachers and the students. On the other, SBCD in the majority of schools had been lifeless, dull, and fruitless. They started school-based curriculum development very late, in low levels, and with poor conditions. Few school-based courses have been offered to few students. Their curriculum resources are quite limited, and worse still, they have not made good use of them. For lack of standards, school-based curricula have been implemented casually with shallow contents. Interaction and cooperation between schools and teachers are far from sufficient (Cao, 2005).

The imbalance can also be clearly seen within schools. First, many schools just develop school-based curriculum piecemeal. It is a one-shot and momentary task, rather than a continuous and systematic process. Little attention has been drawn to the institutionalization of SBCD. Second, of the three forms of organizing teaching materials, specifying, selecting, adapting, and compiling, most teachers choose to select and compile teaching materials. Actually, the local educational authorities hold the right to select teaching materials for schools, while teachers have no such right over these. It is obvious that adapting is neither too hard nor too easy for teachers, and it is a good way to increase the national curriculum’s adaptability to students. However, few teachers choose to do so. Desperate to build up their unique features, many schools become buried in compiling “school-based teaching
materials”, and thus reduce school-based curriculum development into mere paperwork. Third, the operating procedures of development are not handled properly. Some are highlighted (e.g., selecting and organizing contents), some are neglected (e.g., evaluation), and others are even omitted (e.g., situation analysis and the investigation into students’ educational demands, among others). Fourth, the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders seem rather unreasonably divided in practice. School leaders are the key decision makers, while teachers are the main body of school-based curriculum implementation; in contrast, students are severely neglected and social personnel are seldom involved.

PROSPECTIVE
New curriculum issues have successively been emerging with rapid changes in the society. It creates a great demand for schools to react accordingly. In order to enhance the adaptability of school curriculum to students’ needs, it is necessary to develop school-based curricula, and some effective measures should be taken without delay.

Promoting Theoretical Research
Theoretical research should be emphasized for its future impact, and efforts should be made to clarify basic concepts and relationships in promoting the usefulness and feasibility of theories. It is crucial to scientifically establish a theoretical system of SBCD. At the same time, we should try to broaden our horizons and diversify research methods by making good use of academic achievements outside of the pedagogical study field. For example, to be caring and humanist, we can employ phenomenological studies. Researchers “bracket” all their presuppositions, enter the fields of SBCD, analyze the problems emerging from specific and temporary circumstances, and share teachers’ feelings with the aim of cooperating with them. In this way, the usefulness and effectiveness of theoretical research can be promoted significantly.

Putting the Students’ Interests First
Clearly, the ultimate objective of SBCD is to facilitate the development of students. Students’ interests are the starting point and the eventual destination of SBCD, thus schools and teachers should have the students’ best interests at heart and make the curriculum sensitive to their needs and feelings. It is important to raise the students’ subjective positions in the development of the school-based curriculum for their own sake. In the process of SBCD, we should exalt the students’ subjectivity by guaranteeing them the rights they deserve, attract more students to actively partake in the development, and influence them to develop the abilities of self-choice and self-development under the guidance of their teachers. To make sure that the needs and interests of students are satisfied, a number of processes should be done during
SBCD, such as accepting students and their parents as part of the SBCD committee, collecting information about students’ needs and interests through different approaches, and making full use of various resources inside and outside schools, among others (Cui, 2008).

**Empowering Teachers**

The belief is widely held that the more teachers share in decision making, the greater their job satisfaction. As such, the first step of SBCD is to empower teachers. First, we should help teachers form a clear understanding of SBCD for the reason that teachers’ equivocal concepts of SBCD will eliminate the weakness of the curriculum. It is urgent for curriculum experts to simplify and popularize the basic theories of SBCD, help teachers understand the general idea of curriculum development, and learn the expectations and directions of the reform. It is also necessary for experts to illustrate the operating procedures of SBCD, as well as develop some practical assessment tools. Second, it is crucial to optimize teacher training courses and improve the quality of teacher education. On one hand, educators should investigate the teachers’ needs thoroughly, and try new effective approaches instead of implementing the traditional methods. They should also try to offer opportunities to teachers to put what they have learned into practice. This way, teachers can internalize the pedagogical theories and thus improve their abilities to cope with curriculum problems. It can also help build their professional confidence. Similarly, it is also necessary to improve the status and value of school-based teacher education. In order to improve the effectiveness of teacher education, schools should organize various school-based training activities regarding the conditions of schools, students’ needs, characteristics of schools and faculty, among others (Li, 2001). This kind of teacher education can help solve specific problems arising from educational practices. Third, because teacher empowerment is a process of the teachers’ sharing of powers, it is essential to empower them through formal authority or control over resources within schools. Teacher empowerment can be expanded through the role and involvement of teachers in planning and making decisions on SBCD regarding school goals and policies.

**Enhancing Principals’ Capability for Curriculum Leadership**

Immediate measures should be taken to enhance the principals’ capabilities for curriculum leadership of SBCD. First, more curriculum powers should be endowed onto the principals. Second, unnecessary inspections and different kinds of interferences from outside of schools should be reduced to the lowest degree; otherwise, principals would be spending much time coping with the chaos. Besides, more support should be given to principals by means of increasing investment, and providing expert guidance, among others. Of course, it is absolutely necessary for principals themselves to foster professional qualifications and capabilities. Only in this way can they have the awareness, passion, abilities, vision, knowledge, courage, and conditions to prompt SBCD successfully.
Enforcing Action Research

SBCD and educational action research share a lot of similarities (Wang & Huang, 2001). Schools should exert their best effort to realize the general educational goals, and at the same time, maintain their specific conditions. Different schools are faced with different situations. They have their own advantages and disadvantages. As such, it should not be difficult to understand that they will try different ways to solve different problems. They may not progress at the same speed or realize the goals at the same level. Under these circumstances, educational action research is the best choice. During the process of action research, education specialists and teachers work together. The specialists have a wide range of theoretical knowledge; meanwhile, teachers can contribute their empirical experiences. They can maintain a healthy tension between theory and practice, enabling the educational action research dualistic functions—improving practices and promoting theoretical development. During this process, new future-oriented basic schools, such as practice-based learning communities, can be set up (Lu et al., 2006). In this way, the development of students, teachers, and experts can be promoted. Meanwhile, curricula and schools will be simultaneously refreshed.

A community of SBCD should be established through cooperation among the developing subjects. It is important to empower all stakeholders. First, the government should take the lead in setting up a communication platform for all the developing subjects, backed up SBCD, by putting forward favorable policies. Attempts should focus on supporting and developing subjects both economically and spiritually. As for education specialists, they should have a strong sense of social responsibility and try to promote the practices of SBCD by guiding teachers and cooperating with teachers. Of course, both experts and teachers should treat each other equally—experts most especially should respect teachers, considering the teachers’ personal experiences and practical problems. Universities should cooperate with primary and middle schools to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to promote the development of the two. The government, schools, teachers, students and their parents, and other social agencies that share the same intention of promoting the overall development of students, they can work as a whole to promote SBCD.

Focusing on Holistic Balance

The imbalanced and polarized development in the practices of SBCD reminds us to give consideration not only to limited reforms, but also to holistic reforms. While celebrating the success in some areas and some schools, we should realize that most schools in mainland China have made little achievements in SBCD. Faced with many problems and difficulties, many schools are still trapped in a dilemma and unaware of how to get over such situations. We should take all of these into consideration, and then try to find out effective ways to improve SBCD. We should bridge the discrepancies between schools by offering more guidance and support to schools in the inland provinces, rural areas, and to ordinary schools in the cities as well. We should try to build up the cooperating relationships of “sister cities” or “sister schools” so one can learn from the other. More importantly, in this way, the
developed schools with good conditions can help those in poor situations. There are many cases of the types of connection and communication between areas and schools, although they are not intended specially for promoting SBCD alone.

Sharing Experiences with Reflection

Schools are not the only entities responsible for carrying out SBCD. In fact, it is a systematical project, wholly opening up to the society. As such, it is a must to share experiences with reflection to the members of the bigger community of SBCD. To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of SBCD, we can take the following measures: First, set up a powerful resource center made available to all members interested in SBCD. It is equally important to establish a network for cooperation and communication between stakeholders from different levels, different subjects, and different fields. Besides, fora and theme conferences should be regularly held to discuss heated issues, to share experiences, and to reflect what have been done. Another choice is to publicly report successful cases of SBCD along with experts’ comments and suggestions. This can set a good example for teachers. It is also possible to build a special website and issue special periodicals nationwide, thus offering chances for all the stakeholders to voice their ideas and feelings. They can argue with each other, stimulate each other, understand each other, and influence each other, and eventually take SBCD to a higher level.

CONCLUSION

To adapt to the global trend of curriculum development and to adapt to the requirements of political, economic, and technologic system reform, China has gradually empowered local governments and schools in curriculum development, and eventually adopted a three-level curriculum management model. It aimed to compensate for the deficiency of the national curriculum, and increase the adaptability of the curriculum in different regions, different schools, and for different students. In China, SBCD was first advocated by some curriculum specialists, and later, some schools initiated experimental practices. Currently, it has been diffused and promoted in the national basic education curriculum reform. In the past ten years or so, it has chronologically experienced four phases, specifically, absence, experimentation, prosperity, and recession. In theoretical research, many achievements have been made, which are mainly shown in the connotation, implementation, review, leadership, and evaluation of SBCD, among others. In practice, quite a number of desired results have been achieved. Specialized schools and unique curricula have emerged. Numerous teachers and students developed more rapidly and in a well-rounded way. Nevertheless, on the whole, we are still in the preliminary stage of “school-based curriculum” development. There is no denying that we are and we will come across many different problems and difficulties at present and in the near future. As such, we should focus our attention on analyzing the problems that we face, share our experiences, and find effective strategies we can use to further SBCD. All of these are aimed towards finishing the transition from the limited achievements
observed in some regions into completing the triumph throughout China. Rooted in the school-based implementation of national and local curricula, and fueled by “school-based curriculum” development, we will spare no effort to integrate these two and eventually realize the goal of “school-based” curriculum development with a strong Chinese characteristic. We know that it is a great challenge, and we still have a long way to go. Anyway, we have already begun to set foot on the journey.

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