

Curriculum Implementation

Challenges and Strategies in China

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Brief Introduction about the Current Curriculum in China

- *Education and care for children between the ages of 3 and 6 are primarily provided in kindergartens which usually provide full-day programs.*
- *In rural areas there are some one-year pre-primary.*
- *Informal early childhood programs are available.*
- *Nurseries serve children younger than 3 under the supervision of educational authorities.*

- *From the 1980s, China started to carry out the Reform and Open-up Policy. Foreign theories, such as those of Dewey, Montessori, Bronfenbrenner, Bruner and especially Piaget and Vygotsky, began to spread widely in China.*
- *These ideas challenged the early childhood education system. The early childhood curriculum reform gradually expanded on a large scale.*

- *The most influential measure of this reform is the “**Kindergarten Work Regulations and Procedures**”, issued by the former Ministry of Education in 1989.*
- *The regulations was immediately and widely disseminated throughout the country.*
- *According to this document, early childhood curriculum should shift from an emphasis on teaching knowledge and skills to the development of children ,from an emphasis on the uniform curriculum standards to diversified and autonomous curriculum.*

- *To solve the issues in practice, the Ministry of Education issued the “**Guidance for Kindergarten Education**” (trial version) in 2001.*
- *The Guidance takes into consideration the gap between progressive ideas and reality, and offers compromise solutions by stating specific requirements and content in different domains.*

- *The reform movement is ongoing. Curriculum approaches are becoming more diverse and aligned with the increasingly open and diversified society.*
- *Many new curriculum have been developed at the province, city, town or preschool level.*
- *Many kindergartens were required to develop their own school based curricula by the local administration department no matter they could do it or not.*

Challenges We are Facing in Implementing Current Curriculum

We summarized the 4 factors (socio-culture, educational resources, educational system, the quality of the teacher) which challenge the multi-level governance and decentralization of curriculum implementing as following:

I. Conflicts between borrowing western educational ideas and Chinese traditional culture and political system

There are three distinct cultural threads -- traditional culture, communist culture, and Western culture -- have mixed to profoundly shape Chinese people's lives as well as different aspects of Chinese early childhood education (Wang & Spodek, 2000).

Each of the three cultural threads has shaped different aspects of early childhood education. While the influence of the communist culture is evident in practical aspects of kindergarten education, such as organization, administration, and curricular goals and content, traditional culture has had a profound influence on the ideological and philosophical bases of kindergarten, including views of the young child, views of learning and development, and views of appropriate teacher-child relationships.

II Contradiction between curriculum implementation and great ECE resource disparities caused by regional and economic differences

- *Preschool education is not compulsory in China. Only 1.3 percentage of the total national expenditure on education is used for ECE, and most of them are contributed to developed regions.*
- *In China, about 25% of young children have no access to one-year preschool, and about 50% have not attended three-year ECE programs.*

- *Due to the huge regional and economic differences, there are great ECE resource disparities between China's coastal and inland areas, well-developed and developing regions, urban cities and rural villages.*
- *Rural and remote areas have lagged behind in their available resources: the limited educational fees, a shortage of qualified teacher, low pay for staff, a harsh environment, and a lack of parent support.*
- *Usually the child - teacher ratio is 12-20 in well-developed regions and about 25-40 in developing regions.*

III. Inconsistency between curriculum philosophy and the school examination system

- *School education is closely linked with the examination system. Students' performance at the college entrance exam determines their future fate to a certain degree.*
- *Many parents associate their children's examination success with early childhood education.*

IV. Contradictions between high requirements of the curriculum reform and teachers' low professional level

- *The professional level of preschool teachers is not high enough to meet the requirements of the current curriculum.*
- *The Guideline is relatively generalized. It doesn't give clear and concrete statements on how to do in practice.*
- *The professional level and training methods of the teacher training institutions have many problems.*

The National Action Plan for the Implementation

This year the Chinese government has issued the “National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)”, which will briefly lay out the direction of Chinese education for the next ten years.

- *The National Outline put forward the objective of popularizing preschool education by the end of 2020 in China.*
- *It proposed that China should strengthen the government's responsibilities on preschool education development.*
- *It set up a ECE service system, help rural, poor and remote areas to develop their preschool education, and ensure the education rights of disadvantaged children.*
- *According to the idea of this outline, the implementation strategies of current curriculum should be adjusted.*

Teacher Training and Supporting Aligned with the Curriculum Implementation

On November 3, 2010, the State Council of China issued five policies and measures for early childhood education, one of which is "to strengthen the construction of preschool teaching staff". The concrete measures include: to determine a reasonable child-teacher ratio, gradually cultivate adequate faculty for public kindergartens, improve the preschool teacher training system, etc.

Some strategies for teacher training have been used by some local administrations as following:

- *Establishing abundant curriculum resources and encouraging teachers to use.*
- *For high quality kindergartens, focusing more on practice in the context rather on theory in in-service training by using case study, teaching research rooted on kindergarten, and documenting children's and teacher's behavior to reflect teacher's teaching, etc.*
- *For kindergartens in developing areas and/or rural areas, providing curriculum resources even high structured curriculum which are of easy access and easy use.*

Something about Curriculum Evaluation

- *The Guideline for Kindergarten Education (trial version) briefly referred to a few principals and methods for curriculum evaluation.*
- *It believes curriculum evaluation should be mainly and spontaneously conducted by teachers themselves during the course of education.*
- *It points out child development and behaviours are the main index of evaluation. So observation, conversation and documentation are very important evaluation methods.*

The Guideline also points out that evaluation should mainly examine:

- *Whether the aims of the educational programs and activities is adaptable to children's current status in the classroom;*
- *Whether the educational contents, methods, strategies and environment are able to promote children's motivation to learn;*
- *Whether the education process can provide meaningful learning experience for children and meet their development needs;*
- *.....*

- *The curriculum evaluation is always conducted by local governments.*
- *The governments usually develop their own evaluation schemes according to the brief principles in the guideline.*
- *Since curricula are quite diversified and autonomously developed by kindergartens themselves, curriculum evaluation is always subjective rather than objective.*
- *Till now, there was no evidence to say whether the current curriculum implementation is successful or not.*
- *The popular saying is the curriculum implementation has difficulty progressing.*