Impacts of a school based curriculum project on teachers and students: a Hong Kong case study

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Abstract
SBCD activities are considered beneficial to the professional development of the teachers. It is particularly argued for quite some time that involvement of teachers in an enquiry based or action research mode of thinking processes is intrinsic to the needs of teacher development. This study has attempted to investigate first the impacts of involvement in the implementation of a curriculum project upon teachers and students, and second, with an analytical framework of SBCD from Marsh, it is argued that successful implementation of SBCD activities depends on the appropriate conception of the innovation in a number of contextual variables which exert influence on the achievement of the innovation objectives.

Background
School based curriculum development is a term which captures a wide range of activities in relation to what teachers are doing about what their students are learning, how effective learning is and why learning is essential to them (Skilbeck 1984; Eggleston 198). SBCD is not new to the developed countries, which have experienced quite different turns in which parties within the system are in greater control of the curriculum decision-making. In England and Wales, for example, there has been a long tradition among schools in particular in primary sector to organize learning activities by teachers for pupils of diverse interests and abilities. This decentralized model of the school curriculum planning has received little challenge until 1988 when a national curriculum framework was legislated (Elliott 1994). In Australia, however, situations turned against a centralized system of control prevailing in the 50s and 60s, with an increase in the devolution of curriculum responsibilities to the schools in the 70s and 80s (Kennedy 1992). In the USA, the national curriculum development projects conducted in the 50s and 60s in response to the criticism of the falling standards in school performance were found having little impact on classroom teaching and learning (O.E.C.D 1998).

Despite all these diverse and sometimes contradictory developments across countries and the fact that teacher’s involvement in curriculum decision making has taken different forms, SBCD has often been seen as a means towards an end, i.e. an instrument for effective implementation of centrally developed curriculum innovations.
(Elbaz 1991; Lewy 1991), rather than a locus where fundamental issues such as curriculum problems should be identified and innovations should be determined to cater for the needs of the students at workplace. The former requires professional support from outside of the schools, taking the competence of the teachers into questions, therefore viewing the relationship between teachers and curriculum development from the perspective of a deficiency model (Shoham 1995). The latter, however, sees teachers as professionals with capacities to learn and develop when they are engaged in development activities, which require identification of the curriculum issues, planning of the solutions and testing of their practicality. Put in another way, teachers are involved in an inquiry mode of thinking practically, therefore the relationship between teachers and curriculum development is viewed from the perspective of a growth model (Fullan 1982; Marsh 1995; Connelly 1980; Shield & Knapp 1997). This mirrors Stenhouse’s classic assertion that there is no curriculum development without teacher development and points to the intrinsic needs for teachers’ active and direct involvement in professional decision-making processes and mechanism which have direct effects upon their pupils’ learning (Stenhouse 1975; Shulman 1985).

Theoretically speaking, consensus seems to have arrived at a point where the contribution of teachers’ engagement in development activities in schools to the professional growth of teachers takes an integral relationship, but the extent that this is necessarily the case lacks substantive and systemic evidence from research (Morris 1996; Johnston 1995).

In Hong Kong, the call for teachers’ active participation in various types of school based curriculum development activities has been constantly recorded in public documents at the policy levels such as A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong by a visiting panel chaired by Llewellyn and invited by the Hong Kong Government in 1982, Report on Review of 9-year Compulsory Education by The Board of Education in 1997, Review of Teacher Education for In-service Teachers by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications in 1998, Learning for Life/Learning through Life by the Education Commission in 2000, and Learning to Learn by Curriculum Development Council in 2001. The justifications given so far have limited to the strategically structural issues with implementing changes initiated at the center to the periphery, hoping that classroom teaching and learning would have been reasonably turned from a teacher centered mode of thinking and practice into a student focused paradigm of organizing learning activities. The professional functions of school based curriculum development activities have long been neglected at both policy and research levels (Bayona et al 1990; Sabar 1991). Little evidence has been systematically collected in advancement of theoretical and practical knowledge about
the extent that teachers’ engagement in school based curriculum development activities in which teachers are required to make important curriculum decisions would contribute substantially to their professional development (Fullan & Hargreaves 1992). This is particularly timely when in 1998, millions of dollars have been invested by the Hong Kong Government to promote and support various forms of teachers’ involvement in school-based initiative by setting up a Quality Education Fund.

Given the needs from the policy and research levels, a systematic investigation into the dynamic and interactive nature of teachers’ engagement in school based curriculum activities in contributing to their own professional development and enhancement is urgent.

This study should not be seen as one which provides answers to the issue, but one which starts collecting and interpreting observations in line with the quest for empirical data on how engagement of teachers in curriculum decision making processes would enhance their professional growth in a country with diverse culturally backgrounds.

**The School**

The name of the school is Salesians of Don Bosco Ng Siu Mui Technical School which has its tradition of offering help to the disadvantaged in the society. The school is situated in an industrial area with housing estates for low-income families. Its intake covers the Kwai Chung district in the western part of the Kowloon peninsula in Hong Kong. The school has a technical history, which means it normally attracts the bottom 20% of the primary students. It is still the case. Therefore, only a very small percentage of its junior form students have been able to move to senior forms in the same school. The school building is on the slope of a hillside with some grounds for plants and ball games. The school admits only boys. The published aims of the school are:

1. to nurture students with a balanced development;
2. to immerse students in a religious school environment;
3. to cater for the special needs of students;
4. to develop their potentiality, to nurture their character and to raise their motivation and learning attitude, to become a good citizen.

**Details of the project**

The duration of the project was for one year beginning in summer 1999 with a completion date in August 2001. The project received a total of 450,000 HK dollars (equivalent to USD 56,000) to cover 60% of the total expenditure from Quality
Education Funds established in 1998 to promote and provide financial support to school-led initiatives. The key principle underlying the project is like what it said in the proposal:

“We are born with talents, and they are useful.” The traditional teaching modes do not necessarily meet the needs of the personal growth of most adolescents. Our beliefs are: designing a suitable curriculum and activities, integrating subject knowledge in the school curriculum will re-establish the motivation and the confidence of the students with low scholastic achievements.” (original in Chinese from the project proposal for QEF 1999)

Goals of the scheme
The aims of the project stated in the proposal include:

1. re-constructing a curriculum suitable for the secondary one students who are the bottom 20% in their scholastic achievements in the primary schools;
2. re-establishing their self-esteem, confidence, feeling competent and team spirit and responsibility;
3. re-creating a learning environment which provides them opportunities to enjoy learning;
4. offering participating teachers opportunities to develop team work and collaboration skills.

The underlying assumption of the initiative is based on the fact that 75% of these underachievers are not able to move to senior forms when they complete the compulsory education which is heavily biased towards academic subject studies, and which is subsidized by the Hong Kong Government. The change to a curriculum mode, which emphasizes student participation in activities with a major aim to motivate their initiative to learn and collaborate with other students, is a progressive move in contrast to the traditional curriculum orientation in the Hong Kong school education (Adamson et al 2000).

Curriculum, Organization and Resources
Curriculum Organization

1. Integration of three core subjects under themes. The curriculum for the students was a mixed one, with clear subject studies such as technology and design, music, and religious studies, and blocks of time, which was originally scheduled for core subject studies were used for integrated studies. The
integration took place at two levels, integration of three core subjects, Mathematics, English and Chinese under themes or activities planned in curriculum meetings. Each week had a theme to link learning elements together. For example, the first week was “who am I?” with the objective to familiarize the new students to the class and the school environment. The second week was “I am born with abilities” with the objective to acknowledge the abilities of each individual. Teachers in the project would plan activities in their block times in line with these themes each week. The following table illustrates the organization of the time for the students. I only use the first two hours of the first week.

**First Week**

**Theme: “Who am I?” Aim: introduce oneself and learn about the new environment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thurs</th>
<th>Fri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.55-8.40</td>
<td>Brain Gym</td>
<td>Brain Gym</td>
<td>Brain Gym</td>
<td>Brain Gym</td>
<td>Brain Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.40-9.15</td>
<td>Warm up games</td>
<td>Name games</td>
<td>Design and Technology</td>
<td>Eng: sing the song Things I like and I don’t</td>
<td>Music Physical Ed</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-9.50</td>
<td>Chinese: origin of names</td>
<td>Design and Technology</td>
<td>Music Physical Ed</td>
<td>Eng: writing a piece about the things I like</td>
<td>Design and Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sessions in bold were supposed to integrate learning activities under the theme determined in the curriculum meetings. Each week had a theme. Other subjects remained in tact.

2. **Whole form activities.** The second level of integration happened in the centrally planned and organized activities for the whole form. These activities aimed at promoting students’ active participation. These activities were organized around themes and festivals that students were accustomed to, such as camping, barbecue night, top teen training camp, Christmas party and City Search, which integrated various types of study and thinking skills for the students. Their purpose as it said in the proposal was to arouse interest in school life and search for one’s identity.

Grouping and class size
The project had successfully acquired resources to employ an additional teacher. All four classes were reorganized into 6 smaller groups of 20 students to allow more
individual attention and care when necessary, instead of a normal class size of 40.

**Management and Monitor**

Principles of management
It said in the proposal that the management would be a bottom up model and decisions were made in planning meetings and autonomy to use professional judgments in making curriculum decisions was well respected.

Regular Curriculum Meetings
Meetings were arranged once a month. Judging from the minutes of each meeting and my observation in some of these meetings, the focus was to share among the teachers their problems and seek for solutions. Some were purely a matter of administration. My view is that when meetings were administration oriented, they lost their attractions.

Meetings with parents
Parents were briefed about the project and its objectives. The project management had very special arrangement for meetings with parents who were also involved in some learning activities.

Research components
The proposal had an outline of conducting pre-tests and post-tests for students. These seemed to me not an usual practice among schools which had less experience in action research and research in general terms. A consultant was employed to offer advice as well as to write up reports of the project.

School led professional development
Workshops to upgrade teachers’ professional knowledge and skills were organized and the topics of these meetings include effective teaching strategies, cooperative learning, experiential learning, multiple intelligences and brain gymnastics. One obvious problem identified by the management is the lack of curriculum inputs, which possibly was crucial to the success of the project.

**Methods of Enquiry**
All six teachers who were involved in the implementation of the project were interviewed individually. The interview questions concentrated on the teachers’ backgrounds, their understanding of the project’s objectives, the difficulties they encountered during the implementation stage, the various methods they adopted to
solve these difficulties, and their suggestions for improvements. The major purpose of
the interviews which lasted 30 to 40 minutes each, was to provide an opportunity that
each teacher could talk freely about their feelings, their changing attitudes during the
course of actions, and the underlying assumptions of their actions. Six students chosen
by their group teachers were interviewed in pairs, that the presence of their
schoolmates was to lower the level of formality and lessen the pressure on these
students when talking to an alien researcher. The presence of a company stimulated
more topics in the conversations. The data from these students would help triangulate
the data from the teachers’ interviews, on how the project was implemented in
classroom situations. The three personnel who initiated, managed and coordinated the
conception and implementation of the project were interviewed as well. To familiarize
the researcher with the contextual factors such as the personality of each participating
teachers and coordinating personnel, I joined some project meetings throughout the
whole year of its implementation.
Documentation analysis was based on the available project proposal as well as some
surveys conducted by the school on the students’ changing self-esteem and attitudes.
But the data supplied by the school were only used as reference in this paper.

Reports of findings

I. Interviews with Teachers
All six teachers involved in the innovation were interviewed around May 2001,
approaching the end of the project implementation in the second term of the Hong
Kong school calendar. The data strongly indicate a demarcation of teachers’ ability to
conceptualize the curriculum problems that they were encountering in the course of
the project implementation. This ability is also evidenced in their judgment of the
situational needs and the decisions to take a particular course of curriculum actions in
the face of the problems experienced by the students. In other words, these teachers
were not only aware of the issues and the underlying problems, they also knew how to
tackle them with some sense of doubt which was to be ameliorated in working out the
practicality of their proposed course of actions in classroom. I would like to use the
notion of “expert” teachers to refer to a group of teachers who have exemplified these
characteristics of being an expert teacher in reporting the findings. I will also use the
notion of “novice” teachers to refer to the teachers who had less evidence in the
explication of the curriculum problems and the justifications of their actions in
remedying the problems (Galton 1997). I will start with the “expert” teachers first.
The interview focused on the teacher’s conception of the project, the difficulties faced
and the ways how these problems were approached and solved. One teacher was
identified as possessing characteristics of being an “expert” teacher. This teacher had clear understanding of the requirements of the project, i.e. each teacher was responsible for each group of around 20 students, teaching them three core subjects in the Hong Kong school curriculum while implementing the themes of the integrated project. The problem with the issue of how to integrate three distinctive core subjects in activities was tackled with some professional wisdom, accommodating the needs of the core subjects with the needs for activities to raise the level of motivation among these students with under-achievements and low motivation in school learning. She did not rigidly interpret the autonomy given by the project in planning and designing the curriculum for her group but took an “accommodating approach”, to the needs for subject learning and the needs for organizing a series of outside class activities which had an original aim of integrating different learning elements into a holistic piece for effective learning. For example, instead of teaching a Chinese prose in the traditional way of reading, explaining and questioning and completing tasks to consolidate learning, she chose a more creative way of teaching prose. She asked one student in each pair to tell their partners a story, and then using the characteristics of the text types in the study to discuss whether the story told by the ir partner belonged to the category of a particular text type. She was clear and critical about the traditional way of spoon “feeding” students, and agreed to the needs for encouraging students’ initiatives in learning and thinking. She was a deep thinker, critical about the curriculum policy of the school administration, lacking a concerted effort from the teachers, appropriate curriculum leadership, and some organization of curriculum continuity for students across three years of junior secondary. She thought the team building and spirit is essential for the success of the integrated project. For her own professional development after four years of involvement in working for an integrated curriculum, she emphasized that she learned how to plan a curriculum, to organize activities, to read books for new ideas, and after all, how to work with others. She became a reflective thinker pursuing the underlying principles in the ways she worked with students.

The other three could not be classified as expert teachers because these three teachers were less able to articulate the underlying principles of their actions and the conceptions of the requirements of the projects were not clear. Though two teachers were involved in integrated projects for the past three years, their thoughts about the traditional and innovative curricula and their philosophies seemed implicit, rather than explicit. However, these two teachers knew their requirements and were able to work out plans of actions in line with the requirements. When issues about the conflicting requirements of a traditional subject based curriculum and an innovative integrated curriculum bothered them, they were less able to look for imaginative and creative
solutions of accommodating both. They returned to the old pattern of subject based teaching from time to time. Their observation about the project implementation was true to other teachers in the project too. These issues arose because of the conflicting requirements of the subject based curriculum and the integrated curriculum, the single subject bias of each teacher, lack of curriculum leadership, perceived ineffectiveness in the administration and lack of experience sharing among project teachers. The third teacher in this category was in his first year of teaching and had no knowledge about what an integrated curriculum was. He received no formal training in the teaching profession. He felt the project was not doing what it claimed. Integrating three core school subjects by activities was unrealistic. No co-ordination among the six teachers in the project and no leadership in curriculum review and planning were found. In class, he biased towards teaching mathematics and neglecting the studies of English and Chinese languages because he was a Mathematics teacher. But he thought the students were happy and were well received by the teachers in the project.

The impacts of the integrated project upon these two categories are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1: A summary of the different approaches and concerns adopted by novice and expert teachers in the project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Novice Teachers</th>
<th>Expert Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Autonomy</strong></td>
<td>Unaware of its importance; Feeling confused</td>
<td>Exercised the autonomy in the best interest of the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum Approaches adopted in dilemma</strong></td>
<td>Regression: return to the traditional patterns</td>
<td>Accommodating the conflicting issues in creating opportunities which cover the needs of both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Unable to use a wide variety of strategies and integrative thinking about contents and methods freely</td>
<td>Adopting an eclectic approach, combining traditional approaches and student centered approaches Adapting and selecting materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Unable to articulate a clear personal philosophy about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Learning is the responsibility of the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criticalness</strong></td>
<td>Concerns with time, efforts, and inefficient</td>
<td>Concern with the administration issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The other two teachers deserve some attention to both their reaction to the implementation of the project since they are experienced teachers but seem to have shared different philosophies about school education or at least different views about the objectives of the project.

Both had three years of implementing integrated studies in the school. One held stronger views than the other, and I reported the strong one only. He reported the students in his group did not appreciate the activity approach adopted by the project and felt strongly that either views, traditional or progressive, would lead to some student failures. His reservation met with some evidence that deterioration of the motivation of some students in his group was observed. He openly said he was confused. He had reservation about the implementation model and due to the backgrounds of the students, he suggested some traditional methods of dictation and copying should be used to strengthen the foundations of the students. He also felt negative about the pressure for change from the administration. He recommended a naturalistic approach to change, not a top down from the school administration. He shared difficulties and concerns such as those expert teachers in the project, the issue with the conflicting demands from the subject based curriculum and an integrated approach. However, it seems that his strategy was withdrawal and pessimistic, rather than one which is professional with awareness of the limitations of teachers in a change process. His criticalness leads him to pessimism and withdrawal, rather than accommodation and assimilation, which is essential to the professional growth of teachers.
II. Interviews with Students
A total of six students, two from each group, were interviewed. The questions were in most cases open-ended and focused on their experience of the changes in teaching and learning styles, the roles of the teachers and their relationship with students, their attitudes towards the transition from primary to secondary. The data will be organized around these three themes.

Conception of teaching and learning
All six students experienced drastic changes in learning styles, from didactic models of learning under great pressure of the teachers in the primary years of schooling, to a style with freedom and autonomy full of activities. Learning in this project was organized around activities, which aimed at raising their motivation in school learning, rather than with direct objectives from textbook knowledge. They were packed with homework every day in their primary but found a contrastive style of learning in the secondary. Homework was minimum to an extent that they expressed a feeling of “guilty” of not having another homework.

Roles of the teachers and their relationship with students
They had deep negative feeling against the primary teachers who were described as “rigid”, “unreasonable”, “stern” and “unapproachable”, while their experience with the teachers in this project was mostly positive, with descriptive words like “friendly”, “open to questions from students”, “room for students’ challenge”, “relaxed” being used to their teachers in the interviews. They had a good relationship and constructive relationships with most teachers. In primary, they said teachers were always right and arguments were not allowed, but with these teachers in the project they had much more open dialogues in school learning.

Achievements in learning
They were asked what they had learned from the experience in the year so far. They had some consensus that learning was biased towards “life experience”, which to them means “how to respect others”. When being asked what they would like to learn, they all said they wanted English language, Chinese language and Mathematics.
Table 2: Contrastive conceptions of curriculum orientations between students’ experience in primary schools and secondary school in the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary school (project)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Absolutely right</td>
<td>Approachable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alien</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fierce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Subject based and academic</td>
<td>Activity based and life experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>Memorization, home work</td>
<td>Activities, play, interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>styles</td>
<td>No argument with teachers</td>
<td>mode of learning; room for arguments available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Aspect</td>
<td>Feel under great pressure</td>
<td>No pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lot of restrictions</td>
<td>freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishes</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>To learn more English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other observations

Some students expressed concerns about the activity approach used in the project, which they interpreted as “playing but not learning”. The conception of the distinction between “playing and learning” is fundamentally a tradition in the Chinese culture, which values book learning and school knowledge. One student justified his under performance in the primary school in a much more complicated way, that due to the use of activity approach in his kindergarten, switching back to a more passive way of learning in the primary did not match his learning style. Therefore, he appreciated the change back to the activity approach in the project. The reason for his underachievement in the primary is apparently an excuse but his awareness of the changing learning patterns between primary and secondary and their possible effects on his own learning cannot be said to have no relation with the project philosophy. In general, they were aware of the changes from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach to teaching and learning from their primary to the secondary. They appreciated the changes and noticed the shift of focus in their achievements towards having life exposure and values building, than book knowledge. They raised some reservation about the lack of a balance between “play” and “learning”, using a rather traditional Chinese perspective. In some sense they were aware of the planning problems that the project teachers were having, that their awareness might come from their own teachers. They had a general impression that they had been learning in almost all meetings with their respective teachers in the project.
III. Interview with project leaders/coordinators

Three key personnel in the project were interviewed, the head of the school, the overall coordinator of the project, and a religious figure who has special interests in training and providing professional support to the innovative teachers.

The school head was a committed educator who had strong beliefs in working for the good of the students who had underachieved in their primary schools. His emphasis in this project was to create a viable curriculum for the students who had low self-esteem and achievements in scholastic subjects in schools. His aim was to change their attitude towards life, school and teachers. He did not think he was a curriculum leader in the project, but played the role of a resource person. He was not to monitor the progress but to provide support. He thought the teachers in the project learned to share and to use a variety of methods. He was pleased with student achievements in affective and emotional aspects but remained skeptical about achievements in instructional needs of the students.

The coordination mainly was in the hand of a curriculum coordinator who was a senior teacher in the school. In his observations, some colleagues had substantial professional progress while others had no clear evidence of growth because of the project. He agreed with some student observations that “play” and “learning” should be two different domains of activity, and should be separated.

The religious figure was taking the role of a professional trainer in the project. He was strong in team building strategies and familiar with a wide range of teaching methodologies. He was aware of the major issues with the children and showed a thorough understanding in the problems with the project, its direction and the search of an appropriate curriculum structure for the school in our conversation. He felt there was a need to have a curriculum leader with expert knowledge for the project.

IV. Issues raised in the curriculum planning meetings

Two meetings in which the principal investigator participated were recorded. The purpose of the meetings was to raise the difficulties among key members of the team so as to work out plans of actions appropriate to meet the needs of students and teachers involved in the project. These records will also be used later in the discussion to triangulate some of the curriculum issues raised in the interviews with students and teachers. I will organize the recorded data under three themes, namely the professional needs of the teachers who involve in processes of curriculum renewal, the need of curriculum leadership, administrative and resources support, and the establishment of team work and spirit among teachers.

Professional development needs
The needs of these teachers were diverse judging from their backgrounds, some novice and some expert, while some were addiciting to contrary views and philosophies from the innovation project, though there was not a moment of doubt about their commitments. Some teachers raised issues about instructional design to cater for the divergent needs of students in their groups, while other teachers openly indicated lack of understanding of the objectives of the project.

**Curriculum leadership**

Anxiety, doubts, concerns and conflicting conceptions in working out plans for each group could be dealt with in meetings with school personnel of strong curriculum leadership. Issues such as how subject based demands could be accommodated within a paradigm of innovations could be handled in meetings with strong sense of collaboration and partnership among participating teachers. All of the above required leadership of organization, collaboration and curriculum knowledge. Teachers felt frustrated when they were pushed to execute decisions they thought unreasonable to their conceptions of what curriculum should be like, and when they were left in confusion about what was right or wrong, what was professionally reasonable for them. Teachers were not convinced about the relationship between “play”, “activity”, “learning in general terms” and “subject learning”. The style of managing innovations is also a concern. Decisions seemed not to be worked out from discussion and debate in meetings, which the views of each should be subjected to public scrutiny. The decisions of this kind bear witness to concerted efforts and communal spirit, which are essential elements of bringing successful changes. Teachers commented that why the project did not adopt a “naturalistic” way of moving forward, with realistic objectives deriving from evidence and experience of the participating teachers.

**Administrative and resources support**

Teachers raised no substantive issues with resources support but asking them to “re-create” a curriculum, which combines three core subject contents, was beyond their professional logic and modestly speaking, their ability. Teachers wanted some sense of security, and therefore, some returned to the subject teaching to find home their professional judgments in contrast with the demands from the project for integrated studies.

**Team work and spirit**

The data so far indicated the lack of team work and spirit among these six teachers. They rather parted themselves when faced with divergent thoughts and difference.
They did not resolve the differences by compromising, testing, trying out, assessing results etc. i.e. a mode of enquiry based learning and in a sense adopting a style of conducting action research. One teacher commented they were drifting further away from each other without collaboration and concerted efforts to solve immediate problems of their own.

**Discussion**

Marsh’s explanatory model is used in understanding the impacts of the SBCD project (Marsh 1990). His model is comprehensive to cover different but necessary dimensions of a SBCD activity. The addition of students’ voice in curriculum change is my choice.

**Mission**

The school has its mission of working for the socially underprivileged and has a long tradition dated back to its religious origin. Most teachers and the head in the project had expressed strong commitment to the betterment of the students in general terms, though some may not agree utterly to the objectives of the project. This sense of commitment and direction is essential for SBCD activities to be successfully implemented.

**Readiness of participating teachers**

Judging from the backgrounds of the teachers and the interviews that we had, we could clearly identify the differences between three types of teachers, novice teachers on one end of the continuum and expert teachers on the other end. This is not to say that they were not good teachers. On the contrary, they were good and committed teachers. But their professional competence differed when they were confronted with conflicting demands from two curriculum orientations. Expert teachers used an accommodating approach with success while novice teachers tended to adopt a “regression” approach, which they found security and stability in ways they were familiar. One teacher with different philosophy of teaching was frustrated but found no solutions, which were considered professionally constructive to his students and himself too. He withdrew totally. It seems that professional support should be given to the two novice teachers at the appropriate time.

**Leaders and change agents**

The project participants have indicated lack of curriculum leadership. The three key personnel failed to play this role and they thoroughly understood the need for expert knowledge in curriculum. So did the teachers involved in the project. This observation
would find its explanation that most teachers in Hong Kong have seldom engaged
themselves in different forms of SBCD activities and therefore there is an urgent need
for schools to get involved in activities which lead to professional development of the
teachers. But the expert teacher in the project could be further developed to play such
a role. Its success depends on whether the career structure of the school can make
room for such development.

**Group Dynamic and School Climate**
The interviews with the teachers strongly showed the need for collaboration among
the participating teachers. They complained that there was not sufficient sharing
among themselves and that being drifted further away from each other in their
curriculum planning and practice worsened the situation and minimized the chance of
success. The collaborative spirit and the creation of a school with a culture of learning
and enquiry should be on the agenda of change and innovations.

**Time/Provision/Allowance**
The teachers felt comfortable with the period when they were well prepared after the
summer. This is essential for schools, which are planning their innovations. Sufficient
time should be given to teachers for preparation work and sharing among themselves.
I think the schools should start with a project or innovation, which is manageable
from within.

**Resources, Finance and Organization**
In this project, funds were made available from an external funding body, QEF, but
consideration should be given to the continuity of the project if effects on student
learning are found observable and justifiable. The head seems to have some
confidence in maintaining the curriculum innovations that he has started. The
organization is important here and complaints were recorded from the teachers about
the inefficiency of the meetings and the administration. The supporting role of the
administration in the project is essential. Bureaucracy has not a place in the
successfully implementation of change.

**Professional Development and Processes**
Outside experts and partnership with university curriculum experts often play a
complementary role, rather than a leading role in SBCD innovations. It is essential to
note from the necessity of engaging teachers in an enquiry mode of thinking
processes, that the processes are as important as the results and solutions (Stenhouse 1975; Elliott 1994). The enquiry is the necessary element for professional development of teachers. The enquiry based thinking in a sense involves teachers in a series of reviewing and reorganizing experience, in other words, in a reflective mode of thinking (Zeichner 1994). The records of the curriculum planning meetings indicated the interactions among members in the meetings were characteristic of an enquiry mode of thinking but to what extent teachers benefited from these thinking processes need further investigation.

**Student Voices in Curriculum Change**

The project initiators and management seem to have little thought about the place of students’ voice in the change process. Judging from the observations made by the students being interviewed, it is clear that they were receiving drastically different messages from the school and these messages became part of their beings. In other words, the changing conceptions of the relationship between these students and teachers, the changing attitudes towards learning, schools and education should play an essential part in bringing about collaboration and communal spirit among teachers and students. Their appreciation of the changes in curriculum aims, contents and organization seems restricted to their own groups without being shared and possibly challenged among students across groups. Their experiences of changes in these areas should be part of the educational experience for these students as well.

**Conclusion**

SBCD activities are fascinating to the teachers as well as students, because they bring with them achievements and professional developments if these activities are taking into consideration the different dimensions of variables involved in their successful execution in schools. This paper has attempted to outline these achievements and indicated the problems that need attention. The claim that engagement of teachers in a reflective form of thinking processes promotes professional development has received some evidence as far as the teachers were involved in various thinking processes. But the extent that these engagements lead to professional development needs more longitudinal studies and more empirical data.

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