

Using School Evaluation Policy to Effect Curriculum Change? A Reflection on the SSE and ESR Exercise in Hong Kong

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In Hong Kong, despite the officials' efforts to reform the school curriculum, studies have found that implementation of the proposed changes has been superficial (Yeung, 2006, 2009). Recently, evidence-based school self-evaluation has become a global trend in the school improvement movement. The Education Bureau in Hong Kong has followed this trend and launched a school evaluation policy — School Self Evaluation (SSE) and External School Review (ESR). The pair of evaluation measures was initiated to help schools to evaluate their own effectiveness, to ensure public accountability and to achieve self development (Quality Assurance Division, 2006). This paper shares the findings from a local research, which looks into the perception of the policy by school curriculum leaders and its possible impact on the school curriculum and teachers. The curriculum leaders described both

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positive and negative effects, potential threats and weaknesses of the school evaluation policy. Specific attention was given to how effective school evaluation in effect makes curriculum reform mandatory. Findings show how the local school curriculum can be controlled by bureaucratic preferences through SSE and ESR, and ultimately lost its ability to deal with diversity. It also shows how such forces impede teachers' professional autonomy and liberty.

Key words: school evaluation, curriculum change, curriculum implementation

Introduction

Facing the challenges of globalization, technological development and social change, the Education Bureau in Hong Kong has revised the overall aims of education for the 21st Century (Education Commission, 2000). Based on the revised educational aims, a curriculum reform was launched in 2001 (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). The curriculum reform is intended to offer a quality school curriculum that better equips students to meet the challenges of a knowledge-based, interdependent world. The recommendations stress the importance of helping students to learn how to learn, a learning-focused approach in teaching and curriculum construction, diversified curriculum and teaching strategies to suit the different needs of students, and so forth (Curriculum Development Council, 2001, pp. 10–11). To achieve the aims and visions of curriculum reform, schools and teachers are recommended to develop school-based curriculum to suit the needs of students. Moreover, teachers are strongly recommended to advance their teaching strategies toward student-centered approaches.

On paper, the curriculum reforms appear well designed, with recommendations that will help to prepare the next generation to live in a challenging century. However, despite the Education Bureau's efforts to disseminate the reform proposals, local research shows that the reform is far from successful. For instance, findings from some local studies showed that teachers in Hong Kong implemented the student-centered approach only superficially. Curriculum change and innovation,

although promoted for years, are still far from affecting most classrooms (Yeung, 2006, 2009).

Currently, evidence-based or outcome-based school self-evaluation has become a global trend in the school improvement movement. The Education Bureau (EDB) has also launched a pair of school evaluation policies — School Self Evaluation (SSE) and External School Review (ESR). This seems a responsive policy where the officials sit down to work out a common goal with school practitioners — i.e., schools evaluate themselves, improve themselves continuously and develop themselves into quality schools. This school evaluation policy has significant impact on schools in Hong Kong, in terms of school organization, school curriculum, classroom teaching, and so forth. The present research investigated the effect of this policy on school curriculum and the teaching profession. In particular it probed the impact, if any, of school evaluation on the implementation of the curriculum reform in schools.

In Hong Kong, curriculum leaders are the most important figures in putting education policy into practice in schools. They lead the school team of teachers to implement policy. For this reason, their opinions about school educational policy are most representative. This study therefore invited twelve curriculum leaders to share their perception about the policy. They were also invited to evaluate both the positive and negative effect of the school evaluation policy.

School Evaluation and Curriculum Change

Accountability and school improvement continue to be major driving forces in the current decade (Marsh, 2009). To ensure quality in education, schools in many Western countries undergo various models of school evaluation (Janssens & van Amelsvoort, 2008). There are two main types of school evaluation — external and internal. Generally speaking, external evaluation acts as a quality control mechanism which guarantees “standards” and “benchmarks” are met by schools (Livingston & McCall, 2005). Internal evaluation helps schools to ensure accountability to the public (Nevo, 1995, 1997). Schools in some countries experience external inspection; while schools in other

countries adopt more liberal kinds of self evaluation. In some places, as in Hong Kong, schools are encouraged to adopt a combination of internal (school self evaluation) and external modes of evaluation. In either case, schools involved usually follow an evidence-based and standard-based model to produce objective and valid evidence of school performance.

In actual fact, evaluation has a significant role in curriculum change. As Morris and Adamson (2010) mention,

Any useful and comprehensive evaluation of a school has to address questions related to the curriculum and it should be able to identify and recommend solutions to any curriculum problems. (p. 170)

Evaluation has many faces and it works for different purposes in different occasions (Nevo, 1995). While school evaluation or school review is essential to scrutinize school quality, program evaluation serves to evaluate the effect of curriculum change (Hopmann, 2003; Nevo, 1995; Popham, 1993). At any rate, educators agree that curriculum change needs to be informed by evaluation (Hopmann, 2003; Morris & Adamson, 2010; Tener, 2009; Wood, 2001). The literature contains various models and approaches of evaluation to assess the quality and effectiveness of curriculum innovations, new projects and programs (Popham, 1993; Stufflebeam, Madaus, & Kellaghan, 2000; Worthen & Sanders, 1987). There are diverse views of purposes about educational evaluation underlying different models. For instance, the goal-attainment model of evaluation functions to verify if the goals of curriculum change have been implemented (Smith & Tyler, 1942); whereas the CIPP (Context-Input-Process-Product) models can help providing information for judging curriculum decisions (Stufflebeam, 2000). All in all, evaluation can serve to provide empirical evidences that contribute to decisions about curriculum change (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p. 6). However, it is criticised that policy-makers or school administrators often fail to base curriculum change on evaluation, leading reform sometimes appears to be based mainly on “slogans, doctrine or political goals” rather than on “a sound research base” (Mayer, 2005, p. 68). In Hong Kong, “Government-initiated”

curriculum reforms are often problematic for teachers because they are found to be “political, complex, contradictory, and (occasionally) symbolic” (Morris & Adamson, 2010, p. 180). The selection of innovations rarely base on evaluation. Quite the reverse, findings from the present study demonstrate how the school evaluation policy facilitates the implementation of those government-initiated curriculum change.

A Brief Account of School Evaluation Policy in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the Education Commission issued the Education Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1997) in which a number of recommendations were formulated to improve school performance towards provision of “quality school education”. Among the recommendations, school evaluation became the most influential. As a consequence, the Education Department introduced a quality assurance framework in September 1997. In this framework, Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI) served as an external QA mechanism while schools were required to conduct school self-evaluation (SSE) as an internal QA process. From 2003–2004, QAI was replaced by the School Self evaluation (SSE) and External School Review (ESR). By School Self Evaluation, schools could evaluate their own performance, improve themselves continuously and develop themselves into quality schools. Following a school’s SSE, the Education Bureau (EDB) conducts External School Review (ESR) of public sector schools to validate schools’ self evaluation (SSE). In this way, ESR plays a complementary role to SSE. It is an external evaluation to scrutinize internal evaluation (SSE) carried out in schools.

To support SSE and ESR, a framework of Performance Indicators (PI) was provided to help stakeholders to assess school performance. Schools are required to conduct a holistic review with reference to the Performance Indicators framework. The ESR procedures also use this framework to consider how schools perform and self-evaluate. Both procedures seek to review school development and effectiveness. The framework of PIs is composed of four domains containing 29 PIs (Quality Assurance Division, 2002). The four domains include

management and organization, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos, and student performance.

To facilitate the schools' self-evaluation process, the EDB has developed Key Performance Measures (KPM) and measurement tools such as Standard Stakeholder Survey questionnaires (Education Bureau, 2009). Schools are expected to use these instruments for self assessment of school performance.

By 2008, the framework of PIs had been trimmed down to 23 PIs. Other evaluation tools provided by the Bureau, such as KPM, have also been revised in order to "enable schools to review their work in a more effective and focused manner that will ultimately enhance the effectiveness of SSE" (Quality Assurance Division, 2008, p. 1).

Generally, a school will undergo one cycle of SSE and ESR every three to four years. In actual implementation of ESR, an "ESR team" (composed of EDB officials, and one external reviewer) visits a school for up to five days (known as the ESR week). On paper, the ESR team is required to operate in ways that ensure the external inspection process is independent, responsive, fair and open. All procedures are to be available to school personnel and school boards. Discussion and communication between schools and officials is encouraged. However, the performance ratings of individual teachers remain confidential. A formal ESR report will be prepared and given to the school. The school has to release the ESR findings to stakeholders such as the School Management Committee, teachers and parents.

Research Purpose and Methods

The key purpose of this research is to:

1. understand the perception of school practitioners toward SSE and ESR and the approach they take in response; and
2. reveal the underlying agenda or effect, if any, of this policy on the development of schools, their curriculum and teachers.

Interviewing was the major research method used in this study. Interviewing is an effective method to probe the subjective feeling of

key participants (Weiss, 1994). This study invited twelve participants of a course, namely the “Training Programs for Primary School Curriculum Leaders 2008/2009” commissioned by the Education Bureau, to participate in the study. These curriculum leaders are experienced primary school teachers in Hong Kong and have been leading the development of school curriculum for years. They were required to attend the Training Program when newly appointed as Primary School Masters (Curriculum Development), ¹ PSMCDs in abbreviation. These twelve PSMCDs were particularly invited because their schools were recently inspected by ESR. The researcher thought their experiences from this school evaluation exercise were therefore most fresh and relevant. Their experience and perspectives are essential to this study. PSMCDs are also teachers in schools, who are expected to lead their school’s teachers in planning for and coping with the requirements of SSE and ESR. Semi-structured individual interviews, each around one hour, were conducted. The researcher asked each of the curriculum leaders about their perspectives and perception of SSE and ESR. One key focus was to look into how these leaders perceived the influence of school evaluation on their curriculum and leadership role. Interview questions included:

1. What do you think the purpose(s) of SSE and ESR are?
2. How does SSE and ESR affect the school, the teachers and you?
3. How do the school and you respond to the school evaluation policy?
4. How has SSE and ESR influenced the curriculum development, teaching, and leadership in your school?

All interviews were transcribed, followed by qualitative data analysis. To analyse qualitative data collected by interviews, “inductive analysis” was employed (Patton, 2002). The researcher identified and discovered patterns, themes and trends that emerged from the data.

Major Research Findings

This research procedure helped the researcher to probe the participants’ perspectives and perceptions about SSE and ESR. Qualitative analysis started after the collection of interviewing data. During the process of

identifying, coding and categorizing, patterns (recurring regularities) emerged from the data. These patterns were represented by the following broad themes:

1. SSE/ESR and curriculum reform
2. SSE/ESR and the achievement-oriented tradition in Hong Kong
3. Teachers' coping strategies for SSE/ESR
4. SSE/ESR and diversity in classrooms

The following sections analyse these findings in greater detail.

SSE/ESR and Curriculum Reform

All twelve curriculum leaders said that ESR and SSE aligned with the reform agenda stated in the official curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). Many of them recognized the possibility that the officials used the school evaluation policy to mandate curriculum change. A few curriculum leaders said that by ESR, the officials help schools develop professionally. They described the policy as an “inevitable external force” to push teachers to improve teaching and learning.

I think that ESR is a kind of “force” that helps push us (schools) to put curriculum reform into practice. It is clear that the curriculum reform items are criteria for measuring a school's effectiveness. (CD 9: 11–12)

We found that the framework that schools are asked to follow in preparing for SSE and ESR is the same with that proposed in current curriculum reform — for example, our teaching is expected to enhance students' generic skills such as communication, critical and creative thinking, etc. We need to design tasks or activities to assess formatively the learning progress of students. (CD 6: 58–61)

Two curriculum leaders (CD 9, CD2) said that it is the purpose of ESR to check and push teachers to improve their teaching.

I think the EDB wishes to use ESR as a means to make teachers change their way of teaching. This is especially a critical measure for those who are used to the conventional type of teaching. (CD 9: 10–15)

SSE/ESR and the Achievement-oriented Tradition in Hong Kong

It is a matter of fact that the perspective of the public (parents, especially) tends to be utilitarian. Parents try to send their children to top schools. Results in public examinations are the main indicator of a top school. Curriculum leaders in this study reflected that both principals and parents cared very much whether their schools could out-perform others in ESR. ESR report is like a “report card” issued to a school. There are kinds of “league table” between schools in the districts. Parents would compare ESR reports among schools.

Our school principal cares very much where the place our school is on the somewhat informal “league table” between schools in the district. The informal league table derives from parents’ estimation. You couldn’t imagine how parents make this happen. From ESR report issued to the school, parents could find comments of the officials made about our school. ESR report is like a “report card” issued to a school. Parents also equate the achievement of a school to its ability to send students to eminent secondary schools. (CD 2: 60–68)

Curriculum leaders found they could not ignore the power of the “league table”,

Indeed, the EDB has its own “league table”, which is shown only to the school principal. The official league table is based heavily on TSA² results. The principal will ask me and other leaders to follow up if our school does not get a favorable place on the league table. (CD 2, 70–75)

Indeed, the ESR officials expects to see how a school responds to its place in this league table,

TSA result is one key component in SSE report. We need to analyse the student achievement shown on TSA, then identify the strengths and weaknesses to draft our school improvement plan. The ESR officials will then review how our school performs data analysis, self evaluation and planning according to the TSA result. (CD 2: 146–150)

However assertive the officials sound when they promote the notion of “all-round education” to the public, the curriculum leaders find that the hidden agenda is still results-oriented.

Teachers' Coping Strategies for SSE/ESR

All the curriculum leaders agreed that schools had developed strategies to deal with the demand of ESR. These included: teachers work in collaboration to overcome difficulties, forming “study groups”, planning and acting to meet standards laid down by the Performance Indicators, and preparing teachers to cope with classroom observation.

Collaborate to overcome difficulties

Some curriculum leaders claimed that teachers mostly perceive ESR as a tactic used by EDB to monitor their work. In order to equip the whole school well for the evaluation, people in a school work together. And the curriculum leaders mention that “cooperation and collaboration” is one most salient coping strategy. Many curriculum leaders see this as the positive effect of ESR,

You couldn't imagine how school teachers become united nowadays. All at once the ESR becomes a common goal for teachers to fight against. Previously some teachers preferred staying aloof or alone; now they see the need to work together. (CD 11: 45–48)

Forming “study groups” to have in-depth understanding of the evaluation guidelines

Facing the challenge of ESR, several curriculum leaders spelled out their belief that sharing responsibilities among colleagues is a useful strategy.

CD 1 shared that his school formed teachers into “study groups” to read carefully the ESR guidelines,

We would form into different study groups, each take turns to study ESR domains (like curriculum and teaching, assessment of student learning). Action plans will be prepared and submitted for review by the principal. (CD 1: 200–206)

Working to the Performance Indicators

Some curriculum leaders said that they would deliberate carefully on ways to work to the standards set by EDB. The PIs (The brief form which the curriculum leaders called “Performance Indicators”) are taken by the curriculum leaders as official standards for schools in Hong Kong to strive for (Quality Assurance Division, 2008). Together with school teachers, they study the PIs carefully and look for ways to achieve the standards stipulated in these PIs.

Prepare teachers to cope with classroom observation

Many school teachers and curriculum leaders are aware that observation of teaching is most important to reflect school effectiveness. For this reason, they derive different coping strategies to ensure better teaching performance can be shown to the ESR reviewers. These coping strategies include: studying the ESR’s assessment criteria of classroom teaching, improve personal teaching by peer observations, and so forth. For instance, some schools study the ESR’s criteria used to assess teachers’ teaching,

We therefore form into groups to study carefully ESR’s assessment criteria of classroom teaching. We find that the “observation record form for teaching performance”³ is very useful. We therefore carefully look into the assessment items on the record form, brainstorm ideas and experiences in putting those requirements into effect. (CD 3: 44–48)

The next thing is to improve their teaching methods,

Therefore, I often remind my colleagues (teachers) to “polish” their teaching skills, train up the routine in classrooms, prepare their students to work in groups, etc. All these preparation could help them (teachers) to get good grades when the ESR team arrives to observe their teaching in classrooms. (CD 10: 67–70)

Besides, most schools conduct peer observation (of teaching), which is a useful way for teachers to view others’ teaching, to learn from each

other and to improve their own teaching. Some of these schools invited experts to hold a workshop or professional development day/retreat so that teachers can refresh their pedagogical knowledge. One school employs an external organization, which publicizes itself as capable in providing professional service to accelerate quality of school education, to model classroom observation for every teacher before ESR team arrives. The company observed every teacher's teaching, analysed possible problems, then provided expert opinions to improve the school's classroom teaching.

SSE/ESR and Diversity in Classrooms

One curriculum leader shared a noteworthy comment — the officials appear to pay little heed to individual differences in education but expect schools to make all students attain equally good academic achievement,

It is quite disappointing to find that the ESR team seems to overlook the issue of diversity in classrooms in their comment on our school performance. They complained that our academic results in some cases were unsatisfactory; but they disregarded the fact that our school has admitted many students who have special needs (such as cases of mild mentally retarded, or other physically handicapped). Many of our students are from families of low SES [socioeconomic status]. How incoherent the officials sound in implementing educational policy! (CD 8: 105–112)

Discussion

Taking a Defensive Approach to Cope with the School Evaluation Policy

This study shows that curriculum leaders and their school teachers took a careful approach to cater for the demand of ESR. Although the officials often reassure the school personnel that ESR is a friendly device to assist school development, in actual fact schools often take a

defensive strategy to prepare for the ESR. From the major research findings, their skeptical stance can be clearly identified:

1. taking ESR as a common difficulty or “hurdle” to be tackled, the curriculum leaders had derived with school teachers various coping strategies, these included collaborative planning, forming “think tanks” or “study groups”, professional development of teachers to enhance quality teaching, etc.;
2. perceiving that classroom observation is one key focus of ESR, the curriculum leaders devised ways to enhance quality of teaching in classrooms, such as initiating peer observation of teaching, organizing teacher development workshop.

Obviously, the study showed that many curriculum leaders interpreted the policy as a bureaucratic or managerial tactic. Although the curriculum leaders did not dispute that SSE and ESR helped their schools in some ways, the attitude taken was one of “problem-tackling” — the target is to report school achievement to the central authority. For this reason, schools were keen to pursue effective “coping strategies”, often preparing substantial quantitative evidence. Many even put aside other essential duties (such as talking with students), and work to the expectation of the officials as well as the demand of parents. This stress on documentation in turn brought great pressure and workload on teachers. As some curriculum leaders in this study said, “many teachers worried that their teaching couldn’t get a good grade in ESR and this would affect the rating of the school” (CD 8: 90–91). In this way, teachers become “mere technicians, instruments and deliverers of other people’s agendas” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 161). Eventually, teachers in our community have little capacity to recapture their dignity and act as, in Hargreaves’ word, “the society’s leading intellectuals (p. 161)”. Teaching is reduced to technical rationality and teachers do not become truly reflective, professional practitioners (Schön, 1983). Eisner (2001) severely criticized this as “a culture of schooling in which a narrow means/ends orientation is promoted” (p. 187). He reminded that excessive focus on this orientation would make educational practitioners leave the deeper problems of schooling and the real meaning of education unattended.

EDB Effects Curriculum Change by ESR

The research findings show how curriculum leaders agreed that the SSE and ESR framework was a prevailing force that compels teachers to implement faithfully the planned, official curriculum reform in classrooms.

It is obvious that because of the impact of SSE and ESR, schools were more eager to implement the imposed curriculum reform. Listed below are two instances found from the study:

1. As mentioned, the curriculum leaders found that school teachers become more collaborative in view of the need to tackle the challenge posed by ESR. For the same reason, more peer observation and more teacher development workshops are undertaken. These can be said to be a promising effect of school evaluation. It is noteworthy that such development matches with the EDB's policy intent to enhance local school collaborative culture as well as teacher development (see Curriculum Development Council, 2001).
2. The findings showed that teachers studied carefully the EDB's "observation record form for teaching performance" to improve their teaching. The record form designed for observing teachers' teaching lists criteria which are coherent with key proposals of local curriculum reform (e.g., student-teacher interaction, nine generic skills, curriculum integration, IT in education, etc.). So, when school teachers refer their teaching closely to such criteria, they will eventually shift from the conventional way to a more student-centered one.

Curriculum leaders said that schools were particularly willing to work in compliance with the official recommendation when they faced difficulty in recruiting enough students. Some participants and their schools even interpreted the policy as a political tactic and related it to decisions on school closure. Hence, it is not strange that schools are making greater efforts to ensure maximum congruency and alignment between the school plan and the official, planned curriculum.

Mandating Curriculum Change by the Framework of Performance Indicators

The Performance Indicators (PIs) are used in ESR as reference to evaluate school performance under four domains of school work. This study found that many of the schools involved took the PIs as a checklist of their school's practice. Some of the schools organized think-tanks to study the PIs. Obviously, PIs have become "standards" for schools. They have turned out to be forceful means to mandate curriculum change.

However, it must be added that although "standards" have considerable potential for improving schools, they can lead to an increased degree of centralized control over school curriculum, schooling and even the profession of teaching. There has been much criticism of the tendency to overuse or misuse PIs, particularly when it produces a ruthless pursuit of market competition. Hargreaves and Fink (2006, pp. 12–13) summarizes the following effects brought about by the pervasive spread of "standardization":

1. Narrowed the curriculum and destroyed classroom creativity
2. Restricted innovative schools
3. Widened the learning gap between elite and other schools
4. Encouraged cynical and calculated strategies for raising test scores
5. Undermined teacher confidence and competence
6. Eroded professional community as teachers have to struggle alone to get through the overwhelming range of reform requirement
7. Increased rate of stress, resignation and non-retention
8. Instigated and amplified resistance to change

Giving too much weight to PIs could subject the profession of teaching to the routines of "soulless standardization" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 82). Teachers and schools would be squeezed into the "tunnel vision" of test scores and achievement targets (PIs) (p. 1). As a result teachers could lose opportunities to explore creative teaching, and their professional autonomy.

Overstating Academic Achievement Undermines the Effects of Curriculum Reform

The study disclosed that the EDB was again found to be rhetorical with their policy formulation and implementation. On one hand, the officials advocate “whole person education”; on the other hand, schools are evaluated on their ability to score good academic results, for example in the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA). Therefore, schools were keen to boost the results of their students in public examinations, rather than focusing on developing students’ capacity for learning to learn (a slogan of Hong Kong’s curriculum reform, Curriculum Development Council, 2001). Thus, the performance-oriented nature of ESR fortifies the quantitative, examination-oriented tradition of the educational context in Hong Kong (Biggs, 1996).

This orientation would bring down the ideal of the curriculum reform. If assessment is used to determine individual competence, old values of community, cooperation, individual need and equal worth would be replaced by values that celebrate individualism, performativity and differentiation (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1994). This is in opposition to the values of the renewed curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 2001), which specifies moral values as one essential aim for reform.

In reality, findings from this research show that teachers and curriculum leaders have become more goal-oriented as the education enterprise, under the influence of ESR, becomes defined in terms of output (PIs, test results) rather than process. The danger of “teaching to the test” would, quite contrary to what is expected in the curriculum reform, diminish the quality of teaching. The researcher did hear from curriculum leaders that teachers were willing to change their way of teaching in times of ESR. However, one curriculum leader said, “Teachers would not sustain this because they are clear that preparing students to surpass others in tests and examinations is more important” (CD 12: 76–78).

EDB Shapes a Homogeneous Curriculum for the Society

Findings from this study revealed how EDB steers the implementation of curriculum reform proposal through its school evaluation policy in all schools in Hong Kong; as a consequence, the curriculum implemented school-by-school is virtually homogeneous. The curriculum disregards individual differences and diversity of learning needs in the classrooms. This opinion was reflected by curriculum leaders. Hence, the same curriculum is generally delivered to all students in Hong Kong classrooms.

Furthermore, ESR promotes comparison and commensurability among schools and provides a means for the officials and the parents to exercise control over school curriculum. Certainly, parents' understanding of quality school curriculum is shaped by the officials' consistent education (through media and propaganda). Hence, to make their schools more competitive, teachers have to be pragmatic with their approach in their curriculum planning. They need to work to the official standards and also the expectation of parents. The official curriculum agenda is thus faithfully put into practice. This again leads to inability to deal with diversity in school curriculum, which is a threat to egalitarian ideals (Apple, 2006; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). The group of disadvantaged, lower-achievers in the classroom, is not supported by local education. This problem is found in many countries, in which,

the market did not encourage diversity in curriculum, pedagogy, organization, clientele, or even image. It instead consistently devalued alternatives and increased the power of dominant models. Of equal significance, it also consistently exacerbated differences in access and outcome based on race, ethnicity and class. (Apple, 2000, p. 92)

Conclusion

This study shows how the school evaluation policy in Hong Kong functions to become one effective tool imposed by the EDB to push

forward its proposals of curriculum reform. Eisner (2001) once describes this kind of practice by the concept of *rationalization*. He elaborates that rationalization has a number of features. By comparison, it is found that ESR and SSE actually displays many of these features, for instance:

1. it depends on a clear specification of intended outcomes — i.e., what standards and rubrics (PIs) are supposed to do;
2. it uses measurement and assessment as a means through which the quality of a product or performance is assessed and represented;
3. it is predicated on the ability to control and predict — it enables the government to control or monitor how schools perform and to which extent the curriculum standards are met;
4. it promotes comparison and commensurability — in the community of Hong Kong, schools are currently compared by the parents, ESR facilitates this process. (Eisner, 2001, pp. 184–186)

This allows the government to mandate and direct officially designed curriculum change (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). Besides, the formulation of standards and the measurement of performance are ways to make teachers and schools more accountable to the public. Consequently the government could maintain efficiency and effectiveness of local education. However, it will be sad if the community is pursuing one set of standards and a homogenous curriculum, which is mainly manipulated by a central agency. And this also threatens the professional autonomy of teachers.

Moreover, this study reflects how school curriculum in Hong Kong experiences the combined force of bureaucratic control and consumer choice. Interviewees mentioned that school survival required parental support. Parents therefore could influence and monitor the direction of local educational development. Obviously the government understands this and by way of public propaganda, officials easily mould the values of parents. Hence, the EDB uses its bureaucratic power as well as consumer power to take away the professional control of education from teachers. Teachers have to give way to “consumer choice” as well as bureaucratic control. This kind of bureaucratic accountability in education impedes professional development of the community (O’Day,

2002). Of course, some may even say that it signifies mistrust for teachers as well as a threat to the professional autonomy of teachers. Apple (2006) writes that under this condition, teachers are given only kinds of “regulated autonomy”, when “teachers’ actions are now subject to much scrutiny in terms of process and outcomes... such a regime of control is based not on trust, but on a deep suspicion of the motives and competence of teachers” (p. 43). Obviously, in a democratizing society like Hong Kong, one would not expect that teachers are de-professionalized in ways that “only legitimate content and methods are (allowed to be) taught” (p. 43).

Despite all efforts so taken, evidence in this study showed that the effect brought by this school evaluation policy on local curriculum reform is still superficial. Fundamental principles of the curriculum reform (Curriculum Development Council, 2001) — such as catering for individual differences, advancing the quality of teaching and learning, and professionalizing the teaching profession — are not thoroughly followed up during ESR.

All in all, there is a principle or rule of change — “an organization does not change until the individuals within it change” (Hall & Hord, 2006). Educational change is not just a matter of successful or unsuccessful implementation of innovations but more basically and importantly *a change in the profession of teaching*, and the *institutions in which teachers are trained and in which they work* (including schools). Bureaucratic monitoring could hardly foster real change. Just as Fullan (1993) said, “you can’t mandate what matters” (p. 21).

McLaughlin (1987) once argues that implementation of curriculum change is not about transmitting top-down policy by political or technical strategies (see also House, 1979), but about bargaining, negotiating and transformation. Experience suggests that implementation with a “cultural” perspective that emphasizes cultural transformation as a major factor is more successful. Implementation must be framed in terms of individual actors’ incentives, beliefs and capacities (Lewis, 1988). Obviously, curriculum reform in Hong Kong has rarely given adequate consideration to these factors (see also Yeung & Lam, 2007). Policy-makers could refer to Astuto, Clark, Read, McGee, & Fernandez’s (1994) ten basic shifts in beliefs, policies and

practices, which are said to be necessary to move ahead with authentic reform in education. Here below are the five most remarkable ones (p. 87):

1. from control to empowerment
2. from bureaucracy to democracy
3. from commonality to diversity
4. from competition to collaboration
5. from intervention to facilitation

Notes

1. To support primary schools in curriculum reform, the Chief Executive in Hong Kong proposed in his Policy Address (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002) to add to each primary school, from 2002–2003 onward, a teacher whose rank is PSM(CD)/APSM(CD). The PSMCDs/APSMCDs are responsible for leading and coordinating teachers in schools to implement curriculum change. The course, namely “Training Programs for Primary School Curriculum Leaders 2008/2009” was commissioned by the Education Bureau. The course was for training up these curriculum leaders by equipping them with knowledge of curriculum development and leadership, and so forth. The researcher taught this course during the said cohort.
2. TSA, the short form for the Territory-wide System Assessment. It is an assessment administered at the territory level by the Government. It is administered at the three levels of Primary Three, Primary Six and Secondary Three. EDB stresses that TSA is low-stake in nature. It is to provide feedback to schools about their standards in the three subjects of Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics, so that schools could draw up plans to increase effectiveness in learning and teaching. EDB claims that the TSA data would help the Government to review policies and to provide focused support to schools.

3. This is an observation form for recording teachers' teaching developed by the Quality Assurance Division (2005). The form is for use by the ESR reviewers when they observe teachers' teaching performance. There are altogether 28 items to be observed and rated along 4-point scales. The items include: students' participation, peer interaction, students' elicitation of generic skills, teachers' teaching strategies, classroom organization, presentation and questioning skills, and so forth.

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