

【 Education Policy Studies Series 】

Challenges of
Involving Student Voice in
Curriculum Implementation:
The Case of Hong Kong

Christy Wai-hung Ip
Ping-kwan Fok

Faculty of Education Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

About the Authors

Christy Wai-hung Ip is a doctoral candidate of the Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Ping-kwan Fok is Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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Education Policy Studies Series

Education embraces aspirations of individuals and society. It is a means of strengthening human resources, sustaining competitiveness of society, enhancing mobility of the underprivileged, and assimilating newcomers to the mainstream of society. It is also a means of creating a free, prosperous, and harmonious environment for the populace.

Education is an endeavor that has far-reaching influences, for it embodies development and justness. Its development needs enormous support from society as well as the guidance of policies that serve the imperatives of economic development and social justice. Policymakers in education, as those in other public sectors, can neither rely on their own visions nor depend on the simple tabulation of financial cost and benefit to arrive at decisions that will affect the pursuit of the common good. Democratization warrants public discourse on vital matters that affect all of us. Democratization also dictates transparency in the policymaking process. Administrative orders disguised as policies have a very small audience indeed. The public expects well-informed policy decisions, which are based on in-depth analyses and careful deliberation. Like the policymakers, the public and professionals in education require a wealth of easily accessible facts and views so that they can contribute constructively to the public discourse.

To facilitate rational discourse on important educational matters, the Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research of The Chinese University of Hong Kong organizes from time to time “Education Policy Seminars” to address critical issues in educational development of Hong Kong and other Chinese

societies. These academic gatherings have been attended by stakeholders, practitioners, researchers and parents. The bulk of this series of occasional papers are the fruit of labor of some of the speakers at the seminars. Others are written specifically as contributions to the series.

The aim of this *Education Policy Studies Series* is to present the views of selected persons who have new ideas to share and to engage all stakeholders in education in an on-going discussion on educational matters that will shape the future of our society.

Challenges of Involving Student Voice in Curriculum Implementation: The Case of Hong Kong

Abstract

Student voice in curriculum implementation has attracted many concerns in some Western countries recently. However, it has not aroused much attention in Hong Kong. This paper discusses the feasibility of initiating student voice in curriculum implementation of Hong Kong secondary schools. After reviewing the innovation of student voice from both conceptual and empirical perspectives, the authors critically comment on student voice in curriculum implementation in Hong Kong secondary schools. They note that even though there are barriers for such innovation in the Hong Kong context, student voice in curriculum implementation should be promoted for curriculum improvement.

Introduction

In the 21st-century education reform, many countries have emphasized student learning. However, the role of students is not always taken seriously. Policymakers, school administrators, and teachers still play dominant roles in curriculum decisions. Only a few pioneer countries (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia) have advocated, in the last decade, for the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation in secondary schools, and have engaged authentic student voice into the decision-making process. It is believed that students' maturity is

the determining factor for their involvement in the process of curriculum implementation, particularly in primary and secondary schools. Though such innovation creates challenges, many pieces of research have revealed that promoting student voice in curriculum implementation is worthwhile.

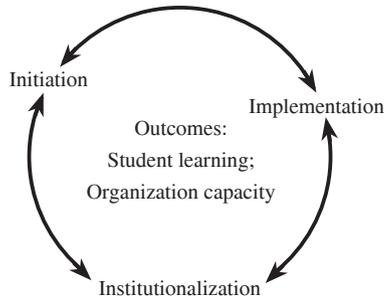
To better examine the feasibility of initiating student voice in curriculum implementation in Hong Kong secondary schools, this paper reviews such innovation from both conceptual and empirical perspectives. The present authors critically comment on student voice in curriculum implementation in Hong Kong secondary schools after discussing the feasibility of student voice in secondary schools. It is significant to note its barriers in the Hong Kong context.

Involving Student Voice in Curriculum Implementation

Student Voice in Curriculum Implementation

Notable scholars have agreed that learning experience is essential to curriculum. For example, in the definitions of curriculum proposed by Bobbitt (1918/1972)¹ and Marsh (1997)², both researchers emphasized that providing students with the required learning experience is basic to curriculum. In line with their belief, Fullan (2007, p. 66) proposed that learning experience is fundamental to the implementation phase of the change process of curriculum (see Figure 1 & Table 1).

Figure 1. A Simplified Overview of the Change Process



Source: Fullan (2007, p. 66).

Table 1. The Three Phases of the Change Process

Phase	Change process
Phase I: Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process that leads to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change.
Phase II: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The experience of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice.
Phase III: Institutionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system, or disappears by way of a decision to discard, or through attrition.

Source: Fullan (2007, p. 65).

In addition, Ornstein and Hunkins (2009, p. 253) claimed that students would change according to the intended learning goals by having the relevant learning experience provided to them. Therefore, when teachers implement a particular curriculum, they should consider whether their implementation could provide students with sufficient and relevant learning experience so that students can learn successfully.

Actually, students' learning experience is increasingly considered as important in curriculum implementation, as reflected by the shift in the orientation of curriculum studies.

In the early days, curriculum was totally implemented according to plan. Later, more and more educators believed that curriculum implementation was a changing process influenced by the learning environment (e.g., Fullan, 2007, pp. 87–100) (see Figure 2).

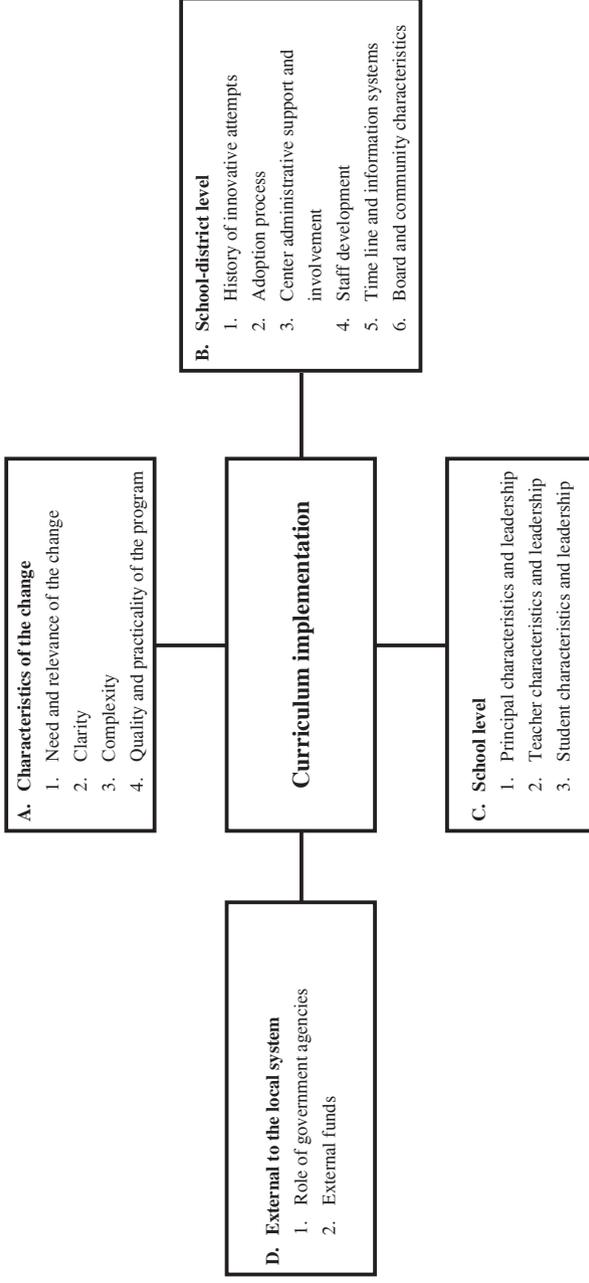
Thus, some scholars proposed that curriculum implementation should accordingly allow adjustment for individuals. Contemporary educators have been more concerned with interaction in classroom learning, and have valued the voices of different stakeholders for implementing improvements. They believe that students can co-construct the learning experience in the classroom (Synder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992, p. 418).

Voices from various stakeholders should be heard. Especially since student learning is accentuated in the curriculum reform, student voices should be respectfully considered. The present authors completely agree with Clarke's (2000) argument that "[since education is to] put learners in situations where they have to think for themselves, critically challenge and reconstruct ideas, student voice matters and should be taken seriously amongst other significant aspects of organizational attention" (p. 23).

Significance of Student Voice

Student voice is significant in curriculum reform. Levin

Figure 2. The Interactive Factors of Curriculum Implementation



Source: Summarized and modified from Fullan (2007, pp. 87–100).

(2000, pp. 156–157) believed that if students participated in curriculum decisions, more opinions of stakeholders would be activated for effective change and higher learning standards would be achieved. Doyle and Feldman (2006) also warned that “it is time adults listened, heard, and acted on these student voices to transform schools into positive environments in which children learn and thrive in academic success” (p. 394). By including student voice, teachers not only better understand students’ views, needs, and experience, but also take on more accountability to their teaching (Mitra, 2003, p. 295).

Above all, students are the first group of people who experience the curriculum. Students are “expert witnesses” (Rudduck, Demetriou, & Pedder, 2003, p. 276) of curriculum, with unique knowledge, experience and perspectives that adults could never emulate (Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck, Day, & Wallace, 1997). Student voice could help to identify problems in curriculum and suggest possible solutions (Arnot & Reay, 2004; Mitra, 2003, p. 289). In addition, students’ feelings and thoughts on the curriculum reflect their satisfaction and the suitability of what is implemented. As Edwards (2005, p. 52) mentioned, students’ questions, input and reflections at all phases of the implementation process are significant. Brooker and Macdonald (1999) agreed with Edwards and urged that students should have a say because:

- [it is] related to the curriculum and youth culture;
- [students’] comments remind curriculum makers to

provide opportunities and learning experiences for students with a wide range of abilities;

- [they could build the] relationship between the actual and intended student outcomes and assessment. (p. 92)

In order to build a liberal curriculum framework, Brooker and Macdonald (1999, p. 84) suggested two ways to examine student-experienced curriculum: (1) to study their attitudes toward particular subjects, and (2) to inquire into their concepts of subject matter. By this, it is believed that teaching, curriculum, teacher-student relationships, student assessment, and teacher training would also be enhanced (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Lending support from various articles, Ip (2010) discussed the promotion of learning engagement, improvement of pedagogy, catering for learning diversity and reframing of teacher-student relationship, and confirmed the significance of involving student voice in curriculum implementation.

Degree of Involving Student Voice

A sad but true fact about curriculum reform is that “reform for students” was used as the reform slogan, but students rarely participated in the change process (Fullan, 2007, p. 170). Because of “an ideology of immaturity” about students (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p. 13), students’ opinions and feelings were either being marginalized or habitually suppressed. Such stereotyping by teachers has led to the consequence that most students “have been silenced all their lives” (Giroux, 1992, p. 158). Many scholars detected this abnormal phenomenon and revealed the importance of

student role in curriculum reform. For instance, Levin (2000) commented that “thirty years ago we missed the opportunity to use new ideas about students’ rights and roles as a way to build stronger and better schools. The opportunity to do so may now be with us again” (p. 169). Yin and Lee (2008) also argued that student involvement could lead to the success of curriculum reform in the 21st century. Yin and Lee claimed that:

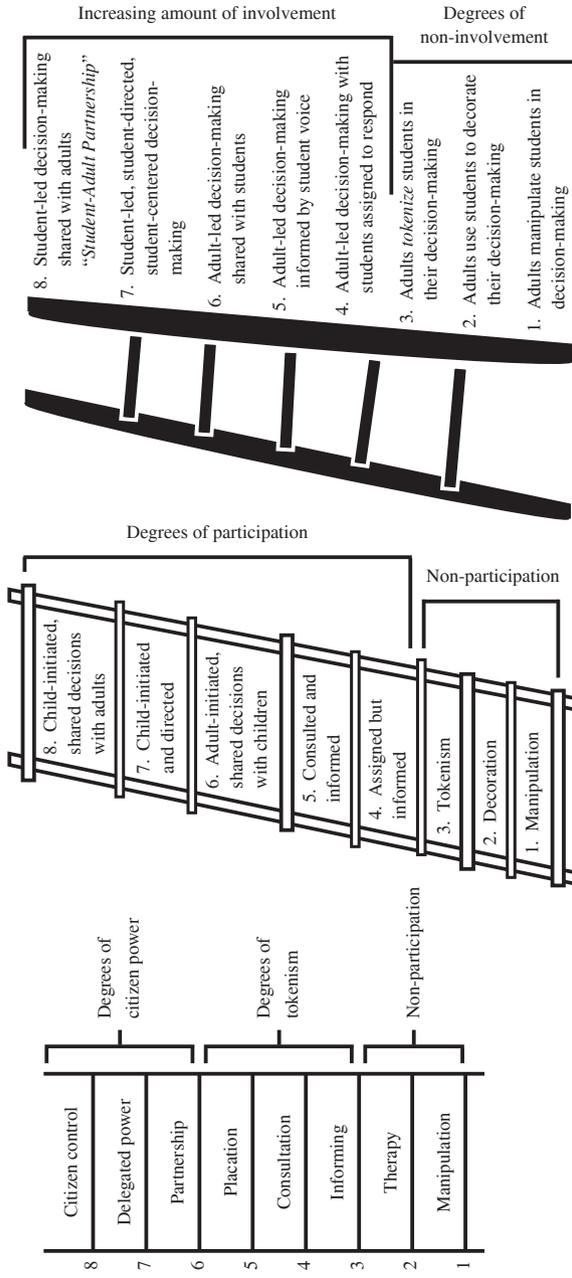
1. student involvement could improve their learning outcomes ...;
2. student involvement could strengthen their leadership skills ...;
3. student involvement could enhance curriculum reform and lead to the migration of success ...;
4. student involvement could also enrich educators’ understanding of curriculum reform. (pp. 70–73)

It was not until the education reform in the late 1990s that students were recognized as agents in education (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009, p. 265). One of the research focuses of student voice is its degree of involvement. Woolner, Hall, Wall, and Dennison (2007) raised the questions of “to what extent student voice should influence decisions” and “how best students should be consulted.” Woolner et al. believed that the answers to the former question were closely related to students’ competency to be consulted effectively (Hill, 2005) and how well they understood the world in order to offer worthwhile views (Wyness, 1999). For the latter question, different scholars have varying responses. For example, with the inspiration from Arnstein’s (1969)

“ladder of citizen participation,” Hart (1992) developed his “ladder of participation” model to describe the degree of student participation, and his work has become significant to the contemporary study of student voice. Hart’s model was adapted by his followers to create a “ladder of student involvement in school” (Fletcher, 2005) (see Figure 3).

In summary, although various frameworks of student voice were developed, all of them expressed the same belief about student voice: students are the key players in curriculum reform. It is time for teachers to change their mindsets about students. Students are no longer passive recipients of their teaching. Students should not be expected to come to the classroom with empty minds. On the contrary, they have their own perceptions of the world. As Fullan (2007) said, “if [students’] initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom” (p. 34). Therefore, it is very important for teachers to address students’ needs and interests in their learning. Teachers can truly understand students by providing an interactive channel for curriculum implementation. The traditional pathways for student participation in curriculum decisions might be fictitious. Students had no choices as to how and in what they participated. Teachers simply pretended that they had considered student voice. In fact, teachers took advantage of student voice to launch what they wanted in most cases. To create an environment for authentic participation, teachers should act as initiators. They should assign the

Figure 3. Comparison Between the Three Ladders of Student Participation



Source: Left — Armstein (1969, p. 217); Middle — Hart (1992, p. 5); Right — Fletcher (2005, p. 7).

corresponding roles to their students, help them develop the necessary skills, and provide them with the experience to take up their responsibilities. Progressively, students should learn to play active roles and to partner with their teachers in making curriculum decisions. Ultimately, students should learn to initiate changes and share the responsibility in curriculum implementation.

Challenges for Involving Student Voice

Woolner et al. (2007) observed that there was a tendency to ignore students' views, though policymakers promoted student voice in the Western world. In usual practice, schools only consult students on some "safe" topics (Frost & Holden, 2008, p. 85), such as the theme of a Christmas party and the place for a graduation picnic. This is a strategy in order not to produce any resistance to routine administration in the school. Students are still outside the gates of discussion on important issues like curriculum. Obstacles for student voice — unequal power, mistrust, camouflage, policy misalignment, lack of space and time, and inconsistent views — are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Unbalanced power relations among school members

Traditionally, teachers are the only authorities in the classroom, especially in Chinese societies. All decisions in the classroom are proposed and approved solely by teachers. Students are on the "other side," identified as knowing nothing, and expected to conform to and obey school rules created by school adults. It is totally unacceptable for students to question or reject the knowledge distributed by

the “legitimate” authority (i.e., teachers) in the classroom. Students are the “victims” whereas teachers are the “directors” who control all the scenes on the stage of the school. However, it is a different story under the recent school reforms.

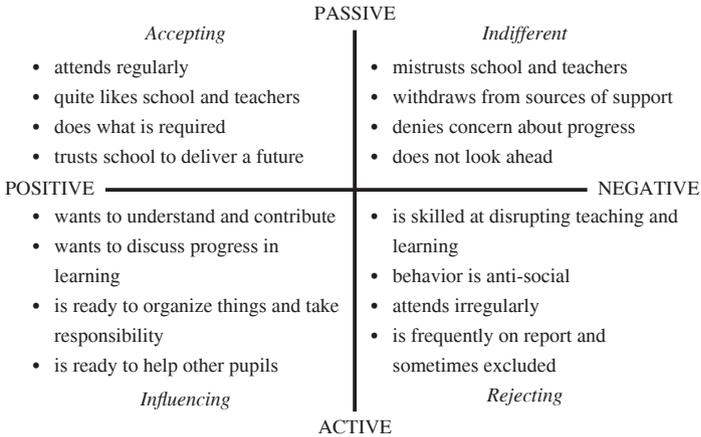
Advocating student voice, whereby student perspective is included by reconfiguring “the power dynamics and discourse practices within consisting realms of conversation about education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3), is contradictory to traditional school culture and conventions. As a result, resistance emerges. The greatest resistance comes from teachers’ fear of challenge to their power. McIntyre, Pedder, and Rudduck (2005, p. 166) notes that although students’ comments on teaching are polite, serious, thoughtful and constructive, and their suggestions are usually built on teachers’ previous practices and generally coincide with teachers’ own views, teachers “are not willing to face, particularly listening to things [they] don’t want to hear” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 369).

On the other hand, Mitra (2003) noticed uneven power distribution among school members. Some members spoke more while others spoke less. When some members found that they were unsafe or might risk censure in going beyond the norms of thinking about problems, they preferred to keep silent. This not only explains why some school adults are not willing to express their opinions publicly, but might also justify students’ silence on school issues. Usually student representatives are not well-trained. Being the minority in

the school committees, student representatives might feel insecure about speaking up against problematic issues or school curriculum publicly. Thus, some students might opt to remain quiet if they are not invited to express their opinions or if they are unfamiliar with the context.

Mistrust between students and teachers

Every reform encounters hardship, especially at the initial stage of change in teacher-student relationships. On one side, teachers do not trust students' potential (McIntyre et al., 2005, p. 166); on the other side, students do not trust their teachers' intentions. In Rudduck and Fielding's (2006) inquiry into student voice, students' participation in school issues was revealed as mostly controlled by teachers. If teachers stereotyped their students as immature children who knew nothing about the teaching profession, they intended to reject students' participation in important issues or would empower their students only in superficial issues (Rudduck, Demetriou, et al., 2003, p. 280). Annual meetings with committee members of the student union might be one such example. Teacher representatives might not consult students before they released the latest school policy and school change. When students suggested something or inquired into issues during the meetings, it might be a routine task to record their voices but without further, practical actions among school adults. Consequently, students might realize that their efforts would only be wasted, and their suggestions would never be put into practice. Rudduck (2007a, p. 1) recognized such phenomena in school and identified the four "pupil states" of student voice in school (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Four Generalized “Pupil States” Recognized by Teachers

Source: Rudduck (2007a, p. 1).

According to the present authors’ belief, the accepting state is an ideal and the other three states have a mobility toward the ideal state. However, such mobility involves changes in school culture and stakeholders’ mindsets, which are not easy. For example, it is obvious that change in teachers’ mindsets to absorb students’ perspectives (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, & Reay, 2004) is necessary but not sufficient; teachers might also need to nurture their patience in modifying students’ perception on student voice activities. Therefore, it is a challenging job to adopt the new teacher-student relationship.

Fictitious student voice

The effectiveness of student voice activities is questionable. If the discussion content of such activities is totally controlled by teachers, students are only the pawns on the chessboard. If

teachers carefully set up the scene and theme of discussions and filter student voice to support their needs, it is an illusion that student voice is being heard. In this case, authentic student voice is blocked and students cannot make use of such activities to tell their teachers what they want. Besides, it is a habit for teachers to pick student representatives who are well-behaved, active, and knowledgeable (Cammarota & Romero, 2006, p. 17; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2002, p. 6). These student representatives are so smart that they understand the rules of the game. They might behave gently and be unwilling to challenge or question the existing curriculum they experience in school. Morrison (2008) commented that this phenomenon followed Freire's (2000, p. 73) banking education theory (see Appendix) that students conform to the imposed passive role and are obedient to the presumed practices:

- It should come as no surprise that students who have experienced this training, especially those students who have succeeded in the "game" of schooling, might resist changed rules that ask them to go against all they have been taught.
- Students who come from conventional education into classrooms or schools employing democratic practices will often feel uncomfortable or even fearful of jeopardizing the only pattern of life they know.
- Asked to play a role in content construction (e.g., explain what they are generally interested in studying, or a particular topic), they may be at a loss, for many have never even considered what their own interests might be.

- Spontaneous initiative, curiosity, and trust in themselves, by and large, may have been drummed out of them; they may have learned to view education as purely instrumental — a means to an end rather than a desirable end in itself. (Morrison, 2008, p. 55)

Even if some student representatives are willing to speak for their fellow classmates, they might only represent particular interests. Levin (2000) stated that:

1. One student is even less likely to represent a diverse student body than a single staff member is for all teachers.
2. Students will typically have less experience and less skill in the kinds of political processes that school planning groups conduct.
3. Being the only student among many adults is also a difficult situation for many young people. (p. 165)

Extending Levin's (2000) critique, Fielding (2004) highlighted some problems in current student voice activities which are ignored. He noted that language is full of personal values and interpretations (Fielding, 2004, p. 296). It is nearly impossible to make a value-free discourse. It is also impossible for another person to understand one's interests, causes and standpoints completely. Therefore, it is very difficult to construct a single standpoint in representing a complex community (Fielding, 2004, p. 299). Additionally, voice is not purely in written or verbal form. It has different meanings for different people or in different contexts. Even the same voice spoken by different people in the same

situation has very different meanings (Fielding, 2004, p. 299). Therefore, the existing representative scheme of student voice in school is questionable.

Besides, “good students” from the dominant groups frequently fill up most of the voice channels in school. Unfortunately, they can only display the interests, enthusiasms, dislikes, beliefs, and attitudes of the dominant groups. In contrast to the dominant groups in school, students from the subordinate groups are usually perceived as misbehaving and disengaged and are underrepresented. They are not considered to be “good students” in the perception of teachers, since they do not have good academic results and good relationships with teachers or other students from the dominant groups. Dealing with such stereotypes, the minorities in school usually hide themselves and are invisible to teachers. Fine and Weis’s (2003) argued that “the intellectual, social, and emotional substance that constitutes minority students’ lives in this school was routinely treated as irrelevant, to be displaced and silenced” (p. 26). Consequently, the voices of minority students who really need more attention are missing in most of the school decisions (McIntyre et al., 2005, p. 167). This inequality not only leads to unfair treatment of minorities in school, but also reduces their opportunities to speak out.

Policy misalignment

Rudduck and Fielding (2006, p. 228) questioned the supposition that although student voice at the school level was initiated by policymakers in the United Kingdom, there are too many

important issues to be implemented in school reform, and teachers do not have enough time and resources to launch all the changes at the same time. As a result, teachers prefer to concentrate on improvements in students' learning and their academic achievement. What is inconsistent is that although student voice sounds like an important issue in education reform, it is not regarded as one of the mandatory criteria when school inspectors examine schools in the United Kingdom. The misalignment between policy and inspection has given teachers a good excuse for not sparing extra time or effort for the inclusion of student voice in their schools.

In addition, Cook-Sather (2006, p. 372) criticized the situation where although laws apparently secure students' right to equal education, students' own words, presence, and power are missing in the legislation.

Extra engagement for teachers

Despite evidence from research showing student voice to be feasible and a good practice for school change, teachers complained that integrating student voice was stressful for them, and that extra workload and time were spent because of the initiation of student voice (Doddington, Flutter, & Rudduck, 2000, p. 50). In some teachers' eyes, student voice was not really worth considering seriously, nor was it sustainable. They would only be willing to reserve the "less serious" times near the end of the school term to incorporate students' ideas (McIntyre et al., 2005, p. 167). In addition, teachers needed to put in extra efforts in building institutional commitment, removing teachers' anxieties generated by

the change in power relations, sustaining authenticity, and including all student voice (Rudduck, 2007b, p. 600).

Teachers' diverse views toward student voice

Actually, teachers' reactions to student voice are diverse. McIntyre et al. (2005, pp. 160–166) identified three types of teachers' response to students' ideas:

- I. spectacular short-term responsiveness,
- II. growing confidence in the use of pupil consultation, and
- III. problems with using pupil consultation —
 - i. expecting too much of pupils, and
 - ii. not valuing pupils' perspectives.

Type I teachers were pessimists. They did not believe that the inclusion of student voice was realistic. This type of teachers commonly criticized student voice as unaccountable since students knew nothing about the complexity of teaching tasks (McIntyre et al., 2005, p. 167). Conversely, type II teachers were optimists. They believed that students' ideas were desirable. Though they were already occupied with a heavy teaching load, they still regarded students' ideas as beneficial to their teaching. The incorporation of student voice was considered as a good opportunity to rethink the alignment between their teaching and student needs. For type III teachers, problems of student consultation existed in two extremes. Teachers either gave students too much autonomy in managing their learning, or mistrusted students' potential in supervising their learning.

In summary, there are three sources of challenge for

student voice: teachers, students, and context. For teachers, the challenge is to change their mindsets toward the teaching profession and students. In the 21st-century curriculum reform, teachers are no longer the only authorities in the classroom. Student role is becoming more and more important in curriculum reform. More student-centered activities such as interactive and collaborative learning are implemented in the classroom, while students are increasingly included in curriculum decisions. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to be more open-minded and acceptive of student voice. They need to consider student voice when they implement the curriculum. Besides, under the pressure of curriculum reform, it is understandable that teachers are exhausted with changes in the whole context of education. However, heavy workload is no longer an excuse for teachers to ignore student role in curriculum reform. It is believed that the absorption of student voice is helpful in making curriculum reform more effective and successful.

For students, it is time for them to rethink their position under the curriculum reform. They are not the quiet victims of education anymore; they are the “masters” of education who have choice. They can exercise their rights to strive for a better learning curriculum relevant to their interests and needs. Above all, a trustful and respectful teacher-student partnership is the key to success in curriculum change. Teachers need to believe in students’ potential while students need to trust their teachers’ intentions.

In addition, it is believed that curriculum policy should

advocate for the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation. Only if the challenges of student voice are handled in this way can curriculum reform be successfully implemented.

Discussion

In the following sections, the present authors analyze the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation in these perspectives: its feasibility in secondary schools; possible solutions to its challenges; and contextual issues in Hong Kong.

Feasibility of Involving Student Voice in Curriculum Implementation in Secondary Schools

Student voice is not a new topic in curriculum implementation. Its evolution dates back to 1919,³ a year that aimed at preparing citizens with democratic qualities (Lewis, 1919). Despite the passing of nearly a century, the original spirit of student voice can be enriched with new meaning. Student voice not only means voice in opposition to current curriculum as represented by different student organizations, but also describes teacher-student partnership in curriculum decisions. The new meaning of student voice aligns with the purpose of curriculum reform that “education is for the students.” Curriculum implementation is not only a matter for teachers, but also a cooperative matter for both teachers and students. The goal of the reform in curriculum implementation is to let students have a say to their learning curriculum so as to fulfill their learning needs and interests.

From the authors' standpoint, the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation is feasible and necessary. In order to implement a well-fitted curriculum that suits students' needs, student voice is the best and most directed source of reference. In the last few decades, student-centered curriculum was promoted in different levels of education. However, in most of the cases, teachers implemented the curriculum merely according to their understanding of their students. They might judge their students' learning styles and preferences by experience but never consult their students about the students' own views, resulting in a mismatch between perception and reality. To minimize this disparity, the initiation of student voice can provide an authentic picture for teachers' consideration. In addition to the mismatch problem, the characteristics of every class of students are different. Previous experience might not help to predict correctly students' characteristics in different classrooms.

Besides student-centered curriculum, teachers are also the curriculum implementers who might take student voice into account for their own sake. Some teachers might claim that they lack time and resources for curriculum reform. However, they might never think of inviting students to help with their implementation. While teachers are overloaded with teaching and administrative work, students are more leisurely observing the dynamic inside the classroom. Students' feelings and thoughts toward the curriculum are valuable. Students might be able to point out problems that are hidden from their teachers since they are the first persons to experience the curriculum. Students might also remind their teachers

that some things in the implementation are very vital to students but are commonly ignored or regarded as minor in the eyes of teachers. As a matter of fact, teachers usually focus too much on structural matters and learning outcomes; in contrast, students tend to pay more attention to the learning process, and might have more insight into curriculum from a learner's perspective. For example, what learning strategies suit their learning styles; what they want to learn more; what their learning difficulties are; what topics are more attractive to them; and so on. Thus, student voice might help to link up the perspectives of teachers and students, and build a genuine teacher-student relationship. In addition, suggestions and views from students are sometimes innovative and distinct. Teachers might not be as creative and sensitive as their students. Hence, student voice is an important resource for teachers to improve their curriculum implementation, especially when they are trapped in heavy workloads.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the initiation of student voice in adult and tertiary education is much easier than that in secondary or even primary education, because of the difference in maturity. However, this does not mean that student voice in curriculum implementation is not feasible in secondary education. Many Western scholars like Rudduck (2007b), Mitra (2009) and Holdsworth (2000) have investigated student voice in secondary schools. In their studies, they proved that incorporating student voice in secondary schools is feasible, although many difficulties are often encountered. All of them believed that the initiation of student voice might improve the effectiveness and quality

of implemented curriculum. In the Hong Kong context of school reform, the present study supports Fielding's (2001) and Hart's (1992) viewpoints that the initiation of student voice is progressive. Teachers might play more active roles in initiating and inviting student voice at the very early stage. They might need to provide relevant training and include students' viewpoints on curriculum matters. When students have developed the required knowledge, skills and attitudes, they are more ready and capable of giving comments and suggestions regarding their experience of the curriculum, and are more willing to discuss curriculum matters with their teachers. Gradually, students might equip with greater autonomy to initiate discussions. By establishing a genuine teacher-student relationship, teachers are more willing to listen to students' opinions while students are more willing to share their viewpoints. Consequently, teachers and students share the same vision and improvement in curriculum implementation, and are willing to co-construct a best-fitting curriculum.

Meeting the Challenges for Involving Student Voice

To deal with the respective challenges of student voice, the authors provide suggestions for improvement.

Unbalanced power relations among school members

From the authors' viewpoint, the unequal power relations among school members are nearly impossible to avoid. The only concern is the difference in power intensity. From a managerial perspective, the school operation is more effective if power is centralized and distributed among a few school

members, such as principals and school administrators. However, in the recent education reform, there is a shift in power relations in schools. A more democratic school atmosphere is promoted in order to initiate diversified voice from stakeholders and shared responsibility among them. Such a change in school culture might take a long time, and traditional power figures like school principals, administrators and subject panels might share the responsibility for its encouragement. They might take active roles in inviting other voices to be heard in schools, and show their respect to the contributors. They might also take responsibility for establishing a harmonic, welcoming and rewarding school atmosphere so as to provide a secure and open channel for different voices. All above, it is necessary to develop clear school policy for different kinds of school decisions. For the efficiency of school operations, not all the decisions on school matters could be decentralized; the central figures in schools might need to make decisions on some occasions. Therefore, it is important for the central powers to negotiate with other school members and arrive at an agreement for different situations.

Mistrust between students and teachers

All people have assumptions, and it is difficult to alter one's perception about another person, especially when the perception is formed by tradition. Traditionally, teachers have believed that they are the only authorities of knowledge in the classroom and their students are immature and knowing little about the world. To change teachers' perceptions toward their profession and students, education and communication are

the only ways. Through education, teachers learn that they are no longer superior in the classroom. They also learn that their students have more and more opportunities to learn about their living world, and their experience is worth considering in the curricula. Sometimes, students might even know more than their teachers since they can explore all kinds of information and knowledge on their own through the Internet, and their well-educated parents can provide different learning opportunities to their children outside the school. Also, there are currently more resources and better facilities available in the community. Libraries, museums, exhibition halls and so on are available. Children could choose the learning place according to their interests during their leisure time. By communicating with students, teachers can understand more about students' backgrounds, life experience, strengths, and weaknesses. As a result, teachers can better prepare their teaching and connect the curriculum to students' previous knowledge. This not only improves the quality of teaching, but also makes the curriculum more relevant to students. Students can therefore be more engaged in their learning.

Students often believe that they are the victims of education, and that their teachers and schools are unwilling to listen to them. To change such attitudes and open up an authentic channel for student voice, teachers can take the lead. Teachers might need to establish a genuine and sincere classroom environment to include student voice. They might respectfully invite students to express their feelings and opinions toward curriculum matters. When students are willing to contribute their ideas, teachers should address

students' needs accordingly. Otherwise, students might think that teachers only pretend to welcome student voice but would never actively follow up. In addition, teachers should provide relevant training to their students so as to equip them with the ability to express their feelings and opinions properly and publicly. When students learn that their teachers would take their voice seriously and put it into action, they are more ready to provide helping hands in curriculum improvement.

Fictitious student voice

Teachers' attitude and quality of teaching might affect students' feedback to student voice activities. When teachers care about their students' learning and respect their opinions, students are more willing to tell the truth. Also, if students can see the effect of the student voice activities and know that what they have requested was put into practice, they might be inclined to collaborate with their teachers in building a learning community. Besides, teachers might need to establish an inclusive environment and listen to diverse student voices, and pay more attention to voices from minority students. In addition, by opening up different channels (formal or informal, written or verbal) for student voice, teachers might be able to listen to students with different characteristics. To avoid misinterpretation of student voice, teachers might need to move one step forward and check with their students for their interpretations.

Policy misalignment

Good supporting policy might predict reform success. It is very important for the policymaker to plan carefully

and consider the needs of reform in order to provide a complete set of resources to support the change. For example, professional training for teachers, training materials for students, pilot school programs, sharing sessions with exemplary schools, guidelines and implementation packages and so on are helpful. Besides, government policy should align with the promotion of student voice. It should not only stay at the implementation perspective, but also involve the design and evaluation perspectives. It should also consider policy and practice from both macro and micro perspectives. Above all, the support of principals, school administrators and teachers has a determining effect on the success of such innovation.

Extra engagement for teachers

Teachers always face difficulties in setting priorities for reform policy. Some might think that student voice can help improve present situations, and is worth trying out; however, they might have already been occupied by heavy workloads at schools. Therefore, it is important for policymakers, principals and school administrators to support the change by reducing teachers' workloads and providing relevant resources. For instance, if schools treat student voice as one of the school activities and include it in the school timetable, teachers might consider it more seriously and free up more time for such innovation.

Teachers' diverse views toward student voice

Everyone has his or her own view toward the same policy. Some might support while others might protest. To promote such

a new idea as student voice in curriculum implementation might take a long time. If teachers can see the importance of student voice and its positive effects, they are more willing to view it from another perspective. Therefore, sharing the success of the pilot schools might be one of the methods to encourage teachers to try it out in their teaching.

In conclusion, a complete set of policies with supportive materials and a fundamental change in school culture might win teachers' support for such initiatives, which might in turn lead to the success of student voice in curriculum implementation.

Involving Student Voice in Hong Kong Context

From the authors' viewpoint, student voice in curriculum implementation is a possible area of study in the Hong Kong context. The following are our analyses in three arenas: policy, school, and classroom.

Policy

Although the wave of education reform in Hong Kong is for the students, the policy documents only include the corresponding adults in schools (Curriculum Development Council [CDC], 2000, p. 6; CDC, 2001, p. 15). It is not until the 2005 consultation document that student role is mentioned (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005, p. 140):

Senior secondary students ... should take charge of their own learning to fully realise the benefits of "3+3+4". They should:

- provide feedback to teachers on how to help them learn better;
- contribute, along with schools, teachers and other parties to their own whole-person development;
- pursue study in both academic and other learning experiences and avoid devoting all effort to preparing for examinations only; and
- engage as a life-long learner. (para. 13.18)

The latest guide for learning and teaching effectiveness of New Senior Secondary Curriculum (NSSC) published in 2009 emphasizes that knowledge building should be in a “community” such that teachers and students should interact in order to co-construct knowledge (CDC, 2009a, p. 6). What is more, students as one of the stakeholder groups might also be engaged so as to ensure success of the reform (CDC, 2009b, p. 6). Sustainable communication strategies should be devised. For students, it suggested:

- Communicating with students through assemblies, seminars, talks, pamphlets, newsletters, websites and surveys
- Sharing information with students in areas such as the SS [Senior Secondary] curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and career guidance
- Forming a student association to allow students to express their views. (CDC, 2009b, p. 6)

In addition, learning communities are regarded as one of the important teaching and learning strategies for the NSSC of Liberal Studies. Nevertheless, the partnership relations between teachers and students are only limited

to the co-construction of knowledge (CDC & Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 109). There is no description on the improvement of curriculum implementation. In our opinion, learning communication between teachers and students might be extended to the curriculum implementation level or even school organization level.

Even though there is a breakthrough in education reform that opportunities for student voice are provided in the policy document, it seems that the major focus of such education reform is to equip teachers for change by means of professional development and resources allocation. Little concern is placed on consultation or interactive feedback from the stakeholders. Above all, with a top-down hierarchical structure in Hong Kong, the administrative policy is imposed and dominated by the adults, the policymaker and school administrators. Students can hardly find a chance to “say a word” on the curriculum. The authors believe that the inclusion of student role in school reform is a good start but it is not enough. More concrete support and resources are necessary. For example, sample plans and schedules for the initiation of student voice should be provided. Official student associations or function groups in pilot schools might act as pilot student voice initiation activities to demonstrate the influence of such a change. Otherwise, such a policy might only engage in idle theorizing.

School

From the authors’ observations, it appears that the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation is a new concept

to Hong Kong secondary schools, which might face much more challenges than schools in Western societies. In Chinese societies, adults are the authorities in the community, in school, and at home. In schools, only principals and teachers have the power to adjust school curriculum. Students are still respectful and passive learners who have no say in what and how they learn. Even though more and more student-centered teaching strategies are adopted in the curriculum, almost all are implemented from teachers' perspectives.

For the teachers, every school subject has its subject meetings where most of the curriculum issues are discussed and decided. However, subject panels, usually comprised of authorities in the particular subjects, make the final decisions to curriculum issues. In some traditional schools, subject panels might even be the central power of curriculum decision-making who are supposed to announce their decisions in the subject meetings. Since the 21st-century education reform began, schools have been more willing to distribute power to teachers. More and more schools have begun to share power among teachers. In some schools, subject panels might make curriculum decisions together with their teammates. Teachers are able to share their viewpoints and comment on previous or existing curricula. Nonetheless, teachers might never think of consulting students on curriculum issues before the meetings, or inviting their students to join the meetings. In other words, subject meetings are only closed-door meetings involving subject teachers. Student voice is always excluded.

For the students, many schools have their own established

student union. Usually, senior form students with good conduct and academic achievement are invited to organize the student union. Schools provide training and resources to the executive members of the student union. From teachers' perspective, a student union is an official student association of student voice, advocated by the school. It serves as a bridge between school and students, which helps to improve teacher-student relationships. From students' perspective, the student union is responsible for their welfare, and organizes different activities for students to join. Occasionally, schools might consult the student union on superficial school matters such as school rules, dress code, and school events like graduation ceremonies. Nevertheless, school adults seldom consult the student union about school curriculum, and the executive members of the student union rarely ask for any opportunity to offer their views on school or curriculum issues. Executives of the student union act as models in school — that is, students who have behaved well and obeyed school regulations. Even though some of these students might not be completely satisfied with the school curriculum, they know the school game well, such that they prefer to concentrate on their own studies rather than questioning the school curriculum. Thus, it seems that the student union might partially serve as a channel for student voice, but only at a superficial level.

Classroom

In the classroom, teachers have more flexibility in implementing the curriculum since they are the only adults who can decide what and how to teach.

According to our observation, teachers have diverse teaching styles. Some very traditional teachers are distanced from their students, and rarely discuss curriculum matters with them, whereas other teachers are liberal, close to their students and willing to discuss curriculum issues with them. Those teachers who appreciate student input have different ways of collecting students' feedback. Some teachers might solicit students' opinions openly in class in the middle or at the end of the academic year. Others might invite individual students to chat with them during recess time, lunch time, and after school. However, only a few teachers initiate student voice in curriculum implementation on a voluntary basis. Very often, teachers are exhausted with administrative and teaching work and cannot spare extra time to do so.

Students seldom initiate a discussion on curriculum implementation. Most students might think that it is the teachers' responsibility to design, implement and evaluate the school curriculum. They might believe that they are expected to receive the curriculum and have no say in it. When students are dissatisfied with the curriculum they have experienced, they might only share their opinions about the implemented curriculum among themselves in leisure time. Although some senior form students might occasionally be willing to share their views on the curriculum with teachers, many students swallow the dissatisfaction and opt to attend tutorials offered by private organizations.

Although every class has its own class club, its main function is to collect money from classmates and organize class activities such as Christmas parties. These clubs seldom

serve as a communicative channel between teachers and students.

In the authors' opinion, educational change is traditionally advocated by the Hong Kong government. Therefore, the education policy in Hong Kong determines the existence of channels for student voice in curriculum implementation. This is true not only in Hong Kong, but also in the Western world. In Western countries, student voice has been getting more and more attention in secondary schools during the last decade because of the advocacy by the governments. The governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia provide not only relevant resources and training packages to support the initiation of student voice, but also funding to support important research into student voice. In Hong Kong, however, student role in curriculum was only mentioned in an education document in 2009. This is therefore a very new concept in Hong Kong secondary education, and will require a long period to implement.

It is also predictable that the initiation of student voice in curriculum implementation will meet more challenges in Hong Kong than in Western countries. In Chinese societies, "great respect and appreciation for teachers and mentors" is a cherished tradition. It is not only customary for teachers to be the only authorities responsible for all decisions in school; students also believe that they should respect teachers' decisions. Students do not bother to involve themselves in curriculum development; they do not know that they have the right to do so. Although some teachers are quite liberal and welcome student voice, most teachers would find it

unacceptable if they felt their dignity and teaching profession were being challenged by their students. These teachers might take it for granted that they have power over their students and are the decision-makers of the curriculum. In their perception, students might only be children who know very little or even nothing about the teaching profession and curriculum implementation. As a result, teachers might not believe that their students have the potential to provide any references on curriculum decisions.

In addition, these teachers might worry that students' involvement would cause trouble and interfere with well-organized and controlled school operations rather than helping teachers improve the curriculum. Very often, curriculum decisions are only disclosed to students after decisions are made. It seems that discussing curriculum decisions with students is a taboo. However, it might not be the case for all the teachers. Teachers who trust their students and are willing to invite them to provide feedback to their implemented curriculum can understand more about how their students perceive the curriculum, and can gain insights in curriculum improvement from their students.

Conclusion

Despite the predictable challenges in initiating student voice, the authors support such innovation in curriculum implementation in Hong Kong secondary schools. In line with scholars like Fielding (2001), Mitra (2003) and Rudduck (2007b), the authors believe that student voice is worth hearing. It is unquestionable that the goal of curriculum

implementation is for the students; therefore, students should be given the right to choose the most suitable curriculum for their own good and have a say in their desired curriculum. The initiation of student voice is a possible way to engage students and give them a sense of ownership to their learning. Through this, teachers can better implement the curriculum to cater to their students' needs and make the curriculum more relevant and connected to their students. In addition, the initiation of student voice might improve teacher-student relationships so that both parties treat each other "with respect and trust rather than fear and threats of retribution" (Smyth, 2007, p. 655). Both teachers and students might grow together. Student voice promotes teachers' professionalism and students' metacognitive abilities to learn (Fullan, 2007, p. 35). Consequently, an authentic student-centered curriculum might be implemented in Hong Kong. The authors therefore believe that the innovation of student voice in curriculum implementation is a worthy initiative in Hong Kong secondary schools.

Notes

1. Bobbitt (1918/1972) defined curriculum as a "series of things which children and youth must do and experience by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life; and to be in all respects what adults should be" (p. 42; as cited in Jackson, 1992, p. 7).
2. Marsh (1997) defined it as "an interrelated set of plans and experiences which a student completes under the guidance of the school" (p. 5; see also Marsh & Stafford, 1988; Marsh & Willis, 2007, p. 15).

3. In addition to *student voice*, there are three other key terms relating to the inquiry of student perspective: *student participation*, *student consultation*, and *student involvement*. In the third annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1919, *student participation* was first included in the academic database of SAGE used to represent the inquiry of student perspective.

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Appendix: Attitudes and Practices of Teachers and Students in the Banking Education Theory

Teacher	Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher teaches. • The teacher knows everything. • The teacher thinks. • The teacher talks. • The teacher disciplines. • The teacher chooses and enforces his/her choice. • The teacher acts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students are taught. • The students know nothing. • The students are thought about. • The students listen — meekly. • The students are disciplined. • The students comply.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher chooses the program content. • The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority. • The teacher is the subject of the learning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher. • The students (who were not consulted) adapt to it. • [Teachers] set in opposition to the freedom of the students. • The students are mere objects.

Source: Freire (2000, p. 73).