

## **Are ‘textbooks’ a barrier for teacher autonomy? A case study from a Hong Kong Primary School**

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**Abstract:** This case study provided insights into the ways in which ‘textbooks’ can be used during capacity building professional development on a sliding scale. The evidence suggests that the informants of this study use of ‘textbooks’ is driven by a number of factors in a reskilling process designed to support teachers in a collaborative arrangement. We argue that where a commercially produced ‘textbook’ is used as a supporting reference point in association with a strong ‘sharing leadership’ that promotes collaborative and ‘a critical friend’ relationships across a whole school, it is possible for ‘textbooks’ to be an important factor in facilitating increased teacher autonomy to plan curriculum, but there remains the potential for a recursivity of how things were known and practiced in ‘textbooks’, unless there is a way for teachers to locate their subjectivity and complicity.

**Keyword:** textbook, case study, Hong Kong, teacher autonomy, learning communities, instructional leadership

### **1. Introduction**

As two tertiary teacher trainers required to undertake Field Experience observations of students training to be Primary specialist teachers in Hong Kong government schools, we were both struck by an overwhelming reliance on the use of ‘textbooks’ (commercially developed course books and associated learning support materials) by Primary specialist teachers. It seemed to confirm a growing hypothesis that the intensification of teachers’ work in Hong Kong was directly related to what we described as an invisible hand in the classroom: ‘textbooks’ controlling teachers’ work.

What really stood out during our initial investigation was what seemed to be a lack of close reference by these Primary specialist teachers to the broad curriculum guidelines set by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). Our growing beliefs about the almost sacrosanct use of ‘textbooks’ over the Curriculum Guidelines seemed to be confirmed when one observed teacher seemed to follow the ‘textbook’ with almost no deviation as she taught. However it was not until we returned to this school to find out more about how and why ‘textbooks’ were used, that we realized in this context ‘textbooks’ were used in another manner: as a reference point and resource for the reskilling of teachers, in relation to what their pre-service training skimmed over. Instead of focusing on the invisible hand determining the delivery of curriculum in the classroom, a more productive research focus began to emerge relating to a two way relationship that existed between ‘textbook’ use and teacher development. It had become clear with the arrival of a new Principal in this school, his philosophy of ‘shared leadership’ and the development of a professional learning community, that the use of ‘textbooks’ could play a more productive role in the reskilling of teachers. In an era of ongoing education reform and persistent bad press about the failure of more recent reform initiatives, was it possible that by using ‘textbooks’ as one

resource, teachers could be reskilled to prepare, deliver and evaluate curriculum with a increasing independence?

## **2. Background**

In Hong Kong, both subsidised and non subsidised government schools have had a long tradition of using commercial 'textbooks'. Consequently how 'textbooks' are used in Hong Kong schools is very much shaped within the local educational context. Hong Kong schools tend to follow 'textbooks' in a prescriptive manner (Anderson, 1998). As there are no officially published or prescribed 'textbooks' in Hong Kong, the supply of 'textbooks' is derived solely from private or commercial publishers. The Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), a division of the EMB, provides guidelines on different subject syllabuses, and then evaluates privately prepared 'textbooks' for suitability against the syllabuses. The evaluation criteria include coverage, content, sequence, exercises, language, illustration and format of 'textbooks'. To facilitate schools choosing quality 'textbooks', the CDI maintains a Recommended Textbook List for schools' reference. Schools are encouraged to choose 'textbooks' from this list although there is no requirement to do so.

Hong Kong's education system historically has been sensitive to changes in its economic profile (Adamson & Li, 1999) and the current raft of education reforms is grappling with how best to meet the changing needs of the community as well as to sustain the ongoing economic and financial development of Hong Kong (Adamson, Kwan & Chan, 2000). The Education Commission (2004) stated that teachers and principals should be given more flexibility and autonomy in exercising their professionalism in the development of appropriate teaching strategies to cater for the needs of their students and schools. In this sense, some powers have been devolved to the school level. Seven major initiatives make up the blueprint for educational reform including curriculum and professional development.

There remains a fundamental tension between the pre-reform nature of curriculum premised by the 'Three T's' and the nature of the current reform requiring a strong focus on teacher and principal autonomy to address the diversity of local school based needs. Teachers are now required to be more facilitative and autonomous as well as use a variety of teaching and assessment strategies based on their students' experiences and needs English Language Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2004). However, recently, a report as Lau (2006 'para'4) stated, the current use of 'textbooks' in Hong Kong schools tends to merely encourage students to absorb information in the 'textbooks' rather than learning how to learn. Such media reports only add to the growing unease in Hong Kong about the use of 'textbooks' in schools.

## **3. Research Purpose**

In the light of the above pressures for change, a developing controversy over the widespread use of 'textbooks' in Hong Kong schools and a reform process that has a strong focus on teacher and principal autonomy to address school-based needs, we want to understand how teachers can develop a capacity to develop curriculum alongside the use of 'textbooks' as a resource. With so many pressures on teacher's time, it would seem that teachers need a degree of support to consistently deliver quality lessons, yet by using 'textbooks', teachers risk losing their professional credibility and independence as they seem to be handing over what they do as professionals to an outside entity. They further risk becoming mere technicians in the teaching

and learning process and becoming ideologically deskilled as by deferring the goals and purposes of their work, they lose a degree of personal engagement and in this sense their own agency (Hall, 2004). In the light of the above, we are interested in how through the use of 'textbooks' as a resource, it is possible to reskill teachers so that they can develop and deliver the curriculum with a greater degree of independence.

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

In this paper, we draw on the limited scholarship relating to the intensification of teachers' work, including Smyth et al (2000) and Stoffels (2005) but more particularly the work of Gitlin (2001) and his notions of 'the threat of intensification' and 'the self-regulating tendencies of teachers'. Gitlin (2001) draws on the work of Lawn and Ozga (1981) who espoused a 'proletarian thesis' suggesting that over time increasing numbers of workers are deskilled whereby their conceptual skills are taken over by management, limiting them to repetitive tasks that do not facilitate a holistic understanding of the processes they are engaged in. Apple (1989) extended and refined this theory. He suggested that through the process of deskilling workers of their conceptual skills, they often underwent processes of being reskilled with other organisational skills. Apple (1989) further suggested that that these processes were often related to the workers' responses and resistance to structures in the economy. Apple (1989) included the work of classroom teachers in processes of deskilling and reskilling. He focussed on the impact on teachers' work when administrators and or the State determined the educational goals and teachers were left to 'execute' these goals. Apple (1982) contends that pre-packaged curriculum materials used in schools both control and deskill teachers by separating their mental labour or conceptualisation from manual labour or execution, thus effecting teachers' capacity to devise curriculum materials suited to their contexts and needs. This raises questions about the use of texts in schools, teacher responses to these texts and the influence of 'textbooks' on teacher's decision making. Apple (1993) later contends that associated with increasing bureaucratic pressures on teachers manifest through the act of teaching being dominated by prescribed lists of sequential behaviourally defined competencies, outcomes and objectives, pre-test and post-tests and a dominance of standardised text and worksheet materials, there is a massive intensification of teacher work. Yet the intensification of teachers' work may not be related solely to an act of control. Smyth et al (2000) suggests that as part of the process of deskilling teachers, there remains the possibility of an unintended outcome of reskilling. This argument acknowledges that some teachers will increase their skills and expertise and that while the nature of the skills will be managerially determined, it will also require compliance from the workforce.

Gitlin's work (2001) extends the notions of teacher deskilling and reskilling and contends that because work intensification is subject to experience and each person deals with this in their own way, the notion should be rather 'the threat of intensification'. This means that while certain forces may act to intensify teachers' work, teachers' individual responses will affect the impact of these forces. This raises an issue of just how do teachers sustain their work and challenge 'the threat of intensification'. Gitlin (2001) further contends that because teachers understand the threat of intensification, they are able to make adjustments to their practices to minimize the potential work intensification by employing practices that seemed to encourage 'more routinised, fact-orientated curriculum' and thus confront the immediacy, simultaneity and multidimensionality of their work context' (p. 254). McNeil (1988) examined this issue from the perspective of the nature of constraints placed on teachers by administrators and the state as well

as their response to these constraints. Her research revealed that where teachers experience a lack of control over their work, they commonly put into place a defensive force relating to teaching as a coping mechanism. The defensive force they swing into action might result in oversimplified lessons, following the recommended text book or allowing students to engage in menial tasks as they attended to administrative requirements.

Stoffels (2005) contends that for most teachers, the threat of intensification of their work has resulted in more than a debilitating 'functional response' to the use of 'textbooks' as a 'virtual script' for their classroom teaching'. Drawing on McNeil's (1988) notion of 'defensive teaching', characterized by an oversimplified content and lesson structure and a slavish following of oversimplified texts, Stoffels (2005) went on to suggest that in an era of work intensification and the use of 'textbooks, teachers will largely relinquish their autonomy to select or develop materials based on their professional knowledge of their students' needs. He further suggests that teachers self regulate their personal initiative and intellectual engagement with the curriculum and in this sense, a threat of work intensification has the capacity to truncate the possibility of teacher agency in the curriculum while effectively compromising teaching and learning.

In a climate of work intensification and increasing devolution of powers to the local setting, how can schools be transformed? Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers who felt supported in their ongoing learning and classroom practice were more committed and effective than those who did not. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) confirmed Rosenholtz's findings and suggested that when teachers had opportunities for collaborative inquiry and related learning, the result was a body of wisdom about teaching that could be widely shared. Later research revealed that there were improvements in schools where the faculty was functioning as a learning community (Newmann & Wehlage (1995); Scribner & Reyes, 1999). Hord (2004) stated that the most successful professional learning communities were characterized by an external opportunity and lead by a powerful administrator who transformed the external force into energy for internal change. Put more succinctly, where there is a strong administrator prepared to foster a sense of a learning community, premised on promoting a supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and the application of that learning and shared personal practice, both teacher and student learning outcomes will increase (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 2000).

## **5. Sampling**

We approached through different channels a number of government primary schools who might have been willing to accept researchers towards the end of the academic year. The class size was approximately 35 students. The class was a mixed ability class that stayed in the same room and subject teachers came to the students. We chose to observe four different subject lessons. One teacher (Ms. Emily, anonym) taught the English and Social Studies lessons and the other teacher (Ms. Sarah) taught Putonghua and the Mathematics lessons. The teachers had completed the required training to be appointed to teach their subjects in a government school and both were experienced teachers.

## **6. Methodology**

This research chose the case study approach because as an inquiry tool that investigates contemporary phenomenon within real-life contexts using multiple sources of evidence, it has

the potential to provide rich descriptions of the context within which teachers operate. (Yin, 2005).

We used video and time interval observations of four lessons in the P1 class as well as interviews with the two class subject teachers and the Principal (Mr. Wong) to collect preliminary data, based on the work of Alexander (2003), and drew on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and applied their data coding analysis technique to develop the analysis framework.

## **7. Findings**

In this section we provide a summary of the narratives of the three case study subjects relating to their perspectives on (i) the rationale for using ‘textbooks’, (ii) issues arising from the use of ‘textbooks’, and (iii) strategies to address / cope with the arising issues.

### **7.1 Rationale behind the use of ‘textbooks’**

#### **7.1.1 Time saving**

Teachers adopted ‘textbooks’ because it saved preparation time.

It takes a long time to prepare the teaching materials. If they can provide us with some of them, it helps us a lot (Ms Emily).

They (‘textbooks’) are useful in some way. They already include some items, such as worksheets and teaching aides, so that teachers can save their time (Mr. Wong).

...it is easier and more convenient for us when textbooks come along with Learning Support Materials. Teachers can have more time on lesson preparation and material delivery if the teaching tools are provided. Good textbooks and teaching tools can save a lot of our time (Ms Sarah).

#### **7.1.2 Teacher enhancement**

##### **7.1.2.a Technological enhancement**

Good ‘textbooks’ not only minimize teacher preparation time, they can enhance the quality of the teaching and learning. Now days with the extensive use of technology, ‘textbooks’ usually include CD ROMs and e-learning services through interactive computer games and aesthetically pleasing visual aids.

If I was a student, I would find it very interesting as the interactive games included in the CD, help me understand the content, vocabulary, and the structures. IT reinforces my teaching (Ms Emily).

Technologically enhanced ‘textbooks’ also facilitate individual learning. Ms Emily highlighted a tool that assists her students learn outside the classroom as follows:

...an eye-pen...It scans the word and then the pen will read it out in English to the students...They (Students) can go out to restaurants and as they wait, they can take their pen out and learn. Learning can take place anywhere.

##### **7.1.2.b Friendly teaching tools**

The variety of teaching tools offered by ‘textbooks’ provide a ‘fun’ and stimulating way for the students to learn and teachers can pass out the ready-for-use teaching tools to students to consolidate their learning.

When they (students) play the games they become more interested. It has some games like card games, pictures and board games that help me as a teacher. (Ms Emily).

Publishers provide different teaching methods, an arrangement of content and user-friendly teaching tools which can enhance teaching and learning quality (Ms Sarah).

#### *7.1.2.c Helpful assessment tools*

'Textbooks' are designed to support a diversity of student learning needs, assist teachers track individual learning development and adjust their teaching accordingly.

It ('textbook') includes assessment tools which can help teachers understand the pupil's background – what they have learnt and what they are going to learn in the future. They can see the progression on not only in P1 but from P1 to P6 (Ms Emily).

#### *7.1.2.d Address gaps in teacher training*

Although teachers are qualified professionals, they also have their limitations and may not be good at all aspects of teaching, especially curriculum design.

Teachers are trained to teach, but they have received insufficient training in curriculum design. (Mr Wong).

The textbook helps me organize the curriculum and helps me organize what I have to tell my pupils, and what the students must learn in P1, P2 and so on (Ms Emily).

Mr. Wong realised that while it was not the right time to ask his teachers to create their own curriculum, they were on the right track. He said:

We have to build up our professional abilities gradually. Professional development takes time. Not all our teachers are professional enough and able to work independently and create their own curriculum.

### **7.2 *Issues arising from the use of 'textbooks'***

Respondents tend to highly value benefits brought by 'textbooks', yet there are some concerns:

They ('textbooks') are not comprehensive or completed. Teachers have to adapt the content (Mr. Wong).

Further, different students have different needs and so it is impossible for standardised 'textbooks' to fulfill all needs. Both teachers found insufficiencies in the 'textbooks'. For example, in a diverse classroom, some students have advanced skills while some students need more guidance.

...there are some very smart ones and I want them ('textbooks') to provide us with something that is a little bit beyond the curriculum. To support me work with the needs of the different students (Ms Emily).

Many textbooks lack variety. While we strive for creativity, they ('textbooks') provide insufficient support to our teaching objectives (Ms Sarah).

### **7.3 *Strategies to address / cope with the arising issues***

#### *7.3.1.a Principal's vision and leadership*

Mr. Wong's vision is an important factor in the way 'textbooks' are used in this school. His administrative philosophy has meant that a range of new policies have been implemented as he aligns the practices of the school the EMB's requirements and his vision.

...the schools' culture is very important. Does everyone strive for excellence? Is the core educational objectives based on the need to benefit each child? These are the questions we are concerned about. The educational value is very important. It is more than just a slogan, but also a guide for our daily lives. For example, if we want to encourage children to respect each other, teachers should praise their students frequently in class, in the playground and in assembly. Finally, students not only learn to respect their classmates and teachers at school, but also their parents (Mr. Wong).

Both Ms Emily and Ms Sarah supported Mr. Wong's leadership because he allowed them more independence to teach. Ms Emily said that Mr. Wong never blamed her if she could not complete the 'textbook'.

Ms Sarah further added how the Principal assists teachers to adapt and develop as teachers. She said:

Different workshops are given to help teachers adjust their teaching methods especially for inexperienced teachers.

#### *7.3.1.b Teacher Empowerment*

Teachers might be uncertain of making changes to the curriculum and Mr. Wong understood these concerns. He tried to empower teachers by providing a variety of supporting measures to encourage them to develop professionally.

We want to let teachers understand that we can't just teach our students by lectures, but also by action. When the entire school understands the educational value, teachers will be more likely to invest more in their teaching. Also teachers have to be responsible for their decisions. My job is to empower my teachers to make their own decisions (Mr. Wong).

#### *7.3.1.c Teacher Autonomy*

When teachers have a greater degree of autonomy to make their own decisions about lesson planning, a curriculum responding to local needs is more likely to be created. Both teachers reported that they welcomed having a greater degree of autonomy in their teaching.

I can teach what is in the book, but I have the right to say if I want more... We sometimes find that the content is too easy or too difficult and we modify it and give them more or less... That is our decision so we cater for individual differences. We have changed parts of the teaching and units because they ('textbooks') do not fit in with our teaching decision... I know my pupils and if I find some parts of the lesson or unit are not suitable, I just cut it. My pupils are the most important factor in what I teach and how I teach (Ms Emily).

The content must match our teaching objectives and its learning activity. We won't cover the whole textbook. For example, the textbook has 20 chapters; we only cover half of it. If the textbook doesn't have the topics we need, we will find other teaching materials. If we find the textbook is not desirable, we will adapt it (Ms Sarah).

#### *7.3.1.d New Educational Direction*

Teachers and students are expected to follow the school's new education direction and practices. Mr. Wong elaborated on what he sees as a core teaching principle. He said:

Teachers are told to teach their students in another way according to two basic teaching requirements of less teacher talk and more student participation. In sum, we can't solely rely on the textbook and professional development is very important. Teachers have to change their thoughts and teaching approach towards the new educational direction.

### *7.3.2 To build up a mechanism for choosing appropriate 'textbooks'*

Since 'textbooks' play a crucial role in learning, teachers should be very careful when they choose their 'textbooks'. The respondents had developed criteria which include indicators and procedures on how to select the 'textbooks' and they are involved in this process.

#### *7.3.2.a Indicators for textbook selection*

The 'textbook selection' evaluation form provided a list of criteria for teachers to assess the appropriateness of 'textbooks'. The Teachers' Resource Book should be arranged in a logical order and needed to be pragmatically and developmentally appropriate. The questions in the Student Activity Book needed to be inspiring and the exercises needed to be interesting and developmentally appropriate. Teacher Guides and Notes should specify the learning steps clearly and provide additional and interesting activities. Also, the overall content should include the different aspects of learning, such as reading and listening. All information had to be accurate and match the learning objectives. Supplementary materials should have online support and provide extra reading for students to extend their learning. There should be test papers with making proformas.

#### *7.3.2.b Procedure for textbook selection.*

Selecting an appropriate 'textbook' is not easy. Based on our interviews, the 'textbook' selection process for an appropriate 'textbook' for each subject and each year level involved many people, procedures, and hours of work. First, publishers are invited to introduce their textbooks to teachers. Then all the textbooks from the different publishers are collected and given to all teachers comment on after reading. Then different working groups are formed according to their teaching subjects and grade levels which exchange ideas relating to the quality and based on different criteria, they grade the books. Then two 'top' publishers are identified. Finally, a book selection committee is formed by two Principals, one coming from a sister school, two vice Principals, two subject panelists and the school director. They make the final decision based on the books' content, quality, support, price and teacher's comments.

### *7.3.3 Professional development strategies*

According to the respondents, 'textbooks' had their limitations. However, the school was aware of these problems and had developed a number of policies to resolve them.

#### *7.3.3.a Lesson preparation*

No matter how good 'textbooks' are, they need to be manipulated and adapted to the local context and classroom contexts. Mr. Wong viewed his staff as cooks, but the proof of the cooking was in the taste:

...the effectiveness of the textbooks very much depends on how teachers utilize these materials effectively ...teachers have to prepare the lessons individually before group meetings.

#### *7.3.3.b Weekly group lesson preparation*

A Chinese proverb is 'More people can do a better job' and being Chinese, Mr. Wong understands this proverb. He has asked his teachers to weekly discuss their lessons with their colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching as he values teachers learning and working cooperatively.

One major part of our drive to improve professional development program is the Group Lesson Preparation program. Teachers exchange their ideas on how to teach a particular lesson effectively. They may work out different ways, such as multimedia, drama and stories to teach a particular lesson. They also discuss which learning focus they should concentrate on, such as emotion-oriented and analysis oriented teaching (Mr. Wong).

#### *7.3.3.c Class observation*

Each person has their own strengths and in this context teachers learn from each other by observing and sharing classes. Other strategies to facilitate professional development were highlighted:

Teachers are formed into groups and periodically obliged to observe their colleagues' lessons and give feedback to each other. There are three teachers in a group...We won't just point out teachers' weaknesses. We also cherish teachers' strengths. We discussed after the observation and evaluated the lesson (Mr. Wong).

#### *7.3.3.d 'Friendly and collaboration' policy*

Mr. Wong was proud of the 'friendly and collaboration' policy. Administrators showed their support to teachers not only by words, but also by actions. They taught with teachers in order to provide an in-service supervision. They give feedback to teachers after the class observation. Teachers and administrators discuss and share their thoughts frankly in order to strive for a better lesson plan for the next lesson. Then administrators found another time to observe the class again to see if the teachers need more support.

## **8. Discussion**

The respondents of this study use the language of expediency and capacity building to think and speak about their use of 'textbooks'. The respondents used terms such as 'easier and convenient' and to 'save time' not to imply an idleness or passivity on their part, but rather as McNeil (1988) found elsewhere, to reflect their desire to find ways to deal with forces constantly crowding in on their already overloaded day. A great deal of daily teacher work goes into ensuring that they can meet the new and often complex requirements and according to Clem, they often do not have time to prepare a quality creative lessons as they are under enormous pressure (2006 – South China Post 16/5/2006). In this sense their work has intensified.

Secondly, the respondents indicated that they use 'textbooks' as a resource to build their capacity to plan and teach with increasing independence from 'textbooks'. Devolution has meant Mr. Wong has greater administrative latitude to respond to the aspirations of his school community, the freedom to direct resources and the autonomy to build and shape a working and

learning environment that he feels meets the needs of all in his school. One of his stated policy thrusts related to developing a supportive learning community (Hord, 2004) through what he called a 'Friendly and Collaborative' policy. He understood that primary teachers in Hong Kong enter the profession trained in the subject knowledge and to apply this in the classroom but having limited exposure to processes associated with turning the broad EMB curriculum goals into curriculum at the classroom level (Fok et al, 2004). Further, it appears that Mr. Wong actively shares his leadership and encourages collective learning among his teachers (Flemming and Thompson, 2004) so that his teachers' capacity is enhanced to draw on their tacit stocks of knowledge.

A crucial component of the capacity building initiative is Mr. Wong's advocacy of a critical perspective on suggestions in the 'textbook'. He is very aware of the pitfalls associated with an uncritical use of 'textbooks'. Accordingly, he wants his teachers to learn to adjust and manipulate 'textbook' suggestions to suit their professional contexts. In this sense, Mr. Wong views 'textbooks' as an initial teaching resource that staff can draw on as they extend the presented ideas in collaborative arrangements with other staff.

The whole school implementation of the 'Friendly and Collaborative' policy requires all teachers and administrators to take part in a number of processes as both learners and leaders where 'textbooks' are prominent. In Group Lesson Preparation time, teachers use 'textbooks' as a reference point to develop a locally responsive school-based curriculum. Ms Emily indicated how these groups encourage teachers to plan curriculum across the whole school and year levels in relation to teachers' professional knowledge rather than the times suggested by 'textbooks'. The learning culture in this school continues both formally and informally during school and after hours. Collaboration based on a critical review of 'textbook' suggestions in relation to teachers' professional knowledge as Hord (2004) found elsewhere assists teachers to move beyond the known 'insufficiency of the 'textbook'.

The respondents indicated that they believe the above new school policies has increased their confidence. They know they are supported by their Principal and colleagues. They feel they can make informed decisions about curriculum development independent of the 'textbook' and thus are willing to modify, manipulate, and adjust curriculum according to their local context. This seems to support the findings of Newman & Wehlage (1995) and Scribner & Reyes (1999) that learning communities support collegiate growth and development.

Mr. Wong asserted that 'textbooks' are increasingly being used as a reference point and through the daily cycles of teaching, group planning and evaluation, his teachers are developing increasing independence to move beyond the suggested curriculum and teaching. For example, Ms Emily indicated that where she felt the content was too easy or too hard, she would make appropriate adjustments to her teaching. The respondents feel that can move beyond the objectives stated in the 'textbook' that do not reflect local needs and modify the curriculum and teaching. This means they are modifying their approach to teaching.

However the fundamental question remains: Does the use of 'textbooks' create a barrier for teacher autonomy? Drawing on the work of Giddens (1979) it is possible to critically examine the issue of power and recursivity of beliefs and practices in this context, which threatens to deny teacher autonomy. Power in this workplace is based on a two-way relationship. Teachers and the

invisible hand of ‘textbooks’ writers make up an important component in the curriculum provided in this ‘institution’ which in turn sustains and supports beliefs and practices through the recursivity of professional lives. Over the years teachers have acquired a good deal of knowledge about the conditions that reproduce the ‘institution’ they work in through resources and tacit stocks of knowledge they draw on. This knowledge is not explicitly codified and if asked, teachers would have difficulty summarizing the knowledge they draw on as they engage in the social life of the ‘institution’. Rather, over time they have become routinised sedimented and historicised into those beliefs and practices that make up the curriculum (Fay, 1987). Through non-reflective actions and by the mobilisation of the resources they draw on, including ‘textbooks’, teacher actions reproduce established ways of doing things.

In this sense, there is a recursivity of how things are known and accomplished in the school, related to the fact that teachers draw on past knowledge and practices bequeathed in ‘textbooks’ as well as their own beliefs and practices. ‘Textbooks’ act as a barrier to their autonomy. Deep changes need to be introduced and the ontology of their ‘Friendly Cooperative’ activities needs to be supplemented with an ontology of embodiment, traditions, historicity and embeddedness, to locate their subjectivity and complicity in how things are known and practiced to discover more about how capacity building school-based curriculum development could facilitate teacher autonomy

## **9. Conclusion**

Many teachers in Hong Kong have limited knowledge and skills related to taking the curriculum guidelines set by the EMB and developing their own school-based curriculum and associated units of work (Fok et.al., 2004). Further, the work of teachers in Hong Kong has intensified. In such a context, teachers have had to develop ways to survive and manage the competing demands made of them.

One response to an intensification of teachers’ work in Hong Kong has been the reliance of teachers on commercial ‘textbooks’ because they believe that by using a ‘textbook’ they can still deliver quality teaching and learning. This belief is strengthened by the knowledge that local ‘textbook’ publishers have worked in a closely with the CDI to ensure the broad curriculum guidelines and approaches are followed in ‘textbooks’. ‘Textbooks’ can also be used to reskill teachers to manage the development of school-based curriculum with an increased independence. In an era of work intensification, instead of teachers being reskilled to primarily take on a plethora of administration duties, reducing teaching to student ‘busy-work’ (Apple, 1989), ‘textbooks’ can also be used as a tool in whole school professional development capacity building initiatives.

Such initiatives based around the use of ‘textbooks’ as a key teacher resource, requires strong leadership premised on the notion of shared leadership (Hord, 2004). By working in collaboratively to plan, teach, observe and act as critical friends, teachers can use ‘textbooks’ as a reference point as they collaboratively develop skills and confidence to develop a curriculum that takes into consideration their tacit stocks of knowledge and thus address a teacher held concern that ‘textbooks’ can never be a total substitute for local professional knowledge. Further as teachers engage in whole school learning community initiatives, they can find support to move towards professional autonomy.

Yet there remains a word of caution. Firstly as Symth et al (2000) found, the nature of the skills will be managerially determined and it will also require compliance from the teachers. Further and related to Symth's finding, where there is a reliance on 'textbooks' as a 'teaching' tool as well as collegiate support, there remains the a recursivity of how things were known and practiced in 'textbooks', unless there is a way to locate teacher subjectivity and complicity through capacity building professional development. It is only in this sense then that the use of 'textbooks' in a capacity building arrangement has the potential for creating an opening for teacher autonomy.

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