

Listening to the voices of pupils: an alternative route to a balanced curriculum for junior middle schools in China

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Abstract: The development and understanding of curriculum are much influenced by learners' cognitive and intellectual development. Since breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation are the four main factors to consider in the process of planning, implementing and assessing curriculum, this essay aims to provide the educators with a critical overview of the curriculum for junior middle schools in China with a focus on the issue of balance. In so doing, the author emphasizes with the support of a range of literature in the UK context the importance of voices of pupils in their intellectual development and academic attainment in regards of curriculum. Meanwhile, the author listens to the perspectives of pupils with special educational needs as consumers on the current curriculum in their schools which show a strong desire for a balanced curriculum. The author tends to argue by analyzing the sample curricular in two key junior middle schools of two cities in a province in China that there still exists a lack of balance in the curriculum in terms of the time allocation for the core and peripheral subjects and the balance within individual subjects in teaching and learning. The author thus suggests the decision makers of the curriculum and those who are involved in the implementing of the curriculum listen and respond to the voices as an alternative route to identify the causes for the failure of meeting the expectations of the curriculum by those pupils with special needs and develop a much appropriate balance in curriculum for them.

Key words: curriculum, voices, balance, special educational needs

Since breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation are the four main factors to consider in the process of planning, implementing and assessing curriculum, this essay aims to provide the educators with a critical overview of the curriculum for junior middle schools in China with a focus on the issue of balance. In so doing, the author emphasizes with the support of a range of literature the importance of voices of pupils in their intellectual development and academic attainment. Meanwhile, the author listens to the perspectives of pupils with special educational needs as consumers on the current curriculum in their schools which show a strong desire for a balanced curriculum. The author tends to argue by analyzing the sample curricular in two key junior middle schools of two cities in a province in China that there still exists a lack of balance in the curriculum in terms of the time allocation for the core and peripheral subjects and the balance within individual subjects in teaching and learning. The author thus suggests the decision makers of the curriculum and those who are involved in the implementing of the curriculum listen and respond to the voices as an alternative route to identify the causes for the failure of meeting the expectations of the curriculum by those pupils with special needs and develop a much appropriate balance in curriculum for those

pupils.

1. Theories in education and definition of curriculum

Theories in education are influenced by learners' cognitive and intellectual development (Piaget, 1972, 1990; Brunner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1980) and have been guiding the development and understanding of curriculum. The teaching principles by Comenius (Fu, 1984) are that every subject for pupils should fit their nature, age and ability; teaching should meet the needs of pupils and follow the natural sequence; pupils' interest in learning should be respected and teaching and learning should be an enjoyable process. Rousseau (Li, 1978) also argues that pupils' intellectual and cognitive development should be considered in teaching. Dewey (Boydston, 1976) believes pupils and curriculum are the two ends of a sequence and the mission of a teacher is to interpret the teaching materials into pupils' life experience.

According to Ralph Tyler (1949), the principles of curriculum and instruction consist of educational purposes, experiences, organization and attainment. The Tyler Rationale combines the ideas and theories on curriculum by Bobbitt (1918, 1924), Charters (1923), Dewey (1902) and Rugg and becomes the dominant curriculum paradigm before the concept of practical curriculum is put forward by Schwab (Zhang, 2000). To Schwab, teachers, pupils, textbooks and milieu are the commonplaces among which pupils are the center for practical curriculum. Curriculum is a unique and ever-changing configuration while the needs of teachers and pupils should be the core for curriculum deliberation. The understanding of curriculum by Pinar and et al (1995) re-conceptualizes the paradigms with the argument of interest in emancipation and empowerment. The priority of pupils in curriculum is therefore emphasized.

Actually, when Spencer (Zhang, 2000) first defines curriculum, it means the systematic organization of teaching content. But it is generally understood as a course of study. Zhang (2000) summarizes curriculum as subjects, target or plan and learners' experience. But the meaning of curriculum has undergone changes since 1970s. First, when curriculum is seen as subjects, pupils' rights and development are not secured in curriculum. Only when it is regarded as learners' experiences, pupils are no longer controlled as much. Second, the shift from curriculum as target or plan to that of teaching process makes it possible to include the target or plan into the teaching process. Schwab's four commonplaces are integrated as a whole in the process. Third, the hidden curriculum which is normally seen as informal or non-official has been attached equal importance to the manifest curriculum (the National Curriculum in the UK, for example). This forms the actual curriculum and should exist alongside the null curriculum (Eisner, 1994), the curriculum which is excluded deliberately or non-deliberately from the school curriculum system. To Eisner, the null curriculum which is about the emotional and behavior development can be crucial to pupils but has drawn little or no attention in the current curriculum system. Last, school curriculum should be integrated with extra-curriculum. The change in the connotation of curriculum entails the reform in curriculum and the direction of the development of curriculum.

2. Curriculum for all and curriculum for pupils with special educational needs

The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 marks the beginning of an era of close scrutiny of what is taught in English schools and represents an extension of government power almost unimaginable to those working in the education service before 1980s (Darling, 1994). The climate allows government to play an increasingly directive role in education while leaving Local Educational Authorities and individual schools to decide on the precise content of each curriculum area. The National Curriculum has now become a substantive aspect of the education system. Its success of winning the hearts and minds of teachers is largely due to the fact that the original very rigid format is replaced in 1993 by a more flexible approach. This and the subsequent amendments (2000, 2002) mean that teachers are secured greater flexibility whilst still providing a curriculum which is broad, balanced and relevant.

When introduced, the National Curriculum is heralded as ‘a curriculum for all’. At its heart is the idea that curriculum should have breadth, balance, relevance, differentiation, progression and continuity. However, in the recent few years there is a call for sweeping changes to the National Curriculum as the one-size-fits-all curriculum has done the pupils a great disservice. Gotch and Ellis (2006, 12) suggest that “insufficient breadth and inappropriate challenge resulted in diminishing enjoyment and progressive dis-encouragement for some pupils, including the most able, as they progress”. Clearly, a curriculum centred on the transfer of particular sets of knowledge and a narrow range of subject-specific, academic skills can not provide pupils the kind of experiences needed in the 21st century. Pupils need a curriculum that is relevant and of immediate concern to them; broad and balanced in a real sense, with a commitment to deep learning and not just passing tests. It would be a curriculum in which there is time for real personal and intellectual development and would not lack rigor or interest. Critics argue that pupils deserve a curriculum that meets their needs whatever their academic ability, not simply one that fulfils a political philosophy. Curriculum should be flexible enough to permit wide participation by pupils with special educational needs without compromising its breadth and balance. So the challenge for teachers of pupils with special educational needs (Carpenter, 1992) is that they have to define the degrees of access needed to make pupils active participants within their curriculum. Teachers are believed to have a wealth of experience which should be harnessed in the design of any new curriculum. They should be at the center of curriculum design and planning; not simply consulted as an afterthought. Teachers have to reflect upon how they compose the whole curriculum for the child matched to their specific ages or learning needs.

The notion of curriculum entitlement for all pupils may offer the opportunity to challenge attempts to segregate pupils who are different. With regard to curriculum for pupils with special educational needs, Sebba and et al (1995, 3) think that “it also challenges narrowing the curriculum and maintaining a fundamental belief that if a pupil does not learn it is because she has a problem which demands remediation through ‘special’ techniques or a different curricular focus”. So teachers have a responsibility to contribute to these changes in order to make the curriculum more appropriate and relevant for all pupils.

3. Pupils with special educational needs and their voices on curriculum

Over a number of years, teachers, parents and other professionals have been presented with a variety of explanations for children's learning difficulties. Whilst some of these accounts have located the 'source' of difficulties within a child, others have identified problems within the curriculum which is presented to the child. Charlton (Jones and Charlton, 1992) examines the shortcomings of these explanations and considers the range of factors which must be taken into account when describing the learning difficulties which are experienced by children. He discusses ways in which aspects of children's emotional malfunctioning can 'block' their ability to profit from the mainstream curriculum. He then focuses upon the association between learning difficulties and emotional problems before exploring ways in which emotional problems can generate learning difficulties which may then impede access to the mainstream curriculum.

When teachers are given back autonomy in curriculum as a professional and not simply a technician in charge of others' systems, are the voices of pupils heard and responded to? In the light of United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children (Article 12 and 13, 1989), an increasing emphasis has been given to children's perceptions. The voices of pupils with special education needs have been attached great importance in the developed countries especially in the recent years for a better understanding of children's perspectives in order to remove barriers to their participation and progress in learning. In the UK, under the Education Reform Act 1988 and Education Act 2002, all pupils, including those who have special educational needs, share the same statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, including access to the National Curriculum. It is thus the responsibility of all teachers to ensure that this requirement is translated into good practice. Research (Klein, 2003) shows that the time is right for democratizing schools and giving children and young people a say in their education is finally on the government agenda. Sebba and her colleagues (1995) redefine the whole curriculum as the response to the needs for pupils with learning difficulties. Byers and Rose (2004) offer an analysis of curriculum management issues in the light of the theoretical and statutory background since the latest revisions of the National Curriculum (2001) and the Code of Practice (2001). The needs are felt in schools to create a power-sharing ethos when faced with the challenges of today's schools. Some schools are already working in partnership with their pupils.

4. Current educational situation in China

4.1 Reform on curriculum

Education system in China has suffered successive transformations which accompanied the ideological changes of those in power. In 1985, the education system reform was outlined. The goal was to train qualified personnel that would make it possible for China to accomplish the 'four modernizations' (progress in agriculture, industry, defense and science and technology). Since 1978, China has adopted the education policy of 'nine-year compulsory schooling system', which means all children are required to attend school for at least nine years. During the period, pupils will finish both primary and junior middle school programs. In junior middle schools, pupils begin to learn a variety of science subjects alongside Chinese, history, geography, English, art, music and physical education. China started to use syllabus formulated by the Ministry of Education in 1950. Radical changes have taken place in the

curriculum for the nation. In 2005, China began to adopt the revised 'New Basic Education Curriculum' after 3 years' trial in some designated areas across the country. The reform in curriculum shows the change of the concept on education. With this new curriculum which focuses more on learning rather than on teaching, cares more on the emotion, attitude and value of pupils, life long learning skills, and etc., China attempts to convert pupils from passive learners to active ones and change the long lasting test-oriented education into quality education. The core of education is no longer the transmission of knowledge to pupils but teaching them how to be good citizens.

4.2 Special educational needs

The statistics from the Ministry of Education in China shows that in 2004, there were 1560 special education schools with 371,813 pupils and 41,384 teachers, staff and workers. This does not include the number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties which would be a very large one. According to the study of Wang Yufeng from Peking University (2005), 18% of pupils from Zhong Guan Village in Peking suffered from social, emotional and behavioral difficulties in 2002. Her estimation of the number of pupils in China under the age of 17 suffering from these difficulties is 21.6%-32.0%. The figure lacks scientific evidence so far and can also vary depending on the criteria for the difficulties. But it is shocking enough for the society to be aware of the seriousness.

4.3 Voices of pupils

In China, very little exists that describes the feelings and thoughts of learners about school. Even less exists about the views of school children on the curriculum for them. Though educators are aware that pupils have much to offer by ways of reflection on their learning, little credit and validity have been given to the perceptions of pupils. One example can help illustrate the situation. In 1999, Ministry of Education began to design the new basic education curriculum for the whole country. Hundreds of educators were consulted to make the amendment. However, no opinion was sought from pupils. Central to the debate of whether pupils should have a say in curriculum should be the rights of pupils as learners. How do the educators design learning environment and learning activities that will ensure that each child as an active participant in the learning process and not a bystander, a peripheral participant watching the activity of others? Although there is not yet a project in China like 'Encouraging Voices' (Shevlin and Rose, 2003), it is obvious that pupils in China have a desire to aspirate their feelings towards the curriculum imposed to them.

5. Case study

5.1 Purpose of the investigation

As it is not designed as a formal research, the main purpose of this small-scaled investigation is to look into the new curriculum adopted in 2005 to find whether it contains the four basic elements of breadth, relevance, balance and differentiation, with a special focus on balance as it is generally considered insufficient by pupils. The author also attempts to find by empowering pupils with special educational needs their attitudes towards the curriculum, whether the curriculum has influenced their learning and their behaviors. The author hopes that the findings could help identify the problems in the curriculum so that the

educators involved in reviewing the curriculum could be informed and a better determination could be made in the process of curriculum planning and development.

5.2 Country, area and sample for the research

In order to examine the effectiveness of the current curriculum in junior middle schools in China, two key middle schools are chosen in Shaoxing and Hangzhou, two important cities in the eastern coastal province Zhejiang, for the small-scaled investigation. As China is a vast country varying in economy, culture and etc., it is normally divided into 3 categories: cities and economically developed areas, towns and villages with medium development and economically backward areas. Zhejiang province belongs to the first category. Hangzhou is the capital of the province. Shaoxing is one of the most important cities in the province. Both cities have a long history and education is very much valued.

The designation of ‘key school’ exists for selected schools at every educational level in China. There are national, provincial or municipal key institutions. The two schools belong to the provincial level ones. Key schools enjoy priority funding as well as the privilege of recruiting the best students. Entry into such schools is based on examination and academic promise and achievement. For such schools, success is usually measured in terms of the percentage of its graduates entering colleges and universities. The success of the key schools has too often been measured solely in terms of college placement of its pupils rather than on more objective measurements of learning. The two schools enjoy very high reputation for the educational provision and facilities. However, like other key schools, there are more than 50 pupils in each class and about 10 classes in each grade. Teachers and staff members are supposed to be the best in the areas.

Four pupils are chosen from the two schools, two from each school. They share many in common: They are normal and very clever pupils at first sight. They are all from well-off families. They have traveled to more places than their peers. They are all good at writing. Their parents all have university degrees and have good jobs. The four families meet very often as they are friends, old and young. However, they all have different learning styles that betray in a sense with the teaching styles in their schools. They would like to be challenged and be taught in a creative way. Gradually they develop some hostile feelings towards the curriculum that does not meet their expectations and their teachers who fail to cater for their needs. Just because they are not encouraged to express their feelings openly, they demonstrate their emotional and behavioral problems in one way or the other. They do not like schooling any more. They find excuses to avoid going to school as they see no point of sitting in a class the whole day. They become de-motivated in learning the subjects and refuse to do homework. Back from school, they usually shut themselves in their rooms and play computer games. They start to have negative attitudes towards life and see no future for themselves. However, they can easily get good marks in the tests. So their parents can not complain too much. Their teachers are aware of the changes in their behavior but they do not care too much since the pupils still have good academic attainments.

- Pupil A: Anna, 15 years old, Junior 3. She is always one of the best pupils in academic attainment in her school. She is good at Chinese calligraphy and plays the piano. She is

an expert in computer for her age and she likes sports very much.

- Pupil B: Helen, female, 13 years old, Junior 1. She used to be a top pupil in her primary school but is no longer so in her current school. She likes fairy tales but has little interest in math or science. She practiced playing the piano for 5 years but eventually lost her interest due to the daily practice demanded by her piano teacher and her parents. She does not like sports.
- Pupil C: Alice, female, 16 years old, Junior 3. She is always a top pupil in her school. She can play the piano well but she does not enjoy it. She is very much addicted to computer games and online chat. She likes sports very much but is often silent in public.
- Pupil D: John, 16, Junior 3. He is not a top pupil in his class but he has a strong interest in history, geography and science. He plays the sax and is very good at drawing and calligraphy. He is not keen on language learning.

5.3 Investigation question and method

As not all pupils need the same curriculum (Farrell, 1997; Rayner, 1998; McLaughlin & Tilstone, 2000) and each subject area of the curriculum can make a unique contribution to positive behavior by linking what is being taught and the teaching approaches and styles used, the investigation is to seek an answer to the issue of balance in the new curriculum. In fact, there is no single answer as to what subjects are the most important for human beings and what approaches are the most effective because individuals are so different and their needs vary. However, in order to make this library-focused research more persuasive, the author conducts this informal investigation to find out if pupils' needs are met by curriculum and what sort of motivation they have for learning the subjects. In doing so, the author gets the weekly timetables from the two schools for an analysis. Some questions about the curriculum and schooling are asked to the samples through emails. The answers are sent back again via emails. The data gathered may not be very reliable or it may lack validity as well. However, the intension of the author is not to generalize the findings but to use them as some food for thought for curriculum development by involving pupils in voicing their opinions.

6. Findings

6.1 Time allocation for core and peripheral subjects

Table 1: *Subjects and weekly time allocation (45 minutes for each period)*

subjects	Junior 3 (a)	Junior 3 (b)	Junior 1
Chinese	5	4	6
English	7	5	7
Math	5	5	5
Science	5	8	2
History	1	2	
politics	2	2	3
P. E.	2	1	2
Art	1		1
Music	1	1	1
Computer	1	1	1
Psychology			1

Geography		3	
Society			3
Self study	4	4	2
Reading		1	
Total	34	37	34

For the timetables, please refer to the appendices (I-III)

Chinese, English, Math and Science are the core subjects for which pupils spend 20-22 hours weekly. In Junior 1, 20 hours are spent for the core subjects each week. This leaves only 10 hours for other 7 subjects. Pupils of Junior 3 study 34-37 hours each week in class among which 4 are self-study hours when pupils have to be in class to do some reading. This does not include the daily 20 minutes compulsory morning reading of English and Chinese. In one school, pupils are asked to go to school on Saturday morning. For the core subjects learned in a day, there must be some homework in written form assigned by the teachers. Pupils are asked to hand in the assignments first thing the next day. If a pupil fails to do so for a couple of times, a letter of complaint will be sent to parents.

As the core subjects are the tested ones for the entrance of senior middle schools, pupils spend most of their time preparing for the tests. The homework assignment for the three-week spring festival holiday for Helen (junior 1) consists of the following:

- 5 pieces of Math test paper
- 2 pieces of Science test paper
- 1 hour daily listening to the English tapes, 6 pieces of English test paper
- 3 compositions in Chinese, 1 book report, 1 classic Chinese literature book, 30 classic Chinese poems for recitation

Pupils normally stay in their classrooms every day for all the subjects other than Physical Education, Music and Computer. Comparatively, peripheral subjects are much enjoyed by pupils because there are no homework assignments for the subjects and they are tested only once in each term. But no matter how good pupils are in the peripheral subjects, if they can not prove they are equally good at the core subjects, they are regarded as having problems in learning. The problems would be discussed openly by the teachers and with the parents of pupils. To make efforts for the study of the core subjects, pupils are hoped to concentrate on the core subjects exclusively.

6.2 Time allocation within the core and peripheral subjects

Time spent weekly on the core and peripheral subjects is not balanced, either. The 5-7 hours learning of English each week, for instance, is mainly the learning of vocabulary, grammar and the skills for taking tests. Speaking is not emphasized because it is not tested. Besides, class time is limited for each pupil to have a chance to practice their English orally. As many teachers have trouble in spoken English themselves, to play safe, they focus more on the other skills. Once pupils get good results in tests, the teachers would feel contented and relieved. Because the teaching of the language is very much test-oriented, pupils have little chance to be exposed to the authentic learning environment. The motivation for learning

is therefore more of an instrumental one. The beauty of the language is not appreciated in a real sense. Time spent on the peripheral subjects, on the other hand, lacks balance as well. According to the timetables, pupils in Junior 1 spend 3 hours learning politics that leaves no time for history and geography. There is nothing wrong for pupils to know what happened and is happening in the country or the world politically. However, spending 3 out of 10 hours for peripheral subjects in politics is seen as not proper or necessary.

However, it is a good sign to see from the timetables that the ‘New Basic Curriculum’ has attached importance to the emotional well-being and citizenship of pupils. The subjects like ‘Psychology’ and ‘Society’ will eventually prove to be relevant and necessary in the long run in educating pupils to be good citizens of the society.

6.3 Voices of the pupils on curriculum and schooling

(Detailed answers can be referred to in Appendix IV)

Do you have many tests for the core subjects?

Alice: *“We have unit tests after we have learned a unit of the books. When we are in Junior 3, we have monthly tests once a month. We have a lot of homework every day. We are worried about the frequent tests. Our future depends on the tests, so we have heavy pressure.”*

Helen: *“I have to think about study most. I can’t have much time to do things like. And I have pressure from my parents. I am asked to do well in every test”.*

John: *“I have too much homework todo. This new year holiday, I havm to do more than 15 test papers and we only rest for 2 days and a half, not 3 days as the government said. I have one or two exams every week, taking three or four exams is in common.”*

Is time spent on the core subjects just right for you?

Anna: *Too much time, I do not like.*

Why don’t you tell your teacher about this?

Anna: *“Because the pupils don’t dare to do something big and serious, for that will affect their futures. There isn’t a leading voice. And on the other side, the government has no other way. They can just pretend they heard nothing. As I said, the college Entrance Exam is there, the only way to solve the problem is to cancel the exam, but it’s nearly impossible. If they did that, there would be a revolution of education”.*

Do you think it will affect pupils in their behavior if teachers do not listen to pupils’ opinions?

Anna: *“The voices give the government pressure too, but not very big, I think. The pupils first feel angry and uncomfortable and hate studying, but little by little, they get used to it and become numb.”*

Are you happy to be in school?

Alice: *“I’m glad to go to school because I often have fun talking with my classmates. But, sometimes when there isn’t anything exciting or I have something wrong with my classmates or teachers, or there will be a lot of tests, I will feel bored and I will find the school a hell”.*

Is there anything you want to tell me about the curriculum?

Helen: *“The curriculum is bored (boring), only little time for fun subjects.”*

When you are not happy with some subjects or some decisions by your teachers, do you tell your teachers? why or why not?

Alice: *“I used to tell them but now I don’t. When I’m in Junior Two, I was not happy with my teacher’s decision and I asked her why. She was very angry at me. Then I knew that never tell them your (feelings to your teachers about (their decision. They will be anory at you and have a bad impresfion on you. Also, it’s teachers’ decision, it can hardly be changed”.*

Do you think you should spend so many hours a week in learning the core subjects? What else do you want to learn if you can choose to learn?

Anna: *“No, I think some time is enough. I want to learn Teakwondo, tennis, football and German”.*

Helen: *“I think I must spend more hours in learning math and science. Because I’m not good at them. I want to learn some interesting things like making some bread and cake, or learn something special”.*

7. Discussion

Children and young people with special educational needs have a unique knowledge of their own needs. There is a strong and inevitable relationship between behavior and curriculum. Adapting the curriculum relevant to children’s needs can promote positive behavior. An inappropriately planned or not balanced curriculum may lead to difficult and dis-affective behavior. However, many educational psychologists place an over-emphasis on observable behaviors but ignore underlying processes. They describe curriculum difficulties but not the reasons underpinning them (Elliott, 2000). Disaffected and bored pupils can be re-motivated and inspired when learning styles, content and focus can be directed by teachers to meet pupils’ needs and interests. The samples in the investigation do not fall into the two broad groups of special educational needs (Garner, 2001), but education of very able pupils is as much the responsibility of every class and subject teacher as that of pupils with special educational needs. Freeman (1998) indicates that special provision within subject areas is the most effective way of promoting excellence and that high-level learning opportunities are essential if very able pupils are to achieve excellence. The broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum can open up experiences that enhance their lives.

But what does curriculum balance mean and how does this look for pupils with special needs? Why do educationalists consider some areas are more important than others in school curriculum? The ‘core’ curriculum in special education has consisted of what might be seen as the ‘peripheral’ curriculum in mainstream schools. It is understood that laying foundations for later learning and for helping learners to understand the world around them is an important reason for teaching science, technology and languages. With the New Basic Curriculum, teachers now have a basis for providing the same breadth and balance for all pupils and for reanalyzing problems which occur to see if the curricular content or delivery could better address the needs of all pupils. The key changes to the curriculum still direct towards a great emphasis on literacy, numeracy and science. Attention should be given to identifying those specific parts of the curriculum which present a challenge to teachers in terms of addressing the full range of pupils with special educational needs. Bovair (2003) thinks it is entirely possible to provide a work-related learning course and protect curriculum entitlement through a balanced and guided choice of subjects, reducing some of the time allocation to subjects that have been core, rather than ‘dis-application’ and using a

combination of types of accreditation to give wide choice to prevent disaffection and to prepare pupils to access options into life long learning.

8. Conclusion

Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. The National Curriculum in the UK is the starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the specific needs of pupils. While in China, teachers will also have to plan suitably challenging work for pupils whose attainments significantly exceed the expected level of attainment within one or more subjects during a particular stage. Teachers may plan further differentiation by extending the breadth and depth of study within individual subjects or by planning work which draws on the content of different subjects. Curriculum development is an on-going process and keeping up-to-date with curriculum modification is crucial. Schools in China can build on their strengths to meet the needs of their pupils.

Simply, curriculum, as Wilson (2000) puts it, is what worth teaching and learning and to what people. It is obviously an area of immense importance that will never be good enough if pupils are not consulted. Curriculum should not be imposed by the powerful adults to the weak pupils. Give pupils voices can be an alternative route for a more balanced curriculum to meet the needs of all.

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Appendix I

Weekly Timetable: Junior Middle School (Grade 3) Hangzhou Foreign languages' School, Zhejiang, China

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:35am—7:55am	Morning meeting	English morning reading	Chinese morning reading	English morning reading	Chinese morning reading
8:00am—8:45am	Chinese	English	Chinese	Science	English
8:55am—9:40am	English	English	Chinese	Math	Math
9:40am—10:05am	Morning exercise				
10:05am—10:50am	Math	Math	English	English	Science
11:00am—11:45am	Science	History & politics	Self-study	Chinese	Chinese
11:45am—1:15pm	Lunch break				
1:15pm—2:00pm	English	PE	Science	History & politics	Computer
2:10pm—2:55pm	Self-study	Science	Math	Art	Self-choosing class
3:05pm—3:50pm	History & politics	Self-study	Music	PE	
4:00pm—4:45pm	Class activities			Self-study	

Appendix II

Weekly Timetable:

Junior Middle School (Grade 1) Hangzhou Foreign languages' School, Zhejiang, China

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:35am—7:55am	Morning meeting	English morning reading	Chinese morning reading	English morning reading	Chinese morning reading
8:00am—8:45am	Math	English	Chinese	Chinese	Math
8:55am—9:40am	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	Chinese
9:40am—10:05am	Morning exercise				
10:05am—10:50am	politics	politics	English	Math	English
11:00am—11:45am	English	Math	society	politics	P. E.
11:45am—1:15xm	Lunch break				
1:15pm—2:00pm	Science	Art	Computer	English	Science
2:10pm—2:55pm	society	psychology	PE	Chinese	Self-choosing class
3:05pm—3:50pm	Music	Self-study	Math	Society	
4:00pm—4:45pm	Class activities	Extra-curricular activities		Self-study	

Appendix III

Weekly Timetable:

Junior Middle School (Grade 3) Shaoxing No. 1 Middle School, Zhejiang, China

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Math	History	English	Physics	Chemistry	Chinese
Politics	Chinese	Computer	English	Chinese	Chemistry
Geography	Math	Chemistry	Politics	Math	Math
P.E	Physics	Geography	Chinese	English	English
					Physics
Chemistry	English	Physics	History	Geography	
History		Math	P.E	Computer	
Reading				Music	
Reading					

Appendix IV

Voices of the pupils

Do you have many tests for the core subjects?

Alice: *“We have unit tests after we have learned a unit of the books. When we are in Junior 3, we have monthly tests once a month. We have a lot of homework every day. We are worried about the frequent tests. Our future depends on the tests, so we have heavy pressure. We want freedom. We want our otherwise free space. We don’t want to be trapped in study all the time. We want to enjoy life happily”.*

Helen: *“I have to think about study most. I can’t have much time to do things like. And I have pressure from my parents. I am asked to do well in every test”.*

John: *“I have too much homework to(do. This new year holiday, I havm to do more than 15 test papers(and we only rest for 2 days and(a half, not 3 days as the government said.*

I have one or two exams every week, taking three or four exams is in common. But we are not the poorest, in other cities and countries near my hometown, the students even have 9classes everyday and spend whole Saturday in school. My teacher often tells us to learn from their hard-working. Some of my teachers also complain the Chinese education system, but they have to do as the society asks they everytime, and ask us to do more homework and exercise, take more exams. So we are only able to do the exercise, and we have no experiences and practices—only study machines! That’s why most of the best student in China can’t find a job in international companies”.

Anna: *The competition is cruelty. The society wants the student to get higher degree. Although the student do not need the unusual knowledge very much, they have to learn and learn, do more and more homework.*

Is time spent on the core subjects just right for you?

Anna: *“Not really. Although ‘Pressure reducing’ has been put up, it’s no use. The college Entrance Examination is still there, so the pressure is still there, too. That is why we learn core subjects only. Too much time, I do not like”.*

Why don’t you tell your teacher about this?

Anna: *“Because the pupils don’t dare to do something big and serious, for that will affect their futures. There isn’t a leading voice. And on the other side, the government has no other way. They can just pretend they heard nothing. As I said, the college Entrance Exam is there, the only way to solve the problem is to cancel the exam, but it’s nearly impossible. If they did that, there would be a revolution of education”.*

Do you think it will affect pupils in their behavior if teachers do not listen to pupils’ opinions?

Anna: *“The voices give the government pressure too, but not very big, I think. The pupils first feel angry and uncomfortable and hate studying, but little by little, they get used to it and become numb. I have an example that happened the day before yesterday. That night, our school had an Art Festival, all the students except we Junior three attended it. We were forced to study all night long. I really didn’t think one night was so important for studying as our teachers thought. It was a whole school activity! We felt so angry that we shouted and complained, but none of us dare to speak to the teachers. So, we studied as usual but without concentration. My good friend escaped to see the performance, but was caught by the teacher on her way. I think maybe this event can reflect something: We are angry, but no one can*

speak up, so we tough it out”t.

Alice: *I don't think so. Maybe some of the voices are heard, but the social expectations are strong and strong.*

Are you happy to be in school?

John: *“I have to get up before 6:30 a.m every day. The morning reading starts at 7:25, but my teacher told us that we must reach school before 7:15—in summer, before 7:10. After 20 minutes' reading, we go to take a short exercise and quickly return the classroom. The first class begin at 8:00. I have 4 classes in the morning of weekdays, but 5 on Saturdays. At 11:30, I finish the fourth class and go to have my lunch.*

The teacher (teacher) told us we must return the classroom before 12:10 and start studying. The first class in the afternoon begins at 1:20. We have 4 classes in the afternoon. If there is no class, we study by ourselves. The fourth class finishes at 4:50. We could return home but the teacher always keeps us at school until 5:10, or later.

From Monday to Friday, we have 8 classes everyday. Each class lasts 45 minutes and between each two classes there is a 10-minutes' rest. But on Saturday we have to go to school, we have no more choices, we have to study for a sad morning”.

Alice: *“I'm glad to go to school because I often have fun talking with my classmates. But, sometimes when there isn't anything exciting or I have something wrong with my classmates or teachers, or there will be a lot of tests, I will feel bored and I will find the school a hell”.*

Helen: *“Enjoying the stay with my classmates and the students' clubs and activities”.*

Is there anything you want to tell me about the curriculum?

Helen: *“The curriculum is bored (boring), only little time for fun subjects. Sometimes I think some of the teachers are hypocritical. For example, they often tell us to take part in the activities to improve our skills, but when there's an activity, they tell us not to take part in it because we have to spend more time studying”.*

When you are not happy with some subjects or some decisions by your teachers, do you tell your teachers? why or why not?

Alice: *“I used to tell them but now I don't. When I'm in Junior Two, I was not happy with my teacher's decision and I asked her why. She was very angry at me. Then I knew that never tell them your(feelings to your teachers about(their decision. They will be anory at you and have a bad impresfion on you. Also, it's teachers' decision, it can hardly be changed”.*

Do you think you should spend so many hours a week in learning the core subjects? What else do you want to learn if you can choose to learn?

Anna: *“No, I think some time is enough. I want to learn Teakwondo, tennis, football and German”.*

Helen: *“I think I must spend more hours in learning math and science. Because I'm not good at them. I want to learn some interesting things like making some bread and cake, or learn something special”.*

Alice: *Some of the schools have changed the education a little. But the majority of the students still study for passing exams. The students are poor ans sad. Even though some people have mentioned the problem, the education system can not changed, parents and teachers pay so much hopes on the students.*