



China - Europe Exchange On Curriculum Reform

29-30 May, 2007

Geneva, Switzerland

Friday, May 25, 2007

General Information

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China and the International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO) will hold a "China-Europe Exchange on Curriculum Reform" in Geneva, 29-30 May 2007 as follows:

1. Core Objectives

- 1.1 Chinese curriculum managers and specialists will brief European counterparts and IBE staff on the recent curriculum reform in China and will receive feedback as compared to European experiences.
- 1.2 Explore areas of further cooperation between Chinese, European counterparts and IBE within the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development.
- 1.3 Set up the basis of a larger cooperation framework between the Ministry of Education of China and IBE.

2. Expected outcomes

- 2.1 Familiarization with the relevant dimensions of the recent Chinese curriculum reform (nine-year compulsory schooling) is acquired.
- 2.2 An in-depth inter-regional exchange on processes of curriculum reform between specialists from China, Europe and IBE is conducted.
- 2.3 Areas of improvement for China's curriculum reform, principally related to goals, strategies and management of curriculum reform, curriculum and learning, and curriculum resources are identified.
- 2.4 Possible areas of further cooperation between IBE and China are agreed upon

3. Overall Goal

To identify orientations and guidelines for improving and consolidating the Chinese curricular reform in basic education as the first step to strategically strengthen IBE-China relations.

4. Date and venue

IBE/UNESCO, Geneva (Cecilia Braslavsky Room), 29-30 May 2007.

5. Participants

Chinese Ministry of Education Delegation

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Resource Persons from Europe

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6. Working Language

Chinese / English

7. Contacts

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Background Note

I. Introduction

Curriculum change is a key foundation of educational reforms around the world. Curriculum encompasses foundations and objectives; processes and contents; and outcomes and evaluations. It can provide the framework, the rationale and the objectives for developing a high-quality equitable education well embedded in what stakeholders expect from the role of education in society.

A broad view of curriculum comprising the analysis of values, skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies and social and cultural returns could support its role as the hub of educational change (a complex and multidimensional process). As Braslavsky (2002) said, curriculum can be defined “as a dense and flexible contract between politics/society and teachers”¹. This essentially implies adequate and dynamic combinations of solid universal concepts that substantially support operational procedures (density) as well as clear and real opportunities to choose from and to be able to implement them (flexibility).

One of the IBE main objectives is to contribute to documenting, analyzing, interpreting and putting in a comparative international perspective, the processes of curriculum change related to EFA goals. The Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development, set up by IBE in July 2005 and now consisting of 672 members from 80 countries, is progressively seen as providing a setting and an opportunity for promoting global discussion of curriculum issues precisely by sharing visions, experiences and practices among educators and curriculum specialists from different world regions.

Within this framework, a series of activities were jointly carried out between IBE and Chinese counterparts during 2006 such as the case study of the Chinese Educational Reform entitled “Educational Reform and Curriculum Change in China: a comparative case study” coordinated by Mr Zhou Nanzhao with the contribution of Ms Zhu Muju (Deputy Director-General, Department of Basic Education, Ministry of Education, Beijing). Also IBE co-sponsored the 2nd. International Forum on Teacher Education (25-27 October 2006) organized by East China Normal University.

As a step forward in fostering the development of the COP in China, IBE Director Ms Clementina Acedo proposed to Ms Zhu Muju to hold an exchange on the processes of curriculum reform with high-level educators and curriculum specialists from Europe with the aim of analyzing what has been achieved as well as to explore alternatives on how IBE can contribute to supporting and consolidating current reform in China.

China has been following the Soviet model in curriculum for the past 50 years. In 2001, China launched the most comprehensive curriculum reform in its history: both corresponding to its rapid social, political and economic development as well as to significant advances in educational, learning and cognitive research. This process of curriculum reform is mainly inspired by Western experiences, with inputs coming from a series of study-tours to developed

¹ Braslavsky, C. 2002. *The new century's change: new challenges and curriculum responses*. New Delhi: COBSE-International Conference.

countries that took place prior to the reform. After 6 years of implementation, the Chinese curriculum reformers are seeking evidence that they are on the right track and also trying to identify areas for further improvement, through a dialogue with the European counterparts and IBE staff.

This Exchange will be jointly organized by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE/UNESCO). China will send an 8-member delegation, all national level experts with relevant functions in the reform process. Experts will also be invited from selected European countries based on their areas of expertise and on the identification of needs from the Chinese team.

II. A global perspective on the Chinese Reform²

II.1. The reform process

The profound curriculum changes in China's basic education since late 1990s have been taking place as an integral part of systemic educational reform within the broad context of socio-economic, political and cultural development at national and local levels of the country. Meanwhile the curriculum change process has been closely interacting with international institutions in the renewal of educational policies, structure, content, method and financing, with a focus on quality Education for All (EFA).

Compared to previous curriculum schemes, the current curriculum reform displays some major characteristics including the following: adequate equilibrium between the formal and informal curriculum dimensions, development of a practical and comprehensive curriculum; flexible class timetabling. The new curriculum addresses old problems such as unbalanced and rigid timetables.

In term of its goals, the school curriculum is expected to meet the multi-faceted requirements of quality education in the primary and secondary level, and to serve the aims of basic education, as defined in the 2001 *State Council Resolution on the Reform and Development of Basic Education*:

- Enabling the development of a new, well-educated, idealistic, moral and patriotic generation with a love for socialism, and who will inherit fine traditions of the Chinese nation;
- Develop an awareness of socialist democracy and law as well as respect for state laws and social norms;
- Develop appropriate world outlook, life outlook and values;
- Develop a sense of social responsibility;
- Develop an innovative spirit, practice skills, a knowledge base of sciences and humanities, and an awareness of environmental protection issues, and
- Develop good physical health and psychological qualities, healthy aesthetical tastes and lifestyles.

According to Ministerial officials, the school curriculum in China has major elements of success, like:

² This chapter takes elements from the case study coordinated by Mr. Zhou Nanzhao and with the contribution of Ms. Zhu Muju entitled "Educational Reform and Curriculum Change in China: a comparative case study", Chapter VI. Conclusions and Discussions.

a) A relevant strategy for planning and implementing the curriculum reform.

The Chinese curriculum reform is characterised by a process of planned change, where all stakeholders actively participate and perform respective functions with prescribed responsibilities

b) The development of curriculum reform scheme (programme)

In June 2001 and upon approval by the state Council, the Education Ministry issued a major policy document entitled *Basic Education Curriculum Reform Programme (Pilot)*, which signalled a new ‘phase of experimentation and promotion’ for the planned curriculum reform.

Based on a nationwide survey study carried out during 1996-1997 and comparative studies after 1998, the integrated framework and programme were developed through “Project Task Forces” for research and management purposes of the planned reform. A competitive bidding system was introduced in the application, evaluation, and management of projects on curriculum change. Out of the 261 project proposals from universities, research institutions and local government education offices, 34 ‘national-level curriculum reform projects’ were approved for their respective task forces to work on dimensions of the reform, including development of curriculum standards, content, design, curriculum delivery in the classroom, and comprehensive research.

The Task Forces work on curriculum development through baseline studies: i) international development and perspectives; ii) national situation analysis; iii) current needs for curricular changes; iv) disciplinary developments in individual school subject areas, and v) characteristics of the development of school-age children at different levels and schooling phases.

c) Experimentation with curriculum development

The principle of “experimentation first and dissemination/wide implementation after” was adopted as a strategy in promoting the planned curriculum reform.

- In the first half of 2001, out of various voluntarily submitted proposals from provinces and municipalities, the Education Ministry selected 38 districts/counties/cities in 27 provinces and centrally administered municipalities as “National Experimental Zones for (9-Year) Compulsory Education Curriculum Reform”. This was done to experiment with (draft) curriculum standards and corresponding textbook development for individual school subjects, to study the implementation of curriculum management at national, local, and school levels, and to experiment with changes evaluation and testing practices.
- In the Autumn of 2002, the scope of experimentation was expanded to provincial level, whereby each province or centrally administered municipality should select one rural county in every prefecture or one urban district in every centrally administered municipality as “Provincial-level Curriculum Reform Experimentation Zone”. By this stage, 10-15% of the entry enrolments in primary and lower secondary level schools had been involved in the nationwide experimentation with the planned curriculum reform.

- In the Autumn of 2003, revision was made of the compulsory education curriculum scheme, subject-specific curriculum standards, Local Curriculum Management and Development Guide, School Curriculum Management and Development Guide, and Scheme for Reform of School Evaluation and Examinations. By this stage, 35% of the first graders of primary and lower secondary schools nationwide were under the new curriculum.
- In Autumn 2004, school curriculum reform entered the phase of over-all nationwide implementation, based on experimentation at national and local levels and its evaluation as well as the exchange of experiences. The Curriculum Scheme and other policy documents were officially issued, and 65-70% of the first graders of primary and lower secondary schools nationwide were under the new curriculum.
- By Autumn 2005, all first graders of primary and lower secondary school pupils had been placed in the reformed curriculum.

II.2 Advances and challenges

Economic and technological development requires well qualified human resources. New curriculum content and the diversification of teaching strategies demand that students not only master factual knowledge but also learn to apply it by reasoning and solving new problems.

Despite the economically and geographically unbalanced and unequal development, and the need to take care of a school population of 200 million, it is a great achievement for China to have over 99% of the age-cohort children in school and with minimal gender difference. In order to sustain this process, a curriculum reform of a 9-year compulsory education is currently underway. The next stage focuses on improving and consolidating the reform process and in particular, addresses those issues that are visualized as pending challenges.

Three important areas related to the curriculum reform have been selected by the Chinese team in order to share their experience with the European counterparts and IBE staff: i. goals, strategies and management of curriculum reform, ii. curriculum and learning, and iii. curriculum resources.

Area 1 – Goals, strategies and management of curriculum reform

The noble goal of education in China is to achieve all-round and balanced moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic student development and to advance character building.

The Ministry of Education established a set of goals and strategies to advance curriculum reform. According to what was planned, it took from 2001 to 2005 to bring the new curriculum for compulsory education into effect nationwide.

The Ministry of Education stated that “The curriculum for compulsory education must be conducive to the universalizing of nine-year compulsory education, be attainable for the overwhelming majority of students, embody the basic requirements for citizen quality, and be focused on fostering students’ motivation and ability in lifelong learning. Under the prerequisite that all students should measure up to the basic requirements, the curriculum for regular senior middle school was arranged in several selectable levels to give students more

choices and development opportunities and lay a fine foundation for them to cultivate competencies in life skills, hands-on practice and creativity”³.

What are the policy frameworks and the goals of the curriculum reform in China? How was the reform planned? What are the organizational structures and the implementation strategies to ensure the success of the reform? Which are the capacity building measures that have been taken at the different levels of the education system? How do the experiences of other countries inform the conceptualization and the analysis of these questions?

Decentralization is a key dimension in curriculum reform in China. The educational administration is organized in three levels – national, provincial and local-school based- which has emerged as a reasonable alternative for a country with such diversity in history, culture and economic development.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a unified national curriculum? How does the unified national curriculum system affect the development of education in China? What is an appropriate equilibrium between national, local and school-based curriculum in the new tripartite system? How does a local-curriculum base contribute to the goals of the reform? What is the role of a school-based curriculum? How does the new curriculum management system work in different regions of China?

According to Ministerial officials, further changes need to be made in order to deal with the worrisome gaps between urban and rural/remote regions that are being generated during the process of implementation of the curriculum reform, and in particular to accelerate the curriculum change and improve the education quality in rural/remote regions.

Area 2 - Curriculum and learning

There are about 10 million school teachers in China. All education reforms require extensive and permanent training of teachers and school principals in the management of change as well as in the different areas of knowledge and disciplines. As the new curriculum demands new ways of effective teaching and learning strategies, teachers need to redefine and change their classroom practices and the assessment of students.

How can teachers be updated with new information, methodologies and practices in order to adapt to the needs of a changing curriculum? How can one ensure that teachers are adequately motivated to appropriate, support and adapt to the reform process, and be open to change themselves?

The introduction of general fieldwork/integrated practice activities is a main challenge for teachers. The term “general fieldwork” is a Chinese one that refers to a cluster of courses in areas such as: hands-on labour and technical activities, social practice, community services, multidisciplinary exploratory projects, as well as technologies of information and communications. Common features of these courses are the encouragement of hands-on practice and integrated application of knowledge and skills in projects.

³ Ministry of Education. 2001 a. *Jichu jiaoyu kecheng gaige gangyao (Shixing) [Program on Reform of Basic Education Curriculum (Experimental)]*. Beijing, China.

What are the theoretical values of the general fieldwork? What is their practical significance? What are the relations between the general fieldwork courses and other traditional subject courses? How can teachers be better prepared to teach general fieldwork courses?

It is widely assumed that school-based action research is a good way of supporting the teachers' professional development. In particular, in China, there exists a multi-layered network of teacher training and professional development. Independent education research institutes as well as those affiliated to universities, at both national and provincial levels, constitute the upper layer. There are also teaching researchers at the local level. They all work with teachers to improve classroom teaching. This network proves effective in trying to adapt almost 10 million teachers to the new curriculum.

What is the framework of school-based research for the new curriculum in China? What are the roles of researchers and administrators at different levels? What can be done in situations when teachers are not adequately motivated? How can experiences of school-based research be shared nation-wide?

Area 3 – Curriculum Resources

Within the unified national curriculum, there was only one set of textbooks for the whole nation. But with the tripartite curriculum system currently underway different set of textbooks have been developed in accordance with the new national curriculum.

How the curriculum reforms inform the production, revision and dissemination of textbooks? What are the problems, challenges and opportunities of going from one set to multiple-sets of textbooks? Is the administration of the textbooks being reformed accordingly?

After 6 years of reform, there are many sets of textbooks in various subjects available on the market.

How are they assessed before being presented to the market? What are the problems arising from applying a diversified textbook policy in an emerging market economy? Are teachers better equipped to provide learning opportunities by choosing textbooks? Do the students benefit from the choice of textbook? How are textbooks chosen by different schools or localities?

According to Ministerial officials the lack of curriculum resources is a mayor difficulty in the implementation of curricula. A significant portion of the population does not have access to curriculum resources and there are huge differences between regions, rural and urban areas. This theme is a top priority on the Ministerial agenda.

III. The European perspective

During the preparation stage of the curriculum reform in China, the Ministry of Education sent out several study groups to developed countries. These visits informed the process of designing the new curricula. Now, after 6 years of reform and in the light of addressing the challenge of improving the equity and quality of the reform, it is considered as worthwhile to hold an in-depth dialogue with European counterparts regarding what has been acheived and how the process can be improved and further consolidated.

The selection of the European counterparts has followed the following criteria:

- a. To provide a global perspective on processes of curriculum design and implementation that can be worthwhile to China. The Eastern European countries can be a good reference due to the fact that they have gone through the same experience of education and curricular transformation from the Soviet-model of centralized control over education to decentralization and democratization at about the same time.
- b. To share European experiences that have been successful in implementing a compulsory Basic Education. The Nordic region is a good example of achieving a high-quality equitable education (the comprehensive models) with little differences among schools and regions.
- c. To share the lessons learned and the challenges (in terms of efficiency, equity and quality) among countries with highly decentralised education systems (e.g. Switzerland).
- d. To share different perspectives on curriculum approaches (e.g. competency-based approach) and their impact in democratising and improving learning opportunities in Basic Education with a particular focus on students coming from poor and rural households.
- e. To share the experiences of designing and implementing textbooks policies as an essential component of the learning process and of helping bring the curricular proposal to the classroom.
- f. To share the lessons learned and the pending challenges around the implementation of teachers' professional development programmes principally in rural areas (e.g. Romania).

CHINA - EUROPE EXCHANGE ON CURRICULUM REFORM

AGENDA

Day 1: Tuesday, 29 May 2007

9:00 - 9:30 **Opening Session**

- (15 min.) Opening remarks by **Ms. Clementina Acedo**, IBE Director
Introduction of the objectives of the China-Europe Exchange and brief presentation of European resource persons and IBE staff
- (15 min.) Remarks by **Ms. ZHU Muju**, Head of Chinese Delegation and brief introduction of the Chinese Delegation members

9:30 - 12:30	Panel 1: Goals, Strategies and Management of Curriculum Reform
	Moderator: Mr. Renato Opertti
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Goals and Implementation Strategies of Curriculum Reform in China</i>” by Ms. ZHU Muju, Deputy Director-General for Basic Education, China
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Reform in Curriculum Administration: An Example from the Countryside</i>” by Mr. LIU Jian, National Center for School Curriculum and Textbook Development, China
(30 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question and Answer Exchange

10.30 - 11:00 **Tea and coffee break**

	European Counterpart Feedback:
(20 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Irmeli Halinen, Director, Preschool and Basic Education Development, National Board of Education, Finland • Mr. Jenne van der Velde, SLO Coordinator Internal Affairs, Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, Netherlands
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question and Answer Exchange
(20 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Alexandru Crisan, Executive President & CEO, Center Education 2000+, Romania • Mr. Moritz Rosenmund, Professor, Research and Development Department, Faculty of School and Society, Zurich University of Teachers Education (ZUTE), Switzerland
(35 min.)	Open discussion on goals, strategies and management of curriculum reform

12:30 - 14:00 **Lunch break**

14:00 - 17:00	Panel 2: Curriculum and Learning
	Moderator: Mr. Massimo Amadio
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “<i>School-based action research as a tool of teacher professional development</i>” by Ms. ZHU Muju, Deputy Director-General for Basic Education, China
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “<i>Reform of the Ways of Learning in New Curriculum</i>” by Mr. GUO Yuanxiang, Vice Dean, School of Education Science, Central China Normal University, China
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “<i>Theoretical Exploration on School Curriculum Reform in China</i>” By Mr. Zhong Qiquan, Director, Institute of Curriculum and Instruction, East China Normal University, China
(30 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Question and Answer Exchange

15:15 - 15:45 **Tea and coffee break**

(30 min.)	European Counterpart Feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Xavier Roegiers, Director, Bureau d’Ingénierie en Education et en Formation (BIEF), Belgium• Ms. Irmeli Halinen, Director, Preschool and Basic Education Development, National Board of Education, Finland• Mr. Jens Nauman, Professor, Department of Education and Social Sciences, University of Muenster, Germany
(45 min.)	Open discussion on curriculum and learning

17:00 **Group Photo**
Reception at IBE

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AGENDA

Day 2: Wednesday, 30 May 2007

9:00 - 10:30	Panel 3: Curriculum Resources Moderator: Ms. Dakmara Georgescu
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Policies on Textbook Development</i>” by Ms ZANG Aizhen, Director for Textbook Administration, China
(10 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Textbooks: Great Expectations and Down-to-Earth Solutions</i>” by Ms. Dakmara Georgescu, Programme Specialist, IBE
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question and Answer Exchange
(30 min.)	<p>European Counterpart Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Alexandru Crisan, Executive President & CEO, Center Education 2000+, Romania • Mr. Jens Nauman, Professor, Department of Education and Social Sciences, University of Muenster, Germany • Mr. Jenne van der Velde, SLO Coordinator Internal Affairs, Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, Netherlands • Ms. Jean Bernard, Senior Programme Specialist in Textbook Revision, Division of Basic Education, UNESCO
(20 min.)	Open discussion on curriculum resources
10:30 - 11:00	Tea and coffee break
11:00 - 12:30	Panel 4: Case Studies in Curriculum: Chinese and International Perspectives Moderator: Mr. Daoyu Wang
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Curriculum Reform in Shanghai: a Unique Case</i>” by Mr. Yin Houqing, Deputy Director-General, Shanghai Education Commission, China
(15 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>The Successful Experience of China’s Basic Education Curriculum Reform: an International Perspective</i>” by Mr. ZHOU Nanzhao, Director, International Center of Teacher Education, East China Normal University, China

(20 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question and Answer Exchange
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(20 min.)	<p>European Counterpart Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Xavier Roegiers, Director, Bureau d'Ingénierie en Education et en Formation (BIEF), Belgium ▪ Mr. Moritz Rosenmund, Professor, Research and Development Department, Faculty of School and Society, Zurich University of Teachers Education (ZUTE), Switzerland ▪ Mr Abdeljalil Akkari, Dean of Research, University of Teacher Education (Berne-Jura-Neuchâtel), Switzerland
(20 min.)	Open discussion on the case study and international perspectives

12:30 - 14:00 **Lunch break**

14:00 - 15:00	<p>Final Exchange:</p> <p>Outline of Policy Implications for the consolidation of Chinese curricular reform by Ms. ZHU Muju, Head of Chinese Delegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Discussion
15:00 - 15:30	Concluding remarks by Ms. Clementina Acedo, IBE Director

15:30-16:00 **Tea and coffee break**

16:00 - 17:30 **Bilateral IBE and Chinese Delegation meeting on areas of future cooperation**