

Teacher Participation in Curriculum and Pedagogical Decisions: Insights into Curriculum Leadership

1. Conceptualizing Teacher Participation in Curriculum and Pedagogical Decisions

Teacher participation in school decision-making has long been an area of research. Duke, Showers & Imber (1980) argued that school decisions that extend beyond a particular classroom, but do not extend beyond school level, cover nine areas: instructional co-ordination, curriculum development, staff development, evaluation, general school improvement, personnel, rules and discipline, general administration, and policymaking. Bacharach et al. (1990: p.127) provided a summary of research on the examination of participation in decision making, and constructed a multi-domain, evaluative approach. Their findings indicated that teachers generally have a desire for greater participation, but that they want increased participation in those areas related to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment but not in the others. That is to say, teachers are interested in curriculum and pedagogical decisions. The reason is that teachers are ethically obliged to do whatever is best for their students, incorporating conditions of specialized knowledge, responsibility for student welfare, autonomous performance and collective self-regulation. Therefore, teachers are interested in and should have the right to participate in curriculum and pedagogical decisions allowing individual student needs to be met and promoting continuous improvement in practice, rather than just complying with imposed standards (Darling-Hammond, et al. 2005). Strictly speaking, there are differences in the subtlety of issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy. For the purpose of this article, I will discuss the issues in a broad term as curriculum decisions are often interwoven with ideas and strategies about intended educational purposes in pedagogical contexts.

Teacher participation and associated terms such as collaboration, collegiality, and teamwork are used sometimes as synonyms and sometimes have a variety of distinctive connotations. Hoyle (1996, p.20) made a distinction between these terms. Collegiality refers to “the power relationship entailed in teamwork”. It can vary from a strong form of democratic procedures of equal participation to a weak form of minimal influence by professional staff in the context of their collaboration being constrained by authority. Collaboration refers to “a continuum of interpersonal relationship running from independence to interdependence”. Teamwork refers to “teacher collaboration specifically at the level of pedagogy”. Participation refers to “the extent of involvement in decision-making, at which levels, on which issues, with what level of desire, and with what sources of power”. To summarize, the differences can be described in the dimensions of level, power, formality, value and volition.

In a narrow and rigid sense, teacher participation in decision making can be viewed as individual participation in the process of management. However, it is doubtful whether this view is relevant and valid in the current situation in schools. Bernstein (1996, p.268) states that social changes in society are likely to be reflected in the structures of a school and schools in contemporary society become more “open” with more “permeable” boundaries. As further elaborated by Hoyle (1975, p.40), this non-traditional schooling model is characterized by “interdisciplinary curriculum content, discovery learning, flexible timetabling, heterogeneous student grouping, extensive student choices, multiple modes of assessment, interdependent roles of teacher, high school-community links and open plan architecture”. All these developments have the result of increasing the complexity of teaching and learning. Many researchers in the field of leadership and management propose that teachers need to shift from the traditional role of curriculum users to a new role of curriculum leaders, and school heads need to establish a collective culture and build up leadership capacity for quality improvement in the rapidly changing educational landscapes (e.g. Slater, 2008; Harris, 2004). Either strategically or spontaneously, teachers have to work together to tackle the complicated education problems imposed by external forces. Therefore, teacher participation in decision making should be conceptualized in both individual and collective terms. In this sense, the concept of teacher participation inevitably incorporates the ideas of collegiality, collaboration and teamwork. In short, in this article, teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making is used as an umbrella term including the other, related concepts.

2. Recent Development

Before 1997, the Hong Kong government took a passive role in preschool education and services. It provided little support in the form of legislation, finance, inspection, teacher training and curriculum (Koo, 2001). Matters related to the quality of educare did not come onto the agenda of policymakers until 1997. A number of new policies have been introduced over the past ten years: upgrading teacher qualifications, implementing a quality assurance framework, harmonising pre-primary education services and introducing new curriculum guidelines. Recently, the local government announced the policy of “subsidizing early childhood education” in the *2006-07 Policy Address*. This policy will provide fee assistance in the form of “an education voucher” for parents of children aged three to six years old and enrolling in kindergartens starting from the 2007-08 school year (Hong Kong Government, 2006: 16). In addition, to assure the quality of teaching, all kindergartens are subject to classroom inspection. Those kindergartens which cannot meet the inspection criteria will not be eligible to redeem the education vouchers. To further speed up the pace of upgrading the teaching workforce, all kindergarten teachers are required to obtain a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and all kindergarten principals will be qualified at degree level by 2011-12. These are the three major factors directly or indirectly influencing teacher

participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making at school level. Each of the factors will be discussed in turn below.

2.1 Redefining the Quality of Educare

All preschools in Hong Kong are private, either profit-making or non-profit-making. Most funding for preschools¹ comes from fees. In other words, the local field of early childhood education is market-driven in nature. As mentioned above, the government provides fee assistance in the form of an education voucher for parents of children aged three to six years old and enrolling in kindergartens. The education voucher scheme is built upon the basic tenet that market competition will lead to efficiency gains as schools compete for students and try to improve their quality. School choice is promoted as a means of increasing competition among local preschools. More importantly, this policy signifies the formal recognition of the consumer power of parents in the education market.

Parents who are the service buyers have indirect, but strong, influential power on school decision making. How they define the quality of educare is the major influence shaping the provision of preschooling and indirectly influencing teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. Preschool service was, and has been perceived by the public as a preparation for primary education and as an extension of mothering. This is largely because preschools have to take on some aspects of childrearing, such as hygiene and feeding. Having a caregiver with specialized professional training did not seem to be given importance by parents (Oppen, 1992). Historically, an informal approach has been taken to the way that preschooling has been defined in terms of quality. The *Key Statistics of the 2006 Population Census* indicated that the average domestic household size is getting smaller, from 4.2 in 1976 to 3.0 in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). The impact of demographic change raises some questions in relation to the definitions of the preschool service: Are parents becoming more aware of the importance of early childhood education and its relevance to the development of young children? Or, do they still perceive the functions of preschooling as

¹ The term “preschool” refers to both kindergartens and child care centres, including crèches, residential centers and day nurseries, which cater for various needs. Day nurseries provide day care services for children whose parents are both working. Crèches and residential centers serve children who lack normal family care and provide either permanent family services or residential care. After the harmonization of pre-primary services in 2006, kindergartens, registered with the Education and Manpower Bureau, provide services for children from three to six years old. Child care centres, on the other hand, are registered with the Social Welfare Department and include nurseries, catering for children aged two to three; and crèches, looking after infants from birth to two.

preparation for formal learning in primary schools and a custodial service for working parents? Case studies of two Hong Kong preschools conducted by Ho (2008) indicated that the parents' views on the quality of early childhood programmes have begun to shift from child rearing to developmental nurturing, but with an emphasis on academic learning. The research findings revealed that the parents who took part in the interviews had a higher demand for the quality of educare and teacher professionalism displayed in the provision of the service. School management, together with their teaching staff, had to work strategically between professional values and parental preferences. In the context of the two case study schools, teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making was critical to tackling the complexities of educational problems. This reflected the fact that there is a new view of teacher participation in decision making at school level emerging in the local field.

2.2 Tightening Up the Quality Standards

In the past, the government's legitimacy in the monitoring of service quality was severely constrained in the field of early education by its not being a fully-subsidized sector. School inspectors visited preschools to give advice on curriculum planning, teaching approaches and school administration. However, preschools were not obliged to follow those recommendations. Service providers just needed to comply with the statutory requirements for the operation of preschools. The government was left with no choice but to adopt a minimal intervention approach to the running of the field of early childhood education at that time.

As proposed in the *Education Commission Report No. 7*, a quality assurance framework was introduced in 1997 for improving school effectiveness through school self-evaluation and external school review (Education Commission, 1997). The Education Bureau (formerly the Education and Manpower Bureau) published the first edition of *Performance Indicators* for preschools in 2000. School performance is graded at four levels: unsatisfactory, acceptable, good, and excellent. The summary reports of quality assurance inspections are published to inform the public of the general performance of the schools inspected and the major areas of concern. Inevitably, parents use these reports as a basis for choosing schools for their children. In principle, the new practice of quality assurance enables the government to regulate the quality of educare through parental choice. The imposition of *Performance Indicators* signifies the role of government moving from minimal intervention to legitimized control (Ho, 2007).

Theoretically speaking, service providers now have to conform to the quality processes as

required by the Education Bureau, in addition to compliance with the statutory requirements for the operation of preschools. In 2001-2007, 185 kindergartens out of a total of 986 were inspected (Education Bureau, 2008). That is to say, the majority of preschools have not been inspected. So, whether or not the government can regulate the quality of educare through parental choice is controversial. In response to a public call for quality, the Education Bureau implemented the *Quality Review Framework* in 2006. Under the new framework, each school has to work out its development plan and conduct a self-evaluation for quality assurance prior to inspection. The Education Bureau conducts a follow-up inspection to provide an external review of the overall performance of the school. To regulate the service quality of preschools stringently, the Hong Kong government has tied the policy of school quality reviews with the implementation of the *Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme*. In addition to the external school inspection, those kindergartens that wish to redeem education vouchers are now required to undertake systematic internal school self-evaluation annually. The new quality assurance policy demands a higher standard in the quality of service provision. Within the quality review framework, schools are expected to be better able to assure their performance through the cyclical process of planning, coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Teacher involvement in all aspects of school operation is identified as a critical factor in such processes, particularly in curriculum and pedagogical decision making.

2.3 Upgrading the Teaching Force

Professional education for preschool teachers in Hong Kong has long been in a crucial need, as the profession has typically received minimal and inappropriate training. In the past, those who had 11 years of basic education could register as permitted teachers in kindergartens and as trainee workers in child care centres without any prior formal professional education. After completing two-year part-time in-service training, the permitted kindergarten teachers could be registered as qualified kindergarten teachers, while the trainee workers could register as child care workers. It is questionable that whether a teacher with such level of training has sufficient knowledge to take part in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. In fact, they usually perceived their roles and responsibilities only in terms of implementing the curriculum plan imposed by the school management rather than being autonomous professionals who had the right to participate in decision making. These perceptions appear to be deeply rooted in the mindsets of some school principals and front-line teachers. These mutually reinforcing perceptions eventually decrease the rate of teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making.

In response to a public call for better quality preschool education, the Education Bureau made efforts to upgrade teacher education and qualifications. A number of measures were introduced: raising the entry requirements to a one year full-time pre-service training in 2003,

and requiring kindergarten principals and child-care centre supervisors to receive advanced training at higher diploma level in 2005 (Hong Kong Government, 1997, 1999, 2000). As mentioned earlier, to speed up the pace of upgrading, all kindergarten teachers are required to obtain a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and all kindergarten principals will be qualified at degree level by 2011-12. In line with the government's intention, the local training institutions started offering bachelor degree programmes a few years ago and some of them are launching masters programmes. More preschool teachers have received or are receiving advanced training at degree level or above in recent years. Upon obtaining higher levels of professional training, front-line practitioners have become aware of their autonomy and responsibilities in the educational process. Meanwhile, school administrators are more conscious of the importance of teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making.

3. Analytical Framework of Decisional Participation

In this section, I will discuss and elaborate the typology developed by Alutto and Belasco (1972) to form the basis of the analytical framework, which will be used to structure the discussion in Section 4. The two scholars comment on participation in decisions as a complex task that can be conceptualized in terms of the discrepancy between a member's actual and desired participation rather than simply on the absolute current rates of participation in decision making. This typology is characterized by conditions of deprivation, equilibrium, and saturation in decision making. The three participatory conditions are differently distributed throughout an organization, resulting in differing organizational outcomes.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework for Participative Decision Making in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Level of Desired Participation	High	Quadrant II Decision Deprivation	Quadrant IV Decision Equilibrium
	Low	Quadrant I Decision Equilibrium	Quadrant III Decision Saturation
		Low	High
		Level of Actual Participation	

As shown in Figure 1, the two axes of level of desired participation and level of actual participation can be used to define four quadrants, producing the three typological conditions

that relate to the quality of curriculum and pedagogical decision making. In Quadrant I, teachers may feel that their position is satisfactory in the decision process, even though their actual and desired participation levels are low. This situation deserves special attention as some problems would arise in this typological condition. Teachers may perceive their responsibility to be restricted to implementing the curriculum plan imposed by the school management. This type of schools is usually characterized by didactic teaching, rigid timetabling, limited student choice, single mode of assessment, independent teacher role and low school-community links (Hoyle 1975, p.42). Under these circumstances, it is very likely that the learning needs and interests of individual students could not be effectively catered for. The professional dialogue and collaboration among colleagues and between school management is also limited.

In Quadrant II, teachers feel deprived in the decision process in which actual participation is lower than the desired participation. There exists a substantial literature concerned with the conflicts inherent in organizations which are staffed by professionals. Corwin (1965) argues that schools are simultaneously organized around contradictory bureaucratic and professional principles. As staffed by professionals, schools are subjected to more internal pressures for greater teacher participation in decision making. These schools, if they continuously insist on a highly centralized process in curriculum decision making, will make their teachers feel deprived from exercising their professional discretion. More importantly, this might lead to potential problems of power struggle and micropolitics. Although it would be relatively rare that this would reach the level of a confrontation in school settings, this kind of conflict has negative impact on teachers' morale and school culture.

In Quadrant III, teachers feel saturated in the decision process in which the actual participation is higher than the desired participation. In speculating on the reasons for teachers having a less enthusiastic attitude towards curriculum decisions, the shared decision making process may present new demands for the teachers involved. Duke, Showers & Imber (1980, p.100) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of the potential costs and benefits of involvement in school decision making. Their findings indicated that there are five potential costs of shared decision making which include increased time demands, loss of autonomy, risk of collegial disfavor, subversion of the collective bargaining process, and threats to career advancement. In addition, teachers typically perceive that school management has the absolutely authority in decision making. If this is the case, shared decision making in centralized management structures is viewed as a formality or an attempt to create the illusion that teachers have negotiating power.

Quadrant IV is the preferred condition in the decision making area of pedagogy and curriculum among the four. Generally speaking, as teachers know their students best, they

should undoubtedly be the best decision makers on the curriculum and pedagogy. Teacher participation in that area of decision making can be viewed as a mechanism to ensure that decisions are based on the development and well-being of students. To facilitate more widespread decision making, participatory management structures in school must be developed. The formal decision making process provides a platform for teachers to work collaboratively with their colleagues and the school head, and that is conducive to positive school culture and school development in the long run.

4. Discussion

In this section, I will place the discussion of the present and future development of teachers as curriculum leaders in the context of early childhood education in Hong Kong where markets, choice, vouchers, external inspection and school self-evaluation have become major forces shaping the service provision of local preschools. I also attempt to shed some light on wider problems, drawing on a review of the literature in the area of school leadership.

4.1 Current situation

A study of the development of the school-based curriculum in Hong Kong preschools conducted by Li (2006) indicated that 88% of the principals (30 out of 34 respondents) and 94 % of the teachers (111 out of 118 respondents) admitted that they adopted one of the learning packages provided by local publishers. The respondents stated that developing a school-based curriculum was the most challenging approach, demanding highly qualified teachers and effective school management. To a certain extent, this result reflected that teacher participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making in some local preschools is presently at a low level in terms of both actual and desired participation (i.e. Quadrant I). As mentioned in Section 2.3, the basic requirement of professional registration has been raised to diploma level by 2011-12. That is to say, the majority of teachers only have sub-degree qualifications. Obviously, preschool teachers with such level of training do not have sufficient professional knowledge to participate effectively in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. These teachers tend to define their role and functions as being limited to the area of curriculum implementation. Reciprocally, some school heads prefer not to involve teachers in the decision making process to avoid immature decisions. This type of school is usually characterized by a bureaucratic and authoritarian style of leadership. Participatory decision structures are rarely found in those schools. Two problems would arise in this condition. One is that the 'prescribed' curriculum can hardly address the complexity of teaching and learning in today's classrooms. The other is that the collaboration between teachers and school management is relatively weak. This form of teacher participation not meet the demand of the new quality assurance policy. As mentioned in Section 2.2, the Education Bureau published the first edition of *Performance Indicators* for preschools in 2000. Adopting the ideology of "child-centeredness" and "developmentally appropriate practice", the document addresses the importance of individual needs and the interests of young children, and the particular form and content of education tailored to each of them. In this connection, Chan and Chan (2003) pointed to the importance of understanding children's developmental progress in various domains and this should be achieved through the use of authentic and continuous assessment.

Under the new framework of *Performance Indicators*, teacher participation in decisions is critical in areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

4.2 Signs of movement toward disequilibrium

In recent years, more preschool teachers feel deprived in the process of curriculum and pedagogical decision making. The desired participation of some teachers becomes greater than the actual participation (i.e. Quadrant II). The main reason for this may be the policies of raising the requirements of professional registration in and after 1997 (mentioned in Section 2.3). That policy direction of upgrading teacher qualifications resulted in the rapid increase of training opportunities, particularly at degree and master levels. Some teachers who have received advanced training are better equipped with professional knowledge and they are more aware of their professional responsibilities for the quality of teaching. They are more eager to exercise their professionalism in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy in a formal structure of decision making. This connects with the work of Muijs and Harris (2003) which suggested that teachers who become intrinsically motivated in participative decision-making can see both the personal and professional benefits of taking up the role of teacher leadership.

On the other hand, there are some preschool teachers in Hong Kong who do not have a strong desire to participate in curriculum and pedagogical decision but they are “required” to do so. In other words, actual participation is greater than desired (i.e. Quadrant III). It is speculated that there are three reasons for teachers to have a less than enthusiastic attitude, namely time demands for teachers, risk of collegial disfavor, and centralized style of school leadership. The shared decision making process may present time demands for teachers involved. Preschool teachers feel that they have a heavy workload. They perceive themselves as hard-working persons with a heavy load of duties and they spend most of their time on preparation: 78% on preparing lessons, 62% on preparing displays, and 55% on planning lessons (Oppen, 1992). Teachers may perceive participation in decision making as an increased demand on their time. Moreover, teachers may fear that they are at risk of collegial disfavor in making curriculum decisions. Relationships in the process of involvement are no longer simply social. Participatory processes bring teachers into contact with each other in ways with which they are not familiar. They need to deal with differences in opinions, or even conflicts, among their colleagues. In the same study conducted by Oppen in 1992, 84 % of teachers indicated their relationship with the children was the area of greatest job satisfaction, followed by relations with colleagues for 69%. This suggests that preschool teachers value the close relationship with their colleagues. In this regard, they may not want to endanger or jeopardize the relationship with colleagues in the decision making process.

As discussed in section 2.2, the Education Bureau introduced the *Quality Review Framework* to promote continuous self-improvement in local preschools. Schools have to meet all the prescribed quality standards in order to take part in the government's implementation of the *Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme*. As stated in that Framework, "This [school self-evaluation] helps bring about coherence and strengthen collaboration, communication and ownership among members of the school community" (Education Bureau, 2006a: 1). That is to say, the school self-evaluation requires joint efforts and aspirations from all school stakeholders. Thus, it is imperative for preschool heads to involve teachers in the decision making process, not necessarily in all areas, but at least in the area of curriculum and pedagogical decisions. Some school heads understand that non-shared decision-making may be efficient but it is not effective in tackling the complexity of educational problems. Involving teachers in curriculum decision making but without delegating the authority embedded in decision processes may be used to 'legitimately' hold them accountable for school outcomes. If this is the case, the mixture of centralization and decentralization would probably lead to a contrived collegiality. The conception of contrived collegiality is characterized by a set of formal, specific, bureaucratic procedures to increase forms of working together. It has both positive and negative possibilities depending on whether it is administratively imposed or supportively facilitated (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996). Some preschool teachers are more willing to participate in curriculum and pedagogical decision making, if their head is open to different opinions and values of collective participation. In contrast with this, some display less enthusiastic attitudes toward decision making where the participatory process is imposed by their head. This view is supported by the literature which points towards autocratic leadership and top-down management structures in schools as major barriers to the development of teachers as curriculum leaders (Muijs and Harris, 2003).

4.3 Achieving the ideal condition of decision participation

A teacher who has high desired participation and high actual participation experiences decisional equilibrium (i.e. Quadrant IV). Teachers who take a more active role in curriculum and pedagogical decision making are more accountable for the quality of teaching and learning. In the case of Hong Kong, the Education Bureau issued a *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* in 2006. The document was written in line with the *Performance Indicators*, and adopts the ideology of child-centeredness and learning through play. Preschools are encouraged to design and develop their own school-based curriculum (Education Bureau, 2006b). Under these new circumstances, teachers taking up the role of curriculum leaders are considered an effective strategy to accommodate the greater complexities introduced by the local education reform. Kirk and MacDonald (2001) also argue that teacher participation

provides a key to understanding the transformation of innovative ideas from conception to implementation. Research generally supports the idea that teachers have greater job satisfaction, higher morale and reduced burnout with higher participation in decision making. Much research in education also indicates that where teachers have the authority to make decisions affecting their work and their clients, and where they are actually engaged in collaborative work, this forms part of the foundation of a good school. This situation is, therefore, considered to be the ideal situation of participation in decision making.

The school management in the condition of high actual and desired participation usually provides formal structures that allow teachers be collectively involved in decision making. The decision made still falls within a hierarchical structure, which is not necessarily top-to-down, but may also be bottom-up. The decentralization of decision making is a counter-balance to bureaucratic leadership in a school. Teachers have a strong desire to participate in the decision making process when there is a lack of compulsion or imposition. This means that teachers choose to collaborate instead of being required or forced to participate. When teachers are eager and willing to participate, such decision making processes provide an ideal starting point for teamwork. In a collaborative culture, working relationships between teachers and their colleagues are spontaneous, voluntary, development oriented, and pervasive across time and space (Hargreaves, 1991 p.55). Such an atmosphere is conducive to nurturing a positive culture in school, particularly growing from its structural roots.

However, there appears a gap between theoretical persuasion and practical outcome in local preschools. Due to the various reasons discussed earlier in this article, it seems many teachers are having difficulties and are either unable or unwilling to participate in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. Some feel that their professional freedom and autonomy in decision making is sharply curtailed by their school management. Some are quite reluctant to accept professional autonomy in order to avoid having conflicts with their head. The tension reflects the existence of the complexity of decision making phenomena in the field. If greater teacher participation at both an actual and a desired level in curriculum and pedagogical decision making is critical for improving the quality of education, preschool heads should be the key people to exercise leadership to achieve this larger goal. As Lumby (2003, p.101) argues, "Trust within a school among staff, and of parents and other stakeholders in the community cannot be assumed". This ultimate goal can only be achieved by effective leadership to reconstruct the organization in a particular way that fosters a collaborative culture in the school. One way to start is to develop a culture of teacher leadership in schools where teachers are able to participate in curriculum and pedagogical decisions and where preschool heads are able to broaden the scope for delegation of authority and responsibility.

5. Some Final Thoughts on Curriculum Leadership

It is indisputable that teachers have the professional knowledge and responsibility for providing developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children. Teachers taking up the role of curriculum leaders could ensure that the decisions taken are based on the needs and interests of young children. Many investigators have concluded that encouraging participation in decision making can increase the probability of change in organizations and can enhance self-actualization, staff morale and school culture. In contrast with this, some argue that lack of control in participatory decision making may be just as damaging as a lack of participation (Lammers, 1967). This reminds us that a fundamental question should be addressed when promoting the shift towards more shared forms of decision making, namely, how can teacher participation be enhanced and developed properly and constructively in schools? This question is a difficult one in the context of early childhood education in Hong Kong, because of the features of minimal teacher education. At present, the majority of front-line teachers only have sub-degree qualifications, despite the rapid pace of upgrading professional education in recent years. One would wonder whether those teachers who have relatively little professional training are ready to act as curriculum leaders to make well-informed decisions. The term ‘well-informed decision’ indicates the need for teachers to comprehend the real essence of care and education for the all-round development of young children. It is quite true that those teachers might not have in-depth professional knowledge or sufficient capability to act as curriculum leaders to make well-informed decisions. However, this question can be viewed from another perspective: How can teachers who have relatively little professional education be helped to build up the capability of acting as curriculum leaders to make well-informed decisions?

In responding to the above question, I seek to explore the issue from the perspective of school leadership. Much research in school management generally indicates that few school heads exhibit fundamentally democratic-collegial styles of leadership, but, on the contrary, most heads are oriented towards the control of teachers. The strategies they use to achieve such control range from being openly directive to being authoritarian (Ball, 1987). If the delegation of authority and power to teachers in curriculum and pedagogical decisions has been viewed as a means by which school heads maintain control, some preschool teachers may be reluctant to participate in order to avoid the political dynamics with their head and colleagues. Therefore, simply developing a formal structure and electing people to positions does not guarantee the benefits of shared decision making. It requires a transformation in the leadership from centralized and authoritarian to decentralized and democratic. If the

transformation has to move towards more shared and participatory forms of decision making, it should set a climate that is much more receptive to the idea of bottom-up management, collaboration and collegiality. This paradigm shift creates a new agenda for preschool heads in the local field. That is, they must address the creation of cultures and structures for collaborative participation in curriculum and pedagogical decision making. Smith and Lovat (2004) discuss the notion of teachers' curriculum decision-making space in school-based curriculum development. The decision options that are available to teachers are determined by five overlapping frames: the system frame, the school/institution frame, the faculty frame, the learners' frame, and the teacher's self-frame. In particular, school management planning is critical to determining teacher's degree of decision-making in curriculum development. As a good start toward delegating leadership, preschool heads in Hong Kong need gradually to involve staff in the process of decision making in order to make them aware of their own professional roles and responsibilities in contributing to curriculum and pedagogy. The processes may involve the delegation of responsibility in which leadership is spread widely among the staff members who are more willing to participate, contribute and lead. In return, the preschool heads also need to learn to overcome the challenges of cultural limitation, in order to transform top-down and bureaucratic styles of leadership into bottom-up and democratic forms of management in the process of organizational restructuring. These changes require a new culture and philosophy of the organization of education at school level.

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